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ECONOMY, POLITY AND RELIGION

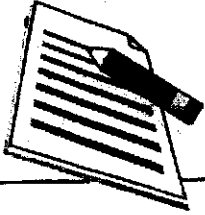
Societies differ in terms of the number of institutions. Highly developed and differentiated societies, like those in the contemporary industrial world, have a larger number of institutions than the simple societies of tribals and peasants. As societies evolve over time from simple to complex structures, their institutions also get differentiated. Not only do they multiply in number but also become more and more specialized and complex.

Although the number of institutions varies from one society to another, all societies generally have four basic institutions, which may be known as universal institutions. These are respectively known as kinship, economic, political; and religious institutions. These institutions do not exist in isolation, rather, there are close connections between them. We may conceptualize a culture as comprising of institutions that are inter-related. A definition of culture may be: It is an integrated whole of institutions. In this lesson, we shall study the characteristics of economic, political, and religious institutions of human society.

OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the basic institutions found in human society;
- explain the characteristics of each of these institutions; and
- understand the relationship between institutions.



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15.1 CONCEPTS OF ECONOMY, POLITY, AND RELIGION

15.1.1 Economy

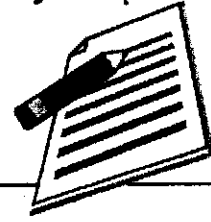
Economy is concerned with production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services. If human beings have to survive, they have to eat. They are not like other animals that are parasites on nature and consume its raw products. Human beings not only produce what they need for their sustenance, but also transform the raw products of nature by cooking and processing them. One of the remarkable characteristics of human beings is that they transform the raw into the cooked. Fire making and the use of fire are associated principally with human species.

None of the activities associated with economy are carried out in isolation. In their system of production, human beings enter into relations with other human beings. Distribution and exchange also assume the existence of relations between people. The nature of these relations conditions the quality of distribution and exchange, and the quality of the things (goods and services) exchanged. Human relations and social values also determine the patterns of consumption. In other words, in a sociological study of economy, one is concerned with the social relations that are built in the systems of production, distribution and exchange, and consumption.

15.1.2 Polity

Polity is concerned with the distribution of power in a society. In each social relationship, there are some who exercise power over others. Even in a group of two individuals (what is technically called a *dyad*), one of them exercises power over the other. Thus, no human relationship is without the exercise of power. For sociologists, power is a universal characteristic of human society.

Now, we should explain the sociological meaning of the term power. By power, we understand the ability of a person to exercise his will on the others and obtain compliance. Power is the ability to take decisions for oneself and others, and to see that the others abide by the decisions taken on their behalf. Defined in this way, power is central to every institution and group. For example, the head of the household exercises his or her power, which he or she has, by virtue of being the head, over other members and his or her decisions are binding. For example, the medical superintendent is the most powerful person in a hospital. These examples help us conclude that in each institution, there are some who exercise power over others.



Notes

Then, what is so special about political power? The difference between power in an institution (like hospital) or a group (like family) and political power is that the latter has a wider application. It is not confined to an institution or group. Rather, it embraces all of them. Political power cuts across different institutions and groups. It runs the government, which takes major decisions about society and its affairs. For example, the principal of a school exercises his power over others and also in the running of the institution that he heads; but, the task of framing educational policy and its implementation is that of the government.

Political power is closely connected with governance: that is, governing and administering. An Italian sociologist made a distinction between two types of elites. The first he called the non-governing elite. They excel in their respective works but do not govern. The second is called the governing elite – they are the ones who exercise power to rule and govern.

A famous musician, painter, and industrialist are the examples of non-governing elite. Thus, Mahasweta Devi, M.F. Husain, A.R. Rehman, and Dhirubhai Ambani are members of the non-governing elite.

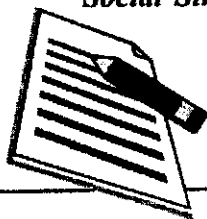
The prime minister, home minister, chief minister, and governor constitute the governing elite.

15.1.3 Religion

There has been no dispute about the universality of economic and political institutions.

But, there have been arguments about the universality of religion. Some thinkers hold that religion has prevailed because of the ignorance of the masses at large and a limited of the human mind. Once science would be able to answer all those questions that puzzle the humans but, it may be admitted here that religion would decline. It has also been thought that primitive society had religion, whereas modern society can do without it. Marxist thinkers also believed that societies that can succeed in abolishing classes and the distinction between the rich and the poor, could very well do without religion.

Today, the theories that doubted the universality of religion have been rejected. We have factual evidence to show that religion in one form or other is found in all societies, whether primitive or modern. In each society, religion is concerned with a set of relations people have with what they regard as 'superior' to them. This superior entity is not human. It is beyond the world of human beings. That is why the terms used for conveying the superior entities are 'supernatural', 'extra-



Notes

mundane', and 'spiritual'. These entities are revered, i.e. they are worshipped and their favour is sought. People *believe* in the existence of these powers, which control human affairs. They think that if these powers are worshipped and propitiated through certain acts such as rites and rituals etc., happiness and peace will follow, and their wishes will be fulfilled.

Keeping this in mind, we may define religion as a set of beliefs and practices dealing with the objects and ideas that people regard as supernatural and worthy of worship. The technical term we use for religious acts (the practices) is *ritual*, which is regarded as the hallmark of religion.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.1

Answer the following questions in one sentence

- 1 Give the definition of non-governing elite.

- 2 Name the basic institutions of human society.

- 3 What is meant by the term power?

- 4 What are the constituents of religion?

15.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

So far we have learnt that economy or the economic system consists of those institutions that provide for the production, distribution and exchange, and consumption of goods and services. In this section, our concern will be with the characteristics of economic organization.

Generally, when we think of economy, we think of goods and services involving money. A teacher teaches in a school for a month, at the end of which he receives a certain amount of money in the form of currency notes and coins. He spends the latter for buying goods and services – for instance, food, haircuts, travel tickets, etc. – that he needs for his survival.

However, we should note that there are societies where the concept of money as we understand does not exist. By money, we mean a standardized unit of exchange,



Notes

by which we can buy anything we need, whether a commodity or service. Societies, like tribal and peasant, which do not have the concept of money, are called non-monetized (or unmonetized).

15.4.1 Division of labour

Whether societies have money or not, they all have rules specifying how people gain access to natural resources and convert them into goods. People have knowledge of techniques they use for extracting resources and transforming them. They all have rules for distributing and exchanging goods and services. The basic characteristic of all economic systems is division of labour, which may be defined as an allocation of jobs to different individuals in accordance with their qualifications, skills, categories of gender and age, or any other trait that the society recognizes.

Societies differ in terms of the complexity and diversity of division of labour. Tribal and peasant societies have a simple division of labour. It means that the extent of specialization they have is little or minimal. In the largest traditional societies, there may not be more than twenty or thirty craft-trades, and also, not more than a few other specialized pursuits, such as those of priest, soldier and epic-singer, etc.

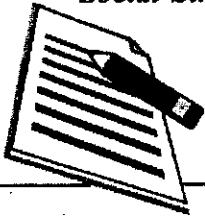
In the most simple societies, such as that of hunters and food gatherers, there may be a near absence of specialization, with each man knowing the techniques of hunting, and each woman, of food gathering. The absence of specialization, however, does not imply the absence of division of labour, because in simple societies, division of labour on the lines of sex and age does exist. As stated earlier, in hunting and food gathering societies, hunting is definitely a male job whereas food gathering is a female occupation.

15.4.2 Industrial economy

Sociologists divide an industrial economy into three sectors: the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors.

The primary sector of an economy includes the collection or extraction of natural resources. It consists of agriculture, mining, forestry and fishing, etc. The secondary sector is concerned with the conversion of raw materials into manufactured goods. The secondary sector expands with the coming of machinery and the development of technology. The tertiary sector of an economy refers to service industries. It includes occupations that offer services to others. Medicine, teaching, and managerial and clerical jobs are examples of the tertiary sector.

In societies where the extent of industrialization is less, a significant proportion of population is engaged in the primary sector. In India, for example, almost a three-quarter of the work force is engaged in agricultural production. By comparison, in



industrialized countries, only a tiny proportion of the population is involved in agriculture. As industrialization increases, the other sectors of economy expand. The higher the degree of industrialization, the larger is the domain of service industries.

15.3 TYPES OF ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

There are different types of economic systems depending upon the ways in which people acquire their livelihood. Broadly speaking, we may divide economic systems into two types, those concerned with food collection, and secondly, those concerned with food production.

15.3.1 Food collection

Food collection may be defined as deriving food from naturally occurring resources, such as wild plants and animals. At one time, the entire society consisted of food collectors. In fact, food collection has occupied the longest period in the history of mankind.

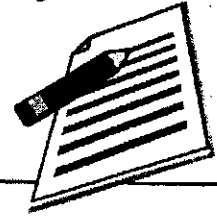
With the passage of time, food collection has been on decline, but even today, certain communities of the world still depend upon hunting, food gathering and fishing. The prominent examples of food collectors are: !Kung Bushmen of South Africa's Kalahari Desert, Mbuti of Zaire's Ituri rain forest, various Australian tribes, the Copper Eskimos, and tribal communities in Andaman Islands.

15.3.2 Food production

Food production is believed to have begun about 10,000 years ago. It was a revolutionary change. Communities in widely separated geographical locations began to cultivate, and then, domesticate plants and animals. Today, most people in the world depend upon diverse combinations of domesticated plants and animals for food. Sociologists distinguish three types of food production systems: horticulture, intensive agriculture, and pastoralism.

15.3.2.1 Horticulture

- By horticulture, we mean the growing of crops of all kinds with relatively simple technology and material culture.
- Common to all forms of horticulture is the absence of permanently cultivated fields.
- The tools generally used in this system of production are digging sticks, hoes, and axes.



Notes

- Ploughs and tractors are not associated with it.
- Horticulturalists do not employ methods of increasing the fertility of the soil artificially as is common in intensive cultivation.

We may distinguish between two types of horticulture. One deals with a dependence on long-growing tree crops. The second system, which is more common, is known as extensive or shifting cultivation. In this, the land is cultivated for short periods. Then, it is left idle or fallow for some years. During the time the land is not cultivated, wild plants grow on it. When the vegetation is sufficiently thick, it is cut down and burnt. In this way, the nutrients return to the soil and add to its fertility. The cultivators grow all kinds of crops on it, before leaving it idle for some years. Then, the same cycle is repeated. The prominent examples of shifting cultivators are: the northern Kayapo of the Brazilian Amazon, Jivaro of Ecuador, Samoan of the South Pacific, the Mal Paharia and Baigas in India.

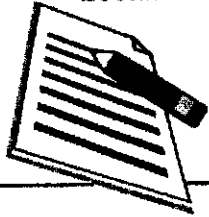
15.3.2.2 Intensive agriculture

- Intensive agriculture is also known as settled agriculture.
- It is a system of food production where the fields are regularly cultivated.
- Cultivators raise the fertility of soil by adding organic materials to it, such as dung from animals and human.
- Fields are irrigated. Besides the monsoon, the agriculturalists use irrigation from streams and rivers.
- Technology in intensive agriculture is far more complex. Ploughs are used rather than digging-sticks and hoes.
- Where mechanization has set in, tractors are used, and mechanical power has replaced the animal traction power.

Intensive agriculture has also led to fairly settled, large village communities. This has implications for the nature of inter-personal relations in an agricultural community. The horticulturalists, by comparison, live in small groups and shift from one place to another depending upon the piece of land they clear for cultivation.

15.3.2.3 Pastoralism

- Communities of people, which domesticate animals, are known as pastoral, and the system of deriving one's livelihood by domesticating animals is known as pastoralism.
- Pastoralism is an effective way of living in semi-arid and desert areas.
- Pastoralists breed animals for meat, milk, hair, hide and excreta (to be used as fuel), etc.



- Pastoralists are not self-sufficient as is the case with hunter-gatherers, because they exchange their produce with non-pastoral people. In this way, they ensure their survival.

Pastoralists sell their animals (generally male) to animal-merchants who buy them for slaughter houses or for selling them to others as traction animals. Animal hair from which wool is manufactured is also sold to merchants. Some pastoral communities also sell milk and its products (such as clarified butter), but most of them use it for their own consumption. Some well-known pastoral communities are the tribes of the Middle East, Basari of Southern Iran, Lapps of Scandinavia, Rabari and Gaddi in India.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.2

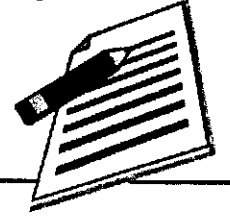
Fill in the blanks:

1. Societies that lack the use of money are known as _____ societies.
2. _____ societies have a large number of jobs and specializations.
3. Hoe is associated with _____ cultivation.
4. Pastoralists are generally found in _____ and _____ areas.
5. Tribes of Baigas in India are _____.

15.4 ECONOMIC SYSTEMS OF SIMPLE AND COMPLEX SOCIETIES : A COMPARISON

Food collection and food production are placed in an evolutionary sequence. The first stage in the evolution of economic systems was of food collection, followed by food production. But, it does not imply that once the systems of food production came into existence, the systems of food collection disappeared completely. Rather, for many years, different systems of food collection and food production, although the former are now gradually on decline and are bound to be replaced in times existed simultaneously, to come. But, at any point of time in the contemporary world, we find hunting and food gathering societies co-existing with highly industrialized societies. One may refer here to the case of Australian Aborigines, many of whom are even today hunter-gatherers, who live in the midst of highly developed and industrialized white Australians.

Economy in simple societies tends to be subsistent in nature, which means production is mainly for consumption. It certainly is not for the market or for



Notes

commercial interests. Family in simple, traditional societies is both a unit of production and a unit of consumption. The members of a family work together on the family farm to produce what they need for their existence. It is in contrast to complex societies where production is for the market. People depend upon the market for acquiring things they need. Family in complex societies is a unit of consumption, not a unit of production, because the processes of production and distribution are centered in the market and are complex in nature. Simple societies are subsistence-oriented, modern societies are market-oriented.

15.4.1 Systems of exchange

There are three types of exchanges found in human society, respectively called reciprocity, re-distribution, and market. The exchange between individuals who occupy equal positions in society is called reciprocity. Here, what A gives to B is reciprocated by B in an equivalent measure immediately or after a period of time.

The second principle of exchange is re-distribution. Here, an individual gives a gift to someone placed above him in rank, and this is returned in course of time. An apt example of this as found in the contemporary society is that between a political leader and the members of his support groups. However, the way in which it is returned may vary from one society to another. Reciprocity is an exchange relationship between people who are placed at an equal level in their society, and redistribution is an exchange relationship between people who are unequally placed.

15.4.2 Market

The market is the third principle of exchange. There are two aspects of the market. First, the market refers to the physical place where people assemble to carry out exchanges, where people assemble for buying and selling. This may be called the 'market site'. Second, the forces of demand and supply determine the prices of goods and services that are available at the market. This principle is called the 'market principle'.

15.4.3 Markets in simple and complex societies

With respect to the market situation, simple societies may be divided into two categories. First, those that do not have any concept of the *market site*. They are called 'marketless societies'. Hunter-gatherers constitute a prominent example of this type. Second, those simple societies which have market sites, where people assemble for exchanging their goods and services, but have no 'market' principle. The market principle is a characteristic feature of economic systems in complex societies. It is not found in simple societies. So, when sociologists speak of markets



Notes

in tribal and peasant societies, as a matter of fact, they mean the 'market site' and not the 'market principle'.

Complex societies are completely dependent upon the market for everything they need. If the markets were to end, the society would collapse, because, as said earlier, the forces of production and distribution are centered in the market. In complex societies, family is not a unit of production. Therefore, it has to depend upon the market for the fulfillment of all its needs and wants.

In simple societies, which have market sites, people do not depend upon the market for their subsistence. They themselves produce the goods they need for their subsistence. If they do not produce some, they acquire them through reciprocity and re-distribution.

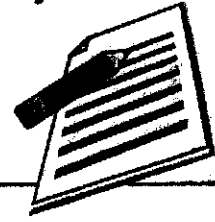
Moreover, markets in simple societies are not really 'pure' economic institutions. First, they are not a regular feature of their societies. Their occurrence coincides with a ritual occasion or festival. The market may come into existence once a week or fortnight. Visitors to the market do not constitute a crowd of buyers and sellers, as happens in markets in complex societies. In simple societies, the market is almost like a fair. People look forward to meeting their kinspeople and friends in the market. Because the market day brings together a readily gathered crowd of people, important political announcements may also be made in the market. In some societies, the market day is also the 'court day', when the court assembles, cases are taken up, and judgments given. Matrimonial matters are also finalized on the market day.

Thus, the market predominantly performs social, rather than economic functions in simple societies. It is in contrast to complex societies where the market is essentially an economic institution.

15.4.4 Barter system

Simple societies have the barter system, that is, a type of exchange in the absence of money, where goods are exchanged for goods. The concerned society decides which goods will be exchanged with which ones. There is no uniform parameter of exchange. In the language of sociologists, there is no 'general-purpose money', a kind of money that can be used for exchanging everything and anything people need. What simple societies have is called 'specific-purpose money', which means that certain specific objects can be used for acquiring another set of specific objects. For instance, cattle may be given as bridewealth for acquiring a bride, but cattle cannot be used for acquiring food or clothes. In other words, simple societies have different spheres of transaction, and things used in one sphere may not be used in the other.

All this shows that simple societies are technologically simple, unmonetized, depend upon barter, and have markets that are multi-purpose entities. They also have complex systems of exchange because they do not have general-purpose money. Among them, social values outweigh economic values. Complex societies are technologically more sophisticated, monetized, completely depend upon markets, and in them economic values outweigh social values.



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15.5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A progressive change in economy is called economic development. Developmental (or progressive) changes are not only positive, as the name itself implies, but are also introduced in a planned manner from outside. In other words, there are external agencies that plan development in a society.

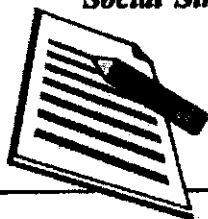
The idea of development became popular in the second half of twentieth century. Social anthropologists and sociologists were concerned about the declining state of tribal and peasant societies. The main reason for their worsening condition has been that they had come in contact with the outside world, which exploited them, took away their resources, and reduced them to a pathetic state. It was thought that if these people were not cared for, they would simply perish away. It was this ideology that guided the process of development.

The basic goals of economic development are: to destroy or reduce to the maximum the phenomenon of hunger and scarcity and to make people self-reliant so that they are no more dependent on outsiders for the fulfillment of their basic needs. For achieving both these goals, the community in which change is to be brought about must also be involved. Those engaged in the process of development should find out from the people themselves, what their needs and priorities are. If these are not taken into consideration, it is quite likely that the programmes of development might prove futile and even be rejected.

INTENT QUESTIONS 15.3

Write T after the statement that is true and F for the statement that is false.

- 1 Food collection came before food production.
- 2 Family is a unit of production in complex societies.
- 3 Reciprocity is between persons who are equally placed in their society.
- 4 Markets are universally found.
- 5 Barter is an exchange in the absence of money.



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- 6 Markets in simple societies are economic entities.
- 7 Development is only economic in nature.
- 8 Communities should not be involved in development programmes.

15.6 POLITICAL SYSTEM

Political system is that system of society which defines the roles that human beings occupy in order to maintain law and order on the one hand, and supervise the functioning of the society on the other. One of the functions of political system is to maintain the legal order, and this, in fact, is its main function in simple societies. In complex societies, along with this function, its other function is to distribute resources for social and economic development.

An important component of political system is the state. Here, we should note that there have been societies in the world which did not have the institution of state. Hunting and food-gathering societies, several types of pastoral and agricultural societies do not have a king, chief, or lord who is the center of power. These societies do not have a centralized authority. Neither do they have governments or legal systems. Nor is there a division of society into classes of rich and poor, or privileged and un-privileged. These societies are known as stateless. They are different from those societies that have a centralized authority, government, legal system, and classes. They are the state societies. The prominent examples of stateless societies are the Australian Aborigines, the Yakó and Ibo of Nigeria, the Masai and Nandi of East Africa, the Nuer of Sudan. Among the simple societies, an outstanding example of the political state comes from the Zulu of South Africa.

Absence of political state does not imply that these societies lack an orderly existence. They certainly are not in a state of anarchy. They have other institutions that try to maintain order in society. For instance, the elders may resolve the conflict between individuals. Or, there may be persons occupying religious offices who are approached for their intervention in conflicting situations. The Nuer, for example, have religious chiefs, known as leopard-skin chiefs, because they wear leopard skin and are approached in matters of homicide, that is, a man accidentally killing another man. In other words, no society is free from conflicts and violations of rules of behaviour. And, each society, some or the other way, resolves these conflicts.

15.7 POWER AND AUTHORITY

Power is different from *authority*. What distinguishes these two is *legitimacy*, i.e., whether the exercise of power is legitimate or warranted under the existing

and acceptable set of rules in society or not. The meaning of legitimacy is 'rightfulness', whether the individual has been given the right to exercise power. Force is exercised by both – the robber and the policeman – but the force that the latter exercises is legitimate, and not the one which the former exercises. The state has been defined as an institution that has the power to exercise 'legitimate violence' over a territory. When the exercise of power is legitimate, it is termed authority. The concept of power itself does not tell us whether it is legitimate or not, because here, the emphasis is on the exercise of force and its compliance. In the concept of authority, the emphasis is on legitimacy. So, legitimate power may be defined as authority.



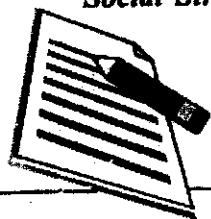
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15.8 TYPES OF AUTHORITY

We may think in terms of three types of authority, respectively called *traditional*, *charismatic*, and *legal-rational*. While simple societies principally have traditional authority, complex societies are characterized by the presence of legal-rational authority. It is also likely that different types of authority may co-exist. The same society may have the office of a hereditary king, which is an example of traditional authority, as well as the office of an elected prime minister, which is an example of legal-rational authority.

The three types of authority are distinguished by their respective sources of legitimacy. When legitimacy is derived from the existing conventions and customs, it is called *traditional* authority. Suppose, the rule is that after the father, the son will become the head of the state, it is an example of traditional authority. In *rational-legal authority*, the laws are formally laid down rules and prescriptions are impersonal and apply equally to all. Individuals have to compete for authority, which is distributed depending upon the rules. Besides the impersonal laws in this system, merit and qualification are also important principles. Traditional authority tries to maintain the system as it is, while legal-rational authority is ideally suited for change. This also explains why simple societies are, relatively speaking, conservative and tradition-oriented, while complex societies are progressive and change-oriented.

The third type of authority is called *charismatic*. It emerges in situations of crises that the existing system is unable to solve. When this happens, people crave for an intervention by a person who could resolve the crises for them, which may be natural, social, or political. Such a person becomes the bearer of charisma. Such a man looks 'extraordinary' and possessor of those qualities that ordinary people do not have. If a charismatic person comes to power, the authority he occupies is called 'charismatic authority'. Chairman Mao Zedong of China is a good example of charismatic authority. But, it is quite likely that a charismatic person might decide



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to remain outside the realm of power. That is exactly, what Mahatma Gandhi did. Therefore, we should make a distinction between a 'charismatic leader' and 'charismatic authority', because a charismatic leader may resolve the crises but after that may decide to remain outside the political system.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.4

Match the column 'A' with 'B'

- | 'A' | 'B' |
|------------------------|--|
| a) Political system | i) They do not have government or legal system. |
| b) Stateless societies | ii) maintains law and order and supervises the functions of society. |
| c) Charisma | iii) when people look for extra ordinary qualities which may not be natural. |

15.9 DEFINITION OF RELIGION

Earlier, we said that there are no known societies in which there is no form of religion. Attempts have been made at different times in different societies by their respective political leaders to create a society without religion, but all these attempts have failed, and religion in one form or the other has continued to survive. Religion is not only universal, but has emerged in modern society as a strong force to be reckoned with.

Religion is a belief in one or more than one spiritual beings. Along with beliefs, rituals (practices) are equally important. From the late nineteenth century, one part of the definition of religion has been that it is a 'set of beliefs and practices'. To which entities do these beliefs and practices pertain, has been a debatable issue.

The most influential definition of religion is that it is a unified set of beliefs and practices pertaining to things (objects and thoughts) which people regard as sacred. Sacred things are those that are 'set apart from the ordinary and are forbidden'. This is perspective of a well known sociologist, Emile Durkheim.

The idea of sacred is universally held. There are religions – like Buddhism, Confucianism, and Jainism – that do not have the concept of God or god but they definitely have the concept of sacred things. Buddhism, for instance, has the four noble truths, viz. the world is full of sufferings, the cause of sufferings lies in desires, one should attain the state of desirelessness, and one should work in an upright manner for one's salvation. All these are regarded as sacred.

Thus, one may define religion in the following terms: Religion is concerned with sacred things, which invoke feelings of reverence, and they are linked to rituals. There is a community of believers that adheres to the sacred symbols.

15.10 TYPES OF RELIGION

We observed in the beginning that though religion is universally found, its beliefs and rituals vary from society to society. In simple societies, the most important supernatural functionary is the *shaman*, a word originating among North American Indians. He is an individual possessed by supernatural powers. In a state of possession, he predicts about the future events that concern the entire society (such as, rainfall, crop yield, any natural calamity, like drought, epidemic and floods, etc.). He also answers the individual questions (such as those pertaining to illness, childlessness) and suggests remedies for overcoming misfortunes.

Two main forms of religion are found in simple societies. One is animism, and the other is totemism.

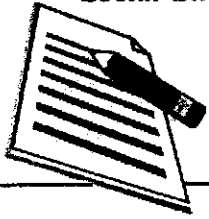
- Animism is defined as belief in the existence of soul (*anima*).
- The soul is highly malleable, plastic, and can pass through any orifice (opening) of the body.
- People believe that the souls of their ancestors and animals populate the world.
- The souls are either benign or malevolent, and affect human existence in a variety of ways.
- The term 'totem' originated among North American tribes.
- The belief in totemism is that once upon a time plants, animals, or other inanimate things founded the clans of people.
- Because of this, people have a special ritual relationship with these plants or animals.
- They think that if they worship their totems, they will have a fulfillment of their wishes.

Besides these, some simple societies also hold a belief in the existence of impersonal powers that have their own laws and affect human destiny in a variety of ways. Polynesians call these powers 'mana'. In other societies, they are known by different names. For example, the Hos of Jharkhanda call it *bonga*. The religious beliefs in some simple societies are quite complex, but what they generally do not have is a belief in one God, the idea conveyed by the term monotheism. Simple societies are largely polytheistic, that is, they believe in the existence of many gods.

Among the religions found in different societies, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and



Notes



Sikhism are monotheistic. They originated in the Near East and each has influenced the others. Of the three, Judaism is the oldest religion, dating about 1000 B.C. Christianity in fact began as a sect of Judaism, before becoming a distinctive religion. Today, Christianity commands the greatest number of adherents, and is spread across the world. Christian communities are found in almost every part of the world. The second largest religion in the world is Islam, and its followers are chiefly concentrated in North and East Africa, the Middle East, South East Asia and Indian subcontinent.

Still another religion which originated in India is Sikhism which developed in protest against the superstitions and beliefs and practices perpetuated by the priestly classes in the Hindu society. It was started approximately 500 years ago by Guru Nanak and was given a final shape by the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh. Sikhism is monotheistic.

The oldest of all the great religions is Hinduism, the principal beliefs of which date back some 6,000 years. Hinduism is both polytheistic and monotheistic. Believing in the unity and oneness of divinity on the one hand, it also has a great diversity of gods and goddesses, in all forms, such as in the form of animals, plants, humans, inanimate and mythical objects.

The religions of the East are known as 'ethical religions' – such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism – which do not have the concept of a single or many gods. Rather, they emphasize a set of ethical principles. The religions that emerged on the Indian soil, and largely confined to India, are Jainism and Sikhism.

15.11 TYPES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Each religion has a community of believers who are involved with religious organizations such as the church and the sect. For them, a church is a large, well-established religious body. This term is used for any religious organization and not necessarily for the organization of Christians.

The church normally has a formal, bureaucratic structure. It has a hierarchy of officials. In its ideology and functioning, it adapts itself to the social values and the society in which it is found. Often, it justifies the existing social order. Because of this, it represents the conservative side of religion.

Against the adaptation of the church to the society, many protest movements surface. They criticize the church for justifying social values that need to be condemned. They also criticize the church for losing its 'true way'. It is quite likely that some of these movements do not rise beyond the level of simple criticisms, but some of them take a more organized shape and emerge into a solidary group of believers who try to follow the 'true way'.

This protest group that generally emerges around a leader (the founder) is called a sect. A sect is a smaller group of committed believers. They tend to withdraw from the surrounding society into their own communities. In India, Arya Samaj has been a good example of a sect in the context of Hinduism. Calvinists and Methodists are other good examples in the context of Christianity.

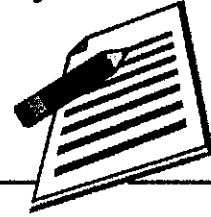
But, over time, a sect may lose its active protest ideology. It may also try to adapt to the society in which it is found. It happens because the sect may start facing the problem of survival and may lose membership. In fact, a sect may be absorbed in a church when its process of adaptation to the society begins. When a sect has 'cooled down', meaning that it is no longer an active protest group, the term used for it is denomination. It may be defined as a sect adapted to the society, which may end up by becoming a group of believers, distinctive in some respects, within the church.

There is another type of religious organization. It is called cult. It resembles sect in some respects; for instance, both are centered on individual leaders. Both reject the values of the outside society. But in comparison to sect, cult is mostly loosely knit. It focuses more on individual experience. It is quite likely that people may follow the theories of the cult without joining it formally. The cult leadership may permit its followers to hold membership of other religious affiliations. The continuity of the cult may be uncertain after the demise of its founder, which may not be the case with the sect. Good examples of the cult are the Osho believers, the believers in traditional meditation (like Mahesh Yogi's transcendental meditation group), and several others believing in spiritualism.

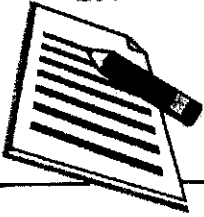
15.12 ORIGIN AND FUNCTIONS OF RELIGION

In the nineteenth century, certain theories of the origin of religion emerged, which were extremely popular at that time, but now they stand discredited. Today, sociologists do not attend to the problem of origin. Rather, they concern themselves with the functions of religion and how it is changing in modern times.

The evolutionists were concerned with two inter-related issues: first, the earliest type and form of religion; and second, how religion came into existence and through which stages it evolved over time. In one of the earliest theories, it was held that the origin of religion lay in the experiences of dreaming and death. What is that the individual sees in his dreams and what is that that leaves the body at death, were the questions that must have puzzled the primitive man. The answer to both the questions he must have found in the idea of soul, which was designated by the term *anima*. It is the *anima* that one sees in dreams, and it is that what leaves the body. That is why it was thought that the first type of religion was animism, a belief in the existence of soul.



Notes



Notes

Other scholars thought that primitive man was not so wise as to discover the idea of soul, which must have been discovered at later times. They thought that the origin of religion must lie in simple notions. Those who thought that totemism was the earliest form of religion said it was the worship of plants and animals that was the first to begin. Some primitive societies believed that plants and animals impregnated their women, and hence they were powerful. Some believed that they founded their clans. Some believed that plants and animals provided resting places to the souls of their ancestors, hence they were worthy of worship.

Another theory of the origin of religion, quite popular in the nineteenth century, was that religion began with the worship of natural entities, like the sun, the moon, stars and rainbow, etc., because they aroused a feeling of fear and wonder in human beings. This theory earned the title of naturism.

All these theories were sheer guess-works. This was the prime reason of their rejection. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the emphasis shifted from the search for origin to the functions that religion performs. Religion is functional because it binds people in a moral community. It integrates the society. It produces the feeling of we-ness, one-ness and solidarity. Later, sociologists also pointed out that religion is an important instrument of social control. It provides a blueprint of the society, for example, the case of caste system. Hinduism is the basis of caste system.

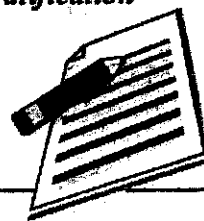
Although this theory is still respected, sociologists also say that it is applicable to those societies that have a single religion. It is here that religion can produce social integration. But, it may not be the case in societies having two or more different types of religion. In these societies, religion may also create conflicts between the believers of different religions. Thus, in these cases, religion may also become *dysfunctional*.

15.13 CHANGES IN RELIGION

This brings us to the last part of this chapter. Here, we shall explore the changing form of religion in contemporary society.

Throughout this lesson, we have maintained that religion has not disappeared, as some social thinkers thought at one time that it might. Instead, its form has changed.

- There has been a reduction in the rituals performed to mark different phases of life, like birth, marriage and death, etc.
- The hold of religion on social life has become weak. This process is called secularization and is occurring worldwide.
- Religion has lost many of its collective functions. Therefore, to say that it contributes to social integration may not be generally correct.



Notes

- Today, a large number of societies have religious pluralism, which means a co-existence of different religions.

Today, religion performs, as it has always performed, an important function of providing explanations of various phenomena to the individual. Religion provides a set of ready-made answers to various 'why' questions, that is, those questions that science in its existing state of knowledge cannot satisfactorily answer. Why religion is universal can be answered by saying that religion provides answers to various questions that individuals raise about their lives, and various accidental and unanticipated situations they face.

But, we should not conclude by saying that religion is functional to all societies at all points of time. Rather, it is most vulnerable to politicization. Various communities have manipulated it to suppress other communities, and to spread hatred between them. Religion has also been used for seeking political support.

These manipulations of religion have led to its strengthening, its reinforcement, rather than decline. As sociologists, we should critically look at both the sides of religion—its function in providing explanations, in rendering psychological support in times of crises, in keeping the social order intact, and also, its manipulation in creating divisions among people.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 15.5

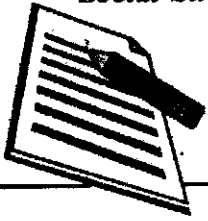
A. Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

1. Sect is a _____ group.
2. The oldest of all great religions is _____.
3. The Hos of Jharkhanda call the idea of the impersonal power by their local term, _____.
4. Sacred things are _____ and _____.
5. Confucianism is an example of _____ religion.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Human society is constituted of institutions.
- The four basic institutions are kinship, economy, polity, and religion.
- Each institution is defined by the content of its aims.
- All the institutions are inter-connected.
- Economic institutions deal with the production, exchange and distribution, and consumption of goods and services.



Notes

- Institutions that deal with the distribution of power in a society are political institutions.
- Religious institutions establish the relationship of human beings with entities that they regard as sacred.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. What do you mean by economy? Describe the characteristics of economic organization.
2. Explain political system.
3. Distinguish between power and authority.
4. Name two functions and dysfunctions of religion.
5. Describe the changes in religion in your own words.



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

15.1

1. They excel in their respective works but do not govern.
2. Kinship, economy, political and religious.
3. Economy is concerned with production, exchange and distribution, and consumption of goods and services.
4. Power is the ability to take decision for oneself and others and see that others abide by the decisions taken on their behalf.
5. Beliefs and practices are the constituents of religion.

15.2

1. unmonetized
2. industrial
3. horticulture
4. semi arid and desert
5. hunting and food gathering.

15.3

- | | | | |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 - T | 2 - F | 3 - T | 4 - T |
| 5 - T | 6 - F | 7 - F | 8 - F |

15.4

- | | | |
|-------|-------|---------|
| a - i | b - i | c - iii |
|-------|-------|---------|

15.5

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------|
| a) protest | b) hinduism | c) bonga |
| d) set apart, forbidden | e) ethical | |