



Unit : 05

Topic – Religion

SYM 101
Sociological
Concepts



Content

- Meaning and Definition of Religion
- Components of religion
- Characteristics of Religion
- Functions of Religion
- Approaches to Study Religion



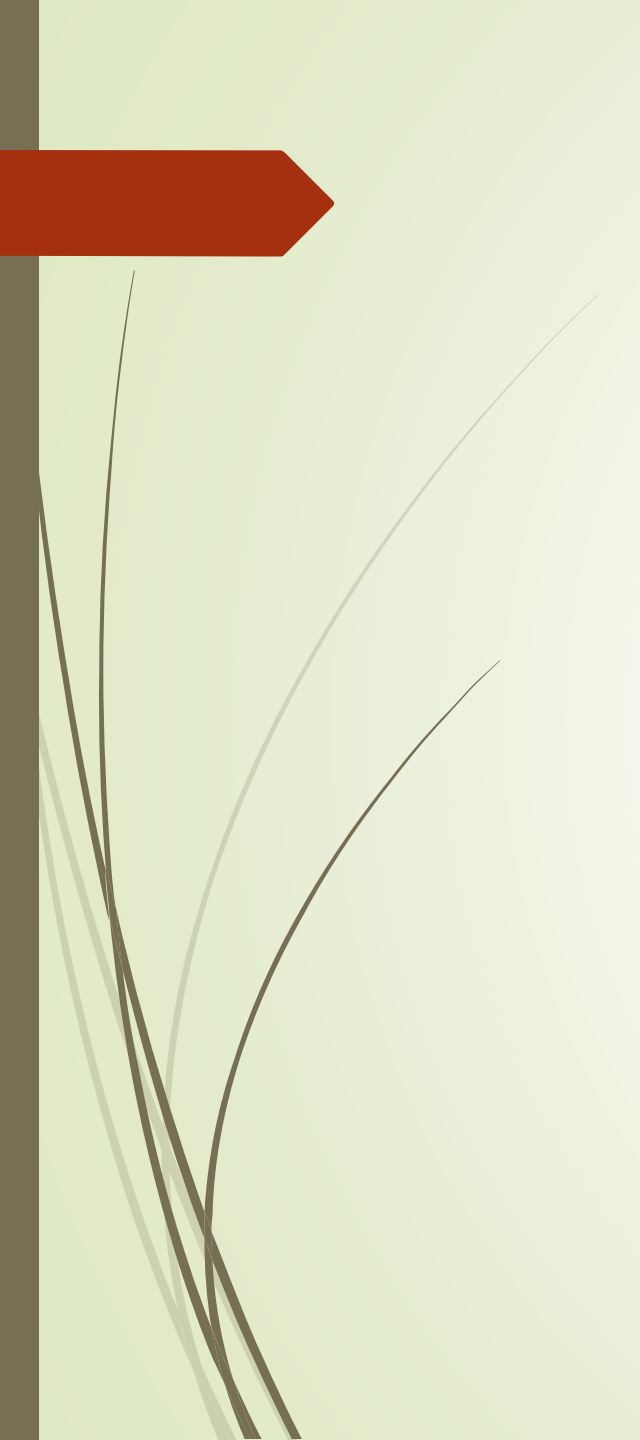
Introduction

- Religion is typically understood as a belief in a supernatural power. However, sociologists are not concerned with identifying or evaluating what that power is or how it operates. Instead, they view religion as a form of non-rational knowledge or a system of explanations grounded in the belief of possessing a singular, absolute truth (Gellner, 1992). From a sociological perspective, religion is studied not for its divine claims, but for how it functions as a system of ideas that profoundly shapes human behavior.
- Sociologists regard religion as a **collective, symbolic, and non-rational response to the human quest for meaning**. While they do not claim access to divinely revealed truths, they analyze how religious systems attempt to provide order and understanding to life. Religious beliefs have tangible social consequences, and it is these impacts—how religion influences values, ethics, and behavior—that are explored in the sociology of religion. Even in the modern world, religious principles continue to play a role in guiding and regulating human actions.



Meaning and Definition of Religion

- Though religion is a universal phenomenon, it is understood differently by different people. On religion, opinions differ from the great religious leader down to an ordinary man. There is no consensus about the nature of religion. Sociologists are yet to find a satisfactory explanation of religion. Writers have defined religion in various ways. A few definitions may be mentioned here.
- **Durkheim** in his book **The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life** defines religion as a “unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.”
- **James G. Frazer**, in his **The Golden Bough** considered religion a belief in “powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life.”

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- **Edward Sapir**, an American anthropologist, says that "**the essence of religion consists in man's never-ceasing attempt to discover a road to spiritual serenity across the perplexities and dangers of daily life**".
 - **MacIver and Page** have defined, "Religion as we understand the term implies a relationship not merely between man and man but also between man and some higher power."
 - According to **Ogburn**, "Religion is an attitude towards superhuman powers."
 - **Max Muller** defines religion as "a mental faculty or disposition which enables man to apprehend the infinite".
 - **Thomas F. O'Dea**, a functional theorist, defines religion as "the manipulation of non-empirical or supra-empirical means for non-empirical or supra-empirical ends". He further adds, "Religion offers what is felt to be a way of entering into a relationship with the supra-empirical aspects of reality, be they conceived as God, gods, or otherwise".

Components of Religion



Belief in Supernatural Forces



Practices/Rites: Positive and Negative



**Acts, Defined as Righteous and Sinful
or Sacred and the Profane**



Some Methods of Salvation



Ethics/Morality

Characteristics of Religion

- Belief in the supernatural power.
- These beliefs are associated with emotional state of mind such as fear, awe, happiness, reverence etc.
- There are many material objects involved in religious practices such as an altar, charms, cloth, leaves, sacrifice, cross, incense sticks etc.
- The material objects involved in religious practices vary from culture to culture.
- Every religion involves its specific rituals such as playing, dancing, chanting, fasting and eating certain specific kinds of food and so on.
- Religious rituals are typically carried out individually, though at times religion is observed collectively through ceremonial gatherings
- Every religion has its specific mode of worship.
- Every religion has its special place of worship.
- The concept of heaven and hell and sacred and profane.

Functions of Religion



Religion as an integrative force

Creating a moral community

Religion as social control

Provide rites of passage

Religion as Emotional Support


Religion Serves a means to provide Answers to Ultimate Questions

Religion as a source of Identity


Legitimate function of religion(meaning and purpose in life)

Religion Act as Psychotherapy

Religion as agent of social change



Approaches to Understand Religion



Evolutionary
Approach:
E.. Tylor and
James
Frazer

Psychological
Approach:
Sigmund
Freud

Functionalist
Approach:
Emile
Durkheim,
Bronislaw
Malinowski

Marxist
Approach:
Karl Marx



Thankyou