

Taboos are meant to safeguard ritual operation from the religious side. They protect religious persons and places of worship and to prevent any pollution in religion. It is believed among Nagas of Assam that a place or a person is made taboo by supernatural displeasure. From social aspect, taboo is having a special use. Often we find the taboo is aimed to create a desirable situation. For example, the taboo forbidding social and sexual relationships between brother and sister saves the society from some major complications. The elder brother is taboo to younger brother's wife, he is 'fear' to the korwas, the elder brother under no circumstances can approach the younger brother's wife, and can never be on speaking terms with the latter. The marriage timings are fixed in many tribal societies considering the climatic condition and the harvesting season. Marriages in other times are tabooed in those societies. Among the Mundas a custom of divine marriage between Sun God and the nature is observed in the spring, after this only the other marriages are celebrated, the period of marriage comes to an abrupt end immediately before the rains set in and the sowing operations begin. Thus a taboo regarding marriage dates are present there which is having a material purpose to serve in the life of local people.

The utilisation aspect of taboo provided the basis of social control among the primitive people. The sanctity of the taboos could be maintained by associating with religion and the supernatural forces. The concept of power shaped by the priests, magicians Sorcerers and sometimes the tribal chiefs provided the sanction of taboo though it originated out of fear, imagination, illusion, ultimately it began to serve some useful social purpose. The mechanism of social control could easily be operated by taboo as in small, localised societies, the identification of the offender was not at all difficult. Other correctives to social behaviour in primitive cultures like omens, oaths, ordeals, dreams, divination and the like do not have similar sanctions like the taboos, but these are also visited for the purpose of social control.

All the social ceremonies like birth, pregnancy, sowing and reaping etc. are carefully protected against the 'evil eye' by wearing amulets, charms, fixing auspicious hours and in other ways. The failures, sufferings, disappointments are also believed to have happened due to some evil forces and the situations in which those happened are attempted to be avoided. The Veddhas of Ceylon leave the house where death has occurred. Fever among the Korwas of Mirzapur is caused by Bhowan and a promise of some sacrifice or offering to this malignant spirit is expected to effect a complete cure. A diseased person or a pregnant woman may sometimes be tabooed as it is believed that their presence may cause discomfort to others.

Radcliff- Brown opined taboo is one of the various social mechanisms by which social order and stability can be maintained. These are essential for the survival of the society as restrictions imposed on people develop values and awareness among them. These are the symbols of negative actions and influences in society and with the help of such symbolic practices the people can develop social solidarity, faith in power and sometimes economic needs of the society are taught to them.

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## **THEORIES OF RELIGION**

### **ANIMISM :**

Religion and beliefs about religion vary from one society to another. There are differences in attitudes of people to consider and understand the role of spirit in life as well as the nature of supernatural. The earliest anthropological theory regarding

religion was presented by E.B. Tylor. He believed religion originated and was maintained on the beliefs of souls, ghosts, ancestral spirit and some more things which are imagined and illusioned without much real rationality, in them. And he named this as 'ANIMISM'. The presence of vitality and life force is not a monopoly of human beings and other animals, according to some primitive people, rather every sound and shadow, dream and pleasure, imagination and hallucination reflect life in some or the other way. So, this animism prevailing in the real and ethereal world is turned into a religion among one group of early men.

The concept of 'soul' varied from one place to another, from one tribe to another but a universal faith in the existence of 'soul' can be found. Tylor proposed an essential connection between this 'animism' and religion of the early men while the later scholars like R.H. Lowie argued that animism and religion largely overlap and they are not identical at all.

Tylor observed, as the primitive people could not explain some of their activities which were almost real for them but not so real as hunting, fighting, eating or sleeping. For example, due to heat they might have seen something just in hallucination, out of fear they might have been hypnotised by some animal, in dreams they might have seen something very realistic, out of love and respect they might have imaginatively met some dead ancestors—all these gave them the idea that a second soul is at work somewhere—this gave birth to the concept of animism. Even the modern man while arguing and explaining various things, sometimes faced the challenge of mystery and loss of logic. Thus, Tylor believed that an attitude of reverence towards something intangible and non-material spiritual beings forms the core of the earliest form of primitive religion '*Ancestor worship was the earliest form of worship and tombs the earliest temples*' as conceived by Madan and Majumdar. Tylor believed out of this basic concept lately religion was evolved. He cites some examples from the primitive people, who practised some rituals that reflect their faith in 'double soul'—some primitive tribes had the ritual of ceremonising 'Green funeral' 'Just after the death takes place and 'dry funeral' after few days' observation of mourning. Tylor opined, the tribal people had in mind the idea that, a dead body is not leaving the soul immediately for ever, rather it may be resettled in the body and so they waited before they could accept the final departure of the soul from the body of the loved ones. Thus the belief was there that, the soul may come and go to and from a living person.

Tylor was criticised for being so certain about the logical mind of the primitive people or identifying a philosopher in the primitive men. Tylor's theory over emphasised one side of the primitive religion i.e. '*belief in soul and spirit*'. However, we can not entirely overlook the role of this aspect, rather it could have been formed one important part in developing religion.

## ANIMATISM :

Codrington coined the term 'Mana' as he found the idea while he was working among the Melanesians. This word implies force that is present in all animate and inanimate objects. In a person or in an object some form of supernatural power may be believed to exist. The theory evolved by Marett on this concept of 'mana' is known as animatist theory. This force is beyond the reach of the senses, but this can be manifested through some physical force also.

Animism was concerned with soul or ghost or some other form of existence of

the dead ancestors etc. 'animism' is designating something more real, which can be visible also. For example Ho people believe in an all pervading life force and behind every object of nature there is the presence of God as well as of evil spirit. so they try to please this spirit for their own benefit and betterment. Their chief deity based on this belief is known as 'sing Bonga'. This Ho concept of Bonga is reflecting the theory of animatism or manaism. Some North American tribe calls this power as Orenda.

### **NATURISM :**

Supernatural power is often identified with natural objects like thunder, sun, earthquakes etc. And any change in the nature is believed to be the expression of the God or supernatural force. It is also felt that the force can be satisfied only through sacrifice from the part of the people. Generally animal sacrifices are offered.

Max Muller, the German scholar and Indologist was the main propounder of the theory of naturism. The primitive man, according to him, was inspired by the natural phenomena to find out the reason behind some natural calamities and catastrophic activities led to their interpretation in anthropomorphic terms, and divine personalities were invented to account for the activities of natural phenomena. The origin of religion, thus, according to MaxMuller lies in this attempt to explain and describe the reasons behind and implications of natural phenomena. Some religions are very close to this naturalism, specially the vedic literature of Hindu religion has reference about dawn, ocean, sun, moon as Gods and Goddesses. Among the Mundas practice was prevalent, as a Munda goes to the tops of hills and throw down stones of all sizes and shapes, so that the rumbling sound of stones falling would resemble the rumbling of thunder, and they believe that rains would follow. The Ho would burn faggots so that smoke may cover the sky resembling cloud and they believe that symbolic cloud is capable of bringing real cloud and rain. Thus, the outward events that affect life have been explained and accounted for by primitive people on the basis of knowledge that they gained through experiences and gradually this helped them to develop religion. Nature, thus, acted as a catalyst in creating the idea of religion though it was not the only one. Among the Mundas, there is 'Burubonga', deity of the hills and mountains and 'Ikir Bonga' is the God of ponds and lakes. Nage-era is the deity of canals and streams.

### **TOTEMISM :**

Totemism implies a tribal social organisation of the sib or clan pattern which is associated with a form of supernaturalism consisting of some typical attitude towards animals, plants or some other natural objects. Totem is related both to religion and clan organisation.

Regarding the religious aspect of totem, many scholars like Tylor, Durkheim have given their opinions and writings. Tylor opined that totemism emerged in the form of religious worship and ancestor worship. Durkheim saw in totemism the collective emblem of society and worship of society is the source of totemism according to him. The other scholars such as Boas, Swanton etc. who regarded totemism as an extension of the personal relation of an individual with an animal and plant. Goldieser regarded totemism as a socio-religious institution. Herbert Risley pointed

in India the religious aspect of totemism is almost dead to a considerable extent, and the social aspect is more operative.

Radcliffe Brown suggested two important words in respect of the idea of totemism—(a) Ritual relations between persons and their totems and (b) Ritual attitude, where every society adopts and imposes upon its members certain objects. The primary reasons behind the development of totemism is a social order.

Traditions regarding the origin of certain clans among the Tamaria, indicate that the totemic animal or plant has helped to protect the human ancestor of the clan. Most of the explanations in relation to the origin of clans among Ho, Munda and the santhal conclude that totems originated out of necessities at a time when human help failed to provide required relief. Thus in most cases totems have been conceived as the substitute or representative of the divine spirit thereby linking them with religion.

We can take the example of Santhals who are identified with totems and totem worship is very popular and it is often obligatory for them. We find Hansda clan with a totem duck, Pansia clan with totem pigeon etc.

## **FETISHISM :**

If a particular natural object is imaginatively attached with some supernatural power and individual being to have faith in it directly, this type of association is known as fetishism. The objects used for this purpose is known as 'fetish', It may be a feather, a shell, a bone etc. For example, if some one has touched a skull and felt the flow of power in his body and with the help of that power, he might have saved a patient's life or brought the rain in time etc. This idea of fetishism is much related with magic. This is entirely a faith in something unexplainable and uncontrollable in general. It's test is it's efficacy, i.e. for how many times or in how many occasions the object could be used successfully—This consideration and understanding may fetter the character of the respective object.