

# **UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS**

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## **Learning Objectives**

Once you have studied this unit, you will achieve familiarity with:

- various religious specialists;
- functional differences among specialists;
- relationship among the specialists; and
- specialisation in relation to the scale of the society.

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## **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Religious knowledge is neither possessed uniformly nor equally shared among all the members of a society. It cannot be the monopoly of one individual. Similarly, no one can claim total expertise in the ways the religious performances or rituals are ought to be organised. Some individuals are more knowledgeable than the others, and similarly some have acquired special knowledge or special training to carry out religious performances or impart religious knowledge to others. Not all rituals require the presence of religious experts, but in some their presence is

indispensable. Those who are trained or have acquired special knowledge are qualified to perform certain religious activities. They may also have certain distinctive personality traits that make them capable of performing such works. Such persons have ritual authority, esoteric knowledge or spiritual gifts and are considered competent to find religious solutions. They are authorized to interpret religious codes, holy laws and ecclesiastical rules and even social norms. These religious specialists or leaders may be one of these different types – shaman, medium, witch, sorcerer, prophet, priest, clergy, saint, monk, missionary, etc. They are given certain status in the society. In reality, some individuals may at times perform the functions of more than one of these specialists and change roles depending on the circumstances and need. These are religious intermediaries that mediate between the super-humans and humans. Religious intermediaries may be part-time or full-time specialists. This unit is devoted to examine the characteristics and interrelationships among these religious specialists.

## **3.2 CATEGORIES OF SPECIALISTS**

Shamanism is most common, and is duly recognised among localised religions but it has not attained reputed status in the world religions which are more organised and it is often relegated to the folk religion. In the modern industrial societies or those developing where the organised world religion dominates, religious specialisation takes place. There are two broad categories of specialists, formal and informal: the specialist who has been conferred by religious authority, which, in turn, has various ranks, are formal specialists which include priests, clergy, saint or seer, monk and missionary. The specialists of informal category are client oriented, such as faith healers, prophets, mediums, etc. Herein, first we will take up shaman's followed by informal and formal specialists.

## **3.3 SHAMAN**

The term shaman seems to have been derived from the Tungus language of Central Siberia, but some claim its origin to be *Sanskrit*. Whatever be its roots, the concept covers many disparate things rather than a clear unified concept. There are some who restrict the term to the northern-Arctic phenomenon, but others use it broadly to cover any ecstatic behaviour. It has, however, been accepted in anthropology as the term for a unique sort of spiritual-medical-political specialist. These specialists are found among the Siberians, Greenlanders, North American tribes, Chinese and other Asian societies. From around 1970s new shamanistic movements have sprung in USA and Europe among the urbanised people with the motifs of western culture drawing upon the indigenous “other” and ancient wisdom which may be called neo-shamanism. Different shamanistic practices are discussed below:

### **3.3.1 Siberian Shamanism**

In the Arctic shamanism, the shaman is a master or mistress of spirits. She or he uses hand-held drums, performs dance and uses elaborate costumes and engages in rituals which are dramatic aided by the use of various theatrical techniques of shaman. The ritual is meant to contact and establish a relationship with a supernatural entity, and the success of a shaman lies not in memorisation of prayer or performance of ritual but in the ability to successfully establish contact and exercise control over the supernatural. Each shaman keeps in control a few spirits who give powers or particular qualities to the shaman. The world is divided into

three realms: the upper realm is one of good spirits; the middle realm is the home of the people of the earth; the lower realm is one of darkness and evil spirits. In the altered state of consciousness, the shaman journeys to one of the other realms with the help of spirits. The main function of the shaman is healing; the disease is believed to have been caused due to loss of soul that has been snatched away by a spirit. The shaman deals with the disease causing spirit or retrieves the lost soul with the help of his familiar or favoured spirits. The ritual is also conducted for successful hunt; the shaman contacts the spirits of an animal species and makes a deal with them; the animal spirits supply food to the humans by enriching hunting, and the humans supply the spirits with human flesh and blood which is the cause of sickness and death. Shamans are frequently chosen by the spirits to become shaman (Stein and Stein 2008:124-126).

### **3.3.2 Tapirape Shamanism**

The unseen world of the Tapirape Indians of Central Brazil consists of spirits known by generic term *ancunga* that consist ghosts – *iunwera*, the disembodied souls of the dead and malevolent beings of many classes and descriptions. The former live in abandoned villages but they visit the inhabited villages in rainy season, and the ghosts also die and become changed into animals. The other class of spirits live deep in forests and these kill those who visit their habitations. The shaman of Tapirape derives power by dreaming and he travels to the world of the spirits; the soul, *iunga*, frees itself from the body in sleep and move freely in time and space. The power of shaman depends upon the number of demonic familiars and their strength; he also seeks support of the spirits from the attacks of the spirits of other shamans. Treating sickness is the most common duty of the shaman. The curing is most frequently done by extraction of a malignant object by sucking which is aided by ‘eating the tobacco smoke’ and vomiting of the stomach. Another important duty of the shaman is protecting the members from the ghosts, and some shamans control and increase the bands of pigs by travelling to the ‘home of wild pigs’ and by copulating with the female pigs. The wild pigs are believed to be pets of the spirits and the shaman brings the pigs of the familiar spirit to the vicinity of the habitation. Shamans often are destructive by sending familiar spirits against another shaman or any member of the society out of jealousy or for revenge (Wagley 1971).

### **3.3.3 Korean Shamanism**

The Korean society believes in the spirits that possess individuals and trouble them causing illnesses to the living. Even though the Koreans are converted to Buddhism that has no place for pre-Buddhist beliefs, the traditional beliefs have not been totally replaced by Buddhist beliefs. The shamanism here is known as Muism or Sinism (religion of gods) and encompasses a variety of Korean indigenous religious beliefs and practices, and the shaman is called *mudang*, usually a woman who acts as intercessor between god(s) and people. The shaman is chosen by spirits, and experienced shaman performs initiation ritual for transforming the novice into a full-fledged shaman, who organises services independently. These are public performances organised for clients for curing illnesses by exorcising lost spirits that cling to people, or propitiate local or village gods. Such services are also held to guide the spirit of a deceased person to reach heaven. For some shaman women it is a good source of income and the practice gives certain degree of influence over the community also.

### 3.3.4 Neo-shamanism

Urbanites of United States of America and Europe started showing interest in shamanism since 1970s. Its popularity is drawn largely from Native American traditions. The drug culture of 1960, interest in non-Western religions, environmentalism, the New Age, self-help, self realisation movement, etc., have contributed to this development. Anthropologists Carlos Castaneda and Michael Harner who studied Yaqui of Arizona (USA) and Jivaro of Amazon have promoted neo-shamanism by publishing relevant material and organising workshops in USA, Europe and Latin America and also training interested people. The aim is to achieve altered states of self consciousness using drugs or drums and have the experience of meeting spirits and power animals. Here bits and pieces of different cultures are put together by each practitioner for such an experience.

Shamans or similar religious specialists are also found in major religions of the world such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Christianity. In India and many south Asian countries, where Hinduism and Islam are commonly professed, there is belief in *Pir*/holy man or Baba or Ma/Matha who acts as a mediator between God/spirits and man. Both Hindus and Muslims revere the *Pir* whereas Baba and Ma/Matha is well respected by Hindus. In the Philippians and in some American Philippine communities, there are individuals who perform “spirit surgery.” Evangelical Christian “faith healers” can be fitted into the definition of shaman also. It depends on what they believe in the source of their “power.” They are shamans if they personally have power to compel their God to cure people. They are intermediaries having independent authority, and use altered state of consciousness to directly contact the supernatural world for healing or solving problems of another individual. They are not associated with any formalised religious institutions. They may or may not engage themselves in or organise any ritual.

Finally, it may be concluded that a shaman is a kind of intermediary who has independent authority, and is not part of an organised religion and is in direct contact with the spirit world, usually through a trance state. One who has charisma and ability to deal with the supernatural powers becomes shaman. There is a special relationship between a shaman and the society. A successful shaman can amass a significant degree of social authority. A shaman is essentially a religious entrepreneur who acts for human clients. She or he intervenes on behalf of a human client to influence supernatural beings to perform some acts such as curing an illness or discovering the cause of an unexpected suffering. One acquires Shamanic power individually, mostly in physical and/or mental solitude and isolation from other humans.

Questions in shamanistic experience can be difficult to answer – such as, are there really animal guardian spirits with which human beings can make contact? Is psychic healing a reality, and, if so, what is the relationship between the capacities of the human mind and external forces? Bowie (2000) agrees that this type of question is not easy to assess empirically, but acknowledges that anthropologist can study what people say and think about their beliefs and practices, and the role that these beliefs and practices play in structuring, people’s lives. Shamans belonging to different communities would use different means to achieve their ends. Certain factors are, however, found in common. They are as follows: a) usually the office is hereditary but occasionally a person’s personality can also make him the chosen one to the office, (b) The shaman may possess a unusual mental state or even a physical shortcoming so that he may be considered neurotic or epileptic, (c) The above abnormal qualities make him the chosen one (d) One takes up apprenticeship

under an older shaman to learn and develop the skills, (e) the shaman may go into a trance or enter into an excited condition to make her/his predictions, or to cure the illness or get rid of a spirit, and (f) hallucinogens, such as drugs or weeds or smoke, are used to go into trance.

One becomes shaman in various ways. In case of Siberian or Korean shamanism the spirit(s) choose the shaman; among the Tapirape one has to dream. Among the Zulu of South Africa the spirit troubles the person chosen to be a shaman with sickness and an experienced shaman finds it through divination and confirms the selection as shaman by the spirit. Among the Zinacanteco Indians one gets a call when one looks into the realms of gods and ancestors in dreams and visions. Often shaman combines, in some cases, the functions of priest, prophet and magician, all in one. Shaman also performs rituals of sacrifice and appeases the gods or spirits once they have been forced to submit to the shaman's needs. Because of the power possessed, the shaman acquires a charismatic personality and leadership similar to a prophet. In order to enhance the image of supernatural powers, one wears unusual jewelry and clothing, sport long and matted hair, paint the body with colour or ash and carry either musical instruments or bones etc. The typical methods for inducing a trance or altered consciousness involve: fasting, the use of narcotic drugs, tobacco, dancing, singing or drumming to a hypnotic rhythm, etc.

## **3.4 INFORMAL SPECIALISTS**

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### **3.4.1 Medium**

Close to shaman is medium. A medium is a human channel of either sex through which god or ancestor or spirit communicates with the living members of the society. The supernatural being possesses the human agency, the medium, that goes into trance or enters an altered consciousness of ecstasy, and the spirit publicly speaks to the living, and that whatever is spoken is attributed to the spirit but not to the human agency. It is believed that the spirit suppresses the human spirit and uses the body of the human agent to communicate directly with the living, and listens with the ears of the human agent whatever spoken by the living. The medium does not recount the revelation and does not even remember what has been uttered after the dispossession of the spirit. The speech of the spirit would be different from the agent with shrill or squeaking voice and delivered with convulsions, rhythmic or frenzy body movements and so on. The message given by the spirit is called oracle, which also means a device used in divination. Even a medium is often called as an oracle.

Mediums existed among the Greeks and Romans of ancient times and they are present in several contemporary societies as well. The temple of Apollo at Delphi was an ancient place of mediums in Greece which dates back to 1400 BC. The famous Oedipus myth mentions the oracle at Delphi about killing his father and marrying the mother Jocasta. The oracle was delivered through a medium called Pythia. In Brazil, the Candomblé and Umbanda religious forms are based on the *orisha* deities of Yoruba religion of Nigeria that have mediums. These forms are developed within the last fifty years, which have been heavily influenced by Catholicism. The phenomenon is now called as Spiritism. The Brazilians visit these medium to find out solutions to their problems, mostly related to their romance (St. Clair 1971), healing, overcoming financial difficulties, etc.

The Western society has been witnessing new mediumship in the latter half of the 20th century. This is called channel and the channeler goes into a trance, or leaves

the body or get possessed by a specific spirit, who then talks with the living through the channeler. The spirit answers the questions of those present. A widely known channeler is Jane Roberts who gets the spirit of Seth, Esther Hicks, Margaret McElroy of Maitreya, Grandbois of Kris (Klimo 1987 referred by Van Rheenen 1996).

#### Reflection and Action

Shamanisms are of various kinds. Sometimes they overlap. Distinguish between the shaman and medium.

### 3.4.2 Witch and Sorcerer

As pointed out by Evans-Pritchard, a Witch is different from a Sorcerer in Africa. But it may not be the case everywhere. Witches have antisocial characters or behaviour; may practice cannibalism or incest in order to enhance their powers. They show deep sense of greed, jealousy and hatred. A witch is always a woman in Nupe, whereas in Gwari, a neighbour with similar culture, a witch can be man or woman. The witch's power is internal and inherited whereas the sorcerer uses external power to harm others. Both are believed to be causing untimely death. The sorcerer is a magician, an evil figure; in many religions healers use black magic, but a sorcerer is internally evil that works for illegal and antisocial ends. Some ailments are attributed to sorcery, such as *kuru* in Fore of New Guinea. Usually the sorcerer employs contagious magic with hair, nail, clothes, etc., of the victim. The sorcerer learns the art and uses different techniques and rituals for causing an effect of the power on others. Another sorcerer is engaged to undo the sorcery or a witch may be allowed to do the same. The practices of witch differ from society to society and even within the same society. In Cameroon, witchcraft is known as *ekong* or *kupe* or *famla* and is practiced across ethnic lines. Even rural France is no exception to the belief in witches. The occurrence of a series of misfortunes to an individual or family is attributed to the works of a witch (Bowie 2000). In Kipsigis of Kenya there are various kinds of sorcerers and witches, and the most powerful one who could perform sorcery against the whole tribe is called *orgoiyat* and the less powerful one is *bonnindet*. There is another specialist called *chepsogeiyot* that determines who is the *bonnindet* in a particular case. The acts of a witch are attributed when no explanation is readily available. Even in modern times, as in case of Sub-Saharan Africa, HIV/AIDS is termed as consequences of witchcraft. In Christian theology the witches and sorcerers are the agents of the Devil or Satan.

#### Reflection and Action

Distinguish between witch and sorcerer; they are not the same. These specialists may be found in every traditional society. Find out if there are such specialists in your own society.

### 3.4.3 Prophet

In his book on religion, Weber has devoted a whole chapter to the understanding of what a prophet is. He defines the prophet as an individual who is capable of proclaiming a religious doctrine or a divine commandment because of his charismatic qualities. The major difference between the priest and prophet is that the prophet regards his mission as a "personal call" and derives his authority from personal revelation and charisma or an exceptional quality. The core of the prophet's mission is to carry forward the commandment or doctrine he has received as revelation. Often the prophet may use magic to establish his authority. The prophet is usually

successful and respected till his ability to convince and prove his uniqueness of purpose is intact. One may say a prophet is a person who receives divine revelation concerning a restructuring of a religion and usually society as well. Prophets are usually outside the priesthood and are seen by priest as irritating, disruptive trouble makers. The prophet could be of either sex and as a charismatic innovator may reject traditional rituals and improvise or advocate those right in her or his sight. The rise of prophets is seen during the adverse times, cultural stress and anxiety. The prophet speaks at the spiritual as well as this worldly level in correcting the society, and, thus, becomes an agent of social change. Evans-Pritchard says in the priest man speaks to God and in the prophet God speaks to man.

Among the African tribes there are prophets among the Nuer, as noted by Evans-Pritchard, that are believed to have been chosen by God to predict future, cure the sickness and ensure fertility of women. Among the Bantu, Zulu, the Zionists of Ethiopia the impact of Protestant Christianity and colour discrimination in the Church brought out the prophets who assumed leadership in the society to establish separate churches. Similar situation is observed among the Hausa of Nigeria with the impact of Islam. Orunmila is prophet of Yoruba religion who has tremendous role in organising religion that has been spread to Brazil and other South American societies. Christian prophets established new churches in Yoruba having got separated from the church of the Whites.

When Jews or Christians think of prophets, people like Moses, Noah, Isaiah, Jeremaih, Eziekiel, and Daniel usually come to mind. However, the most striking example of a biblical prophet was Jesus which is a debated reality as the Jews and Muslims consider him to be a prophet while the Christians take him to be God. If a prophet is successful in convincing enough people that he or she is right, a new religion is usually established. The case in point is Joseph Smith's divine relation and subsequent prophetic teaching in the 1830's and early 1840's led to the creation of the Church of the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) in USA. To put it simply, the prophet may be seen as an individual who is an instrument for carrying forward the will of God and he/she is obeyed because of the ethical nature of his mission. He/she may also be a person who individually sets an example of attaining salvation, as did Buddha. This latter form of exemplary prophetism has been found particularly in India.

In Islam it is believed that God sent several prophets at different times and places to communicate his message, and they are human beings who are not God incarnates. The Quran mentions a total of 1 lakh 24 thousand prophets (124000), and of them the last is Prophet Muhammad. There are no prophets in Hinduism the way the concept finds its place in Judaism, Islam and Christianity. There are scriptural texts that contain prophetic message such as Vedas and Bhagavad Geeta about *kaliyug*, the dooms day and seers who prophesied the future of the world events as in case of Sri Potuluri Veerabramham of 18<sup>th</sup> Century who lived and is much venerated in Andhra Pradesh. One of the modern day prophets in India can be Sathya Sai Baba whose predictions are believed to have come true, and they had advocated for social harmony and spiritual equality. However, these seers have claimed themselves as Gods.

### **3.4.4 Diviner**

One who engages in techniques that inform about the unknown causes or future is known as diviner. The divination is magical and involves in rituals. It is based on the belief that the world consists of things and events that are interconnected

and as such the magic is to manipulate things and observe the connections. The diviner often interprets the dreams and omens, contacts the spirits and ancestors through trance. Sometimes the viscera of animals or birds are examined to find out the cause of illness. In many ways the diviner gets to know the unknown causes or future events that affect the individuals and community. The diviner could be an ordinary member of the society or has a position of shaman or medium or prophet or priest or healer.

## 3.5 FORMAL SPECIALISTS

### 3.5.1 Priest

A religious leader who is authorised to be part of an organised religion is considered to be a priest or priestess. Different religions have different terms for these individuals. They may be known as Rabbis, Ministers, Mullahs, Lamas, Imams, or something else. These individuals are the keepers of the sacred law and tradition. They are found mostly in large-scale societies. Priests are initiated and ceremonially inducted members of an established religious organisation as a full-time specialist. Priests are sometimes distinguished from people by the way they dress, etc. The training of a priest can be rigorous and long, which includes not only fasting, prayer, and physical labour but also learning the dogma and the rituals of his religion. Priests are authorised to perform religious rituals designed to influence the supernatural world and to guide the believers in their religious practices. They personally do not have supernatural power of their own by the rituals but the rituals that they perform are believed to be effective. In societies where there is a hierarchy of spirits and gods and the chief gods, they must not be approached directly but through the priest.

The community deals with deity or deities through the priest who acts as a representative of the community. The latter performs various rituals on behalf of the community, which include periodical or rituals of calendar usually related to agricultural cycles and seasons, disasters, epidemic diseases and well being of the community. Priests also perform the rites of passage associated with birth, puberty, wedding and death. They are also to legitimize authority of the community through rituals, as in case of coronation and they are usually taken as protectors of ethics and morals of the community and set high standard for the entire community. By virtue of this and their association with the sacred place which may be a shrine or sacred space where deities or spirits dwell, they remain symbols of sacred. Sometimes priests may have received divine unction (anointing of the sick) through dreams, visions or trance. The priests usually enjoy highest status in the society because of the above which are special to them. Usually the priests undergo rigorous training, memorising texts, obtain religious knowledge, skills of performing rituals and so on. Such training may have been institutionalised or informal, as the case may be. While in some cultures both men and women can be priests but in some, such as Islam or Hinduism, women cannot be priests. As in Catholic Christianity and Buddhism the priests remain unmarried but in several other religions priests are married.

Anthropologists have observed that societies with full-time religious specialists (priests) are likely to be dependent on food production rather than food collecting. They are also likely to have economic exchange involving the use of money, class stratification, and high levels of political integration. These are all features indicative of cultural complexity. Female religious specialists are likely to be found in those

societies where women are acknowledged to contribute in a major way to the economy and where gods and goddesses are both recognised. In Western Europe and North America, for instance, where women are now wage earners, in almost every profession they occupy leadership position in the work force and they have an increasing presence in the leadership of many Judeo-Christian religious groups (Lehman, 2002).

In Aztec society, the priesthood was very complex and the priests were arranged in a hierarchical order. In Nahuatl language, the word priest, *tلاماقزqui* means “giver of things” to gods for their favour. They were engaged in human sacrifice, especially to Sun, providing the sacred food. Most of the rituals involve in animal or human sacrifices. It was believed that the humans who were sacrificed would become deities. The priests enjoyed great respect in the society. The Zuni, the Pueblos of America, are very ceremonious people. There are different types of priests in Zuni society – Sun priest, Bow priests, Rain priests, etc. The Sun Priest is considered to be the most respected holy man. Women are also included into the category of priests. The rituals and ceremonies are held in *kevas* and plazas. In Okinawa society of Ryukyu Islands women lead the religious matters and the women specialists or priestesses are called *kaminchu*. They communicate with and make offerings to the ancestors, local gods and more powerful deities. Their primary duty is to officiate at community wide festivals and rituals which take place in a sacred space, usually in a grove or *ong*, at a cave or by the sea, and men are not allowed to enter these sacred spaces. Their duty includes the protection and fuelling of the communal fire, which was used to establish new households. They would also perform divination to determine the best days for sacred ceremonies, for social functions, such as marriage or funeral, and for agricultural pursuits.

Priesthood is not open for every one as in case of Hinduism where it is restricted to Brahmin castes. The priest in traditional India may assist in the performance of a ritual-at home, or in a temple. In Hinduism, he is born into a priestly caste, by virtue of which he gains these functions. The Vedas say that the social group of Brahmana is the priestly class, and the Rig Veda describes the priestly activities of some of the families of the Vedic tribes. Priests are most often found in hierarchical societies and generally hold a higher status in their societies than those they preside over. A Hindu priest performs the *pujas* (rituals) such as Sri Satyanarayana Katha, Rudrabhishekam, Chandi Patham, Navgrah, Vastu pooja, Bhoomi pooja, Grih Pravesh, Mool and Grah shanty, Sundar Kand Path, Kaal Sarpa Yog Shanti, Garbadan, Punsavana (foetus protection), Simanta (satisfying the wishes of pregnant mother), Jaat Karma (child birth), Naam Karma (naming child), Nishkramana (taking child outdoor), Anna Prashana (Giving the child solid food), Mundan or Choula (hair cutting), Karnavedh (ear piercing), Yagyopaveet (sacred thread), Vidyarambha (Study of Vedas and Scriptures), Samaavartana (completion of education), Vivaah (marriage), Sarvanskaar (preparing for renouncing), Sanyas (renouncing), Antyesti, Ayush homam, Sudarshan homam, Maha Mrityunja homam, Navgrah homam, Ganpati homam, Maha Lakshmi homam, Santan Gopal homam, Grih Shanti homam, etc. Priests hold power due to their association with their respective religious institutions. The traditional Judaism also restricts it to Levites.

Similarly, in the widespread practiced rituals of Catholicism, the role of priest is to officiate or organise baptism (the first sacrament of Christian initiation), penance (confession and reconciliation), confirmation (the second sacrament of Christian

initiation), Eucharist (the third sacrament of Christian initiation), marriage, unction (anointing of the sick) and sacrament, etc. Buddhist priests are to perform certain roles required of their calling.

### 3.5.2 Clergy

Though the term clergy is closely associated with Christianity, the social scientists have also been using the term to include full time religious functionaries in major world religions. Clergy is a broader category that includes priest or priestess and the priesthood is attached to the status conferred by the religious authority within the religious institutional framework. But the priesthood is not same in Christianity or Islam. In these cases clergy do not mediate between God and people. However, in Judaism there are roles of priest and rabbi, and, in fact, the latter means a teacher and they were divided into Sadducees and Pharisees. In Christianity the clergy is divided into several ranks as bishop, pastor, deacon, etc. Islam does not accept priesthood but there are specialists who are known as ‘men of God’ like *ulema*, which mean who knows or who has knowledge of Quran and God, learned and are proficient in *sharia* law. This category include *imams*, and in the Shiite branch there is the category of *ayatollah*.

In Christianity, the pastor is one of clergy ordained functionary of the Christian church. Though it was restricted to men, it has been extended to women also, and the church in the West is now struggling to accommodate the clergy with same sex orientation. The pastors do not mediate between a person/group and God as in case of priests. Their main responsibility is to provide spiritual leadership and help the congregation developing deep personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They go beyond the spiritual realm to help in social life of the church members for the spiritual and social dimension are dependent on each other and well being of the members of the church are his concerns too. In Orthodox Judaism women are forbidden to become a *rabbi*. Traditionally, in Islam women have not been the *imam* or teacher, but gradually the change is taking place as in Morocco.

### 3.5.3 Saints or Seer

Saints are a specific group of individuals who maintain pious, ascetic or austere and devote life found in all religions, but more significant part of Catholicism. They are individuals who led devout Christian life who had done amazing things with their lives and performed miracle during their life time and believed to have caused miracles after death. They are recognised by the Church as Saints and the sainthood is instituted by Pope. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, a Protest organisation, recognises the Latter-day Saints who are no more, and contemporary saints as well.

In Hinduism the equivalent concepts are *rishi* or sage or seer, who has acquired rightful vision accomplished actions. They see things through spiritual eye, perceives the hidden truth and bear truth. They are model of religion and role models for others to lead spiritual life. Besides the *rishis* of Vedic times, there are well known seers and saints such as Kabir, Tulsi, Surdas, Tuka Ram, Srikrishna Chaitanya, Eknath, Narsi Mehta, Tyagaraja, Dhyaneswar, Tiruvalluvar, Namdev, Mirabai, Dayanand, Guru Nanak, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekananda, Swami Ram, Shri Sai Baba of Shirdi, Ramana Maharishi, Sri Satya Sai Baba, and Sri Aurobindo. Sufism of Islam and Sikhism honours saints and seers. In Islam too saint worship is practised. *Pir* reverence is found widely practised all over the Islamic world.

### 3.5.4 Monk

The term “monk” has Greek origin meaning single or solitary. It is used to describe a religious specialist who conditions the mind and body in favour of the spirit. This conditioning often includes seclusion from those who do not follow the same beliefs, abstinence, silence, and prayer. Monk symbolises asceticism and austere life. The concept is ancient and can be found in many religions and philosophies. It seems Monks were originally present solely in Christianity, but through a looser definition created by modern westerners, the term has been applied to more religions (for example *bhikkhu* in Buddhism, hermit in Hinduism). The term is also often used interchangeably with the term “ascetic,” which describes a greater focus on a life of abstinence, especially from sex, alcohol, and material wealth. In Ancient Greece, “monk” referred to both men and women. Though in modern English, the term “nun” is used to describe a female monk. The monks living together under one roof and under the rule of a single person is known as monastery and the way of life is called monasticism. Separate monasteries are maintained for males and females. In Christianity, the monastery of females is called convent. The Christian monasteries are spread throughout the world. There is a wide variety of monasticism across various Roman Catholic Churches where monastery is the common feature, which is absent among the Protestant Christianity.

Before becoming a monk in a monastery, nearly every monk must take some sort of vow, the most famous being the Roman Catholic vow of “poverty, chastity, and obedience.” It is also common to have a hierarchy within a monastery through which a monk can rise over time with the growth of spiritual excellence. Monks are often confused with friars. Although they are very similar, the main difference between the two is that the friar is associated with community development and aid to the poor.

Though the term monk is applied in Buddhism also, the situation of asceticism is different. There is a trial period before one is ordained as monk. There are male and female monks in Buddhism that live separately. In Thervada Buddhism the monks live the life of mendicancy and collect alms. In Chinese Buddhism, the monks are linked with the Chinese martial art, Kung fu. In Thailand and Myanmar the young boys live for some time in monastery and may not return to the monastery but remain as celibate and monks. The contemporary example of monk can be the Dalai Lama. The Dalai Lama is the head monk of Tibetan Buddhism and traditionally he has been responsible for the governing of Tibet. The Dalai Lama belongs to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the largest and most influential tradition in Tibet. The institution of the Dalai Lama is a relatively recent one. There have been only 14 Dalai Lamas in the history of Buddhism, and the first and second Dalai Lamas were given the title posthumously. According to Buddhist belief, the current Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of a past lama who decided to be reborn again to continue his important work. The Dalai Lama essentially chooses to be reborn again instead of passing onward. A person who decides to be continually reborn is known as *tulku*. Buddhists believe that the first *tulku* in this reincarnation was Gedun Drub, who lived from 1391-1474, and the second was Gendun Gyatso. However, the name Dalai Lama meaning Ocean of Wisdom was not conferred until the third reincarnation in the form of Sonam Gyatso in 1578. The current Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso.

There are monks in Jainism also in both the traditions of Shvetambar and Digambar. They are of different orders such as *acharya*, *upadhyaya*, *muni*, *ailak*, etc. Both male and female monks renounce all relations and possessions, practice strict and

complete non-violence, and follow strict vegetarianism avoiding root vegetables. They travel from city to city crossing forest and desert bare foot.

In Hinduism Madhvaacharya, the *dwaita* philosopher that propagated the love of Lord Krishna established eight *mathas*, monasteries. Each *matha* is headed by a swamiji who may be called as monk. It is known popularly through Hare Krishna movement and International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), monks outside India. The Ramkrishna mission has monastic organisation shaped by Swami Vivekananda, chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, the founder of the mission. Like the Christian monasteries, the Ramakrishna mission is concerned not only with the Hindu religion and philosophy but also engaged in Educational works, Healthcare, Cultural activities, rural upliftment, Tribal welfare, Youth movement, etc.

#### Reflection and Action

Differentiate between saint/seer and monk. They appear to be the same but functionally different.

#### 3.5.5 Missionary

Though the term missionary is closely associated with Christianity, the function of missionary has been found in all major world religions. Whoever has been engaged with the spread of a particular faith across the national or cultural boundary can be termed as missionary. Thus, there are Hindu, Buddhist and Islamic missionaries. They are advocates of God or divine being and teach how one should come into personal relationship with the divine being(s). The missionary is different from prophet whose focus is the same society, but are involved in change. While the former is concerned with the change of the foreign society, the latter is engaged in the change of the same society. A missionary will have to necessarily know and understand the beliefs, practices, cosmology and religious dogma of others before she/he teaches one's own faith to others. In case of the Christian missionaries they learned the language of others in order to translate Bible or gospel of Jesus Christ and also propagate the Christian faith. Their learning of other's language and interest in the religion led to production of 'pagan' religious beliefs which had facilitated anthropologists in theorising religion. The missionary after planting church could become or known as a pastor or one of the ranks of the clergy.

### 3.6 MODES OF RELIGIOUS SPECIALISATION

The above mentioned religious specialists are not found in all societies but some are present everywhere. Victor Turner (1989) notes certain socio-cultural correlates existing with these specialists and are also found related to the scale and complexity of the society. He draws distinction among priest – prophet, priest – shaman, and shaman – medium. The priest is mainly concerned with the conservation and maintenance of beliefs and practices and mediates between the transhumans and people. Her or his powers rest with the religious knowledge. The prophet is charismatic and maintains personal relation with the transhumans and as a result acquires personal power and is able to bring change in the religious practices, and may even well stand outside the cultural system to propose new doctrines, ethics, etc. Shaman is a sub-type of priest, flexible and mobile. She or he acquires power for the ability of controlling the spirits and provides profound role in curing rites. The shaman is not radical and does not bring change in the social or cultural system. There is a thin margin between shaman and medium; the former exercises control over the spirits, the later gets possessed by the spirits and becomes vessel

or oracle of the spirit and delivers oracles. Turner notes that sometimes the two functions of priest and shaman are found in the same individual and similarly mediums, shamans and prophets also form a single subtype of religious functionary. While the priest communicates with the transhuman entities through ritual along with cultural objects and activities, the medium, shaman, and prophet communicate in a person-to-person manner. Between the priest and the deity intervenes the institution. As the priest presides over a rite, the shaman or medium conducts a séance.

According to Turner, as the scale and complexity of society increases, the division of labour develops and, accordingly, the degree of specialisation changes in the religious domain. In simple societies all adult men and women have some religious function, and particularly women tend towards more religious function with their capacity to enter the state of altered consciousness. The knowledge of herbs gives some special knowledge and such of them are known as medicine men. Therefore, the specialists lead normal life as other men and women in the habitation. In this type of society we find shamans and mediums.

In a complex society where there is advanced division of labour, religion no longer pervades all social domains; it is rather limited to its own domain. There is considerable specialisation in the religious activities. There exists impersonal social relations, bureaucratization, rationality in decision making, etc. In this society there is ranking of religious specialists and organised established religious institutional system. Priests, clergy and other religious orders are found. It also supports the missionary activities with the support of the state or individuals. Different religious cults, sects, religious movement, etc., are found in these societies.

There are intermediaries between the small scale and complex societies which exhibit religion with certain degree of bureaucratisation, specialised roles and functions. These are found in Africa, Asia, Central and South America. In these cases, religious dichotomy has been found where national and tribal gods are worshipped in larger towns whereas in villages minor deities, demons and ancestral shades are worshipped. The national level gods are being mediated by the priests and official religious servants in the temples or shrines. The mediums and priests coexist but the latter control the former.

In many small scale societies, religion and politics are inseparable. In centralised political systems chiefs and kings also take up the role of the priests engaged in rain making, sowing and harvest rites. The duties of priests are also bound up with the office of the kinship with specialised ritual functions. Among the Bemba of Zambia, priests of shrines undertake the burial rituals of the king. These priests called the *Bakabilo* constitute a council that exerts check on the powers of the king (Turner 1989:7). In stateless societies, certain ritual positions have functions of maintaining order and resolution of conflicts as in case of Nuer's "leopard-skin chief" or "priest of the earth" (Evans- Pritchard 1956).

### **3.7 SUMMARY**

Religious specialists are important personnel that hold authority in religious domain. They are also charismatic, uphold the faith attending to various needs of the faithful and keep the flock together by their leadership. Since studying religion is relatively new in anthropology, various concepts developed in course are often overlapping and strict distinction cannot be maintained. This is true particularly in case of religious specialists. The difficulty gets compounded when the same person engages

in more than one special activity. Religion is so interconnected with several aspects of life and institutions that it gets influenced externally and influences various aspects of life. Therefore, the anthropologists could identify certain socio-cultural correlates with religion, and certain religious forms and institutions are found in certain levels of social forms and societies. The world religions are more associated with the state societies than the tribal societies.

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### **Sample Questions**

- 1) What are the general characteristics of a shaman?
- 2) Trace connections among shaman, medium and priest.
- 3) How would you conceptually differentiate medium, oracle and prophet?
- 4) How priest, clergy and monk are interrelated?
- 5) Discuss the relationships between the scale of society and the religious specialisation.