Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

An institution is an organization, having regulative principles that organize most of the activities of an individual in society. Men, while living in society, are expected to conform to its ethos that keep in check any deviation from the accepted norms and is not conducive to its harmony and peace. Its commandments, therefore, acquire a kind of sanctity which an individual can ill afford to violate. Through these organizations, society liberates the pent up human energy for constructive goals and limits the wayward activities of men, by setting up standards for them to maintain. H.E. Bernes describes a social institution as the social structure and machinery through which human society organizes, directs and executes the multifarious activities required to satisfy human needs1". Thus an institution comes to mean the established norms, forms and conditions of procedure characteristic of a group activity.

An institution is set up with the purpose of providing presumed needs of an individual and his adequate functioning in society. It has
always been the backbone of any social, political or religious system. Institutions like the family, marriage, education, religious and economic are common to all human societies. Social institutions regulate man’s conduct in a social order. Educational institutions impart instructions right from kindergarten to the university to provide the (human person) knowledge and skill to become a useful member of his community. Banking provides a sense of direction to the trade and commerce and transaction that man makes to earn his living. Religious institutions in the form of church worship, ritualism and liturgy provide a way to well-knit, homogeneous social order. An institution is thus “organized system of social relationship which embodies certain ‘common values’, and ‘procedures’ and meets certain basic needs of society^2^”. The emergence of mutually common shared values reflect its shared ‘ideas and goals’. The system of relationship is the network of roles through which this behaviour is carried out. So an institution is a set up of behaviour, norms and system of social relationship.

Institutions, as modes and ways to provide direction to human proclivities assume a dynamic role and give life and activity to people. Its fundamental demand is loyalty to its norms, patterns of behaviour evolved by it after centuries of experience. They have basic traits of maintaining, assigning and formulating standards. All institutions are
based on an ideology that forms their matrix. Institutions prepare their members to carry out roles that the institutions assign to them. They develop signs and symbols which serve as short hand reminders to their members. An institution gives a definite, continuous and organized pattern of behaviour to the individual in society and these patterns involve normative ordering and regulations. The social institutions are simply social habits which are systematized, instituted or established by groups.

Kingsley Davis rightly defines an institution as a set of "interwoven folkways, mores and laws built around one or more functions". J.O.Hertzler opines that "when interests, ideas, sentiments and beliefs, in form of folkways, customs, conventions, rights, mores, appear in more coherent and rational form, precipitated type of social procedures or more or less definitely organized structure for regulating the intercourse between the members of social groups, they become institutions". He calls the institution, "great cluster of established, accepted and implemented ways of behaving socially". His focus is, however, on social institution that cater to man's societal instincts. Durkheim puts it more succintly, "society is a moral order and institutions are its structural constant".
The emergence of various institutions in the history of mankind has always been in terms of the need of the individual. Only those institutions survive which have a higher degree of adaptability and flexibility and accept the role that the people of the day demand from them. History is a witness, how political systems have changed with time. Slavery, feudalism and the concept of the divine right of princes and prelates and the concepts like sati, female infanticide and widowhood in India have disappeared with the winds of doctrine. An institution, William Graham Sumner defines as a “concept --- and a structure?”. The concept is based on a definite doctrine that provides an institution its basic motivating force for its growth and continuity. Thus it enforces on its members a sacrosanct conformity to its basic principles. It provides a relief to man’s peevish propensities and mental inharmonies. In fact, all human tendencies of head and heart, mind and soul crave for a nexus that can place them in proper perspective and order.

Religion is an important institution of society. It plays a pivotal role in human life and is essential for the spiritual and ethical development of man. It has been regarded as one of the most powerful
factors in creation, propagation, and preservation of civilization and culture. It is thus the most pervasive and important force that shapes human life by providing it a sense of direction. Religious institution is a form of association in which men enter into relation with one another on the basis of myths, beliefs and a specific metaphysic that can still be the spiritual curiosity that ever rises in the human breast. Whence and whither, how and why, constantly haunt the human mind, and it is religion that regulates this impulse by setting a goal before the individual.

Religion has two aspects; its scriptural values and its institutional framework. Gunar Myrdal says, “A value system which emphasizes ‘live’ and ‘let live’, may help preserve ecological balance of society, but if this belief is institutionally expressed in reverence of particular animals --- such as snakes and cow --- then the effect may be opposite”. When a new religion is in the process of formation, the life of a group is integrated through simple rites and religious practices. New concepts and new symbols give expression to its solidarity and then the term institution is often used and applied. It is a method of providing a means of religious expression by individual and his group.

In a religious association the forms of worship and the administration of the sacraments are its institutions, while its object is
the fulfilment of spiritual needs of its adherents. Joachim Wach, however, emphasizes three aspects of religion. The theoretical, that is religious ideas and images, form and content, the practical or behavioral, that is ritual, symbols, sacraments and sacrifice and the institutional, that is how its values tend to shape the institutions that expressed them. A vital religion, by its very nature, must create and sustain a social relationship. Thus the values and ideas cannot become functional unless they are institutionalised. Institution is necessary to mobilize resources from different groups and individuals and to maintain the legitimacy of its values, symbols and norms. The institution takes a religious faith, often at first inchoate and flexible, and gives it a systematic form.

Religious institutions represent the religious structure and machinery. These institutions satisfy the spiritual needs of its members as they organize, and execute multifarious activities of human society. It is the institutional framework which provides unity of purpose and gives cohesion and strength to religion and society. Institutions always facilitate the process of religious development and responsible for the stability of the social order. Religion as an institution imposes on its disciples a definite moral and ethical discipline. So, institutions form an integral part of a religion and are concomitant with the very existence.
of ordered religious life. They regulate various aspects of religious groups and organize patterns of behaviour of an individual member. Institutions, thus provide an effective functional organization for the propagation and spread of a creed. Religious institutions, therefore, acquire paramount significance, for they promise man's liberation from trammels of existence, time and transience and promise a life of joy and peace.

A religion flourishes through its institutions. Religions like Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam and Sikhism are based on prophetic visions of their founders. These religions have to evolve an organization so that the message of its charismatic leader should continue to influence the future. Around his thoughts, there arise institutions to promote and practise his precepts for the common rung of mankind. A survey of the religious institutions of both the orient and the occident will bring to the fore how these institutions have guided human life by providing its relevance and significance in this vast, inexplicable universe.

II

In the semitic lore, it is Judaism that enjoys status as a religion that later on gave birth to two most leading faiths of the world,
Christianity and Islam. Absolute monotheism is the main tenet of Judaism and the utterances of the Prophet are duly interpreted by the authorised persons known as Rabbis. Judaism as interpreted by the Rabbis accepts the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) as divine revelation and accords the text an uncontestable authority. On the Mount Sinai, before the burning bush, Moses underwent a profound spiritual experience and brought Ten commandments to his people. He brought the concept of Yehwah, the Omnipotent and just Lord, whose justice was tempered with compassion. Thomas and Thomas aptly observe, “Moses envisioned pity as an integral part of piety”.

The attempt was made to establish a theocratic community and build institutions that would look after the religious and social needs of the people. At the top was the high priest who claimed his descent from Aaron, the brother of Moses and under his supervision was the temple priesthood. Synagogues became the most important institution and centres of all religious activity. It also regulated the conduct of the community by commandments and prohibitions. Though Judaism preferred exclusivity, conversions were not prohibited and the circumcision was the primary requirement for any convert. The Jews destined to be wanderers spread all over the globe and by their intelligence and ability built institutions to run trade and commerce to
invite envy of many communities. These institutions also helped them preserve their religious traditions, in establishing a well ordered system of poor relief and to bring equality and social cohesion among the people.

III

Christianity, though an offshoot of Judaism, came to acquire greater prominence because of the missionary spirit that drove its men to all over the globe. It postulates God as a loving and forgiving father, who sent Jesus, His son, to redeem the sins of mankind. Christ's Sermon on the Mount is an expression of this selfless love which alone can lead man to salvation. Love and forgiveness emerge as the cardinal principles of Christian faith. It is in this context that its postulates like immaculate conception, virgin birth, crucifixion, redemption and the day of judgement and resurrection acquire specific, symbolic and spiritual meaning to this faith. Common meal and baptism are other practices instituted by Jesus.

The most important institution was Church of Rome, which was established by St. Paul. It is hailed as a divine organization which kept the torch of knowledge burning throughout the dark ages of Europe. It enjoyed supreme authority as an intermediary between man and God.
Salvation was possible only through the intervention of the church. Church has set up a dichotomy of the sacred and the secular, of the supernatural and the natural. Thus it proclaims a prior standard by which social institutions of the natural order are to be judged and to which they should be subjected.

Since Christianity enjoyed royal patronage, it was regulated on a strict hierarchical order. From Pope at Rome to an ordinary priest in parish, all religious functionaries looked upon the laity as the flock of sheep to be tended and guided to a destined goal. The Pope at Rome wielded power over the states and princes ungrudgingly acknowledged their allegiance. With the election of the Pope, the intrigues and corrupt practices came to be associated with it. It brought the moral life of the Pope to the lowest ebb and evil practices crept into the holy order. The original purity and nobility of the teachings of Jesus suffered a serious set back.

Though the church and liturgy still play a great role in the life of the community, it brought great social and political changes. No religion in the world has seen the emergence of as many denominations as Christianity. From the medieval monasteries and convents to the Seventh Day adventist church of today, the variations are indeed wondrous and wide. Christian institutions, therefore, have
been changing with time and circumstances. The church, though true to its basic tenets, has been adapting itself to local circumstances to convey the message of its Messiah.

IV

Islam, which means submission to the divine will, derives its tenets from Judaism and Christianity, though its principle basis is the revelation of the Prophet Mohammed that he had had in the cave at Mount Hira. Islam advocates strict monotheism and rejects any kind of idolatory in most uncompromising terms. It teaches man to live in the will of the Allah. To submit to His will and to follow the path shown by the Prophet is the principal duty of a true Muslim.

The religious institution of this faith is supported by the five pillars; the profession of faith; the five-time prayer; fasting; payment of alms and once-in-a-life time pilgrimage to Mecca. It is a religion that claims, like the early Christianity, no clergy, no church and no liturgy in the true sense of the term. This monotheistic concept of God united the Arab tribes and enabled them to form the international community.

The Quran asks the Muslims "Not to revile those whom others worship, besides Allah, lest they, out of spite revile Allah in their ignorance." Despite this injunction, there emerged the concept of
Jehad which, like the Christian crusades, had far reaching consequences. As Islam, extended its boundaries, it regarded any advance as a form of Jehad to conquer distant territories. It was a religious sanction for the Islamic expansion. Since Islam enjoyed the royal patronage, coercion became the order of the day to convert infidels into Islam. It accounts for the religious intolerance and unaccountable atrocities of the Muslims towards those who came under their rule. But it ignores the vital truth that inherent Islamic features of egalitarianism and humanitarianism had much to do with its acceptance by a large section of the people conquered by the Muslim rulers.

Islam is not a mere religion. It signifies a cultural whole, for it does not separate religion from politics. The Prophet combined in himself the dual role of a religious leader and an able administrator. The Church and the state, religion and society were united in an organic whole. This was the reason the Quran deals with economic, social and political or administrative matters also. It also discouraged begging and calls upon all Muslims to rise above it and to work and earn their livelihood. The object of Islamic economic system is to secure the widest and most beneficent distribution of wealth through institutions set up by it. Zakat is the important institution provided for
it, in which two and half per cent of total property or assets of an individual were set apart for relieving poor of distress, providing stipends to students and for advancing social welfare. The ideal of the Islamic religious institutions and the perspectives they promise is indeed praiseworthy. *Shariat* or the tradition still rules its corporate life and is binding on all who owe their allegiance to the Prophet.

V

In India, Hinduism is the oldest religion. Being an evolutionary religion, it has no founder, no definite set of doctrine and is not a cradle religion. The four *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Mahabharta* and the *Ramayana* are the matrix out of which were born the religious institutions, that provide values to the Hindu mind till this day. The central core of the Hindu ethics has been the *Varnashram Dharma*, which organised society into four *Varnas* and the life into four *ashramas*. The concept of spiritual evolution was determined by these two basic institutions, and without its knowledge one cannot understand and appreciate the essence of Hinduism. All these institutions revolve around the basic postulates like the inexorable law of *Karma*, transmigration, *samsara*, *maya* and *moksha*, that is salvation from transience decrepitude and decay.
The caste system emerged as the most important and distinguished institution in Hinduism. It has been described as the steel framework of Hindu social structure by O’Malley. Caste is determined by birth and cannot be changed or renounced. There are fixed professions or occupations with little freedom for an individual to shift to some other type of world. Majority of the Hindus do not belong to any distinctive group with theological and ritual unity, “Caste, that is, the ritual rights and duties it gives and imposes, and the position of the Brahmins, is the fundamental institution of Hinduism. Before everything else, without caste there is no Hindu12”.

Apart from Varna Ashrama, it was the Karmakand that regulated the Hindu life. All ceremonies and rites from birth to death of an individual were performed under the supervision and direction of the Brahmin Priest. Purity, both external and internal, was regarded as an important institution among all the sects of Hinduism. The institution of untouchability is the logical result of the Hindu caste system and has been in force in the Hindu society for centuries.

In Ashram Dharma, the life of an individual was divided into four stages, each of which prepares him for the discharge of certain fundamental duties. In the fourth stage of life, renunciation is practised to attain the mystical experience of the Ultimate Reality. It has divided
human concerns into two broad classes, one is primarily connected with the welfare of the soul and comes within the purview of religion, and the other which pertains to mundane or worldly affairs and therefore, falls outside the sphere of religion. Renunciation and spiritual austerities known as tapas became important in attaining the ultimate meaning and purpose of existence.

In the orient, the tradition has been to reject the world and its allurements. Renunciation has been held as a great spiritual ideal. All human endeavours are directed to shun the world and the recluse becomes the ideal figure, for he is a man who dismisses the world as maya.

Though the caste system enabled the Hindus to save themselves from being submerged under the surging waves of foreign invasions and their cultures and races within its own ambit. It also enabled the Hindus to resist the onslaught of Islam and save them from submerging into these religions. It gave them an organization that prevented wholesale conversion to Islam, but it did more harm to nation and society.

The Hindus turned towards conservatism to protect their religion from syncretism, for they were averse to change and prone to stick to tradition, particularly in the socio-religious matters. It has blocked the
way of progress for talented individuals. The extreme segmentation generated by it has stood in the way of the growth of the sentiments of the national unity. The economic activities and satisfaction of desires are divorced from the observance of the law of Dharma. The result was a highly pessimistic view of life marked by metaphysical fears and greater bondage to basal passion for which another name is slavery. Thus, the present weakness and fragmentation of the Hindu community is, to a great extent, due to this extreme rigidity and immobility of the caste system that had been in operation for centuries.

VI

Another independent religion is Buddhism, which though born in India, became a major world religion due to its missionary activities. The phenomenal rise of Buddhism and the set back it gave to Hinduism are the natural results of the degeneration that had crept into the Hindu way of life. The Buddha in his first sermon at Sarnath spoke about the Four Noble Truths and the eight-fold Middle Path to seek Nirvana, liberation from pain. These principles form the basis of all Buddhist institutions.
It gave two new institutions – the monastic order of monks or *sangha* and the ideal of celibacy. The Buddhist monastic order, *sangha* became a source of the teaching of the masters and orally preserved its traditions. All people irrespective of caste, colour, creed, sex, status, were admitted into it and it upholds the egalitarian ideal. Monks in saffron robe, with a begging bowl, would go from door to door, begging alms till their daily need was met and then return to their solitary retreat to meditate and pray. This order of monks has lived apart from laymen and remained cut off from the life-giving current of the world.

It also sought to popularise asceticism and celibacy. They accepted men and women into *sangha* without demanding that they should have previously lived the life of a householder. They also organised the groups of wandering ascetics in the *sangha*. The true disciple of Buddha is not a householder but the monk who neither superintends parishes nor holds congregations. Arnold Toynbee rightly remarks, “Buddhism is virtually an order of monks... who constitute the inner church and are almost completely withdrawn from the secular society”.13

It also made *ahimsa* an integral part of its religion as it preached the doctrine of non-injury to sentient creatures. Due to its institutions,
Buddhism has become quite a significant force throughout India and later on spread gradually and steadily beyond the boundaries of India. But these institutions had socio-political effect. With the passage of time, these monks lost their missionary zeal, creativity of thought and consequently the missionary spirit gradually disappeared. Many people were attracted to it more by the ease and security it offered than by faith and devotion to the ideal which it stood for. They found it much easier to live on the doles of others than to join the battle of life and struggle for success. Moreover, Buddhism shuns social commitment and corporate amelioration. It has established no social and political goals. The practice of *ahimsa* gave a rude setback to the martial spirit.

**VII**

Jainism aims at the conquering of desire in man. The world is constituted of two elements, the material part (*ajiva*) and the spiritual part (*jiiva*). The basic doctrine propounded by Mahavira consists of four vows and twenty-two endurances. The doctrine of *Karma* occupies an important place in its metaphysic. It propounds the doctrine that the living and non-living, by coming into contact with each other, forge certain energies which bring birth and death and the endless cycle can be broken by a course of discipline and may lead to salvation. To
escape from the cycle of birth and death, the entry of new karmic matter in the soul must be stopped. This can be achieved by following the ethical path prescribed for the monastic order that stresses an austere life.

The community of monk (sangha) and of laymen form the chief disciplinary regulation in Jainism which prescribed moral and spiritual codes for its followers, irrespective of their caste or social rank. They were obliged to observe a set of ethical rules and the life of a recluse. Jainism draws a distinction between the ascetic who are called ‘Yatis’ and the layman or householder who are called ‘Sravakas’.

The observance of *ahimsa* constitutes the core of this faith. It becomes of cardinal importance for them to know the diverse forms which life assumes. The path prescribed for the monks is more austere than that of the layman. He is enjoined to renounce everything and not to dwell under a roof. He is expected to endure hot and cold, hunger and thirst and curb passions that vibrate man’s five-element frame.

The practice of the institution of *ahimsa* led to the exclusion of Jains from all industrial trades. Agriculture was, of course, completely excluded. As a result they adopted the profession of banking and money lending. Its major religious institutions have given birth to a distinct social order.
VIII

The foregoing discussion is thus an attempt to demonstrate that every religion has its institutions which are essential to sustain its growth and for the spiritual guidance of its adherents. It also brings out how religions distinguish from one another due to their institutions. Judaism and Islam are whole-life religions, whereas other faiths divide human concerns into two broad classes. While one is primarily connected with the welfare of the soul, the other pertains to mundane or worldly concerns of man. The adage, “Render unto Ceaser the things that are Ceaser’s and unto God the things that are God’s” may be regarded as typical of this attitude. They draw a distinction between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the temporal.

Man has four levels of being: physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual. At each level, he is in need of an institution to guide his life and discipline his conduct. Basically, an animal, he has been blessed with reason, emotion and imagination and has evolved the institution of marriage to keep his sexual instinct under control. At the emotional level, he needs people to share his private pains and personal joys and this need is fulfilled by the institution of the family and the community. To express his feelings about the things around him, he develops
literary and aesthetic concepts, and to seek union with the infinite, he follows the principles and percepts of his religion. So to know and realize the divine in him, man relies on religious institutions which advocate a way, a path to seek the spiritual goal.

It is the business of religion to restore belief in the purpose of life and give zest and meaning to it. There is no human activity which lies outside the purifying and ennobling touch of religion. All activities of man social, political and economic, are to be spiritualized. Religious institutions should set principles to regulate the conduct of their members so that they can approximate to the ideal of their masters. A religious institution promises an ideal image of man towards which he should strive in order to rise from brute to man and from man to a God-like status. It is in this context that the next chapters form a modest attempt to understand the rise, growth and uniqueness of Sikh institutions.
REFERENCES


5Ibid., p. 77.

6Durkheim, Emile, Quoted in *Conceptions of Institutions and the Theory of Knowledge*, Stanley Taylor, Bookman Associates, New York, 1956, p. 120.


