Anthropology

Q: Define Religion. Discuss various anthropological approaches to the study of religion.

1. Religion:

Religion is derived from the word 'religio' which means 'to bind together.'

Definition: Religion is collection of ritual, practices and belief systems about supernatural powers, their qualities and the way people associate them with themselves.

→ **According to E.B Tylor:**
"Religion is a belief in spiritual beings."

→ **According to F.C Wallace:**
"Religion is the beliefs and practices concerned with supernatural beings, powers and forces."

Religion exists in all societies but the forms may differ. As for different sociologists and anthropologists it holds dif-

ferent meanings and purposes in different societies.

2- Anthropological Approaches to Study Religion:

a. ~~Functial~~ Functional Approach:
> Functionalist approach regards religion as a part of society, common to a group and belief acquired by all indiviuals in the group. The common belief through common ritual enhances cohesion, solidarity in group, promoting and fulfilling social order and stability.
> They also argue that religion contributes to the need of fulfillment of social order and stability in social order.
> Proponent: Emile Durkheim - Malinowski
> Durkheim argued that religion is a social institution which serves specific functions within a society such as social cohesion.

b. Structuralist Approach:
> Structuralism, associated with Claud Levis Strauss, used different systems of under-

standing to explain the world around them, resulting stunning diversity of myths, beliefs and practices.

> Strauss analysed the binary oppositions and structural patterns in myths, suggesting that these structures reflect deeper cognitive structures in human mind.

c. **Structural - Functionalist Approach:**

> Structural-functionalism, built on functionalism examines the stuctural components and roles of religion in societies.

> Scholar like A.R Radcliffe Brown emphasized the social structure and functional roles of religious beliefs and rituals, highlighting their contribution to social order and stability.

> The proponents of this theory argued that one should study the function of social structure, institutions and how they function to maintain the social whole.

d. **Symbolic Approach:**

> Symbolic approach, influenced by thinkers like Clifford Geertz gave 'semiotic' con-

cept of culture. He explored the symbolic meanings embedded in religious practices and rituals.

➤ He emphasized understanding the cultural symbols and their significance within specific cultural contexts. Religious symbols and rituals are seen as expressive forms that convey deeper cultural meanings.

e- Psychological Approach:
➤ It is based on Sigmund Freud's psycho analysis.
➤ Freud viewed religion as the unconcious mind's need for wish fulfillment because people need to feel secure and absolve themselves of their own guilt.

f. Postmodern and Interpretive Approach:
➤ These approaches question grand narratives and explore the subjective indivivual inter-pretations of religious experiences. Scholars like Talal Asad and James Clif-ford emphasize the diversity of religious experiences, challenging univercal techniq-ues and exploring the multiplicity of meanings with religious practices.