

Chapter II

MAGIC AND MEDICINE AS A SCIENCE

We have already noticed that at the early stage of human society religion magic and science existed in an undifferentiated form. Religion and magic went hand in hand, often the priest was King-like in wielding power, the medicine man was usually the priest in as much as he was in possession of divine power. In some societies the chief or the King was looked upon as the healer. The science of medicine was not developed in the modern sense, i.e. it was not based upon a verified or experimental evidence of causal connexion. There was some science, but so much of it was engulfed in magical belief and practices that the epithet 'science' can hardly be ascribed to the system and practice of healing of the primitive people. Of course, there is a view that the early science was magical in nature. If that be so, then we should see how science came out of magic, and more specifically, what is the nature of magic as a communal practice. And also the fact that how on the basis of such a set of beliefs and practice the art of healing could be carried on in early society.

Magic is regarded as an aspect of religious belief and practice. J.G. Frazer has regarded magic as an earlier, primitive form of both religion and science. The practice of magic is based on observation of natural phenomena and involves a theory of causality. Therefore there is a basic similarity

between magic and science. But unfortunately all the hypothesis and conclusions are erroneous. Frazer has said that magic is spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct, it is a false science as well as an abortive art.

Religion has no other proof, no other test for its truth, it is by his own experience a man proves its truth. Religion is immediate consciousness. In the beginning primitive people were unable to manage the outer force i.e. animal strength. Gradually for their survival they started to depend upon a religious belief. The primitive people used to think that men can perform supernatural things and even compel the gods to work his will by means of magical art. But gradually the magician understands that his powers are not supernatural and cannot force God to work. But the propitiation of gods to grant one's wishes and prayer was not an individual affair. The priest or the magician acted on behalf on the society. If it were resorted to form an individual point of view, it was called witchcraft.

The difference between religion and magic should be radical. Magic is said to violate the fundamental principle of religion - belief in the wisdom and goodness of God. Affection which binds fellow worshippers to one another and to

the being they worship psychologically cannot be derived from magic. Religion and magic have a common appearance in the external acts i.e. the sacrificial rites, which originates with the worship of the gods to the community.

According to Frazer, the basic principles of magic are two - the law of similarity i.e. "homeopathic magic" and the law of contagion i.e. "contagious magic".

(a) According to the first principle like produces like.

The imitation is believed to produce the reality e.g., sticking pins into a doll or effigy is like sticking arrows into the enemy. This type of magic is very frequently found in the particular form of rain-making. Homeopathic magic is founded of the association of ideas by similarity.

Another beneficent use of Homeopathic magic is to heal or prevent sickness. For the cure of jaundice the ancient Hindus used to perform an elaborate ceremony based on homeopathic magic. For example, driving away yellow colour from a jaundice patient to put back the yellow colour to yellow creature and yellow things, such as, the sun, to which it properly belongs and to procure for the patient a healthy red colour from a living vigorous source viz. a red bull.

(b) Contagious magic is founded on the association of ideas

by contiguity. Prolonged or intimate contact produces identity so that the enemy's nail parings and hair can be treated as if they represents him.

Both branches of above explained magic is comprehended under the general name of sympathetic magic.

An account of magic in India may now be given. Magic in India has been essentially the profession of certain caste. When the welfare of the tribe or certain class depends on the magical rites, the magicians rise into a position and may readily acquire the rank and authority of a chief or King.

Magical rites are practiced at weddings, during pregnancy, at birth to procure offspring and ensure its safety and predict its sex etc.

Following examples of magical practice are significant in the context.

(i) To cure scorpion bite the insect should at once be caught and burnt and the smoke is allowed to touch the bite.

(ii) In many communities rat's teeth are the strongest than man. So the child's extracted tooth is thrown on the thatch of the house, because rats make their nests in the decayed thatch. At that time child must say "Mouse, mouse, give me your iron tooth, I shall give you my bone tooth".

Snake-bite is a very popular incident. Its remedy also depends on magical art.

There are so many beliefs that are practised in society. Witchcraft and sorcery also involve the belief in supernatural powers. The practice of sorcery and witchcraft were very popular in European Christian tradition. Sorcery theory and practice are widespread on all continents but witchcraft is less widespread phenomenon. When a misfortune takes place it can be explained by witchcraft or sorcery. Through their practice they try to discover the agent of causation. They are concerned with the development of the arts of healing and defence.

Frazer thinks that men are confused to make a distinction between men and God for the possession of magical powers. The primitive community regards their chief as a god. But the god may grow old and feeble which would be a pity. Then killing the god to compel him to leave his old body and then it is supposed to enter the body of the murderer, who thus becomes a new god. According to the Frazer, gradually man has started to distinguish between magic and religion and then their faith in the former no longer but in prayer and sacrifice.

Ideas about magic and supernatural creatures play a

vital role on society. They explain disease, injustice, misfortune and death. Social reformers often feel that education may be used as the most potent weapon against such superstitions. Magic, witchcraft and sorcery are rooted in traditional customary ideas. All knowledge rests on soul degree of trust and respect. All the knowledge of supernatural powers of gods and goddesses, of demons and demonesses of sorcers and witches in all primitive societies derived from respected traditions and institutions and from men who have proved themselves worthy of trust.