
UNIT 28 LIFE CYCLE RITUALS-I : BIRTH AND MARRIAGE

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28.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have read the unit you should be able to

- describe a typology of religion
- explain religion in tribal societies
- discuss a classification of ritual
- describe rites of birth of the given communities
- explain marriage rites of the given communities.

28.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we begin with an introduction to ritual. We then discuss Saraswati's functions of ritual (Saraswati : 1984). Having done this we describe and analyse birth and related rites among Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribe. We also describe and analyse marriage rites among the same groups.

28.2 ASPECTS OF RITUAL

The word 'ritual' can only be understood in terms of a background of who is using it. For a clergyman all ritual takes place within a church in keeping with various relations. For a doctor however it may refer to some habits of a patient(s). For Durkheim rites are the modes of behaviour which delineate how a man should conduct himself in the presence of sacred objects (Durkheim : 1915). A recent publication edited by Daniel de Coppet (1992) states that **ritual is a special kind of performance which is both an act and a statement**. Rituals create and maintain — or transform — a society's cultural identity and social relations. Thus ritual while putting on a performance also communicates. That is to say human beings actions in the ritual context communicate. In attempting to understand ritual we are trying to discover the rules of grammar and syntax of an unknown language.

Finally life-crisis rituals have an effect on society of rejuvenating its 'sentiments' as Radcliffe-Brown (1966) puts it and make it cohere. Van Gennep found (1966) that these ceremonies which he called rites of passage, were to be found in all societies. He felt that three types of major phases could be distinguished:

- i) separation
- ii) transition
- iii) incorporation

These phases can be found in birth, marriage and death. With respect to our topic we find that the ideas of separation transition and incorporation are all indicating the tension or liminality which accompanies these rituals. Thus rituals of life cycle whether birth and marriage or death have to have within them an in-built mechanism of tension management. The same ideas have been expressed in terms of the facts of preliminality, liminality and postliminality. 'Lumen' means threshold, and each life crisis or life-cycle ritual goes through this feeling of tension or liminality while crossing the threshold. We will mention these categories in the examples we give later on.

Tension arises at childbirth, marriage, and death because these events call for very careful handling. In death specially there is a fear imminent. So also in the others. However, an important observation, made by Van Gennep, is that the three major phases of separation, transition and incorporation are not developed to the same extent by all societies or in every set of ceremonies. Thus rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies. Rites of incorporation are prominent in marriage ceremonies. Transition rites play an important part in pregnancy, and initiation rites.

28.3 FUNCTIONS OF RITUALS

We now turn to functions of rituals since these functions form an important part of any life cycle ritual. These functions are present usually in a combined way in these life-cycle rituals which we will now discuss. Saraswati (1984 : 98-104) has stated that ritual is the core component of all religions. The rules of ritual are transmitted either orally or through the written text. And as Saraswati points out through "ritual action flows the well being not only of the performer but also of the performing society" (*ibid*). He points out that ritual is by definition "an obligatory social behaviour prescribed for occasions that have reference to belief system". Ritual also holds the ritual participants together both as a community in belief and action. It provides a system of meaning to both the social and the cosmic world. The sharing of ritual experience creates a deeper bond. Religious behaviour and ritual, is different from secular ritual. However the former maintains social order from one point of view, and the latter from another.

Saraswati has provided the societal functions of ritual. These societal functions of ritual which Saraswati provides indicate to us as we have noted earlier that ritual has a specific role of play. This role includes as Radcliffe Brown (*ibid*) has said, to make the society cohere and to rejuvenate all the values and ideals society is comprised of. It involves a socializing aspect too. Ritual is thus a teaching device and as Saraswati notes its performance includes apart from socialization, social control, as merit and status, rites of identification and so on. We discuss these below and suggest the student try to identify these in the rituals, we describe later.

- i) **Ritual as Socialization:** In all societies there are life cycle rituals, or *samskara*. These rituals are of two types i.e. the rites from conception to cremation, and the other deals with daily and seasonal sacrifices.

- ii) **Ritual as Social Control:** Ritual has integrative values and puts the social order together. It is linked with other worldly rewards and retributions. It is an integral part of the normative system. Thus the maintenance or ritual order also brings about social order and the spiritual order.
- iii) **Ritual as merit and status:** Ritual leads to religious merit and it is itself performed for merit and status. The performer gets social prestige and spiritual merit.
- iv) **Ritual as identification:** The imitation rite is essential for every member without which membership cannot be gained. Ritual mutilation, circumcision, perforation of ear lobe are all rites of identification.
- v) **Ritual as Spiritual Advancement:** Prayer, pilgrimage workshop and esoteric rites all aim at spiritual advancement.
- vi) **Ritual as Nonverbal Communication:** Ritual has a variety of esoteric and exoteric communication. The use of words and space is such that it often follows archetypal patterns. Esoteric communication has a hidden and specialized meaning available only to experts, such as priests. Exoteric communication is available to all concerned.
- vii) **Ritual and Cultivation of Excellence:** People's sense of enjoying beauty and sense of aesthetics are reflected very well in ritual objects and motifs. Ritual leads to excellence here. It may be dance, painting or handicraft which achieves this. As Saraswati (*ibid*) notes 'No Brahmanic ritual is devoid of aesthetic value.
- viii) **Ritual as Therapy:** Rituals of witchcraft and sorcery are such that they are used in many societies to heal affliction. This is as true of simple religions as that of complex and mixed forms.
- ix) **Ritual as Occupation:** Ritual specialists exist in all societies and enjoy extra privileges and economic benefits. In Hindu places of pilgrimage such ritual occupation can be very lucrative.
- x) **Ritual as Way of Life:** A religious being lives within the ambit of ritual. There are rituals for daily observance, annual ceremonies and some festivals.

Thus we may say that the above scheme covers the broad scope of ritual or of functions of ritual as viewed by Saraswati.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) List Van Gennep's three types of rites of passage.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
- ii) List four types of rituals from among those which are presented by Saraswati.
 - a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)

28.4 BIRTH AND RELATED RITES

These according to Saraswati are rites of socialization. When we turn to life-cycle rituals we find, that they are the core of religion. Again, life-cycle rites refer more to the cycle of life: birth, marriage and death. Nevertheless the ritual itself may not follow such a linear path. That is to say that between birth and death a man or woman may have one or more divorces and marriages. This is an almost universal fact. Moreover, another facet of our problems is that a study of a life cycle ritual often begins at conception, goes on through various rituals during the period of pregnancy until child-birth. It then goes on to initiation etc. right upto marriage or suitability to marriage. This happens with regularity not just among the Hindus but also in tribal religions and is almost a universal phenomenon. As such in our descriptions "birth" would mean the rituals surrounding birth. This is so also for marriage and death.

28.4.1 Hindu Birth Rites

Before we can immediately study birth and marriage in Hinduism it would be good to restudy Unit 15, in Block 4, in ESO-02. This unit studies Hindu Social organisation and indicates that Hinduism has a vast backdrop of ideology to its rituals. In his book "*Hindu Sanskaras*" (1976) Raj Bali Pandey has pointed out the following scheme.

- i) pre-natal rituals
- ii) rituals of childhood
- iii) educational rituals
- iv) marriage rituals
- v) funeral rituals

In our treatment we will deal with pre-natal rituals and some of the rituals of childhood.

All this description is meaningless until related to a sociological perspective on life cycle rituals. The first of the pre-natal rites is at conception. This is called '*Garbhandhana*'. It is this rite through which a man places his seed in a woman. The time for this rite was from the fourth to the sixteenth day right after the monthly courses of his wife. The second prenatal rite was '*Pumsavana*' or quickening a male child. This rite was observed in the fourth month of pregnancy. The woman fasted on that day and put on new clothes after bathing. The sprouts of the banyan were pounded and their juice put in her right nostril with verses extolling virile sons. The main factor of this ritual was that it was held to fight off abortion and to produce a male child.

The '*Simantonayana*', or 'hair-parting' is the third of the prenatal rites. In this rite the hair of the woman were parted. This was to keep evil demons away from her, and also to keep her in good cheer. It was done in the fifth month of pregnancy. All these rites are clearly preliminal rites or rites of separation. They are rites which occur before the transition of birth itself. To a greater or lesser extent the tension of coming to the threshold or liminal point is increasingly built up from *Garbhadana*, through *Pumsavana* and *Simantonayana* which is done in the fifth month of pregnancy.

We now turn to the '*Jatkarma*' or the birth ceremonies. These are the rituals of childhood. The *Jatkarma ceremony* was performed before cutting the naval cord. The moment of birth was recorded for astrological purposes. These are the liminal

rites and there is a quick and obvious reduction in tension and these rituals manage the tension levels right up to the *Medha-Janana* and *Ayusa* which are now described.

The ceremony of "*Medha-janana*" is done first with the fore finger of the right hand. The father holding an instrument of gold gave to the child, honey and ghee or ghee alone. The substances that the father gave to the child were considered to be good for mental growth. They also produced beauty, good digestion and talent. Next we have the "*Ayusa*" or rite for ensuring a long life. The father whispered appropriate mantras into the child's ear. Five Brahmans are asked to blow their breath on him. The breath, it is believed, produces a long life. This ceremony, therefore, was to strengthen the breath of the child and provide a long life for the new born. The next rite is supposed to harness 'strength'. The father recited appropriate verses for the same.

The navel-cord is cut, the child thoroughly washed and put to the mother's breast. The next ritual is that of '*Namkarana*' or name-giving. **This is a ceremony which is not strictly recommended nor spelled out in the *grihasutras* but delineated in the *paddatis* or booklets.** First of all, the composition of the name was decided. It is prescribed that boys should have an even number of syllables and girls an uneven number of syllables. It is felt that the social status of the family is reflected in the name. The names given, fall into four categories. These are based upon the asterism under which the child was born; the deity of the month; the family deity and the popular calling.

Namkarana is usually, though not always, done on the 10th or 12th day after the birth of the child. *Namkarana* is a post liminal rite. It is a rite of incorporation by which the child on the 10th or 12th day acquires a name through a ritual and hence gains an identity. We can also see here some of the functions of ritual which we have described earlier (see Section 28.3) such as socialization, religious merit and so on. This is because mother and child, according to belief, suffer ceremonial impurity. When this period expires the house is washed and purified. Mother and child are bathed, and the ceremony continues. Today when the child is born in rural Kumaon after the period of impurity is over, a detailed *Namkarana* ceremony follows. Even the Doms have a Dom Pandit to *pontificate*, (Kapur 1988). It is also usual to make the following ceremonies part of the '*Namkarana*' itself. These ceremonies are the '*Miskramana*', in which the mother goes around on the some spot and touches the child's foot on the ground. This ceremony is actually meant to be done during the fourth month.

The next ceremony takes place after this by touching some food to the child's mouth. This ceremony is supposed to take place six to seven months after naming. The significance of this ritual is actually to begin weaning away the child. The *Chudakarana* is the tonsure and its done only after the fifth month. Fittingly it is often done in the ceremonies before marriage. Also the *Kamavedha* or ear-piercing is done by the twelfth month. In the field as distinct from the textual view (Kapur : 1988) we find that the rituals are in fact often conducted in a group and without reference to the time aspect stressed by the textual view. Thus *Namkarana* and *Miskramana* and so on often take place at approximately the same time, during the same ritual performance. These ceremonies observed show there is a concern for the auspicious and always a desire to earn spiritual merit and related esteem through ritual. These rituals can be seen as rituals for socialization as well as rituals for spiritual advancement. Also there are rituals of incorporation. But in the Hindu scheme they are mainly rituals of merit and status and those of social control, excellence, therapy, way of life and occupation. Hindu birth rites thus begin at the time when conception takes place. Thereafter, there are rites which are performed in order to be blessed with a boy. Evil souls are also kept away through a ritual in which the hair is parted. Only then do the birth rituals *perse* begin. Thus the *Iatkarma* ceremony takes place before the navel-cord is cut. Thus there are rituals

for ensuring good intellectual growth and long life. These rituals all indicate the Hindu view of life which considers the ecological environment and spiritual beliefs as being equally important for welfare of a person. Thus the rites of incorporation in Hinduism are very elaborate.

28.4.2 Syrian Christian Birth Rites

These birth rites are also mainly those of incorporation into society and to earn spiritual merit and status. Unit 17 of Block 4, in ESO-02 gives a good background of Syrian Christians social structure. The first child of a couple is born usually in the mother's house. The daughter goes to her parents a few months before delivery. In earlier times it was customary to bring the pregnant woman to her mother's place with the help of seven ladies including the mother. The rituals and customs before the bride comes to her mother's house right up to the moment of childbirth are rites of separation/preliminality. The child is born with the help of married women of the household and the aid of a midwife. The birth of a boy gives great joy and a loud whistling sound is made. As soon as the child is born the exact time is noted so that the horoscope can be accurately cast. This practice is taken from the Hindus, and much faith is put on the forecasts. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. Initially the horoscopes are cast on dried palmyra palm leaf parchment. This is made into strips joined together with strings. The strings are kept fixed by wooden blocks to act as the cover of a book. The writing on the parchment is done by a steel stylus in beautiful letters. Sometimes this is accompanied by floral designs. Next the child is bathed and a priest or an elder relative whispers in the child's ear "*Moron Yesu Masiha*" or "*Jesus Crist is Lord*". As soon as the child is born a horoscope is cast. From this point on the rituals pass the 'threshold' (the liminal point) and enter into incorporation/postliminality.

The child is also given a few drops of honey to drink in which gold is mixed. This is done by the grandmother or a presiding lady by rubbing a gold ornament on a stone on which some honey has been smeared. This custom shared by the Nambudpuris is to ensure prosperity.

After seven days, the husband's family visit the baby. Care is taken that the party consists of an odd number of people. This is because of the belief that even numbers of people on such occasions bring bad luck. On seeing the child the husband's mother places some gold in the hands of the child.

Activity 1

Read Section 28.4 on birth and related rites. Read also the subsections till section 28.4.4. What are the similarities and differences in birth rites of various communities? Write down a note on this and compare it with other students, if possible at the Study Centre.

The baptism can now take place along with the service in the chapel. After an interval of two months or more from the date of birth of the child, the wife returns to her husband's house with gifts of jewellery, clothes and household equipment. These are customs which are associated with postliminality. Their function is socialisation of the society, its rejuvenation and bringing it closer together by virtue of having faced the life crisis together.

The formal education of the child begins at 3 or 4 after a "thread" ceremony somewhat like that of the Hindus. The priest sits next to the child with a brass tray in which 'paddy' is heaped. Taking the child's forefinger the priest traces '*Yesu*' in the heap of paddy. A short prayer is offered followed by a feast. It is considered

that the child has been initiated into learning and can begin his schooling. For girls in their 7th or 8th year the ears are pierced so that they can wear ornaments, it is clear from the previous descriptions that the rites of incorporation as signified by birth are elaborate. When a daughter goes to her mother's place three months before giving birth it is a ritual act. But it is not accompanied by ritual activities *per se*. Earlier seven ladies brought the pregnant women to the house. These and other rituals indicate that Syrian Christianity is ritually quite different from Hinduism. Some rituals are similar at times especially when gold and honey are given to the child to ensure prosperity. But they display every bit the desire to placate supernatural forces. **As is clear in Hinduism, rituals are primarily of socialization, merit and status, identification and cultivation of excellence.**

28.4.3 Sikh Rites of Birth

It would be necessary for us to first describe the social organization of the Sikhs. This has been done in Unit 18, Block 4, ESO-02, where the origin of the Sikhs, their ideology, their five emblems and so on are presented. So we can go straight to the rites of birth. The rites of Sikhs too like those of the Hindus and Syrian Christians reflect a similar aspect of the rites of passage. That is preliminal rites or rites of separation *before* birth; liminal or transitional rites at or just around birth when the tension is at the highest; and finally the naming rites which are rites of incorporation or postliminality.

The birth of a child whether boy or girl is equally welcome. When the mother has recovered, there is a visit to the *gurdwara* for giving thanks. A certain amount of cash is given to buy *Karah Prasad*. In villages women prepare the *Karah Prasad* themselves and take it to the *gurdwara*. A 'romalla' or piece of silk or brocade about one square meter is given to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. At the *gurdwara* thanks giving *sabads* (hymns) are read. Devout families ask that the child be given 'amrit' or nectar which is made by dissolving *patashas* (sugar crystals).

The *granthi* (priest) stirs the water with a *khanda* (short two-edged sword) and describes the first five verse of the *Japji*. The *amrit* is put on the *kirpan* and touched on the child's tongue with it. The mother drinks the rest. The *Guru Granth Sahib* is now opened at random and the first word of the left hand page will be read out to the parents. The name is decided by using the initial of the word and announced. The *granthi* says 'Jo *bhole so nihal*' and the congregation approves by saying 'Sat sri akal' Prayers follow.

Box 28.01

A Sikh must take an early morning bath in fresh water. Next he must recite the *Japji*, the *Jap* of Guru Gobind Singh and his *Swayyas*, before or after breakfast. Before beginning the daily work he must sing the *gurbani* in the *gurdwara*. The thought of God should not leave his mind as he works. He should then recite the *Rahiras* (the Holy Path) at dusk and the *Sohilla* before sleeping.

There are social customs as well. In a joint family the baby is born in the husband's home. The wife's parents visit her bringing gifts for her and the mother-in-law and a turban for the husband and father-in-law. Sometimes a *langer* or free feast could be arranged for the poor and gifts given to widows as charity. The Sikh birth rites too are rites of incorporation. Besides going to the *gurdwara* and visiting the bride's mother and father, they are also rites of social interaction. They also show ritual as occupation in the form of the *granthi*. Spiritual merit and spiritual advancement is also seen. Socialization behaviours are also clearly present.

However Sikhism is essentially an open and modern religion. The martial aspect of

the religion surfaces forcefully in the *amrit* ceremony where *patashas* are dissolved in water by a short two edged sword. The *amrit* is then given to the child on his lips and tongue with that *Khanda*. Also the way of naming is very random but based again on the *Guru Granth Sahib*.

28.4.4 Korku Birth Rites

Korkus are a tribe which live in the Vindhala hills. They are spread out in many parts of these hills and number many different groupings of the same tribe. Let us now turn to their rituals of birth.

Stephen Fuchs points out that (Fuchs, 1988 : 219-236) Korku girls begin menstruating between 11-13 years. According to Korku belief a woman is ritually unclean as long as the menstruation lasts.

The Korku never relax their strictness regarding these rules. The Korkus believe that a woman becomes pregnant only when a soul enters her womb. This is the soul of a Korku that had died one generation earlier. This is always so. Pregnancy is a happy occasion. Every pregnant woman observes certain rules and taboos. For example she must abstain from pork. A pregnant woman should not pass under a mango tree because that is believed to impair her fertility. She must also avoid menstruating women, and those who have given birth recently. To avoid miscarriage she is advised not to lift heavy weights.

Korkus women carry on their field work and household duties till the very last moment of labour pains. A midwife is sent for, who is often a Nahal woman. The Nahal women are of a lower caste. No Korku midwife, it is worth noting, will attend a Nahal woman in labour.

The birth takes place in a corner of the verandah far removed from the entrance or kitchen. This is because a birth is ritually impure and pollutes the food. It must be far from the entrance to keep out people with an evil eye. The woman sits or lies on the ground and the midwife massages her from the hips downwards. In case of a difficult childbirth a thread is unravelled before the woman's eyes or a magician is called in. He makes a potion with water which the woman is to drink. If even this fails, the magician goes into a trance. His patron deity tells him the course of things. Offerings are prescribed sometimes those of a goat. A 'magic' string is tied on her. The offerings are made after the birth. The student should note that we have repeatedly pointed out that both Van Gennep's scheme for rites of passage and Saraswati's scheme for functions of ritual are unveiled before us in each case.

The student should be in a position to locate the three types of situation regarding Van Gennep. He or she should also locate some of the functions of the rituals with regard to Korkus also.

After the birth, the midwife ties the umbilical cord with a cloth and cuts it with a knife or bamboo splint. Turmeric is applied on the wound. The placenta is buried in a corner of the verandah, the mother and child are put up behind sheets in a corner of the house. This is to avoid the evil eye. The mother doesn't eat solid food for about five days. She is served a thin gruel. The newborn child is suckled only on the third day. During the first two days, the lips of the new-born baby are touched with butter milk. Mother and child are ritually impure for about 12 days. A bath is taken to purify her. It is clear here again that the rituals are those of incorporation. They socialize the child. In this brief description of childbirth among the Korkus we can clearly see the influence of Hinduism over their ritual. The concept of pollution as the child is born and then the purification are both clearly a Hindu concept. However, the originality of the tribal view remains. This is brought out by the twisted thread being unravelled in front of a woman having a difficult

delivery. Moreover, the menstrual period is one of avoidance of women. These rituals are rituals of incorporation. They have all the elements of ritual as non-verbal communication and therapy and a way of life.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) List some of the Hindu birth rites ?
- a)
 - b)
 - c)
 - d)
- ii) List some of the Syrian Christian customs/rites during the birth of a child.
- a)
 - b)
 - c)

28.5 MARRIAGE RITES

Marriage reflects the social life of a society. Saraswati (1977) points out that birth, death, and marriage are considered as predestined in Hindu society. He points out that for Hindus marriage is not a social contract but a religious ritual. Marriage is one of the duties of being householder (*grihastha*). Marriage helps a 'twice born' man to fulfill his religious duties and responsibilities. Marriage is an essential sacrament for a woman.

28.5.1 Marriage Rites Among Hindus

Saraswati (1977) writes that a boy should marry a girl of equal status. Marriage should take place within the caste. There are considered to be eight forms of marriage: *Brahma*, *Daiva*, *Arsa*, *Prajapatya*, *Asura*, *Gandharva*, *Raksasa*, and *Paisacha*. The first four of these methods are *Prasasta* or approved; the last four are *Aprasasta* or disapproved (Pandey : 1976). These forms of marriage have been discussed in Unit 15, Block-4, ESO-02.

We now turn to the marriage rites and their symbolism. You will note as we describe the rituals that Van Gennep's classification of separation, transition and incorporation is found to be present. In marriage of the Hindus often there is a shifting of the residence also and this adds to the liminality or transition element of the ritual. Saraswati notes that there are two kinds of rituals in Bhramanic marriage, that is, *Sastrachar* and *Lokacharya*. The *Sastrachar* are performed according to the textual canons of the *shastras*. The orally transmitted rituals are *Lokachar* or *Striachar*. Even in forms of marriage such as *Gandharva* or *Paisacha* where consummation precedes the wedding, *Sastric* rites are used to legalize the marriage. However the *Lokacharya* rites have also to be performed by the women and the villagers. Saraswati (*ibid*) points out that there are various customs in different regions and villages, which are observed at the wedding.

The main points of the *sastrachar* are that there is use of written text, scriptural authority and that the male priest pontificates. Mantras are essential and clarified butter is used. Again, there are mainly purificatory/benedictory rites. Auspicious time is very important for rites. Then the applicability of rules is wider than of *Lokacharya*. The textual tradition is upheld and followed both at the groom's and

bride's places. These rites are also essential for legitimizing marriage and consequently children therein.

Now what of the *Lokacharya*? Here oral knowledge is used. Women exercise the authority and lead the ceremonies. There are songs and incantations but no sacrifices. Again the rites leave a magical element. Further the rites are performed in the sequence. The women desire rules as based in memory and mainly localized. The oral tradition of *Lokacharya* is different for the groom and for the bride. Oral rites are not compulsory or essential but have a profound meaning and emotion. Rites of marriage which appeared in the *Paddhatis* and *Prayogagranthas* are now given below (Saraswati, *ibid*).

- i) The oral giving away of the bride to the bridegroom.
- ii) A formal selection of the bride.
- iii) The nuptial canopy is made.
- iv) Fixing the time for the marriage ceremony.
- v) Fetching earth for growing sprouts a few days before the wedding.
- vi) Putting on turmeric paste.
- vii) Worship of Ganesh (Ganesh Puja).
- viii) Establishing a waterclock on the day of the marriage.
- ix) Ancestor and Goddess worship.
- x) Worship by the father-in-law of the bride who worships the goddess Gauri.
- xi) Worship of the wife of India : sachi.
- xii) Announcement of ancestors of bride and bridegroom with *gotra* and *pravara*. Then there is *Kanyadaan*, the gift of the virgin.
- xiii) The protection cord is tied.
- xiv) The bridegroom's scarf is tied to one end of the bride's sari, *Saptapadi* follows. This is the rite of "seven steps".
- xv) Putting vermilion on the parted hair of the bride.
- xvi) The bridegroom now sits on a pile of rice. The groom and bride throw rice on each other.
- xvii) A *tali* is tied by the groom around the neck of the bride.
- xviii) A bamboo plate is given by the bridegroom's mother to the bride's people.

These rites are aspects of one ceremony and though extended sometimes for a few days they essentially form the rites of separation.

This however is not how things actually happen. Saraswati (1977) notes there is a difference in the textual (as above) and the contextual. Again, the guide books are peculiar to specific regions and do not apply to all regions. This is also further classified by pointing out that Lokacharya traditions differ.

In a paddhati quoted by Pandey (1976) the *Kanyadaan*, means the “gift of the virgin”. Only the father is properly entitled to make this gift or someone in his place when the father is not there. Thus the grandfather, brother, and others including the mother are entitled to give away the girl. A *Samkalpa* is uttered and then the bride is given away formally. *Satpadi* are given greater prominence in the Pnaddhati quoted by Pandey than the one quoted by Saraswati (1977). This is the rite of seven steps and without it the marriage is incomplete. The husband and wife step in a northerly direction in seven steps. However it is also a *Lokachar* custom that the bride and groom go round the sacred fire seven times. Puffed rice is sprinkled by the bride who follows the groom her sari being tied to his turban. This ritual practice is supposed to legally bind the couple in matrimony. While *saptapadi* is common to the *Grihyasutras* *Kanyadaan* is not. We should now briefly point out the symbolism of the marriage rites as noted by Saraswati (*ibid*). The *sastras* treat marriage as a sacrament and religious rites are prescribed for it. The blessings of Superhuman beings are sought. When the groom makes the bride stand on a milestone it is to make the marriage firm and strong. Similarly, all the rituals of marriage and the *mantras* are used to seek blessings and make a strong creative union. The mantras too fulfil this purpose. There are biological symbols as well as such as when the bride is sprinkled with *sura*. This makes her desirable. This is so for fertility rites. Magical rites are used to make the post-consummation period safe for the woman. In Kumaoni marriage of the Hindus although a *Paddhati* is used the division of rites of passage is very clear. In brief all negotiations prior to marriage including date and time of the ceremony, putting turmeric and bathing the village water source are rites of separation, or preliminary rites. The journey to the groom from the village and carriage of the empty doli or carriage is part of the liminal or transitional aspect which last through the marriage ceremony. The post-liminal or incorporation rites are when the *doli* has the bride in it and the procession walks back (Kapur, 1988).

It may be said that a Hindu marriage is a very complex ritual and both the textual and the contextual aspects appear in it. Before we turn to the Syrian Christian Marriage rites let us look at some of the *Lokachar* rites. Before leaving his house for marriage the groom sits on his mothers lap and she ‘feeds’ him with her breasts. At the time of *Kanyadaan* the bride sits on the lap of her father. Such customs abound and Saraswati (1977) feels that they are survivals of old customs. Indeed we may say that the textual and the contextual cannot be separated. There would scarcely be a marriage where the *Sastrachar* and the *Lokachar* do not intermingle. This is because the rites and the customs go hand in hand each enriching the other. there are various facts that the marriage symbolism touches upon. Firstly, it is an aspect of unification (Saraswati, 1977) of man and woman seeking divine grace. The bride is made to tread on a milestone as a symbol of firmness. There are certain biological symbols as well. Marriage is about procreation and there is a rite when the bride is sprinkled with *sura* to make her intoxicating. In the case of survival of old customs, some have already been mentioned. These are numerous and we mention that during *Kanyadaan* the bride sits in her father’s lap. In the *Antahpat* ceremony the mother’s brother brings her in his lap. When the garlands are exchanged, he sits in her mother’s brother’s lap. The bride and bridegroom sits in the lap of the bridegrooms mother who feeds them banana and milk. While doing so the *mangalsutra* is tied around her neck. Before leaving home the bride is carried on the back of her father. Saraswati points out that these are symbolic of the custom of child marriage. These rituals create a strong bond between the groups that are participating in the marriage rites. They also carry the message of socialisation, religious merit, non verbal and verbal communication, therapy etc. to the participants. This is because tension gathers, rises and dissipates in a controlled and orchestrated manner under the influence of the customs and rituals. We now turn to the marriage ceremony in Christianity.

28.5.2 Marriage Rites Among Syrian Christians

In the past, child marriage was widely practised in Kerala. The consummation however took place only on reaching maturity. Nowadays marriages take place after maturity. It is also desirable that the groom be employed, and the bride be in her early twenties. The initiative in negotiating a marriage usually rests on the bride's family. When the appropriate choice has been made, according to the girls side, a representative of the boys' family is sent to settle the marriage. In the past a bride and groom met for the first time in the church at the time of their marriage. Today, while wooing and courtship are out, the two partners exchange photographs and may meet under supervised conditions to talk for a brief while. This supervision is done usually by the girl's mother or her married sister. The betrothal ceremony among the Syrian Christians takes place on the day the banns or formal proclamation of the intended marriage, are announced by the priest in the church immediately after the *Qurbana* or Eucharist, or the Sacramental service to commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. As usual all the ceremonies preceding the marriage ceremony are the rites of separation/preliminality. The banns are called in both the parishes, that of the boy and the girl. This is to ensure that anyone who has any objection to the marriage should place his point of view.

Activity 2

Attend a marriage of either Hindus, Syrian Christians, or Sikhs. Compare it with the description given in the unit. Discuss the similarities and differences with other students, if possible in the Study Centre.

A betrothal feast is held in the bride's house which begins with sweets and is followed by a formal meal. This is the time when the dowry is handed over. It was regarded as a gift from the father to the daughter and approximated the value of the property the younger sons would receive on the death of their father. It was ruinous in many cases.

The marriage service consists of two parts the first is the betrothal and the second is the solemnization of the marriage. The betrothal and the solemnization of marriage are both aspects of liminality. They presage the moment of transition from one status (unmarried) to another (married). When the bridal couple arrive at the church, two gold chains and a cloth serve as a veil for the bride. The *minnus* or *tali* are placed on a table in front of the sanctuary. The couple stand in front of this table, the bride on the right of the bridegroom. This is in contrast with Western Churches where the bride always stands on the left.

The service commences with prayers and blessing of the two rings. The priest first places the ring on the right hand fourth or "ring finger" and blesses it. He then places the ring on the corresponding finger of the bride's hand. It is believed that the ring finger has a vein which is directly linked with the heart. **The Syrian Christian ceremony differs from the western church in that the rings are put on by the priest and not exchanged between the couple.**

Next we have the blessing on the crowns. Gold chains with crosses are used for this. After the gold chains are blessed the priest raises the chain from the groom three times like a crown and places it on his cheek. He does the same with the chain of the bride. These chains are usually heirlooms and preserved carefully for such occasions.

The priest now comes to the actual ceremony of marriage. The priest places the *tali* around the bride's neck and the husband ties the thread of the *minu* in a knot. After this the priest puts a cloth, which is a gift from the groom to the bride on her head and the marriage ceremony closes.

The custom of tying a *minu* or *tali* is copied from the Bhramins e.g. the Nambudiris. The veil was formerly preserved as a shroud to cover the bride at the time of her death.

After the church wedding the bridal couple come in procession to the bride's house where a pandal or shamiana is erected. The rites after the marriage is solemnized and the procession to the brides house are rites of incorporation or postliminality. They are met at the gate by young women carrying lights. The best man leads them in. The crowd shouts 'nada nada', 'walk walk' and blows shrill whistles. The bride must take the right foot over the threshold, as this is both a mark of respect as well as an omen of good luck. The couple sit on a dais amidst floral patterns made of rice and flowers. Rose water is sprinkled on the guests and *pan supari* are distributed. Marriage songs are sung and the wedding feast begins. *Pan supari* and tobacco are served before the guests depart. Thus Syrian Christians have a large number of customs for their marriages. The church features prominently and is the venue of all weddings. Akin to the western Christian wedding, rings are exchanged. However the ring is given to the bride and groom by the priest not by groom and the bride respectively. These rituals of the Syrian Church reflect social control and identification, occupation and a way of life. We need to add that these rituals rejuvenate the societies values and norms, itsw "sentiments" so to speak.

28.5.3 Marriage Rites Among Sikhs

Mixing between the sexes is restricted among the Sikhs as in other religion. Again Sikhs live in extended families. Marriage is thus not a personal affair alone but forges a lasting bond between two groups. The wife who enters into a new group must prove herself compatible. This compatibility is expected not only with the husband but with others including the husband's brother, sister, sister-in-laws, parents and so on. Social status and monetary transactions should play a subsidiary role. Child marriages have been repudiated by Sikhs. The legal limit in India is eighteen years for women and twenty one years for men.

There are certain norms and considerations, usually the eldest daughter marries before her younger sister. Again, if a young person is undergoing higher education his marriage will be deferred until this is over. Further if there is death in the family e.g. a father dies then the elder son's marriage is postponed till the younger children have completed their education. The family and its friends assist in finding a partner (Cole and Sambhi : 1978). What is looked for, is suitability in the form of virtuous qualities, temperament, and age. Social status and economic status are also looked into. Finally, the caste is also taken into account. Thus a Jat is likely to marry a Jat and a Ramgarhia a Ramgarhia. There are, however, exceptions. A Sikh must marry a Sikh. The gurus teaching the best carried out in a householders state. Usually mixed marriages are not successful and conflict and tension creep in through rural-urban, ric-poor, the moral laxity versus piety. Sikhs should not marry close to their family or "whose caste name is the same at the distance of the four grandparents" (Cole and Sambhi *ibid*). The couple meets informally before the final decision is made. This is done in the presence of some of the family elders. This helps them both to familiarise themselves with, and assess the prospects of the matrimonial alliance.

A bethrothal ceremony may take place before the marriage but it is not compulsory. The wedding is both a social and a religious occasion. It can take place on any day. Sikhs do not believe in auspicious/inauspicious days. There are no doubt practical considerations. For example monsoon months are inconvenient as rains interfere in arrangements. *The wedding takes place in the bride's village, on a flat roof top of a country house or garden or gurudwara. It is important that the Guru Granth Sahib should be there.* We now turn to the preliminal, liminal and postliminal

rites. By this time you must be familiar with them. Try to locate them as the unit continues.

The groom's party usually arrives at the evening earlier and the formal meeting of the two families take place. When the covering hymn *Asa di Var* is sung the groom takes his place at the foot of the *Adi Granth*. The bride sits to the left of the groom along with a friend. A short hymn containing general advice is sung. One of the officiants then explains that *a Sikh marriage is meant to be a fusion of two souls in one and not a social contract*. It is like the union of man and God which is the aim of Sikhism. Hymns are sung giving advice on marriage. A wife should be fidel, humble, and do her husband's bidding.

Check Your Progress 3

i) What are some of the Hindu marriage rites ? List them by name.

a)

b)

c)

d)

ii) Briefly describe marriage rites among the Sikhs. Use about five lines.

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.....
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The bride and groom assent marriage by bowing to the *Guru Granth Sahib*. They sit down and the bride's a father garlands the *Guru Granth Sahib*. Then the bride's *dupatta* is tied to the muslim scarf which hangs from the groom's shoulders. The *Lavan* of Guru Ram Das is turned to. The verse is sung as the couple walk around the *Guru Granth Sahib* in a clockwise direction the groom in front.

They return to their place and the second verse is read. The circling is now repeated. This happens four times. As the last encirclement is completed, flower petals are thrown. The service ends with the singing of the first five and the last stanzas of the Anand followed by the *Ardas* prayer. The Guru's Counsel is now taken by opening the scripture at random. The congregation is served *Karah prasad*. The marriage party leaves for the grooms village in the afternoon. The entire ceremony is the liminal or transition aspect of the ceremony. The marriage party leaving for the grooms village/town/city/residence marks the period of incorporation or postliminality.

A word on the symbolism of the ritualism is useful here. The first circling is for adherence to the householders' duties. The second is for faith in God. In the third for living detachedly in the world with eyes fixed towards God. The fourth circling and verse describe the return of the soul to God. Thus Sikhism is symbolic but maintains a simplicity and beauty of ritual. The symbolism involved in the Sikh marriage is directly connected with the *Guru Granth Sahib*. This ceremony is very beautiful and simple in the sense that it involves four circlings of the holy *Grantha*, each of which have a specific significance gleaned from the scripture itself. Even the assert of both groom and bride is given to the *Guru Granth Sabhi* rather than any individual. Ritual of socialization, non-verbal communication, spiritual advancement,

28.5.4 Marriage Rites Among the Korkus

Stephen Fuchs tells us (Fuchs, 1988 : 237-281) that Korkus exercise clan and village exogamy and also kinship exogamy. This extends to all known kin. Marriage between cousins and cross cousins is forbidden. Most of the marriages are arranged marriages although love marriages are not ruled out.

In arranging the marriage similar economic background and similar social levels are also necessary.

The Korkus live in joint households and this means that the match should not disrupt this institution. During the first year of marriage the women spends time mainly with her mother-in-law and sister-in-law.

The initiative for contracting a marital arrangement is taken by the youth's parents. When an appropriate girl is found keeping all the restriction in mind, her parents are approached. The boy and girl are usually not consulted. All love matches and open declaration of attachment are considered shameful. Such behaviour leads to a large reduction in brideprice. The elders of the house take only a marginal interest in the proceedings. Thus the choice of marriage partners is left mainly to the parents. But today a boy rarely marries against his wish. All the Korkus do not have the same rites, just as in the case of the Todas and Andaman Islanders. There are differences among Korkus of the Nimars, and Korkus of the Melghat, and Central India. Among the Nimar Korkus engagement is celebrated on a Friday. The boy's father and a villager take the brideprice. All these may be considered to be preliminal customs.

The price of a bullock or calf is also be given. The bullock donated to the girl's father must be returned if the groom dies. The gift of the bullock has symbolic significance; it seals the friendship between the two families. The wedding ceremonies are spread over several days.

The Wedding Shed: The wedding shed is erected in the groom's village in a Monday. It is erected on a Tuesday in the bride's village. The young men cut 12 *salai* trees. They are received by the bride or mother of the groom. She holds a tray with unboiled rice, *kuku* and oil. She moves the plate around and puts the mixture on the foreheads of the youngmen in a vertical line. Then the wedding shed is erected. This is clearly a preliminal custom signifying the separation stage. These rites as we will see are very elaborate among the Korkus discussed.

Box 28.02

The Korkus are found in the Satpura mountains in Central India especially in the region surrounding Mahadev Hill. The hills are about 2,000 ft. high and spread out into plateaus. The Korkus occupy the central portions of the Satpura mountains, the Mahadev hill and eastern sections. They are agriculturists. This area was ruled by different political powers and led to a Hinduization of the Korkus. Hinduization here refers to a process by which the religious practices and rituals of caste Hindus are emulated by the Korkus.

In the evening after the wedding shed is erected, the groom is bathed and offerings are given to the ancestors. The offerings consist of various foodgrains and a chicken. These offerings are given at the "middle post" of the ancestors a pole in

the centre of the village. The bridegroom simply watches. Women sing wedding songs sitting in a circle following which the women amount the groom with turmeric. The night is spent in dancing and feasting. The village shaman offers a chicken and prayers to god for the young couple. The wedding party is then ready to go to the bride's village. The party consists of the bridegroom and his nearest relatives of both sexes. His mother however must remain behind in the village. The party arrives at about 5 pm in the bride's village.

Ceremonies of the Bride's village: The bridegroom is in nuptials-dhotti, shirt, and a new turban. He wears a dagger with a lemon struck on its point. This dagger symbolises protection against evil spirits. The procession then starts with jingling bells. Shortly before departure a blanket is spread in the yard. The groom embraces his elder brother's wife seven times. This is possibly a survival symbolizing the fraternal polyandry of the past.

The wedding pavillion is patched over smoothly by cloth. In front of the entrance to the house two magic squares (*chauk*) are drawn on one of these the groom sites. This brings us to the transitional aspect of the ritual.

Now the bride dressed in finery is carried into the wedding place, by her-maternal uncle who carries her on his hips like a child. The bridegroom is similarly carried by his maternal uncle. The two are thus carried around the courtyard thrice. During this time both groom and bride throw rice and millet grains at each other. They also throw turmeric. The two are seated on the square in front of the mandap. They are covered with a sheet and water is poured over them. The groom ties a bead necklace around the girl's neck. The end of the bride's *layenda* is knotted to the groom's loincloth or sheet which he carries on his shoulder.

Now both get up and walk to the image of Mutua Deo, where the priest performs an offering. The bride holds the little finger of the bridegroom with the little finger of her right hand. They both walk around the squares and the central post five times. They are now officially married. Now the couple is separated and made to sit side by side on the two squares. Once again the loin cloth of the groom is tied to the bride's *layenda*. From now on the rituals will be postliminal as the 'limen' or threshold has been crossed. As we see the customs and rituals among the Korkus are inclusive of rites of socialization, non-verbal communication and therapy. In fact there is a great deal of feasting and drama involved in it. However, unlike the formal atmosphere of the Hindu marriage, the grandeur of the Syrian Christian marriage, the beauty and elegance of the Sikh marriage, the Korku marriage is a riot of feasting, colour, and music. This however does not undermine its solemn nature.

28.6 LET US SUM UP

In the above unit we have described and explained the rites of birth and marriage in various communities. These include the Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribe. We have therefore dealt with the subject adequately.

28.7 FURTHER READINGS

Cole W.O. and Sambhi P.S. 1978. *The Sikhs : Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd.: New Delhi.

Pothan, S.G. 1963. *The Syrian Christians of Kerala*. Asia Publishing House : Delhi.

28.8 KEY WORDS

Esoteric	: That act(s) or symbol(s) which is specialized or 'secret' and known only to a few expert people.
Exoteric	: Those acts or symbols which are known to and understood by the 'common' person.
Incorporation	: Rituals that absorb an individual into society e.g. birth rituals.
Identification	: Ritual which creates a new identity for the individual concerned e.g. ear piercing ceremony.
Separation	: Rituals, such as those at death which intend to sever relations between the living and the dead.
Ritual	: This is the core component of religions. Its rules are transmitted orally or textually.
Transition	: These rites play an important role in pregnancy and initiation rites.

28.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) Rites of Incorporation
- b) Rites of Transition
- c) Rites of Separation
- ii) a) Ritual as socialization
- b) Ritual as identification
- c) Ritual as merit and status
- d) Ritual as nonverbal communication

Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) Garbhadana
- b) Pumsavana
- c) Sunantonayana
- d) Namkarana
- ii) a) *Moon Yesu Masiha*
- b) Giving the child a few drops of honey to drink in which gold is mixed.
- c) Baptism along with the service in the chopal.

Check Your Progress 3

- i)
 - a) Worship of Ganesh
 - b) Ancestor and Goddess Working
 - c) Kanyadaan
 - d) Saptapadi

- ii) Among the Sikhs *Guru Granth Sahib* occupies a supreme position. The couple has to bow before it and later go round it clockwise four times as hymns of Guru Ram Das are sung. Only then is the marriage considered solemnized.