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# UNIT 2 PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS IN RITUALS

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## Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you will be able to understand the:

- performative aspects in rituals in two different ethnological regions; Africa and Indonesia;
- the religious diversity and their value in anthropology; and
- performative aspects in rites de passage.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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Religion is an important sub-system, and it is the one that intersects with other sub-systems significantly in a cultural or social system. It embodies various religious values, thoughts, ideas and notions and relates itself meaningfully to political, economic, social organisational aspects. Each of these endow certain values to the religious behaviour of people, thereby religion assumes importance in everyday life. The aspect that gives strength to religion (or ‘factuality’ that religion gets) come from the value placed on the performative aspect of ritual or religious actions. It is derived from the concept ‘performative utterance’

introduced by J. L. Austin (1962), a language philosopher. According to Austin, though most of the utterances or sentences uttered describe something in the world, but certain of them does something in the world which he called performative utterances. These unlike others are not related to true or false, or not – truth evaluable, rather when something wrong had taken place or desired end has not resulted, they are said as ‘happy’ or ‘unhappy’. The uttering of a performative sentence is doing an action completely or partially. An example of such an utterance is “I pronounce you husband and wife” declaration of the Christian Minister at the wedding. Austin deals with them under illocutionary speech act which is related to doing an action such as ‘is there salt on the table’, which means not only an enquiry if there is salt on the table, but also asking some one to hand over the salt. Similarly one utters looking at the door ‘it is cold in here’ which implies a request to close the door. In this perspective ritual acts do something which are believed to result in some consequences.

From this theoretical angle, ritual actions and religious behaviour can be examined and understood from the performative perspective. It is a shift from the earlier conventional approach to religion by formulations of the systems of beliefs, moral, ethical values. It can be noticed in the definition of religion given by Clifford Geertz, “A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic” (1973:90). In this definition, he underlines symbolic objects, the dispositions and symbolic actions of people governed by moods and motivations formulating an aura of factuality. Victor Turner on the other hand looks at the performative aspect in ritual as a social drama. The rituals of affliction among the Ndembu, include dramatisation of breach of social norms, identification of the crisis, negotiation of crisis situation and integration of the social group resolving the problem through public action. The performance takes place in the context of treating the sick person which affects the entire social group of which the sick is a member. These two anthropologists have this perspective when they describe ritual and religion in the broad framework of symbolic and phenomenological or interpretative approaches to study religion. It must be pointed out that the following description is the summary of the ethnographies.

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## **2.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* IS AN EXAMPLE**

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The work on Ndembu rituals is a contribution to the understanding of the meaning of ritual performances. The meaning of the act is combined in the rituals.

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## **2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY**

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### **2.3.1 Intellectual Context**

Earlier, the focus of the religious and ritualistic studies was on the functions they perform. With Turner, the focus shifted to the symbolic aspects, to finding out the meaning of the rituals.

### 2.3.2 Fieldwork

Intensive fieldwork was carried out using the standard anthropological methods. In addition, the author collected the myths that the Ndembu held.

### 2.3.3 Analysis of Data

This book is a collection of essays already published in various journals and anthologies, and these essays are arranged in two sections: (1) mainly theoretical treatments of symbolism and witchcraft; and (2) descriptive accounts of aspects of some rituals. At the time of investigation (1950s), there were about 18,000 Ndembu in Winilunga district, dispersed in scattered villages of about a dozen huts over 7,000 square miles of deciduous woodland in Zambia (formerly Northern Rhodesia) and Zaire (formerly Belgian Congo) in Africa. They are matrilineal and practice virilocal residence, and the oldest male matrikin of the senior genealogical generation is usually head of the village. The majority of local groups in Ndembu society are relatively mobile, transient and unstable. Men, of their own choice, and women through marriage, divorce, widowhood and remarriage, constantly move from village to village and change in domicile. Men go where they have kin who are widespread over the region. Villages may break up and divide or disperse, members disperse and come together at another point of time, but the structural principle remains the same. The residential pattern is influenced by matrilineal descent and virilocal marriage. Matriliney governs prior rights to residence, succession of office, and inheritance of property. A man has right to reside with his matrilineal kin, primary or classificatory. He may live in his father's village if mother lives with him there or if she does not, as a privilege granted to him by his father who has a right in his village matrilineage. This kind of residential pattern has implication that at a given time the village structure is made up of not only relationships between male matrilineal kin, but also between these men and a variable number of matrilineal kinswomen who have returned to them after divorce or widowhood, bringing their children. There are two kinds of solidarity among the male kin: between fathers and sons and between brothers. These receive recognition in rituals.

**Symbols:** Turner writes about ritual and symbol, "By "ritual" I mean prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. The symbol is the smallest unit of ritual which still retains the specific properties of ritual behaviour; it is the ultimate unit of specific structure in a ritual context." (1967:19). The symbols are objects, activities, relationships, events, gestures and spatial units in a ritual situation. The structure and properties or meanings of these ritual symbols may be inferred from (1) external form and observable characteristics; (2) interpretations offered by specialists and by laymen; (3) significant contexts largely worked by the anthropologist. The ritual symbols are stimuli of emotion, and they are at one and the same time referential and condensation symbols, each symbol is multireferential rather than unireferential. Ndembu regard some symbols dominant, and such of them are mainly two classes: first tree or plant in a series of plants, shrines in curative rituals. Both the classes of dominant symbols are closely associated with non-empirical beings. Symbols instigate social action and even act as "force" and they have to be examined within the context of the specific ritual. The vernacular term for symbol, *chinijikijilu*, "to blaze a trail" by cutting marks on a tree with one's axe or by breaking and bending branches to serve as guides back from the unknown bush to known bush to known path.

Turner writes, “A symbol, then, is a blaze or landmark, something that connects the unknown with the known” (48). About meaning of a symbol, he states, three levels must be distinguished: (1) the level of indigenous interpretations (or, briefly, the exegetical meaning); (2) the operational meaning and (3) the positional meaning. The first one is obtained by questioning the indigenous informants about the observed ritual behaviour, the second one is what the Ndembu do with the symbol, and not only what they say about it, and the third one is about what is derived from its relationship to other symbols in a totality whose elements acquire their significance from the system as a whole. The exegetical meaning of dominant symbol may be conceptualised in polar terms. One cluster can have a set of referents of gross physiological characters and on the other end these are referents to moral and social structure. For instance, milk tree stands at one end for physiological aspects of breast feeding with affectual patterns and at another end matriliney.

In the paper on “colour classification in Ndembu ritual,” Turner deals with the problem in primitive classification. Against the earlier opinion of dualistic classification, like left and right, consanguineal and affinal, he argues that in African and other contexts also there are lateral symbolisms of other forms of dual classification. Among the Ndembu there is tripartite classification relating to white, red, and black colours. Like any form of dualism which contains a wider tripartite mode of classification, he finds white and red in close association against the black. In Ndembu life-crisis rituals, there is mystery surrounding three rivers: the rivers of whiteness, redness and blackness. The white relates to or refers to mother, milk, semen, power and so on, and the redness relates to blood of women, animals and so on, whereas blackness is related to death. There are several other referents for these colours. However, the people clearly contrast white and black in antithetical way as goodness/badness; purity/lacking purity; lacking bad luck/lacking luck; life/death; health/disease and so forth. But white and red form as a binary system and remain complementary to each rather than as antithetical pair. Such a kind of association is found in several societies, and examining some of them, Turner finds some interesting facts about the three colours. These colours represent products of human body emissions, heightened bodily experiences; heightened physical experience transcending the experiencer’s normal conditions, experiences of social relationships. Black is particularly related to catabolism, decay, sleep or darkness. Finally Turner makes a strong case stating that these three colour stand for basic human experiences of the body associated with the gratification of libido, hunger, aggressive and excretory drives and with fear, anxiety, and submissiveness, they also provide a kind of primordial classification of reality. This view contrasts Durkheim’s notion of social relations in relation with things.

In ‘betwixt and between: the liminal period in rites de passage’ Turner considers the liminality – the transition from one position to the other - as an interstructural situation in the rites of passage. Though rites of passage are found in societies, they reach maximum expression in small scale societies. Structure he means the ‘structure of positions’ which is a relatively stable condition or state. In this state individuals or group or society are no longer classified and not yet classified. Symbols represent this situation in many societies drawn from the biology of death, decomposition, catabolism and other physical processes that have negative tinge. In circumcision and puberty rituals the neophytes are structurally “dead” among the Ndembu. In some cases the transitional beings are particularly polluting

since they are neither one thing nor another. In some other the neophytes find connection of deities with superhuman powers. The neophytes are structurally invisible. The liminal processes are regarded as analogous to those of gestation, parturition and suckling. Sometimes incumbents experience many kinds of subordination or superordination. In many societies, the neophytes acquire special spiritual knowledge through *sacra* which is classified as: (1) exhibition, “what is shown”, (2) actions, “what is done”, and (3) instructions, “what is said”. Turner considers the liminality of rites of passage as the building block of culture as individuals pass out of and re-enter the structural realm.

In ‘witchcraft and sorcery: taxonomy versus dynamics’, while critically reviewing the book *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa* (Middleton and Winter, 1963) Turner finds that anthropologists are concerned with exhibition of “structures” of social relations, ideas, and values and cultural analysis. He suggests they move forward employing process theory employing a construct “action-field” reproducing the structure or “web of relations” identifying goals, motivations, rationality, meaning and so on. There should be consensus on the definition of witchcraft and sorcery, now anthropologists have used these concepts interchangeably. He urges them to engage in unraveling structure of the social system in its dynamic process while analysing the components at cultural level.

**Rites:** In ‘Muchona the hornet, Interpreter of religion’ Turner shows the ritual specialist’s knowledge about plants and animals in the area, their medicinal properties, symbolic value, their meanings and interpretations. Such persons are great resource for getting insights into the peoples’ interpretation of their world. In the chapter ‘Mukanda: the rite of circumcision’ he provides detailed account of the process and analysis of the Ndembu’s circumcision ritual which is quite complex, employing field theory. Before describing the ritual organisation, he gives a detailed account of the social field and its properties. These include the differences in the size, origins, and extant interests of villages, their internal segmentation, marital interconnections of the residents, sociospatial distances between them, and other aspects of their interdependence with and independence from one another. Further, customary relationships between categories of people and psychological differences among the individuals and so on in the field are also indicated. These properties are significant in terms of sponsoring role of a village, identification of Establisher, and Senior Circumciser and their assistants. The selection of these persons involves conflicts, association of groups, and change of alignments, differences and resolution of the disagreements. The rite of Mukunda has three main phases: *kwing’ija* – causing to enter, *kung’ula* – seclusion and *kwidisha* – the rites of return. The sequence of the episodes is as follows. After the formal invitation to Senior Circumciser the activities of the ritual begin under *kwing’ija*, the assembling of food and beer at the sponsoring village and clearing of a site for the camp of the novices’ parents and kin; these are preliminary. The activities that takes place on the day before circumcision are: the collection of *ku-kolisha* strengthening medicine, the sacralisation of the camp and sponsoring village, prayer to the ancestors of the sponsoring village, sacralisation of the *ijiku Makukanda* fire by the Establisher, the setting up of a *chishing’a* pole, sacralisation of the circumciser’s fire, and the night dance in which novices’ parents take a leading role. On the day of circumcision, there are ritual washing, preparing novices’ food, procession to the circumcision site, the beating of drums by guardian, the erection of *mukoleku* gate, preparation of the circumcision site, the hyena, the circumcision, ritual washing and feeding of

novices. The *kung'ula*, the next phase, includes the building of the lodge where the boys are secluded till they are healed which takes around two to four weeks. During this time, there is appearance of *makishi* masked dancers, training and esoteric teaching of the novices. In the final phase, *kwidisha* – the rites of return, on the first day, the activities include assembly at *katemu kanyanya*, the small shaving place where medicine is applied, *nayakayowa*, man dresses as a woman and miming of copulation, the first entry of the novices in which mothers witness their sons, the *ifwotu*, site for the stay of boy, the second entry of the novices and the night dance. On the second day, there is burning of the lodge, the final purification, *katemu kenei*, the great shaving place – shaving around hairline, the making of *nfunda* – the medicine, the lodge instructor's final harangue, the third entry, the *ku-tomboka* war dance, and finally the payment. In this rite *mudyi* and *chikoli* trees, the *nfunda* – medicine made of various barks and scrapings of trees, and death of novices are the significant symbols besides various other symbolic acts.

In 'themes in the symbolism of Ndembu hunting ritual' Turner aims at providing the meanings of various symbols that appear in rites related to hunting cults – *wumbinda* and *wuyang'a*. These meanings can be noted at different levels – exegetical, operational and positional. For the Ndembu, the hunting is more than a food quest, it is a religious activity. It is preceded and followed by the performance of rites. The *wumbinda* and *wuyang'a* are assemblage of various rites, the former is concerned with worship of a hunter ancestor and propitiatory rites whereas the latter is for attainment of a certain degree both of proficiency in killing of animals and of esoteric knowledge of the cult mysteries. The dominant symbol in these rites is *chishing'a*, a branch forked in one or more places, stripped of all its leaves and bark. It is termite resistant and strong wood representing the strength of huntmanship.

In 'Lunda medicine and the treatment of disease' Turner aims at not simple enumeration of afflictions and healing procedures but revealing ideas implicit in the Ndembu treatment of diseases. He shows that these ideas pervade wider realm of belief and action. Besides the presence of colour, trees and other symbolism, he notes ultimate and axiomatic values of Ndembu religion and ethics entered into such an everyday matter as curing a headache. Finally, in 'A Ndembu doctor in practice' he is concerned with the healing processes of illnesses. The Ndembu healers use herbal medicines as well as therapeutic magico-religious rites following divination. All deaths are attributed to sorcery or witchcraft, but only those of structurally important individuals are singled out for special ritual attention. *Chimbuki* whom Turner calls "doctor" is a "ritual specialist" who performs the rites through cult association devoted to manifestation of the ancestral shades that afflict its living kinswomen or kinswomen with various illnesses. With the help of an extended case study Turner analyses the *ihamba* cult therapeutic practice, which is very significant in the curative processes. This is different in the way that the "doctor's" task is less curing an individual patient than as remedying the ills of a corporate group. The disease has social dimension, breaches of social relationships due to conflicts and factional rivalry which need sealing up through confessions of grudges and ill-feelings. Ndembu social norms and values, expressed in symbolic objects and actions are saturated with generalised emotions.

### 2.3.4 Conclusion

The book provides a detailed understanding of the cosmology of the Ndembu. The practices of these people lead on to their thought patterns. Making use of the extended case study method, Turner shows the channelisation of emotions through these rituals.

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## 2.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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This work is a contribution to the symbolic understanding of rituals. It is one of the crucial texts for following the interpretive approach. Besides understanding the meaning of rituals among the Ndembu, the book lays the foundation of the approach, which can be used in other studies.

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## 2.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *The Religion of Java* IS AN EXAMPLE

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Clifford Geertz's ethnography on Javanese religion is a contribution to the interpretive approach in anthropology. Geertz, an American anthropologist, is hailed as a symbolic anthropologist. His book on Javanese religion is one of the few books on the religion of a non-Western people. The book appraises the reader of the intricacies of Javanese spiritual life.

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## 2.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

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Geertz (and his wife, Hilda Geertz) carried out a long fieldwork in Java, publishing a number of works, one of which is on religion. The fieldwork was carried out in Modjokuto, a small town in east central Java, using the method of history and anthropology.

### 2.6.1 Intellectual Context

The time when this work was carried out was mostly devoted to the study of small-scale tribal communities. Geertz thought of carrying out a study in a small town. This work is famous for syncreticism. Geertz was highly influenced by the writings of two philosophers, Gilbert Ryle and Ludwig Wittgenstein. He drew upon the tradition of ordinary language philosophy. He followed the concept of 'thick description' from Gilbert Ryle and the concept of 'family resemblance' from Ludwig Wittgenstein.

### 2.6.2 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was carried out in the town using the standard anthropological techniques and methods. Besides conducting fieldwork in Southeast Asia, Geertz also conducted fieldwork in North Africa. In his fieldwork, he turned anthropology towards the frame of meaning within which people live out their social life.

### 2.6.3 Analysis of Data

The ethnography focuses on Modjokuto, a small town in east central Java, Indonesia which had a population of about 20,000 in 1951-52 of whom about 18,000 were Javanese, 1,800 Chinese, and few Arabs, Indians and others. It is the capital of a district as well as a sub-district. While the Chinese are mainly involved in trade and business, the Javanese are peasants, government officials, white collar clerks, teachers, artisans and manual labourers. According to the world-outlook – religious beliefs, ethical preferences and political ideologies – the Javanese constitute three cultural forms: *abangan*, *santri* and *prijaji*. The religious system consists of a balanced integration of animistic, Hinduistic and Islamic elements. This syncretism is the island's basic folk tradition predominantly found in Javanese villages. In the towns most of lower-class and the dispersed peasants continue to follow the tradition known as *abangan* tradition. The purer Islamic tradition is called *santri* mostly followed by Javanese traders, but not strictly confined to this group as it has great influence even in villages among the peasants. The social elites, who have roots in the Hindu — Javanese courts and entered in salaried civil service as white-collar elites, and conserved a highly refined court etiquette, are called *prijaji*. Their tradition includes complex art of dance, drama, music, and poetry, and a Hindu-Buddhist mysticism. While *abangan* stress the animistic aspects, the *santri* represent a stress on Islamic aspects, and the *prijaji* stress the Hinduist aspects of Javanese syncretism of religion. These are not constructed types but the Javanese themselves apply to their societal divisions. Though these three appear to be three sub-communities, they are actually enclosed in the same social structure, and share many common values.

**The *Abangan* variant of religion:** The *abangan* religion represents the peasant synthesis of tribal inheritance and urban tradition besides several others. It is an amalgam of a little native curing, a little Tantric magic, a little Islamic chanting and so on. The communal feast called *slametan* forms the cultural base of *abangan* religion which is found uniformly in all the three religious variants of Java.

**The *Slametan* Communal Feast:** It is small but constitutes the core ritual in Javanese religious system, wherein food forms the significant symbol and recurs on all occasions such as birth, marriage, sorcery, death, house moving, bad dreams, harvest, name-changing, opening a factory, illness, supplication of the village guardian spirit, circumcision, and starting off a political meeting and so on. The components of the ritual include, special food which differs depending on the intent of the *slametan*, incense, Islamic chant, the extra-formal high-Javanese speech of the host which varies with the occasion, but it lacks drama. It is mostly held in the evening, just after the sun has gone down and evening prayer. As the guests, neighbours, friends, kinsmen and others arrive, the host opens up a speech expressing gratitude for accepting the invitation, and hopes everyone shares the benefit of the *slametan* and then states the intention of giving the *slametan*. Lastly he begs pardon for any errors that he may have made in his speech. It is followed by Arabic chant-prayer. Each participant is served a cup of tea and a banana-leaf dish into which is put a sample of each food item from the centre of the food which was already placed, before the *slametan* started. When everyone has filled the dish, the host bids them to eat. After half-dozen scoopfuls one by one they stop eating and ask for permission to leave, while most of the food remains uneaten, as they desire to eat in private or with their family members and leave the place. The meaning of *slametan* is drawn from the result; no one

feels different from others, and no one has a wish to split off from the other person. Also importantly the local spirits will not cause ill feelings among the people and keep them unhappy and confused. These spirits are believed to be existing at old Hindu ruins, woods and unusual points in landscape. The incense and aroma of food pacify the spirits. There are three main kinds of spirit: *memdi* (frighteners), *lelembut* (ethereal ones) and *tujul* (spirit children). While the *memdis* are harmless and enjoy playing practical jokes, the *lelembut* possess individuals, cause illness, even death and these are to be driven out by *dukun* (curer). *Tujuls* are familiar spirits, one get them by fasting and meditation and one has to make devil's pact of satisfying them and in return get wealth from the spirits; if one becomes rich suddenly, the reason is attributed to the *tujul* owned by that person and are encountered by prayers and magical spells. There are other spirits called as *demits* (place spirits) which inhabit certain places, trees and so on which respond to the pleas of people and receive *slametan* with special foods and *danjangs* (guardian spirits) are like *demits* but the difference is that they are spirits of historical figures like village headman. The *slametan* concentrates, organises, and summarises the general *abangan* ideas of order, their "design for living" (Geertz 1960:29). The *slametan* falls into four main types: (1) those centering around the crises of life like birth and death, (2) those associated with the Moslem ceremonial calendar like birth of the Prophet, (3) those concerned with the integration of village, the cleaning of the village of spirits and (4) those concerned with occasions like departing for a long trip, changing place of residence or changing name and so on. The limit of space forbids going into details about these. On each of these, there is change of food which obtain certain symbolic meaning relevant on the occasion and change of chants or spells. However, the basic structure and meaning remains the same. It may be important to note here about the *dukuns* who are curers, sorcerers and ceremonial specialists. There are a variety of them dealing with various physical ailments and disharmonies. They are believed possessing *ilmu*, a special knowledge having even magical powers, sometimes learned from a teacher. In several cases the powers do not remain with the individual permanently. Not only that there are different opinions about the *dukuns*, but the general belief is negative as they inevitably die violent death. The *abangan* worldview in *slametan* practices are infused with the Permai political and nationalist ideology which shun the strict Islamic tradition though general cooperation is extended to people of all walks of life.

**The Santri variant of religion:** There are three elements in the *santri ummat* (community) in Modjokuto: peasants, traders and *penghulu* family members. From northern Java, peasants who were already attracted to Islam migrated to southern part of the island for various reasons around 1825 AD. This was followed by a group of itinerant Javanese traders in cigarette, cheap cloth, dry fish, leather goods, small hardware came from northern Javanese towns in sixteenth century and propagated Islam in Modjokuto and the country side. They aped the business and life styles and religious customs of the Arabs, and gradually became wealthy. As time passed more of these peripatetic traders settled in Modjokuto. The *penghulu* family members are a sort of aristocrats worked for Dutch government under colonial rule. The *santri* religious ideological background rests on the core of Islam – Koran, Hadith, Sharia, and the five pillars (confession of Faith in Allah and the Prophet, the five time prayers, fasting in the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca) and *zakah* or *zakat*, religious tax. The difference between the *abangan* and *satri* is that the former are indifferent to orthodox Islamic doctrine

but fascinated with ritual detail while among the *santri* the concern is with the doctrine overshadows the attenuated ritualistic aspects of Islam. The *santri* find themselves in conservative group called *kolot* or modern group identified with a charitable non-political entity called Muhammadiyah. There are two political parties of *santri* in Modjokuto: Masjumi and Nahdatul Ulama (NU). The Masjumi has close association with Muhammadiyah and the NU represents the conservative group. There is a minor third party called Partai Sarekat Islam Indonesia (PSII) which identifies with the modern group. The loyalties of the *santri* swing largely between the Muhammadiyah and NU parties.

As the *abangan* religious form is tied up with the custom it does not need formal training to support it and it can be learned in peasant's life following examples set by others. But for *santri* Islamic school system is necessary specially to combat with the religious illiteracy and backsliding, neither of them is less meaningful to *abangan*. The traditional school system of *santri* lies in *pondok*. A *pondok* consists of a teacher-leader, commonly a pilgrim who is called *kijaji* and a group of male pupils anywhere three or four to a thousand, called *santri*. The *santris* live at the *pondok* in dormitories, cook their own food and wash their own clothes. They live by themselves either working in the fields of the *kijaji* or others or supported by the parents. The *kijaji* is not paid, and the students do not pay tuition. All costs of the institution are born by pious members of the *ummat* as part of their religious duties under the *zakat*. The *pondoks* are located in country side, usually consists of a mosque, a house for *kijaji* and dormitories for *santri*. Classes are held in the mosque where the *kijaji* chants passages from books of religious commentary and interprets the same. The verses from Koran are memorised by the *santri*. There has not been time regulation and grading of the students. This kind of school later got influenced with the secular school system. The NU started secular schools with strong religious component on the lines of modern education, called *madrassah* while the Muhammadiyah started modern schools not totally without religious instruction. Both paved way for reformation of the *santri* traditions.

The Ministry of Religious Administration has an office at Modjokuto which looks after the affairs of marriage and divorce. This office is headed by *naib* and assisted by *chotib* and others. Under the Muslims Law if a man pronounces the *talak* only once, he may change his mind within three menstruation periods and take back his wife. He may again dismiss his wife later and take her back again within three menstruation periods. If he does not take back his wife either first time or second, the man and his wife are irrevocably divorced. If the *talak* is pronounced third time, they cannot remarry unless the woman is remarried to someone and divorced. These matters are looked after by *naib*. The officials also collect information about the running of mosque and giving courses for the village religious officials about Muslim Law.

**The *Prijaji* variant of religion:** The *prijajis* are Java's gentry while the *abangans* its peasantry. They trace their ancestry back to the great semi-mythical kings of pre-colonial Java, who did "refined" and "non-refined" work. This is said to be an outgrowth of the old Hindu system that had five groups – Brahmans, Satrijas (Kshatriyas), Vaisias, Sudras, and Paraiyah. They represent mainly Great Tradition and have always mainly been in towns, while the *abangan* represent Little Tradition peasantry of the villages. The *prijajis* are seen as self-controlled, polished, learned, and spiritually refined. They symbolise *alus*, meaning pure,

refined, polished, polite, exquisite, ethereal, subtle, civilised and smooth. The outlook of *prijaji* is also explained with a pair of concepts: *lair* and *batin*. *Batin* means the “inner realm of human experience” and *lair* “the outer realm of human behaviour”. The religious life or values of *prijaji* focus on etiquette, art and mystical practice. The etiquette conceals the *alus prijaji* the real feelings from others, manifests in humbling oneself politely and is the correct behaviour to adopt toward anyone who is of equal rank or higher. There are different linguistic styles to be employed when interacting with people of different ranks. The Great Tradition of Javanese has three varieties of art complexes: *Alus Art*, *Kasar Art*, and National Art. Each of these complexes consists a variety of play, orchestra, myth or story, poetry, performance/dances, text and set ups.

The mysticism of pre-Colonial Java forms the basis of *prijaji* religious variant. It can be summarised in eight postulates. (1) In the everyday life of man “good” and “bad” feelings, “happiness” and “unhappiness”, similarly other emotions are inherently and indissolubly interdependent. No one can be happy all the time or unhappy all the time. The aim in life is to minimise the passions in order to find out the real feelings behind. (2) Underneath these coarse human feelings there is a pure basic feeling-meaning, *rasa*, which is the individual’s true self and a manifestation of God within the individual. (3) The religious aim of man should be to “know” or “feel” this ultimate *rasa* in himself. (4) In order to achieve this ultimate *rasa* one must have purity of will and must concentrate one’s inner life by instinctual discipline such as fasting, staying awake and sexual abstention. (5) Besides the spiritual discipline, one must empirically study the human emotional life; a metaphysical psychology leads to an understanding and experience of *rasa*. (6) As people vary both in their ability to carry out the spiritual disciplines, it is possible to rank individuals according to their spiritual abilities and achievements. (7) At the ultimate level of experience and existence, all people are one and the same and there is no individuality for *rasa* and others are the same in all. (8) Since the aim of all men should be to experience *rasa*, religious systems, beliefs and practices are only means to that end and are good only insofar as they bring it about. This leads to a relative view of such systems.

Within this broad mystical conceptuality of human emotions and experiences, there are variants such as Budi Setia which is heavily influenced by the international theosophy movement of Annie Besant. Sumarah believes in the existence of God who has created heaven and earth and all in it, and acknowledge the prophets and the Holy Books, but not idolize them but practice self-surrender. Kawaruh Kasunjatan recognises guru who exhorts to plain living and high thinking, use techniques of breath regulation, concentrate on inner life, and perceive the ultimate *rasa*-sounds in one’s inhaling-exhaling (*hu Allah*).

#### 2.6.4 Conclusion

Geertz finally concludes, the “three groups are all enclosed in the same social structure, share many common values, and in are, in case, not nearly so definable as social entities as a simple descriptive discussion of their religious practices would indicate” (1967:355). He says, “religion does not play only an integrative, socially harmonising role in society but also a divisive one, thus reflecting the balance between integrative and disintegrative forces which exist in any social system” (ibid).

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## 2.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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Geertz's work is often referred to in the context of the functional theory of religion. Durkheim, who is regarded as the primary contributor to the functional theory, saw that religion binds people in a moral community called church. However, in reality, this thesis is applicable to those situations where there is a singularity of religion- all members of the community belong to one religion and obviously it creates solidarity among them. Geertz's work draws our attention to a situation of religious pluralism where religion instead of creating solidarity in society produces divisiveness, and may become the main source of conflict and disintegration. So, from one perspective religion is the source of social integration, but when we look at social reality from the perspective of the entire society, it creates divisiveness and conflicts.

### A Comparison

Other than the fact of different geographical locations, the two studies focus on the population that is different in its political and economic background. As the Ndembu is primarily hunting tribe, the Javanese society is basically agrarian. The Ndembu are largely conservative animists though some converted to Christianity, whereas the Javanese religion is syncretism of animism, Hindu-Buddhist and Islam. In both the cases religion plays significant role in the day to day life of people; among the Ndembu the political aspect of religion has not been highlighted perhaps it is underplayed under the powerful colonial British rule, but among the Javanese it has strong political links at regional and national level. Apart from these, the significant difference between the two is the theoretical approach. While Turner adopts Field Theory, Geertz depends on phenomenological and epistemological approach. Geertz finds that religion is integrative as well as disintegrative force but in case of Turner, it appears more as an integrative force bringing back social harmony as the social structural principles, practical and idiosyncratic behaviour often create social conflicts and tensions.

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## 2.8 SUMMARY

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Ritual constitutes an important component of a religion which varies in content and form depending on the context and intent. Within the religions of Ndembu and Javanese, as discussed above there are several rites. However, underlying principles and structures are same in each case. Though rituals can be examined and explained from various theoretical perspectives, they exhibit certain features specific to their nature. One such feature is the performative aspect in which the actors that participate relate themselves to various categories – human and non-human beings. In this interaction process they take for granted instant or delayed occurrence of certain desired things as a result of the symbolic actions, and perform their actions in a way that bridges are constructed over the breached norms which caused affliction to individuals in order to restore health to individuals and social harmony. These two case studies presented in this unit explain this phenomenon.

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Middleton, John and Winter, E.H. 1963. *Witchcraft and Sorcery in East Africa*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Turner, Victor. 1967. *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

## Suggested Reading

Geertz, Clifford. 1960. *The Religion of Java*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

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## Sample Questions

- 1) Explain the performative aspect of a ritual.
- 2) Discuss the relationship between ritual and religion.
- 3) What have you understood by religious symbol from this unit?