

Block

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RELIGION AND RITUALS

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BLOCK 5 INTRODUCTION

This lesson will introduce you to the aspects of religion and ritual. Religion is defined, after Emile Durkheim, as a unified set of beliefs and practices, concerning the objects that are set apart and forbidden. Common to all religious systems of the world, irrespective of the scale of the society, there is a belief in the existence of the sacred world of the 'supernatural powers', in which the people have faith, believing that these entities exercise power over their affairs.

The first unit comprises the ethnographies written by a British anthropologist, Jonathan Parry, and an Indian sociologist, M.N. Srinivas. Whilst Parry's work is concerned with a study of death rituals and the specialists concerned with the performance of the last rites (and the 'business of death'), Srinivas's book is a study of the Coorgs of Karnataka. Chapters in Parry's book were delivered as the Lewis Henry Morgan Memorial Lectures. Parry's work is also a comment on the nature of Hindu hierarchy and the place of renouncers (*sannyasi*) in it. He takes up Louis Dumont's thesis for a critical examination, according to which by renouncing the world, a Hindu becomes an 'individual'. If Parry is concerned with an interpretation of Hindu death rituals, Srinivas, who earned his doctoral degree from Oxford under the supervision of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, is mainly concerned with the functions of rituals.

The second unit comprises the ethnographies on the Ndembu of Zambia by Victor Turner and on the Javanese by Clifford Geertz. Turner's work is a contribution to the symbolic understanding of rituals. Comprising ten essays, Turner's book shows the robustness of rituals in the Ndembu society which, like the society of the Trobrianders, is matrilineal and virilocal. The distinction Turner drew between 'dominant' and 'instrumental' symbols is of great significance. Geertz's emphasis is on understanding a society that has a plurality of religious streams. In Java, Geertz found the coexistence of three religious communities – the Muslim, the Hindu-Buddhist, and the Animists; he analyses the ideological conflicts that take place between these communities. In this context, we would recapitulate that Durkheim's thesis is applicable to those situations where there is singularity of religion.

In the last unit, the first ethnography is on Iran. In this, Michael M. J. Fischer draws upon his rich fieldwork with the religious personnel (*mullahs*) and their students in the holy city of Qum. He composes a picture of the Iranian society from 'inside' – the lives of the ordinary people, the way each class interprets Islam, and the role of religion and religious education in the formation of culture. In the second ethnography, Peggy Froerer is concerned with the transmission of Hindu nationalist ideas by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to the tribal communities (*adivasi*). The book also examines the impact of all this on the relations between Christians and Hindus. Based on a fieldwork lasting two years in Chhattisgarh, she argues that the Hindutva ideology has penetrated into the everyday lives of tribal groups. Though this movement has received a setback at the national level, it seems to have gained strength in states with large tribal populations.

UNIT 1 SACRED KNOWLEDGE

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Learning Objectives



After reading this unit, you will learn about:

- the various forms of religious practices in India;
- the relation between society and religion;
- the rites of passage;
- the priestly categories; and
- how 'sacred' is constructed in India.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

To understand the concept of sacred knowledge we will focus on the ethnographic works (a) *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* by M.N. Srinivas and (b) *Death in Banaras* by Jonathan P. Parry for the unit.

Coorg is a tiny, mountainous province in south India, bounded on the north and the east by Mysore state and on the west and south Canara and Malabar districts of Madras presidency. The isolation and the inaccessibility of Coorg, with its steep mountains, dense forests and heavy rainfall contributes to the maintenance and elaboration of the distinctive mode of life and culture of Coorgs. Under British rule the existing roads were improved and new ones were built. Nowadays buses run regularly on all the main roads connecting different parts of Coorg

with each other and Coorg with their neighbours. Yet even now no railway line passes through Coorg and this restricts the amount of contact it has with the rest of India.

Most people in Coorg live in villages, either themselves cultivating or supervising the cultivation of land. All the important languages spoken in Coorg are Dravidian with the exception of Hindusthani and English. Coorgs make use of the Kannada script on those occasions when they wish to reduce Kodagi into writing. Educated Coorgs are usually trilingual, knowing Kodagi, Kannada and English. Kodagi is used at home, Kannada in talking to most non-Coorgs excepting Malayalis and English in official matters and occasionally in conversation with strangers. English is popular with Coorgs and women (especially under thirty) have some acquaintance with it.

1.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* IS AN EXAMPLE

Srinivas' work of 1952 is one of the best contributions to an understanding of how the structural-functional approach maybe used for understanding the ritual and social life of people. Incidentally, the data for this work was collected in the late 1930s and the early 1940s and on this Srinivas had already written a doctoral thesis. At Oxford, under the masterly supervision of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, the founder of the structural-functional approach, Srinivas reanalysed the Coorg data and prepared a piece of work which endeavoured to answer the questions: what does ritual do? What is the contribution of ritual to society? It was in this work that there occurred the concept of Sanskritisation; earlier the concept of Brahmanisation was replaced. Although in later writings, Srinivas elaborated upon the concept of Sankritisation, it was in this work the concept was given along with an elaboration upon the case of the upper mobility of Coorgs.

1.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

1.3.1 Intellectual Context

When Srinivas came to the scene, Indological studies and the studies of texts to understand India had precedence upon field based study. The detailed accounts of communities lacked theoretical sophistication. Srinivas' work was not only fieldwork based but was also an application of a theoretical approach for analysing data. The first work he did was submitted for a doctorate under the supervision of Prof. G. S. Ghurye, which was a fine combination of Indological and sociological approaches. Then, under the supervision of Prof. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, Srinivas reanalysed his data using the functional approach, and the result was this book.

1.3.2 Fieldwork

First hand fieldwork was carried out with the Coorgs using standard anthropological techniques and methods. Srinivas spent a long time with the Croogs to know their culture from inside. He combined the empirical data with the historical.

1.3.3 Analysis of Data

Social Structure

The existence of the sub-divisions among Coorgs does not prevent them from regarding themselves and from being regarded by others, as a single group. Coorgs consider themselves to be Kshatriyas who constitute the caste of rulers and soldiers in traditional hierarchy and rank next only to Brahmins, who are priests and scholars. Coorg formed a compact unit in relation to other castes. They possessed wealth and power, they like dancing and competitive games involving the exercise of skill and strength, hunting and soldiering. In the Vedic and classical caste system these virtues are attributed to Kshatriyas, the caste of warriors and kings who are next to Brahmin in hierarchy. The resemblances between the Coorgs and the Vedic Kshatriya are striking indeed in the matter of values and it is understandable that Coorg should regard themselves as Kshatriya. The classical Kshatriya, as one of the three 'twice born' castes were entitled to perform certain rituals at which sacred verses (*mantras*) from the Vedas were recited by the priests. But the Coorgs do not perform any of these rituals and Vedic *mantras* are not recited when a Coorg is given a name, or marries or dies.

Coorgs, like other caste Hindus, object very strongly to eating of beef, and the strength of their objection was early recognised by the British who banned all slaughter of cattle for the table in Coorg in 1835. But the Coorg dietary includes pork and liquor and this is occasionally singled out for comment by other castes. The co-relation between status and dietary practices is particularly strong in the interior of south India and the Coorg claim to be considered as Kshatriyas comes up against this fact. Coorgs rightly point out that the Rajputs of north India eat pork and this has not prevented them from being generally regarded as Kshatriyas. However, Rajputs eat only wild pig and not the domesticated one. There are mainly forty castes and tribes in Coorg. But Coorgs come into intimate contact with a few of them.

The nuclear unit of the Coorg society is the *okka* (or the patrilineal joint family) and only the male members of an *okka* have any rights in the ancestral estate. Women born in *okka* leave it on marriage while the women who come into it by marriage have extremely limited rights in the ancestral estate. No woman may be head of an *okka*. A Coorg proverb says 'a woman may not be the head of an *okka* and a bitch may not be given a share of the game it helps to kill in a hunt'.

Only sons can continue the *okka*. But when there are no sons, a daughter or a widow of a dead son is married in either the *okka pariye* or *makka pariye* any which has the effect of granting the children of either form of union membership of their mother's natal *okka*. If it is not possible to perpetuate the *okka* in either of these ways a boy from another *okka* is adopted. There is sexual division of labour, men generally doing the work outside the house while women do the work inside. The tasks done by men are in a vague way regarded as superior to those done by women. The men cultivate or supervise the cultivation of land by low castes labourers. However, agriculture is not and has never been their sole occupation. The army has always attracted Coorgs and nowadays educated Coorgs are to be found in every profession. Coorg women's activities are on the whole confined to the house. They cook food for the twenty or thirty members of the *okka*. They look after children and servants, the storing of food, the raising of pigs and fowls and so on. The younger women have to bring water from the domestic pond or well and carry manure in reed baskets to the fields.

Women are expected to observe a stricter code of conduct than men. Different ideals are held up for men and women. Strength, skill in fighting and hunting and courage are admired in a man. A proverb states 'men should die on the battlefield and women should die in child-bed'. The killer of a tiger or panther and mother of ten children were both accorded the honour of a *mangala* ceremony.

But nowadays under the influence of the western ideas the Coorg women are once again coming to the fore. Education is more widely spread among Coorg women than among the women of other castes, including Brahmins. They are nurses, teachers, and doctors and do not hesitate to live outside Coorg. The economic position of Coorgs and the fact that they marry comparatively late are some of the factors responsible for the greater spread of education among Coorg women.

Membership of the *okka* is extremely important and lack of membership in some *okka* or other tantamounts to social extinction. Elders consequently try hard to see that the children of extramarital alliances get berthed somewhere. It is right and proper that the father of the children should secure them membership of his *okka*, but if for some reason or the other he cannot be persuaded to do so the children are made members of their mother's *okka*. A *nad* is a bigger unit than a village and it is usually more homogenous culturally than a larger area which includes it and few other *nads*. A *nad* might differ from other *nads* in the matter of the date of observance of important festivals such as the harvest festival, and the festival of arms. The articles used in the harvest festival ritual might also vary in different *nads* and this is due to the fact that in each area the plants locally prolific are chosen to express a wish for growth.

THE RITUAL IDIOM OF COORGS

The Ritual Complex of Mangala

Formerly *mangala* was performed to mark the attainment of social adulthood by a boy when his ears were ritually bored by the goldsmith. This *mangala*, the first to be performed for a boy, was called *kemmi kutti mangala* or the *mangala* at which the ears are bored. The wearing of the ear rings was symbolical of the attainment of the social adulthood. One who was physiologically an adult but who had not undergone the ear boring *mangala* did not count as adult for ritual and social purposes. The counterpart of ear boring *mangala* for a girl was the *mangala* performed when she attained puberty. This was called *pole kanda mangala* or *mangala* performed on the sighting of defilement. The menstrual flow was regarded as defiling and formerly a woman observed seclusion for three days during her periods. *Mangala* was also performed when a woman became pregnant for the first time. A woman who had given birth to ten children all of whom were alive was entitled to a form of *mangala* known as *paitandek alapa*.

A man who killed a panther or tiger had the right to *nari mangala* or *tiger mangala* being performed in his honour. Marriage increased a man's status and a bachelor was regarded as socially and ritually inferior to a married man. *Mangala* was performed to a bachelor's corpse before burying or cremating it presumably in order to raise the status of the soul of the dead bachelor. A man who had lost two wives in succession was ritually married to a plaintain tree before marrying his third wife. The marriage to the plaintain tree was called *balek mangala* or plaintain

mangala and the tree was cut down soon after the mangala. Formerly when a man built a new house he performed *mane mangala* or house *mangala*. Mangala was performed for the head of the house on this occasion. Another form of mangala which has entirely disappeared now is *ettu mangala* or ox mangal. The ideal and usual marriage in Coorg is for a virgin to marry a bachelor and this is called *kanni mangal* or virgin *mangala*.

The astrologer selects an auspicious day for the performance of *mangal* and an even more auspicious part of the day for the performance of *murta* which is the most important part of the *mangala*. Four Coorgs beat the small Coorg drum called *dudi* and some traditional songs are sung at various points during *mangala*. These songs give an account of the ritual that is being performed. The singers also sing the road song while the subject of *mangala* is taken from one part of the house to another and the road song gives a traditionally exaggerated account for everything that is found en route.

Mangala indicated the movement of the subject from one position in the social structure to another, marking a change in his social personality. *Murta* ritual is the most important part of *mangala* and consequently it is performed during the most auspicious part of the auspicious day and the subject undergoes a series of preparatory and purificatory rites before sitting down for the *murta*. The subject of *mangala* (if male) is ritually shaved by the barber after which he is given a bath by three women relatives whose husbands are alive.

The ancestral estate the most valuable part of which is the rice field is regarded as sacred. A Coorg is not allowed to walk in it wearing his sandals just as he is not allowed to enter the inner parts of the ancestral house or a temple with his sandals on. He is not allowed to whistle or hold an umbrella over his head while walking in the ancestral estate: both these acts are not consistent with the ritual respect which the estate has to be accorded. The entire rice field is cut up into a number of small rectangular plots ridged up on all the four sides. Each plot is referred to by a distinct name and one of these plots is regarded as the main plot and it has the same name as the entire rice field. The traditional association between an *okka* and its ancestral estate is symbolised in the custom of burying the umbilical cord of the eldest son of the head of the *okka* in the main plot of the ancestral estate. The eldest is the one who is going to become the head of the *okka* he will have to look after the ancestral rice field. The main plot stands for the entire rice field and it is entirely proper that the umbilical cord of the future head of the *okka* should be buried in the main plot. Thus a Coorg continues to take an interest in the affairs of his *okka* even after his death, which means that he continues to care for the rice field on which the prosperity and happiness of the *okka* and thus indirectly of the total society depends.

The Kaveri festival includes a rite called *bottu* and this is intended to protect the growing crop in the woods on the estate and the domestic well. One of the most important calendar festivals of the Coorgs is the *putri* when the paddy sheaves are ritually cut.

The Concepts of Pole and Madi

The Kodagi term for ritual purity is *madi* and this term is found in all other Dravidian languages except Malyalam and *pole* which means ritual impurity is found in all Dravidian languages except Telugu. *Pole* is used in Kodagi in two

senses: one, in which it means ritual impurity generally and another in which it means certain specific forms of ritual impurity. In the latter cases it is usual to add the necessary prefixes, for instance *kurudu pole* (blind pollution) or *tinga pole* (monthly pollution) refers to the impurity of a woman in her periods and *petta pole* or *purudu pole* refers to birth pollution.

A man is in a condition of ritual impurity in relation to a member of a higher caste while he is in a condition of ritual purity towards a member of a lower caste. The concept of ritual purity and impurity systemise and maintains the structural distance between different castes. Caste hierarchy, on the other hand, makes these concepts relative, except with reference to castes at either extreme. Nail and hair parings are impure and they have to be thrown far away from the house. Poverty will result if they are scattered in the house. Birth and death both result in ritual impurity for the entire household for several days. This ritual impurity will not disappear even if the impure person has a dozen baths a day. But once the prescribed period is over the individual attains his normal ritual status after a bath.

If the crows perch on a roof and caws, the death of someone under that roof is presaged. A man who sees two crows mating will die soon after unless he sends a false message announcing his death to his kinsmen. The harvest festival and the 'festival of arms', are both significant in this connection. The Kaniya astrologer decides what periods of time are auspicious for worshipping weapons and for cutting branches of the tree. He also decides when the village (or *nad*) should have the collective hunt, in which direction the hunting party should go if they want the hunt to be successful and finally the man who should lead the hunt. The weapons are cleaned and kept either in the sacred central hall or in the south-western room. They are marked with sandal wood paste. The weapons are worshipped with flowers and a favourite flower used for worship on this occasion is *toku* which derives its name from the fact that it looks like a gun. Curried meat and cooked rice-flour are offered on plantain leaves to the weapon. All the adult males in every *okka* in the village or *nad* have to co-operate in the collective hunt that is held after the festival of arms. Each *okka* takes its dogs to the hunt. Every dog gets a portion of the meat of the animal killed. Every man taking part in the hunt gets a share and those who hit the game first and second get an extra share each. He who first hit the game is also entitled to the animal's head while the one who was the first to touch the killed animal's tail is given one of the front legs in addition to his ordinary share.

1.3.4 Conclusion

Srinivas' aim in this book is to show the interconnection of religion with society, and how religion contributes to an overall continuity of the social order. Among the Coorgs, Srinivas says that the patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal joint family is at the core of the system and its continuity is the most important aspect.

1.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This ethnography is a salient contribution to the understanding of rituals from a functional perspective. The concept of Sanskritisation has also been given here, which means that a lowly placed caste or tribe tries to emulate the customs and

practices of the upper caste, with an aim to become its member in due course of time. Srinivas illustrated this process with the help of the Coorgs.

To make the concept more understandable we will now focus on the work of Jonathan P. Parry who gave a very lucid picture of rituals attached to death in the holy city of Banaras in his book *Death in Banaras* published by the Cambridge University Press.

1.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Death in Banaras* IS AN EXAMPLE

This book is an example of the interpretive approach in anthropology. Parry is concerned with finding out the meaning of rituals and how the ‘business of death’ is organised in Banaras.

1.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

This ethnography is a study of the death rituals as performed in the city of cosmogony, Banaras.

1.6.1 Intellectual Context

As pointed out earlier this book is a fine example of the interpretive approach. Among the social phenomena, death is one that has not been studied to the extent it should be, and from that perspective, it is a significant contribution.

1.6.2 Fieldwork

The author of this work has spent a long time in the city of Banaras, working on cross-section of populations, beginning with a study of a group of renouncers, known as Aghori. The chapters comprising this work were presented as Lewis Henry Morgan Memorial Lectures.

1.6.3 Analysis of Data

As a place to die, to dispose of the physical remains of the deceased and to perform the rites which ensure that the departed attains a ‘good state’ after death, the north Indian city of Banaras attracts pilgrims and mourners from all over the Hindu world. This book is primarily about the priests (and other kinds of ‘sacred specialists’) who serve them: about the way in which they organise their business, and about their representations of death and understanding of the rituals over which they preside.

Death and the City: Through Divine Eyes

This deals with Banaras’s association with death and its transcendence. This is looked from a religious perspective that Lord Vishnu created the cosmos tie by performing aesthetic austerities at what is now the city’s main cremation ground. Kashi is known as the ‘Great Cremation Ground’ because it is there that the five great elements which compose the world arrive as corpses. The gulf which divides the city from profane space is again underlined by the maxim that it stands apart from the three *loks*, the fourteen *bhuvans* and the nine *khands*. Kashi constitutes a tenth *khand*. But if Kashi is the cosmos it is also symbolically identified with

the human body. The five *ghats* which are visited in the course of the *panch-tirath* pilgrimage are sometimes explicitly equated with the five elements of which the body is composed.

Since cremation is a sacrifice, regenerating the cosmos, and since funeral pyres burn without interruption throughout the day and night at Manikarnika *ghat*, creation is here continually replayed. As a result it is always the *satya yug* in Kashi, the beginning of time when the world was new. That it is because of the city's sacredness that people come there to die and be cremated is an obvious truism. What is less obvious perhaps is that the ideology itself implies that Kashi is sacred precisely because they come for this purpose, for it is death and cremation that keep the city at the navel of the universe yet outside space and time. It is no accident, then, that the scene of cosmogony is also the site of unceasing cremation or that the especially important corpses should be burnt on that very spot where Vishnu sat for 50,000 years alight with the fire of the austerities by which he created the world.

A Profane Perspective

With its reputation for orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism and its ancient tradition of Sanskritic learning, it is the Brahmans who set the dominant religious tone of the city. Despite its relatively small population, Banaras now supports three universities, each of which prides itself on strength in Sanskrit studies and/or Hindu philosophy, as well as a host of *pathshalas* (traditional schools) devoted to transmitting under the tutelage of a Brahman *guru* a knowledge of the sacred scriptures and an ability to recite the vedic *mantras*.

At the level of popular religion there is at least a degree of 'syncretism'. Many lower castes Hindus go as supplicants to the shrine of the Muslim martyr, Bahadur Shahid, for the solution of problems caused by the malevolent ghosts of those who have died a bad death, many lower castes Muslims visit the *samadhi* (tomb) of a Hindu Aghori ascetic for the cure of barrenness. The pilgrims however have continued to arrive in ever increasing numbers though it is likely that a smaller proportion of them than formerly belong to the highest and the most affluent sections of the society, and that the 'index linked' value of the average priestly donation has declined. But this is almost certainly made up for by volume and turn over. More and more pilgrims come by rail and bus on 'package tours' of a number of sacred centres and fewer and fewer of them stay in Banaras for more than a couple of days. Perhaps a majority are there only for a few hours. Many are the first members of their family or village to have visited the city and do not therefore have a hereditary *panda*. Increasing number of corpses are also brought to the city for their last sacrifice and more people of rank aspire to cremate them on the footsteps of Vishnu.

Some of those outsiders who have cremated their corpses in Banaras stay on to perform the mortuary rituals of the first twelve days and some who have cremated elsewhere come to the city to perform these rites. At certain seasons large numbers of villagers from the surrounding countryside, accompanied by their exorcists, visit the sacred tank of *Pishach Mochan* to lay the spirits of the malevolent dead to rest. During *pitri paksh* (the fortnight of the ancestors) tens of thousands of pilgrims stop at Kashi to offer rice balls to their ancestors at *pishach mochan* or on the *ghats* before completing their pilgrimage to Gaya, where they perform rites for their final liberation. In one way or another then death in Banaras is an extremely big business.

Death as a Living: Shares and Chicanery

This chapter describes the division of mortuary labour between various groups of occupational specialists who earn a living in and around the burning *ghats*, a division of labour which is closely constrained by the ideology of caste. One type of caste specialist is, for example, required to handle the physical remains of the deceased another to deal with his marginal and malevolent ghost before its incorporation as an ancestor while a third type of specialist presides over rituals addressed to the essentially benevolent ancestor.

At death the soul becomes a disembodied ghost (or *prêt*), a hungry and malevolent state dangerous to the survivors. On the 12th day after death a rite is performed which enables the deceased to rejoin his ancestors and become an ancestor himself. The Mahabrahman (funeral-priest) presides over the rituals addressed to the ghost during the first eleven days after death, and accepts on behalf of the ghosts the gifts intended to it. A further set of gifts is made in the name of the newly incorporated ancestor on the 12th day and these are accepted by the deceased's hereditary household priest (*kul purohit*) in the case of outsiders who have stayed in Banaras to perform the mortuary rituals. The Brahman specialist stands in for the soul he serves (the impure funeral-priest for the ghost, the relatively pure pilgrimage-priest for the ancestor).

Mahabrahman means the 'great brahman'. The caste is alternatively known as Mahapatra, 'great vessels'. An actor is a *patra*, a vessel for the qualities of the character he plays. In the drama of death the funeral-priest is the vessel for the rancorous greed of the ghost. Worshipped as the deceased he is dressed in dead man's clothes, is made to wear his spectacles or clutch his walking stick and is fed his favourite foods. If the deceased were a woman, a female Mahabrahman is worshipped and presented with woman's clothing, cosmetics and jewellery. At a rite which marks the end of the period of the most intense pollution, the chief mourner, and then the other male mourners, are tonsured by the Barber. But before even the chief mourner, the Mahabrahman should be shaved – as the *prêt* itself- were the one most deeply polluted by the death.

Though unequivocally Brahman, Mahabrahmans are *prêt* Brahmans – ghost brahmans- who are in many contexts treated much like Untouchables and are described as *acchut* (not to be touched). No fastidious person or clean caste will dine with them. In theory, they should live outside the village and to the south of it (that is in the direction of death). Writing of the Banaras rural hinterland in the 1940s, Opler and Singh report they may not even enter the village to beg. With regard to such matters as the consumption of meat and alcohol and the incidence of widow remarriage and breaches of caste endogamy they could not be described as paragons of Brahmanical orthodoxy, but nor could many of the other Brahman communities who earn a living on *ghats*. The Mahabrahman's relative degradation is rather a consequence of the fact that they participate in the death pollution which afflicts their patrons. Since they have many *jajmans* they are (as it were) in a permanent state of impurity. Not only impure, the Mahabrahman is also highly inauspicious. Although physical contact with a sweeper woman would be unambiguously polluting, it is auspicious to see her face as one is embarking on a new enterprise. By contrast it is at any time inauspicious to set eyes on a Mahabrahman and if you chance to see one first thing in the morning then somebody in your house may die. You should not even utter his name in the

morning. Nor may a Mahabrahman come to your door. ‘Nobody’ as the proverb has it, should have the misfortune that a Mahabrahman cross his threshold. He is somebody to be kept at bay, somebody to whom- in the custom of certain localities- to throw stones as he departs at the end of the mortuary rituals least he be tempted to return. Salt should not be put in the food he is served, for salt sets up relationship with the eater and no relationship should be acknowledged with the ghost (*prêt*).

The Mahabrahman is regarded with a mixture of fear and contempt. He is regarded with ‘a gaze of hate’ (*hay drishti*), is known as the ‘bitter one’ (*katu*), is said to have no ‘lustre’ (*kanti*) on his face, and the stereotype contrasts his fabulous wealth with the squalor of his demeanour and life-style. He is treated with less respect and consideration than the meanest untouchable. One Mahabrahman friend resentfully recalls his teachers’ taunts that he should leave school to hang up water-pot dwellings for the ghosts; another tells of a Khatri woman throwing away all the chillies drying on her roof when he went to retrieve the kite which had landed on it.

Mahabrahman weddings and other life-cycle rituals are presided over by a ‘pure’ Brahman. One Mahabrahman sells *pan* (the betel-nut which many Banarasis chew addictively) in a quarter of the city where many people must be aware of his caste; while another runs a tea-shop on the main road which passes through his suburban village.

The rites of the first eleven days after death are conducted on the *ghats* (or on the bank of some sacred tank). The Mahabrahman who officiates at these rites will only come to the house of his *jajman* (patron) if he is summoned on the day of the cremation to preside over the offering of five rice-balls made between the door of the house and the funeral pyre. On the following day he directs the hanging of the water-pot which serves as the home for the *prêt* in the branches of sacred *pepal* (*Ficus religiosa*) tree; and he subsequently accompanies the *jajman* there on daily expeditions to offer ware and a lighted lamp. He also conducts the offering of one rice-ball each day, each of which creates a different part of a new body for the deceased. This body is completed on the tenth day. On The eleventh day it is fed and the *prêt* is now ready to become an ancestor. The Mahabrahman’s duties are at an end. He is worshipped, fed, given gifts and departs having mashed the water-pot dwelling of the *pret*.

If cremation is carried out in *panchak* – (a block of five consecutive lunar mansions (*nakshatras*) during which it is particularly inauspicious to burn a body) – the Mahabrahman presides over the rite of ‘pacifying the *panchak*’ (*panchak shanty*). In cases of ‘untimely death’ he superintends on the eleventh day the additional rite of *Narayani bali* which has the object of preventing the embittered soul from remaining in *prêt* form (*yoni*); and he also performs *putla vidhan*– at which an elaborate effigy of deceased is constructed and then cremated for those whose corpses were either lost or immersed in the Ganges. ‘Bad deaths’ generally represents good income for the funeral priest.

The inventory constitutes the maximum elaboration of the Mahabrahman’s duties. In most cases there is no question of *panchak shanty*, *Narayani bali* and *putla vidhan*. Of the standard repertoire, the Mahabrahman would only expect to perform the full complement for an important *jajman* from whom he expects a

munificent offering. For the majority his services are considerably attenuated, and often amount to no more than attending the rituals of the tenth and eleventh days, scrambling them through with much surreptitious editing when the financial pickings look slim, and accepting the gifts with more or less bad grace.

The Mahabrahman's presence is, however, essential. He confers salvation, and allows the soul to 'swim across' to the other world. For the successful conclusion of the rites he must be satisfied with the gifts offered. 'His belly must be full', though on such occasions he is seemingly insatiable. Without his blessing the deceased will remain in the limbo of *pret*-hood to plague his family with misfortune and further bereavement; with it their descent line can prosper and increase. His curse is greatly feared, a fact which the Mahabrahman often exploits with veiled threats designed to encourage a tight-fisted *jajman* to loosen his purse-strings. A separate caste—the *Mahabappas*—is funeral priests to the funeral-priests. *Mahabappa* settlements are small and scattered, and each serves the *Mahabrahman* communities of a considerable area. No matter on which *ghat* they are cremated (or immersed), the *Mahabrahman* who has *pari* (his 'turn' in the rota) on the day on which the corpse is brought to the *ghat* has the exclusive right to accept all gifts which will subsequently be made in the name of the ghost, the most valuable of which are generally offered at the rituals of the tenth or eleventh day.

In practice, the city *Mahabrahmans* are only likely to hear about, those who cremate in Banaras, or whose ashes are brought for immersion. The residue represents the least promising donors. In the past, four settlements of village funeral-priests were appointed by the city Mahabrahmans to watch over their rights, and inform them of any death in the vicinity. Today it is these local representatives who appropriate a large proportion of the offerings made by village *jajman* of the poorer sort. *Jajman* from outside the radius of *pachchh* do not fall within the scope of the Banaras funeral-priests unless they stay in the city to perform the tenth and eleventh day rituals, in which event they are claimed by the *pari*-holder. But even when this is not the case, he may still derive some income from them by presiding over the offerings made at the *ghat* on the day of cremation. In total, the *pari* owner may acquire ten or twelve *jajman* who will offer him *sajja dan* ten or eleven days later; and earn up to Rs. 150 from offerings made at the pyre.

The mechanics of the system are such that occasionally a *pari*-holder miscalculates, or more likely forgets to show up on the *ghat* on the day of his *pari* (though he will usually have realised his error by the time of crucial ten or eleventh day rituals). In such an eventuality, Bihari Maharaj – the richest and most powerful *pari*-holder whose servants remain on *Manikarnika ghat* 24 hours a day – takes charge of all *jajman*; and when the rightful owner eventually turns up reimburses him with a proportion of the takings. In the course of the year there are one or two *paris* which remain regularly unclaimed, and for all intents and purposes Bihari has made these his own. Within the *Mahabrahman* community *pari* rights are very unevenly distributed. Bihari Maharaj has rights to some seventy-five days a year, while his half-brother and another man between them account for a further fifty-five days. In other words, a third of the year is owned by just three individuals.

In both *pachchh* and *pari* the right-holder needs the help of several semi-permanent *karinda*-servants in order to attend to all his *jajman*, and to muster a suitably imposing backing at the time of negotiating the offerings. About twenty Mahabrahmans work more or less regularly as *karindas*, most of them for several different employers. On the day of *pari* one of them will remain throughout the twenty fours at *Harishchandra ghat*, and two or three at *Manikanika*, where they collect information about prospective *jajman* and preside over offerings at the pyre. The income from *pachchh* and *pari* is quite unpredictable. The profession, people say, is dependent of the sky (*akash-vritti*). Several turns running may yield only the most impoverished *jajman*. But there is always the chance that once in a while the *pari*-holder may enjoy the windfall of a Maharaja, or a Marwari business.

Other variants of *pari*

The untouchable Dom funeral-attendants labour at the pyres under a similarly infamous reputation for rapacity. The cremation ground Doms – who distinguish themselves as Gotakhor (driver) Doms – insists that they are an entirely separate sub-caste from the Sweeper Doms of Banaras and other north Indian cities, and from the Basket-maker Doms of the rural areas. They numbered around 670, and mainly reside in two neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the two burning *ghats*.

The family barber has already cropped up in association with the funeral-priests. He acts as a general factotum throughout the period of mourning; and would normally accompany the funeral procession to the cremation ground where he tonsures the chief mourner, sometimes all sons of the deceased, and sometimes the corpse itself. An experienced Barber will have come to the *ghat* before, may find himself directing many of the proceedings, and is usually expected to negotiate with the wood-seller (who pays him commission of 1 *anna* in the rupee) and with the shops which sell shrouds and other mortuary goods. Around 700 small crafts are licensed to work the river front. Most are owned and manned by *Mallahs*, a caste of fishermen and boatmen. Each boat may take passengers only from its own *ghat*, though the right to fish anywhere on the river is unrestricted. An important source of subsidiary earnings on several *ghats* is the right to dredge in the river mud for coins thrown into the Ganges by the pious pilgrims as *gupt dan* – a ‘secret’ and particularly meritorious gift.

The way in which passengers are allocated between the various right-holders of a single *ghat* is variable. Dashashvamedh is the most popular bathing *ghat* in the city. The boatmen all sit together on a wooden platform at the bottom of the long flight of stone steps that leads down to the river. As any potential passenger reaches the top of the steps one of the boatmen will stake a claim by calling out ‘the one with the spectacles’, the ‘bell-bottom pant *wallah*’, ‘the red monkey Englishman’. Whoever claimed the passenger takes him.

At Manikarnika ghat there are six established shops which specialise in the sale of what are collectively called ‘the goods of the skull-bearing’ (*kapal kriya saman*). These consist of shrouds, various offerings to the pyre, and the big water-pot (*gagra*) which the chief mourner throws over his left shoulder at the end of cremation to ‘cool’ the pyre. These shops also sell stone slabs for weighting down corpses immersed in river. Forty or fifty years ago a single individual had a monopoly on this business- which he reportedly enforced by smashing pots brought by the mourners from elsewhere.

By contrast with the *kapal kriya* trade, the wood businessman at Manikarnika is today a relatively 'free' market. Up until about 1910, however, a single shop owned and managed by a powerful Rajput family- had a complete monopoly over all wood sold on the *ghat*. This shop still exists and remains the exclusive supplier of wood to the Doms when they negotiate an 'all-in' price which includes the cost of materials. The reason is that the arcaded structure where the Doms sit to negotiate their 'tax', where they eat and store bamboo from the biers, is under this Rajput family's control, and the Doms use it only on their sufferance. The same shop is also the sole supplier of the five mounds of wood which the Municipal Council allows for the cremation of indigent corpses.

***Pandagiri* – the profession of pilgrimage-priest**

As we have seen, many mourners bring the ashes of a deceased kinspersons to Banaras to immerse in the Ganges, while the vast majority of pilgrims perform offerings to their ancestors during the course of their visit. It is in principle the pilgrimage-priest – the *panda* or *tirath-purohit* – who arranges, and may even preside, over these rituals. In the case of those outsiders who remain in, or come to the city to perform the post-cremation mortuary rites, it is he who stands in for, embodies and receives gifts in the name of the newly incorporated ancestor at the rituals of the twelfth day.

The *panda* puts the pilgrims up in his own house or in one of the numerous pilgrims' hostels, arranges their visits to the shops, temples and other sacred sites and for the rituals they perform, and accepts the gifts associated with them. He is, he says, 'a contractor of religion' (*dharma ka thekedar*)- a phrase which nicely captures his role as a general purpose 'fixer' for both this-and other-worldly comforts of his clients.

The Last Sacrifice: The Expression of Grief

At death it is men who give birth. In nearly all communities, women are regarded as too faint hearted to accompany the corpse to the burning *ghat* and it is exclusively men who assist cremation. Even in the absence of the son a man serves as *dagiya* (the one who gives fire) and performs the subsequent rites. What then is the role of women? The short answer is, to grieve.

The corpse are meticulously washed by women, wrap it in a white shroud and lay out on the bed with thirty seven other brightly coloured shrouds draped over it. When it is moved to one side for its bath, and when it is lifted onto the bed, the women burst out into a chorus of wails and have to be cajoled by men to relinquish it. More garlands and balloons are added to the bier, a golden sari is tied to a long bamboo pole, a red sari to another. These are to serve as standards which would lead to the funeral procession. *Abir* is rubbed on the face of the corpse. It is time to move but the women who surround the bed become reluctant to make away for the pall bearers. As they shoulder it the women cry out in anguish, the two bands play different tunes, the young boys also dance frenziedly, and most of the men raised a triumphant cry of *Har, Har, Mahadev* (a greeting appropriate to Lord Shiva). The women are allowed to accompany the procession only a short way.

The Good and Bad Death

A good death occurs at the right time and at the right place—ideally in Banaras on the banks of Ganges with the lower limbs in the water. Failing Banaras or some other place of pilgrimage one should die at home on purified ground and in open air, and not on a bed or under a roof. Even in Banaras there are good and the bad times to go. Death in *uttarayan*—the six months of the year that begin with the winter solstice (*maker sanskranti*)—is propitious for this is the day time of the gods. During *dakshinayan* (the other six months) they spend much of their time asleep and do not therefore take much notice of human affairs. But the ancestors are now wide awake so *dakshinayan* is auspicious for the performance of the *shraddh* rituals addressed to them and this is during this period that *pitr paksh*—the fortnight of the ancestors— is celebrated.

A bad death is one, then, in which the deceased has revealed no intention of sacrificing his body (e.g. the victim of violence or accident), or of renouncing its desires (e.g. suicide). Alternatively it is that of a person whose body does not constitute a fit sacrificial object.

Ghosts into Ancestors

In Banaras the post cremation mortuary rites describe the way to convert the marginal prēt-ghost into an ancestral-*pitr*, and to facilitate the arduous journey of the deceased to the adobe of the ancestors (*pitr lok*) where he arrives on the anniversary of his death. Rites addressed to the ghost are presided over by the Mahabrahman Funeral-priest, those addressed to the ancestors by the deceased's hereditary household – or pilgrimage – priest. In Banaras both sets of rituals are collectively known as *shraddh*. Etymologically *shraddh* is closely related to *shraddha* or faith, *shraddh* being popularly defined as that which is offered to the ancestors with faith. The offerings are of two kinds. The first is *pind dan* the gift of *pinds*—balls of rice, barley flour or *khoa* (a thick paste made by boiling milk). The second kind of offering is mediated by the Brahmins who are fed and offered gifts.

Panna Ojha

Those who die a good death are cremated. *Panna Ojha* is a man of commanding presence in his mid sixties. Despite his ochre renouncer's robe, *Panna* is a householder. By caste a potter, he lives in a village some five or six miles from the centre of the city. Most of his patients see him on the *verandah* of his house, on one side of which is a raised platform which contains a shrine of the goddesses *Durga* and *Sitala*, and a square sacrificial fire pit into the ash of which several ascetics' tongs and tridents are stuck. During his consultations *Panna* sits imposingly on the platform with his patients—generally in family groups— at his feet below him. His sessions begin with an elaborate act of worship for his tutelary deities and a lengthy reading from various sacred texts.

1.6.4 Conclusion

The book provides an account of the association of the city of Banaras with death rituals. It also gives a brief sketch of what is known about its history as a pilgrimage centre, and as a place to die and to dispose of the physical remains of the death.

1.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Generally, in the study of death, the focus has been on rituals. By contrast, Parry's work is a thick description of what is called the 'business of death'. In addition to a symbolic analysis of rituals- their meaning and purpose- the work provides a detailed understanding of the 'ritual technicians' so to say, who are associated with the performance of death rituals. From the study of the microcosm- the Manikarnika ghat- Parry moves on to the understanding of Banaras as the 'city of cosmogony'.

1.8 SUMMARY

The study of religions can be approached in many ways and can present a number of different kinds of problems. For social anthropologists or for some of them one major problem is that of the social function of religion – how does religion contribute to the existence of society as an ordered and continuing system of relationships amongst human beings? In the first monograph on the Coorgs of South India, the author has presented that religion is a binding force amongst individuals. The scientific problem is how religion does this, how, in other words, it functions.

Parry's work focuses on the priests and other sacred specialists who serve the enormous numbers of mourners and pilgrims who are drawn to Banaras from throughout the Hindu world. A clear and coherent descriptive analysis of the rituals performed by these specialists and their ideas concerning death and of ways in which they organise their business, the book is at once a clear analysis of the rituals concerning death.

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Suggested Reading

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Sample Questions

- 1) Write an essay on the social structure of the Coorgs of South India?
- 2) Write in short on the ritual complex of Mangala of Coorgs.
- 3) Write briefly on the deaths as a living with special reference to shares and chicanery in Banaras.
- 4) What is *Pandagiri* in Banaras? Comment.



UNIT 2 PERFORMATIVE ASPECTS IN RITUALS

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
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- 2.6 Description of the Ethnography
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- 2.8 Summary
 - References
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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.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

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.

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

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.

2.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

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 *kwig’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.

2.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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.

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

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.

2.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

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).

2.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

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.

2.8 SUMMARY

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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Suggested Reading

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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?

UNIT 3 RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS AND RELIGIOUS CONFLICT

Contents

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- 3.6 Description of the Ethnography
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 - References
 - Sample Questions

Learning Objectives



This unit will teach you about:

- the importance of religion in contemporary life;
- religious conflicts; and
- how different kinds of conflicts are found in different societies.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

‘Anthropology of Religion’ has been one of the important areas of anthropological research. However, during the last three decades or so the study of various aspects of religion such as the growing religious conflict, religious consciousness and religious movements have assumed significant dimensions in the wake of ‘religion’, in one way or the other, occupying the centrestage in different parts of the world including south Asia.

The present unit deals with two accounts— one from India dealing with religious conflict and violence in the wake of the rise of Hindu Nationalism (understood in the Indian context as *Hindutva*) and the other with Iran where the religious dispute took the form of revolution and changed the Iranian society in several ways.

3.2 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Iran from Religious Dispute to Revolution* IS AN EXAMPLE

The situation in Iran is different from the rest of the Islamic world, for Iran is a country of Shia Muslims. In terms of civilisational complex, it is Persian. Changes started occurring in Iran after Ayatollah Khomeini came to power. This monograph deals with the contribution of different cultures at different points of time.

3.3 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.3.1 Intellectual Context

The book published in 1980 is devoted to the role of religion in social transformation. Not many works are devoted to religious education. The focus of the author is on the role of religious education in moulding the character of people.

3.3.2 Fieldwork

The author of the monograph conducted first hand fieldwork in Iran. This book began as a personal note. The author has always been concerned with the self-reflective dimensions about the ethnographic and anthropological endeavour. All this is reflected in this work. The author made use of the historical method in his work.

3.3.3 Analysis of Data

Iran is one of the largest and most powerful Muslim countries of the world and is different from the mainstream Islamic world and is represented by Shia Muslims (the mainstream Islamic world is represented by the Sunni Muslims). Moreover, it is also different civilisationally – unlike the Arab civilisation, it is Persian civilisation. To understand contemporary Iran's complex society and polity, it is essential to grasp the historic changes initiated by Ayotallah Khomeini in 1979- the supreme religious and spiritual leader of not only Iranian people but also conceded as one of the most influential leaders of the Shias of the world.

As the author of this monograph Michael. M. J. Fischer points out, “one of the great puzzles for anthropologists and philosophers is how and why culture and common sense are differently constituted in different historical times and in different societies.” Today in Iran both culture and common sense are undergoing change. This work examines the transformation, particularly the part played by religion. The focus is on religious education, both learned and popular, and its function in moulding character and thereby reinforcing the common sense. This function may also be called as the anthropology of education.

The present monograph begins with a philosophical discussion on Culture, History and Politics. Two of the most interesting segments of culture are symbolic structures and common sense. In the religious realm of culture, Shiaism is the established form of Islam in Iran. It may be understood in several forms of expressions such as preaching, passion plays and the curricula and debates of the *madrassa* (a typical religious school) which can be viewed as cultural form

composed of symbolic structures. Within this perspective Islam is not merely a set of doctrines that can be simply catalogued. Rather, it is a “language” used in different ways by different actors in order to persuade their followers, to manipulate situations, and to achieve control of political position. In Iran, there are at least four main styles of using Shiaism, the popular religion of the villages and *bazaars* (popular, traditional markets) which may encompass a number of local or ‘little traditions’, the scholarly religious (textual) being imparted in the madrasa where the religious leaders are trained, the Islamic mysticism known as Sufism, and the privatised, ethical religion of the upper classes. A fifth style may also be added which may be a combination of the scholarly religion of the madrasas and the privatised, ethical religion of the upper classes which Dr. Ali Shariati’s (a sociologist-philosopher- liberal scholar) followers have promoted as the ideological basis of the 1977-79 revolution. Ali Shariati, the hero of Iran’s youth in the 1970s attempted to bridge the gap between traditional Shiaism and contemporary sociology.

Reflection

Shia Islam (Arabic Shi’i) is the second largest denomination of Islam after Sunnis. Shia is the short form of the historic phrase *Shiatu Ali* (Friends or followers of Ali or party of Ali). Like other schools of thought in Islam, Shia Islam is based on the teaching of the Quran and the message of Prophet Muhammad. In contrast to other schools of thought, the Shias believe that only God has the right to choose a representative to lead and safeguard Islam, the Quran, the Sharia. They believe that Ali was chosen to succeed Muhammad after his death and Ali was succeeded by eleven Imams (leaders) through his lineage, the twelfth Imam being still alive and in hiding. Thus, they reject the institution of caliphate. The Shias believe that Muhammad’s family the *Ahl-al-Bayt* has special spiritual and political authority over the community. The overwhelming majority of the Shias are known as Twelver Shias believing in twelve Imams while the minority Shia sub-sects are Ismaili Khojas and Dawoodi Bohras. Iran, Iraq and Azerbaijan are the Shia majority countries followed by Bahrain where, though in majority, they are not the rulers. It is largely believed that the Shias constitute around 20% of the total Muslim population of the World.

Several accounts of religion and political conflict in Iran have been written but most of these failed to convey the religious sensibility and its transformation perfectly. It was not an easy task. As per the Shia doctrine, their last Imam is in hiding going into occultation in the ninth century AD (he is not dead, merely not manifest in the world) and shall appear at an appropriate time. This belief gave the Shias strength and a sense of security in the face of persecution by the non-shia rulers. The belief in an Imam (leader) in the hiding should not be taken that whatever the Kings or temporal leaders and government do should be taken as illegitimate and wrong. It simply means that such authorities should not be followed blindly and if they deviate or violate Islam/Shiasim, they must be defied. This led to the popular revolt against the King of Iran during 1977-79 revolution.

The institution of Madrasa plays a vital role in the Shiite Iranian Islam. The madrasa schools represent a form of education, the western world would be familiar with as they are the same as the Jewish ‘Ye Shiva’ and the catholic medieval stadium. All three has lost their creative vitality by the thirteenth or

fourteenth century replaced by modern universities and other secular institutions. But the story of the madrasa is a story of rise, decline and again rise of a traditional institution. The madrasa is a symbolic structure as well as an educational forum. The curricula do not impart religious education only but also includes philosophy, logic, history, geography etc. It has also been accommodative to modern demands. Significantly the state and the religious establishment always considered the other a threat to its own legitimacy and have been suspicious of each other. The madrasas in Iran have been like a free university with lot of flexibility where the students enjoyed greater freedom and come for the sake of learning. They may choose their teachers and continue as long as they wish. The early dropouts may just act as village preachers and the serious ones after years of learning may become scholars or legal experts (*Mujtahid*).

Though madrasas in Iran vary in terms of style and substance, the madrasa centre of Qum (a city in Iran) holds a special significance. Qum may be described as the religious heart of Shia Iran. It played a very important role in the transformation/revolution of 1979. Qum is located 150 km. from Tehran, the capital of Iran. Currently, it is the largest centre for Shia scholarship in the world and attracts Shias of the entire world interested in religious scholarship. It is described as the city of seminaries. Most of the seminaries teach their students modern social sciences and western thought as well as traditional religious studies. Qum is considered holy by the Shias. It is a small town with practically no industry. It is still a very traditional town based on farming weaving, some herding, selling to pilgrims prayer material as souvenirs and services to the madrasas and shrine population. Although Qum has a long madrasa tradition, the current set of madrasas are only a century old. Most of the exalted religious scholars known as *Ayatollah* come from the Qum seminaries. This includes Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader, of 1979 revolution. The radical – revolutionary thoughts of Iranian Islam come from this centre and that is why the King Razashah Pahalvi clamped a number of restrictions on its clergy and that is why Qum emerged as the ‘arena of conflict’.

The influence of Qum may not be very vital to Shiaism in day to day life of the common people but the sanctity of the ‘Tragedy of Karbala’ gets further legitimacy from the seminaries of Qum. More than any other event in its history, the ‘tragedy of Karbala’ has moulded the psyche of the Shias and it played a crucial role in the overthrow of the powerful King backed by US. These events may not be understood in entirety without having some idea of this tragic event which created the eternal schism in the Islamic world. After the death of Prophet Mohammed, the group of his followers closely affiliated to Ali, his cousin, associate and son-in-law was called *Shia-tu-Ali-* (the friends of Ali). The people belonging to this group, while disassociating themselves from others, formed a nucleus around Ali and believed in his *Imamate* (leadership). Thus, the term ‘Shia’ means all those who support the claim of Ali as the first and rightful, direct successor to Mohammed. They considered Ali as the successor of Mohammad in temporal as well as spiritual matters. The Shias further believe that *Allah* and His prophet (Mohammad) has clearly designated Ali as the only legitimate successor of Mohammed, who has continued all the fourteen hundred years, to preserve, uninfluenced by political and dynastic considerations the teachings and directions of Mohammad in their original and purest form through his (Alis’) descendents – the twelve Imams. Thus, the Shias clearly reject the institution of caliphate coming into existence after the death of Mohammad. Those who did not agree

with this Shia stand and recognised caliphate are popularly called Sunni and constitute the mainstream Islam/Muslims. The Shias were pushed to the fringe and did not enjoy any political power for centuries. Most of their Imams were poisoned or assassinated and they continued to face persecution in the entire Muslim world.

After the ‘martyrdom’ of Ali the ‘tragedy to Karbala’ played the most important role in the growth of Shiasim and Shia identity. It was in the year 680 AD that Husain, the third Imam of Shias, son of Ali and grandson of Mohammad from his daughter Fatima was brutally massacred together with his seventy two companions by the forces of Yazid, the then Muslim caliph, at the desert town of Karbala, now in Iraq. Mohammads’ family and descendants were humiliated. The commemoration of tragedy of Karbala forms the basis of the Muharram mourning observance throughout the world. The intensity of grief over tragedy of Karbala is seen to be believed. Many describe the hearts of the Shias as the ‘living tomb of Husain’. The grief is reflected in the day to day life of the Shias and to a large extent forms the basis of Shia identity.

Religious settings in the villages and old urban neighborhoods serve a variety of social needs. The mosque with its daily routine of prayer, the weekly gatherings for religious discussion, the annual passion plays related with commemoration of Husain’s tragedy, mournings on the death days of various Imams and celebration of their births, special pilgrimages to the Shia shrines and celebration of the death of the tormentors of Shia Imams constitute important events in the daily life of the people. Visit to the various stopping places of saints (*Imamzada, qadamgah*), *sacred* trees and wells for vows and cures, the *Khanqah* or shrines of Sufi Saints are favourite events especially in women’s lives. Charity to the assembled beggars and Thursday *Ziyarat* (visits, pilgrimages) to the graveyards to ancestral ties and duties are some other important events in the lives of the people. *Ulema* (Clerics) are not involved in some of these events. They lead prayers in the mosque as *Imams* (leader of prayers). An educated village *Imam* can be an important community leader. Even the *Ayatollahs* (elevated clerics) also serve as Imams in their respective places.

The position of *Imam-e-juma* (leader of Friday prayer) in big cities were usually state appointees till Khomeini’s revolution in 1979. For the god fearing and pious Shia Muslims they were a butt of joke and hardly commanded peoples’ respect as most of them were ignorant to Arabic — the language of the Islamic religion, and it was alleged that they were addicted to sports cars, wine and women in Switzerland. These ulemas teaching Islam but not embodying it in their lives were anathema to the masses. Same was the case with westernised Muslims.

Sufism, in different forms remain important to the Persian/Iranian consciousness. The Sufi saints, their teaching and poetry appealed to the masses as well as to the highly urbane, sophisticated and westernised upper class. The masses consider such individuals, who are open and trust worthy, as the true sufis or *darvesh*. ‘Such individuals need not worry about proper clothes or rules of propriety because they are epitome of honesty and hospitality and thus enjoy moral authority. Such persons have rejected materialism and worldly temptations and refused to blindly follow the royal diktats. Together with the dissenting clerics they acted as the central point of dissent and revolt against the Safavid King who ruled Iran up to 1979.

The Revolutionary Movement of 1977-79

Iranian society like any other society of the world has been changing not exactly as Europe or America. A transformation from a patrimonial agrarian society to an industrial-technocratic one was going on. Like several agrarian societies, men and women had different roles. In Iran it was largely in conformity to the Islamic morality revealed in their first and most revered Imam Ali's sermons but the Shah (King) of Iran was a man in hurry and took to, largely, Turkey's example of forced modernisation espoused by its leader Kemal Ataturk, who wanted the Turkish Muslims to ape the western lifestyle and imbibe the western secular life style and value system. His draconian and anti-democratic way of governance not allowing any dissent compounded the situation further.

Exiled by the King, Ayatollah Khomeini was living in Paris and then migrated to Iraq. But Dr. Ali Shariati, a charismatic scholar, philosopher, socialist was already very popular there. The conservative clerics did not see eye to eye to Shariati for his modern Shiite views appealing to the masses especially to the educated youth. He was expelled from the University of Mashhad. His idea of reform was not in consonance with the conservative interpretation of Islam espoused by many clerics. Trained at Sorbonne, France he was working on an Islamic sociology. When his ideas began appealing to sections of students studying in the traditional madarsa, many clerics were alarmed. Thus, he antagonised the royal authority as well as the clerical authority in general. He called for rethinking the Islamic message by thinking about Islam in sociological terms rather than metaphysical terms. He did content analysis of the Quran through linguistic – phenomenological analysis of key Islamic terms. He rejected western capitalism and had a vision of a just Islamic society. He represented the modernist Shiite thought thus antagonising the monarchy as well as the clergy.

In any narration of how the religious dispute led to revolution, the role of Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini's teaching occupy the central place. While Shariati was developing his ideas of a modernist Shiite Islam, Khomeini was espousing the concept of *marje-e-taqleed*, and *Wilayat-e-faqih*, thus both hitting at the roots of the tyrannical monarchy. The term *marja-e-taqleed* designates the highest ranking authorities of the 'Twelver Shia' community. There used to be 4-8 such high ranking jurists (ayatollahs) but after 1970's the Shia community was dominated by two ayatollahs of immense stature- Ayatollah Khomeini (1902-1989) an Iranian, and Ayatollah Khui (1899-1992) an Iraqi, whose followers were mostly Arabic speaking Shias. The terms *marja* refers to centre and *taqleed* refers to following. Thus the highest ranking cleric leads the community in both religious and secular matters. It gave legitimacy and recognition to these clerics. The term *wilayat-e-faqih* means the guardianship of the jurist. Khomeini was accepted as such by a large number of Shias of Iran and elsewhere. When he came to power in 1979, he became the supreme arbiter of all matters of government in Iran.

With the beginning of the decade of 1970's, the restlessness of the Shia community against the dictatorial governance of the King was craving for political liberation. The causes of the revolution were both economic and political. Oil prices increased in 1973 and it led to several structural problems. The massive increase in revenues led to reckless spending and phenomenal increase in urban wages and a very high rate of inflation. The increased urban wages caused massive migration from

rural to urban area as the rural population was suffering from stagnation in agricultural sector due to relative neglect of agricultural sector. There were hardly any incentives for the peasantry. Instead of raising production prices by supplying credit to stimulate production, food was imported on a massive scale and sold at subsidised rates. Small producers were not given any respite and money was channeled towards new mechanised agriculture and projects dependent on large irrigation dams.

Large sections of peasants were displaced and squeezed off the land to make way for the agribusiness and state farm co-operations. To top it, lakhs of semi-skilled and skilled labour were imported from foreign countries – Afghanis, Koreans and others were preferred. That also led to great resentment.

Dissent was always hated by the monarchy, but harassment of dissidents both rural and urban increased. SAVAK, the secret Police of the Kings' administration was used recklessly to crush all dissidents. They were picked, detained and many never appeared again. Muharram commemoration of 1977 and 1978 was used politically to mobilise the mourners. The King was popularly portrayed as Yazid-the Muslim caliph, hated by the Shias for his role in the massacre of Imam Hussain and his family and friends in Karbala. Now the revolution was on. It was joined by the rural folk, students, intellectuals, religious clergy, petty traders and left-wing activists. Ayatollah Khomeini who was living in Iraq for several years and leading the anti-King forces, was forced to leave Iraq. He got asylum in France where he continued to live till his triumphant return to Iran. The entire Iran was engulfed in protest including its major cities- Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Qum, Shiraz, Abadan and others. Amidst lot of bloodshed, the King left Iran on January 16, 1979 and went to USA, its protector, promoter and closest ally. Later, dissidents who did not agree with the King but also differed with Ayatollah Khomeini on ideological issues-prominent clerics like Ayatollah Teleghani, leftist organisations such as Mujahiden-e-Khalq and Fidayeen-e-Khalq and a host of others – were persecuted by the Khomeini regime too. Now, the religious revolution was complete. The Kings' socially liberal policies, especially with relations to the status and freedom to women, were also reversed and Iran became a theocratic state. Shiaism was given a radical and militant idiom. The political revolution also served to revolutionise Shiaism itself and led to many changes.

3.3.4 Conclusion

This book shows that the Iranian society is changing but it is not like the change that is occurring in Europe or America. The society is changing from an agrarian state to an industrial-technocratic one. The role of religious education is examined in detail.

3.4 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

Certain parts of the world have remained relatively unstudied and that includes the Islamic world. This ethnography advances our understanding of the Islamic world, especially that of the Shias.

3.5 THEORETICAL PART OF WHICH THE ETHNOGRAPHY *Religious Division and Social Conflict: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Rural India* IS AN EXAMPLE

The ethnography *Religious division and social conflict: The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in Rural India*, by Peggy Froerer describes the role of religion in society.

3.6 DESCRIPTION OF THE ETHNOGRAPHY

3.6.1 Intellectual Context

Emile Durkheim's thesis states that religion performs the function of integrating society; however this theory is applicable to those societies that have a singularity of religion. In a religiously plural society, this thesis is not applicable because of the likely conflict between different religions and their ideologies. This ethnography asserts this view.

3.6.2 Fieldwork

The author of this work carried out a piece of fieldwork with a tribal community using the standard anthropological methods. Historical data was also collected.

3.6.3 Analysis of Data

Religion may play an integrative role in uni-religious lands and nations but may be divisive under certain circumstance and conditions in multi-religious societies. The social conflicts we are witnessing, in present day India, in the arena of religious faiths has been studied from different angles in various disciplines of social sciences.

The present study deals with 'religious division' and 'social conflict' with reference to the rise of Hindu Nationalism. The research was carried out between 1997-99 in Mohanpur, a village located in one of the more densely forested subdivisions (*tehsil*) of Korba district in Chattisgarh having a large tribal population. There is an extensive body of academic work within different social sciences devoted to the origins and contemporary manifestations of the Hindu nationalist movement. Moreover, the present monograph may also be viewed within the contest of more competitive religious assertions taking place across the globe and the present study deals with this aspect with reference to Hindu and Christian religious assertions.

The RSS, Adivasis and Christianity

Protecting the 'Hindu nation' against conversion to Islam has been central to the agenda of Rashtriya Swam Sewak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliating organisations but from 1970s onwards it incorporated Christianity too in the wake of some conversions of Adivasi communities of central India to Christianity and this become its central concern. As the author writes "One of the objectives of this book is to demonstrate how particular strategies being employed by RSS activists are underpinned by the broader mimetic relationship that the organisation has

with the Church. Throughout India the more visible forms of mimesis include the re-conversion programme.” The *Vanvasi Kalyam Ashram* and the *Vidya Bharti*, affiliates of the RSS that are concerned with the physical welfare and education of tribal communities, are patterned after the church’s long term engagement in the social upliftment of more vulnerable communities.

Area and People

The fieldwork for this ethnography was carried out between 1997-99 in the village Mohanpur near Korba of Chattisgarh. It is a rice growing area and cut off from urban mainstream. The total population of the village was 886 consisting of 163 households. The village is divided mainly into two groups-Hinduised/Hindu Adivasis and Christian Oraons. Ratiya Kanwar, Majhwar and Dudh Kanwar are Hindu scheduled tribes while the Oraons are a Christian scheduled tribe. The non-advasi households consist of Yadav (OBC) and Panika, Chauhan and Lohar (scheduled castes). The Ratiya Kanwar are the earliest settlers in this village and they are the dominant group. They have been living in this village for 9-10 generations. They are enjoying the highest social status, first settler status and landownership makes them the most dominant group followed by Majhwar and Dudh Kanwar who settled here 2-3 generations after Ratiya Kanwar. The Christian Oraons comprise of 241 people divided into 42 households. Significantly the adjoining twenty villages have no Christian presence and the local catholic mission is located 6 kms from this village.

In the local caste/social hierarchy the Yadav, Panika, Lohar and Chauhan despite being scheduled castes enjoy higher status than the adivasis/scheduled tribes. Christian Oraons come lowest. Within Ratiya Kanwar group and within the village as a whole Gandhel clan is the most powerful being the earliest settlers. The traditional authority in the village lies with the Gandhel clan of Ratiya Kanwar and the entire village acknowledges their authority. The Christian Oraons arrived from Pathelgaon- a town near Jashpur and settled here in the 1970s and they feel indebted to the Ratiya Kanwar for allowing them to settle down in the village. Significantly all the Oraons are Christians and they happen to be the only Christians in this village. The village head man allowed the four earliest families of the Oraons to settle here on the condition that they would establish their *Basti* (settlement) atleast half a kilometer away from the village and shall not use the village well because of ritual reason as they were considered as untouchables. The first wave of migration was followed by some other Oraon families who joined them in the same *basti*. All of them came in search of good cultivable land. Today the Christian Oraons are the second largest group in the village after Ratiya Kanwar.

Because of their untouchable status and not serving any specific ritual or economic role for the Hindus, there is little daily interaction with the Hindus. Yet, they occasionally participate in communal labour activities. Their ‘outsider’ status is underlined by linguistic differences too. They speak *Kurukh*, a Dravidian based language having no relation with *Chatribole*, the popular dialect of Chattisgarh spoken by the rest of the population.

Oraons and Christianity

The Oraons converted to Christianity only two generations ago but became practicing Christians only after migration to Mohanpur under the impact of the

local catholic mission situated nearby. Though the catholic mission in central India has been working since 1840 but its impact was negligible. Later it became popular only when they took up non-Evangelical activities in the field of education, medical services, famine relief, cooperative banking etc. Significantly, religious conversion was a collective act and not individual. Thus, it was like a mass movement. Conversion to Christianity helped them combat the exploitative landlords/moneylenders. They were organised and mobilised by the mission, developed consciousness about their exploitation and ways and means to combat it. A little education too, was also an empowering factor.

In 1970s a dispensary and health clinic was opened and two catholic sister-cum-nurses joined followed by the construction of a small church. The medicines and potions distributed by the dispensary posed a challenge to the prevalent traditional healing method and it created some social tension. The Christian Oraons could never be assimilated in the local population because of their belief in a different faith – Christianity.

Oraons' Economy

The economic activities of the Oraons helped them attain prosperity within a short period of time. Though they did not have much cultivable land, they supplemented their income by earning as wage labour in construction sites of the nearby town, Korba. They were also experts in preparing liquor from *Mahua* flower and sold it to the entire village. Since they did not have substantial land, they did not have many Mahua trees and hence they purchase it from the local shopkeepers. The Ratiya, Kanwar used to sell their mahua to the shopkeepers instead of selling it directly to the Oraons but the margin of profit carried from the sale of liquor compensated the cost. Thus, they became more prosperous than the other groups in the village. The Oraons gave credit of their prosperity to hard work and Christ's blessings. Thus, liquor production and vending became one of their stable sources of income supplemented by the cash earned by them as wage labourer.

Hindu Adivasis

They virtually monopolised land ownership and are politically much more empowered than the Oraon Christians. Yet, their livelihood largely depended upon cultivation. Erratic monsoon and the resultant decreased yield has been a big barrier in their economic mobility and prosperity. Because of increasing Hinduisation popular Hindu gods such as Rama, Krishna, and Shiva entered into their pantheon but these 'big gods' are less involved than the local tribal deities in the affairs of day to day life. Moreover, the local deities are neither housed nor worshipped in the small village temple. This temple is meant for propitiation of 'big gods'. Brahmin priests occasionally visit it to supervise rituals 3-4 times every year and express resentment for the neglect and non-maintenance of the temple.

Points of tension and role of the RSS

Life in the village has been going on its pace with minor tensions emerging and getting dissolved through the mediation of the panchayat, till 1980s when the RSS emerged as an important actor in this region. However, the effective intervention of RSS in the village affairs may be traced back to 1990s. Its' local headquarter is located in Korba where its activists (*pracharaks*) reside and operate

in the adjoining areas. A young man from the dominant Ratiya Kanwar group, who could not make it big during his stay in the nearby town, facilitated the entry of RSS pracharaks into the village. It assiduously cultivated the Gandher clan of Ratiya Kanwar which became its support base in the times to come. These activists started promoting the Hindutva agenda by projecting the Christian Oraons as the hated 'other'. Like the Christian mission they also have a broader 'civilising mission'. They looked at many of the customs and traditions of the adivasis as 'uncivilised' and understood these as 'Junglee Hinduism' (Savage Hinduism). They have contempt for the local healing practices. They projected Hindi as 'language' of Hindus' against the local dialect. They found that the main obstacle to the Hindutva ideology is Church and thus they projected Christianity as part of a global conspiracy to subjugate the Hindus. RSS propagated that the unity of Hindus against Muslims and Christians was essential to protect the Hindus and the 'Hindu nation'.

Taking clue from the Christian mission they also came out into social services network and established a bio-medical facility to attract the Hinduised adivasis they have already a network of schools- Saraswati Shishu Mandir under the umbrella of Vidya Bharti.

Exploiting the resentment of Ratiya Kanwar and other Hindu groups against the growing material prosperity of Christian Oraons, they struck a sympathetic chord among these groups. With the help of some sympathetic members of Ratiya Kanwar groups, they identified two point of tension:

- i) Liquor related disputes
- ii) Land related disputes

Like most of the tribal regions, liquor is an important component of the local society and culture. *Daru* or *arkhi* is the local name of the country made liquor produced through Mahua flowers (*bassica latifolia*). It is an important ritual, medicinal and social necessity of the entire village. It is offered to the deities and used in healing practices. Significantly, the bulk of production and sale are in the hands of the Oraons while the bulk of customers and consumers are Hindu adivasis. Like other parts of India the higher social groups do not produce liquor, they only consume it. Against popular perception, the income obtained through the sale of liquor is not substantial but the monopoly over production and sale of liquor served as a triggering point of social tension. The fact remains that the growing prosperity of the Oraons rests on the wages carried by the Oraons from construction sites in Korba and elsewhere. Cash earned from sale of liquor and wages have helped the Oraon purchase substantial cultivable land or obtaining it through mortgage transactions. On the other hand the Christian mission never put a blanket ban on production, sale and consumption of liquor on religious ground. It was only excessive drinking that was propagated as 'unchristian' by the missionaries. Before the advent of the Oraons there used to be a government run liquor shop but it could not cope with the competitive rates of liquor produced by the Oraons and hence shutdown. In order to minimise the dependence on the liquor produced by the Oraons, some Hindu adivasis took up the production of liquor but it was largely meant for the ritual and medical purposes. The practice of purchasing it from the Oraons for daily use continued.

Another point of tension is the procurement of Mahua flowers for the production of liquor. Since most of the land is owned by the Hindu adivasis, especially the Ratiya Kanwars, most of the mahua trees are owned by them. Because of traditional economic obligations the bulk of mahua flowers are sold to the local shopkeepers and not to the Oraons directly who are obliged to purchase it from the local market on higher rates. Attempt was also made by the RSS activists to discourage the Hindu adivasis from consuming liquor as it was detrimental to their economic interests. In the process, they took the risk of losing support since liquor consumption was an integral part of their culture. However, it was largely ignored.

When other arguments forwarded by the RSS activists did not cut much ice with the Hindu adivasis they were told that the Christians have a hidden agenda of acquiring all Hindu land through sale of liquor. Under the pressure of RSS activists the Hindu adivasis demanded their land sold to the Oraons back, leave the village and go to Manpur (an adjoining town) to live with their 'fathers'. The Oraons were threatened that all the material luxuries purchased by them, such as TV sets, through sale of liquor would be snatched or smashed. The crux came when the Oraons were told that if they wished to live in the village they should stop going to church and worship in Hindu temple. The Oraons were terrorised.

The RSS activists further unfolded the Hindutva agenda by fabricating a new ethno-religious identity as part of the larger nationalist concern. For the first time in a meeting the Oraons were referred to as 'Christians'. It never happened before. They were always referred to as 'Oraons.'

Thus, the pre-existing local tensions provided the local RSS activists with a convenient platform which strategically extend to the Hindutva ideology of RSS. Local tensions increased with the increased frequency of RSS 'training meetings' where the youth of Hindu adivasis are taught Hindutva ideology. The projection of Hindu adivasis as 'true Hindu' and to bring them into the 'Hindu mainstream' added a new dimension to tribal identity. Moreover, emphasis on 'Hinduness' of adivasis creates a sort of 'imagined community'.

Land related disputes and conflicts constitute another point of tension. Any organisation or individual can assert its' role only on the basis of its credibility. RSS, through assistance in bio-medical treatment, education and enforcement of accountability of local level state officials has endeared itself to the local Hindu community. Extension of bio-medical assistance and education reduced the dependence of Hindu adivasis on mission services. But taking up the issue of harassment and corruption on the part of lower level bureaucracy helped and empowered them. This gave weight to the voice of the RSS activists.

Ratiya Kanwar enjoyed special rights and entitlements being the original and earliest settlers as per local traditions. They dominated the local society through possession of agricultural and forest land. That in why land tension evolved into central 'conflict symbols' and this was used intelligently by the RSS to transmit Hindutva.

The ecological conditions are such that nobody in the village can survive on agricultural income alone. The vagaries of nature and low productivity play an important role in the local scenario. The Hindu adivasis earn their livelihood

through agriculture—mainly paddy cultivation and collection of seasonal *tendu* leaves used in *bidi* making which does not provide them much cash. On the other hand, the Oraons cultivate whatever little land they have, produce and sell liquor and involve in wage labour in construction sites in the nearby towns. Thus, they are more hard working and enterprising. Though as original settlers Ratiya Kanwars have the first right to clear land and make it cultivable, they have not exploited this entitlement to the extent they should have. On the contrary they have been selling or mortgaging their land to the Oraons. They have not forgotten that when the Oraons emigrated to this village they were poor and had nothing in their hands but within three decades they attained more prosperity than their Hindu hosts. The steady acquisition of land by the Oraons created resentment and jealousy among the Ratiya Kanwars.

As original settler the Ratiya Kanwars are obliged to perform certain rituals on behalf of the village to propitiate the local deity. Though Oraons are exempt from participation in these rituals, they are expected to participate and contribute. The Oraons sometimes reluctantly participate but refuse to join in frequent *pujas* because they have their own god. It reinforces the Oraons' outsider status and amplifies cultural distance. The RSS took full advantage of this situation and espoused the call for 'son of the soil' to deprive the Oraons' of their hard earned prosperity. Thus, they are taking advantage of cleavage between the Hindu and Christian adivasis. They have successfully created an 'enemy' for the Ratiya Kanwar and carved out a political constituency for their agenda through sustained engagement in civic activism. When the news of violence against tribals of Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and other adjoining states reach the village through mass media the Oraons become terror struck but they have not left the village yet and continue to make compromises to buy peace.

3.6.4 Conclusion

The present study is concerned with 'religious division' and 'conflict' in the context of the rise of Hindu nationalism. An area which had remained largely unstudied is the impact of the religious movements in tribal communities. This work examines this in the monograph.

3.7 HOW DOES THE ETHNOGRAPHY ADVANCE OUR UNDERSTANDING

This work advances our understanding with reference to the dynamism of religion. The book shows that livelihood and economic advantage is used as a factor in creating communal tensions. It was possible because the prosperity of Christian Oraons had upset the existing configuration of social relatives and hierarchies. The book shows how religion works in a tribal community, which are formally regarded as closed and unchanging ideas that are wrong.

3.8 SUMMARY

The two ethnographies discussed in this unit have a number of common and uncommon points with reference to religious assertion and political use of religion. Yet the main point of difference is that in the Iran's context their religion was not in conflict with any other religion but in the Indian context the other religion and

its' followers were demonised and through the 'politics of hatred' created the 'other' as enemy and pursued its' political agenda.

References

Fischer, Michael M.J. 1980. *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. London: Harvard University Press.

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Sample Questions

- 1) Discuss the religious dispute in Iran.
- 2) Discuss the cause of religious and social conflict in Mohanpur.

