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A BRIEF STUDY OF INDIAN RITUALS

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Abstract:

A ritual "is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests." Rituals may be prescribed by the traditions of a community, including a religious community. Rituals are characterized by formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism and performance.

Rituals of various kinds are a feature of almost all known human societies, past or present. They include not only the various worship rites and sacraments of organized religions and cults, but also the rites of passage of certain societies, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, coronations and presidential inaugurations, marriages and funerals, school "rush" traditions and graduations, club meetings, sports events, Halloween parties, veterans parades, Christmas shopping and more. Many activities that are ostensibly performed for concrete purposes, such as jury trials, execution of criminals, and scientific symposia, are loaded with purely symbolic actions prescribed by regulations or tradition, and thus partly ritualistic in nature. Even common actions like hand-shaking and saying hello may be termed rituals.

The field of ritual studies has seen a number of conflicting definitions of the term. One given by Kyriakidis is that a ritual is an outsider's or "etic" category for a set activity (or set of actions) that, to the outsider, seems irrational, non-contiguous, or illogical. The term can be used also by the insider or "emic" performer as an acknowledgement that this activity can be seen as such by the uninitiated onlooker.

In psychology, the term ritual is sometimes used in a technical sense for a repetitive behavior systematically used by a person to neutralize or prevent anxiety; it is a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder.

KEYWORDS:

Rituals, Folklore, structure of Rituals.

INTRODUCTION:

Ritual in term means the performance of ceremonial acts due to the traditional commissions or sacerdotal decrees. It is also being used in modern times to address an established routine or standard act. As ritual is a mode of behavior performed by the people of different cultures in different ages, it is possible to view ritual as a way of understanding and describing the human nature.

Although human can be described as basically a rational being, he can be viewed as ritualistic as well. In this way there would be a parallel connection between ritual and verbal behavior of the human nature. Ritual as language consists of a set of symbols based upon some prescribed rules. In almost every theory dealing with ritual behavior, language is considered a crucial factor in defining the nature of rituals,

and the specific form of language used in explaining the ritualistic acts is the language of myth while both myth and ritual are considered as the foundations of any religion.

It is hypothesized that rituals, as a well-established set of rules, have been established by the sum experience of generations dealing with forces of nature, which is often categorized under beneficial or harmful, positive or negative. Since there was no written language to transfer the experienced knowledge to future generations, rituals have been used. Hence rituals are important parts of any society or culture to understand their cultural values and architectural discoveries.

By the rise of language as a communicating method and books as a collection of historical discoveries, the role of rituals became vague but they were still considered as important parts in the process of architecture. The development of the mental faculty of the modern man, and his detachment from nature as a divine existence, changed the look of the rituals to guidelines or standards. However, rituals of the past were the combination of physical, psychological and spiritual discoveries while the architectural standards of the day only consider physical and partially psychological aspects of human experience.

STRUCTURE OF RITUALS:

It is clearly observed that the experts generally considered both religion and science of civilized society while identifying the structure of rituals. After considering the previous studies in this area its apt and more supportive to understand the subject.

Experts showed their interest the historical development of rituals and tried to get the meaning. They concentrated only on primitive (aadima / prachina) culture. Experts like W.B. Robertson Smith studied in this line. Vamsha system and Bali system were studied by the experts. Purification, presentation, pooja etc considered as later developments of rituals. Frazer Durkhiem tried influenced by such study of rituals.

Rodcliff Durkhiem, Bronilsoo, Melinoveski, E.E. Evans, Tarkat and Parson, Vagmand leech and other experts diverted their attention and concentrated to study not only the aims and objectives but also area and scope of rituals. Currently rituals work for a particular purpose or not, whether they are only symbolic aspects of human interests. Such problems studied and examined in the social life. The role and uses of rituals also discussed by these experts in depth.

Modern civilized society adopted various modern and advanced technologies to lead their life. Although their life style, beliefs, celebrations have been influencing by their tradition and beliefs which performed by their ancestors. There may be changes. But definitely there is old system beliefs mixed in their lifestyle. It is not et al possible to eradicate such rituals from our society. If we observe one's life style keenly, we find the symptoms of age-old tradition, beliefs. That is why the experts of communication strongly express their views as yet there is a geographical distance among groups we could find various similarities in their beliefs, celebration dedication and other things. The experts who have engaged in comparative study of other cultures say that we could find similarities of many beliefs, celebrations in their respective rituals.

Nature was the wonderful thing to the folk who lived in ancient age. They frightened of sunrise, sun set, wind, rain, fire, water, river, creatures, etc. and believed that there is a super power in nature. So, men and women tried to being loved by the nature.

Both personally and in a group the whole folklore started to perform duties and offer pooja to the invisible power. Then onwards Indra, Agni, Vayu, Varuna, Earth (Bhoodevi) became god and goddesses among the folklore. Daily the folk started to offer pooja and pray for safe living.

"Folklore means the life filled with rituals".

The activities of our life influenced by rituals and knowingly or unknowingly they are being followed by the society.

Man found rational power with his own power. J.G. Frazer showed a strong love towards human rational power and identified relative reason of a work before the concept of soul (Atma)

He say as –

' Whenever sympathetic magic occurs in its pure unadultrated form, it assumes that in nature one event follows another necessarily and invariably without the intervention of any spiritual or personal agency. Thus its fundamental conception is identical with that of modern science, underlying the whole system is a faith, implicit but real and firm in the order and uniformity of nature".

Frazer showed the relation between two objects. Eg. There is a belief in Bornio Daks. The owner of a home (Husband) calls two magicians during delivery time. One enters the maternity room and another one lays out side the room and acts like a pregnant woman. He ties a big stone to his stomach and covers with a piece of cloth. The magician who is inside the room explains about the pregnant woman in a high pitch so that another magician acts according to the information he receives. Here the stone represents baby.

Such acting believed that delivery process made easy. Here there is a strong traditional communication.

RITUALS IN DAY TODAY LIFE :

The folklore from different region of the world cultivated some practices such as offering pooja, believing and highlighting the supreme power of nature. Still today such beliefs are the part and partial of their life. Such beliefs among folklore occupied a prominent place in the community and became popular as tradition.

In China people offer pooja to the Sun with flesh and smoke (dhoopa). When two strangers meet each other in the tribal of Asharta and Ghana in Africa fight with Sword. Such fighting continues up to they see blood of any one among them. Then they stop fighting. They offer pooja with the blood and they suck the blood. By sucking blood both believe that they mix each other. This is a ritual. Such strong beliefs have been changing time to time and existing among the folklore.

Such rituals became traditions and transforming generation to generation.

In India almost all celebrations have agricultural background. Rain is the intimate essential aspect of agriculture and there are many beliefs of rain. Folklore is considering rain as God-Varunadeva.

In Karnataka State there are many tradition / rituals of rain such as Jaldi Gouri Pooj, Jokumarana Pooje, Kappe Pooje {Kappe maduve}. Dollina Walaga, Kalasha Pooje, Somana Sootra Kattuvadu, Kaayi Kattuvadu, malege kooruvadu, Baragala Basappannannu ooru datisuvadu. (seemi maremma) prastha maduvadu. In West Bengal Women perform naked dance during night with a team of musician on Amavasya.

Three members climb a furry tree and imitate rain in Russia to call rain. It is mandatory that only males should participate in these celebrations and there is no scope for females. They believe that such activity imitation attract rain.

The folk of Australia pluck hair from their arm and throw to the direction from where they receive rain regularly.

Americans believe that a naked girl who decorated by grass and leaves marches through streets visiting each and every home singing with her peer group influence the rain.

In Romania also there is a system that a naked girl visits homes singing a song.

In Sumatra black girls plays colorful game (Okuli) in a river.

A Branch of a Oak tree dipped in water to attract rain in Greece and Rome.

Narabali system was there in Uganda and there is a tradition of sprinkle water towards the sky in Mexico. In England also people sprinkle water with their mouth.

If there is heavy rain fall which affect both the lives and crop folk perform some other pooja. Eg. People make the twins to stand during rainfall and keep an hot (red coloured) stone on the ground where there is raining.

We have been performing many rituals throughout our life. The range of rituals spread from womb to tomb. When a woman becomes pregnant form that day onwards various rituals are going to celebrate in the house eg. Birth of the child naming, schooling, upanayana, marriage, piturina, death, pinda etc.

RITUALS IN A LIFE SPAN:

1. Birth : When a child enters to the world it cries. It indicates birth of child. The Soolagitti (nurse) gives non-verbal signals to the relatives and the mother without uttering a single word whether it is male or female baby.

Husband or owner of the house distributes sweet and fires on the air. The whole villagers will come to know that the event of birth. Pedha will be distributed if it is a male child and zilebi indicates that born of female baby.

Soolagitti looks after and cleans the body of the baby. Sumangalis participate in a cradle ceremony sobanapada, jogulapada will be sung during such occasions.

As and when child grows naamakarana, vidyarambha (schooling), upanayana rituals will be celebrated in the family.

Again there are rituals when a girl becomes mature. Parents arrange to sit the girl (daughter) under a tree which oozes milk like gum. She will be kept separate from the living area and she spends five days. Food restriction is there for five days. On fifth day she takes her bath with the help of Muttaide. Gangapooja, hostilu bareyurike, visit to a temple etc. should be followed without fail. Then she is eligible to enter the society.

2. Marriage : It is an important ritual among folklore where two likeminded and eligible young male and

female become husband and wife. Marriages among blood relation are strictly prohibited. A brother is not eligible and banned to marry his sister. But he can marry the girl who is his sister's daughter. Moreover sagotra marriage is not possible. Still today folklore is following such system strictly.

Before marriage engagement is must. Samavartane, aralu hoyyuvudu nishchaya tambula, hara vinimaya (Exchange of garlands), Saptapadi arisinenne, urutane, unguradata, haltuppa, kere meeyuvudu, visit to temples etc., rituals are there. On an auspicious day marriage ceremony takes place before sarapanchas and elders of the society in a temple or in front of the house either the sides.

Now man enters grihashthashrama and leaves brahmacharya. Before marriage kashiyatre and samavarthana take place. Both young boy and girl take oil bath, with turmeric paste. Sobanapada being sung by the girls and muttades. After marriage 'Prastha' (first night) will be held on a particular date and time according to the guidance of jythishi (fortune teller). In modern days also most of us are following most of the rituals and giving importance to 'muhurta'.

3. Death : When a person dies folklore call him/her swargavasi (heaven being), sanadi, bhajanapada, could be observed in the home. There will be a crowd and silence. Few women cry in a loud tone appreciating the qualities, character and deeds of dead person. Branches of coconut tree and banana plants, a sidagi made up from bamboo are the signals that some one died in one of the homes of the street. By observing from a distance place one can understand the situation. i.e. the ritual.

During the funeral we can see gulal, betal leaves, petals of flowers, flowers and coins spread along the way. Moreover there will be a sound of explosion, crackers. Such items communicate to the folk that a funeral function is going to held. After passing through the street/road those items communicate us about the situation clearly.

Three days, nine days functions take place. Pindakarma is must after funeral function. The food which the dead person used to eat being distributed to the crows. Every year other members of the family conduct a programme called (obituary) punyasmaraane.

SOME OTHER RITUALS :

During past Veda period women used to apply Kumkum and Arishina (turmeric powder) on their forehead and kadige to their eyes. Mangalya, Kiviyaale, hair cutting, hair style etc. followed to enhance their husband's span of life.

Kalidasa gave a vast information on hair styles of women they were changing such hairstyle according to season. In his 'Meghdoota' he said them women wear mandarapushpa (Lotus) and dry the hair with scented smoke. He gave information on scented smoke in his 'Ritu Samhara'.

In the post Veda period men also apply Kajal to their eye and 'Rala' to their lips. Both men and women were following the traditional cosmetics in order to keep themselves attractive and healthy. Women were one step ahead in keeping their body attractive and beautifully.

Bath : 'Gandha Shastra' was an important ritual of bathing in Karnataka. It is an important ritual to remove bad smell (adore) of human body. It was the glorious celebration for kings and queens. Raja's bathrooms were beautiful. They were applying the Til oil which mixed with ketagi, punnaga and chanpaka to their body. Malla's were expert to do such works. After bath the servants were applying the extracts from various leaves, flour and herbs. They were also using wheat powder, Aradala, Turmeric to remove oil from the body. Specific water called 'teertha' was used. Trained women pour water on Raja's body with the help of golden and silver pots. Amalaka paste to hair and scented turmeric paste was applied to body.

Ordinary men and women unable to bath with oil daily. Therefore they were having 'Abhyanjana' once in a week.

In modern society also folk are performing the ritual at least once in a month.

Oil bath was mandatory for the students of Agrahara

'Harihara' in his Ragale said that, attractive coloured tilak (bindi) used to apply on forehead. It was the auspicious symbol who put (bindi) tilak on their fire head in Kalachories states.

Folklore of Karnataka were following the ritual called Gandhashastra.

Gandhenne hachagondur gangyaga nintara

Ondondur heli nagataara | rayarige

Entha sirigangi hadadala ||

Folklore of Karnataka were using sandalwood oil. Women were keeping their tooth white which bright like a pearl.

"Few other women make their tooth reddish like petals of lotus there is saying in Kannada folklore 'Hallu Yaalakki Kariyange'"

Folklore of Karnataka is using various hairstyles, chakradurubu, Ambadegantu, Adikegantu, Jodusamagantu, Saadamudishekkku.

Malgedande, Mudiho, Haralina hoo, Julupina hoo, muriho etc., names are there to the golden ornaments. To decorate hair, Hedenaagara, Chandrakolu, Raagate, Chaaltikonde are using in rich folklore.

Almost all famous temples in Karnataka have collection of such ornaments.

Folk rituals have their own importance in our life. Activities of our life are running according to the rituals. Such rituals are communicating and spreading message at every step of our life. So such rituals are treated as medium of communications.

CONCLUSIONS:

I began this essay thinking that ritual was going to be pretty easy to define, after all who doesn't know what a ritual is, right? I was in for a real surprise. Trying to define ritual is like trying to define religion, everything depends on how you look at it and from what approach you try to define it. Are you looking at it from a religious point of view, or a societal one, or a psychological one? To each approach there is an answering definition for rituals. So for me to define ritual from my point of view I'm going to take it from the religious point of view and please keep in mind this is my own definition of ritual. Ritual to me is an encounter between imagination and memory translated into the physical acts of the body. It is repeated, sacred and done with awareness and precision, it can be elaborate but it can also be simple.

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