

Unit 8

M. N. srinivas : The Coorgs

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Learning Objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to,

- describe a Coorg village;
- outline the legacy of the Coorgs;
- describe and discuss the Okka; and
- discuss aspects of Hinduism.

8.1 Introduction

Coorg is a 'tiny' province in South India. To its north and east are the Kannada speaking districts of Mysore State and to its south and west Tamil speaking districts of Tamilnadu. Coorg is an inaccessible mountainous region with heavy rainfall, flooded rivers and dense forest.

The total land area of Coorg is 1,593 square miles of which considerable portion is under Reserve forest. Western Ghat mountains pass through Coorg. Brahmagiri and Puspagiri are important places on the main range of Western Ghats. The river Kaveri springs from Brahmagiri and Kanake, its tributary joins it at Bhagamandala. The rivers are fordable after rainy season. They are not navigable and their waters are not used for irrigation.

It is natural that the Coorgs have a distinct mode of life and culture as the region remained isolated for centuries because of its steep mounts and dense forests. But the Lingayat Rajas took advantage of this isolation and conquered the country in the ninth century A.D. they tried to keep it isolated as Coorg is a rice growing area. The people of Coorg had regular contacts with their neighbours and visited them to sell their surplus produce in Malabar market. They brought articles of their daily use in return for their rice. Their visits to Mysore and other religious places of Hindu shrines and temples were regular.

Richter, one of the earlier writers on Coorg reports:

"The general appearance of the country varies considerably in different districts. In the vicinity of Somwarpet, in the alternating with sloping glades, interspersed with clumps of forest trees resembling the finest

park in Europe. Bear Meraara, the hills are closer together and more abrupt, and the ravines deeper and more wild. Towards frazerpet, the country assumes the champaign character of Mysore plateau, with scattered solitary hills. South of Meraara in the direction of Virarajpet, especially in Beppunad, Kadiyetnad, the country is open, the woods are neither dense nor high and beautiful glassy downs, rise from extensive rice valleys". The eastern frontier between the Kaveri and Lakshamana-Tirtha exhibits an almost uninterrupted and impervious forest."

8.2 A Coorg Village

A village in Coorg is different from a village in Andhra Pradesh, Mysore and Tamilnadu. It is "a group of houses and huts huddled together in a confined space with fields and gardens stretching all around". In Coorg proper every Coorg house is built on its ancestral estate and near it live the servants of the house who are generally of a very low caste.

The ancestral house is usually a substantial Building of stones and, mortar with solid carved wood-work. Masons and carpenters of Malabar build such massive houses. Coorg ancestral house resembles the houses of well-to-do Nayars. The house generally stands on an elevation and narrow high way walled winding lane and keep as many as 250-300 members.

The ancestral estate included some jungle, grazing land valleys for rice cultivation. The main building had kitchen garden near it. There was also a pond or well to provide water for domestic purposes.

The ancestral estate had a shrine dedicated the Okka ancestor. Some stones representing cobras were planted on the platform.

There are only two towns in Coorg. Mercara, the capital has a population of 7112 and Virarajpet has 4106 persons.

The language spoken by Coorg is Kodagi. It is an independent language. However, it is closely connected with Kannada and in part with the language of Malabar coast. Kannada was the official and court language of Coorg under the Lingayat Rajas. It is medium of instruction in schools today.

8.3 Legacy of the Coorgs

The Coorg lived in isolation for a very long time. In the ninth century A.D. They were attacked and conquered by the invaders belonging to the Changalva and Kongalva dynasties. The Changalvas occupied and established their rule in some areas of northern Coorg, with their capital at Bednur. The Kongalvas were in possession of some parts of the east. Both these dynasties became feudatory to the ruling Gangas of Mysore took the eleventh century. The rulers of these dynasties were Jains by faith. In the eleventh century they became feudatory to the Chungalva. In the meanwhile the Changolvas changed their religion and accepted Lingayatism or Sivism.

After the fall of the Gangas, a new dynasty rose to power in western Mysore called Hyosalas. The Hyosala drove the Cholas out of Mysore. The Changalvas refused to accept the over lordship of the Gangas and Hyosalas and claimed independence. Several battles were fought between these dynasties. Srinivas mentioned that these battles were important because the Coorgs fought these battles with the Changalvas against the invaders from Mysore. In the last battle the Changalvas ruler was killed and his elephants, horses and gold were captured by the Hyosalas. After this

defeat the Chandalvas withdraw into Coorg. In 1174, the Hyosala sent an army general called Battarasa to attack the Chandalvas and to drive them out of Coor. In the battle that follows Battarasa sustained heavy losses, but in the end he was successful in subduing the enemy. He established his capital at Balpore.

Allads of Coorg gathered together and fought against Battarasa inflicting heavy losses on the enemy. The Hyosala rule continued till it was attacked and subdued by Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan. The Muslim rulers took advantage of succession disputes and attacked Coorg. The prince of Bednur was transferred to Gorur and was put under confinement.

The prince of Bednur escaped from Gorur and reached Coorg. The Coorgs rallied round him and Vira Raja occupied whole of Coorg in 1834.

The prince of Bednur ruled Coorg till 1809. He had no male issue. This raised the problem of succession. The brother of dead king was triumphant in 1811 and when he died in 1820, his son, a 20 year old, Chikka Vira Raj was the ruler of Bednur. He was an incompetent ruler. He was sensuous tyrant. In 1834 the British annexed Coorg and thus it was the end of the rule of Lingayat Rajas.

- i) Thus, we find that the authority of Coorg chieftains or Nayakas was destroyed under the Jain invaders.
- ii) The administration was centralized.
- iii) A postal service was established.
- iv) Land survey was made; details of forms were recorded in the Hukum Nama.
- v) Serious offences like adultery, murder and theasion were heard by the Raja himself.

The struggle with Haider Ali and Tippu Sultan increased the sense national identity of the inhabitants of Coorg.

Reflection and Action 8.1

Discuss about the leagacy of the Coorgs. In what way do you find it to be unique? Discuss and write down in your notebook.

Tippu Sultan died in 1799. At that time Vira Raja⁴ was in power. He helped the English in their war against Mysore. Vira Raja died in 1809, leaving behind only daughters. This lead to the inevitable succession disputes.

8.4 Land Tenure System

The land tenure prevalent in Coorg was quite favourable for Coorgs to maintain and develop a military tradition of their own. Land revenue was the principal source of the Lingayat Rajas. The assessment of land was made on the basis of survey and the classification of cultivated land in Coorg. Similar survey was made during the reign of Linga Raja. This settlement was recorded in a book called the Hukum Nama. Most Coorgs held land under this military tradition. The term Janma is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit word Janma meaning birth. It was hereditary and the right to the property passes from father to his son.

After 1834, the British introduced the following changes in the Coorg society:

- 1) Abolition of slavery. Slavery was abolished through it did not affect the land holding Coorg. The slaves were free to choose their work.
- 2) Another important change was the introduction of coffee plantations. Coffee plantations increased the demand for labour. The slaves deserted their masters and joined the plantations.
- 3) Coffee became important next only to rice. Coffee plantation changed the face of Coorg. It brought foreign planters who settled down in Coorg.
- 4) Coffee plantation changed the master-slave relation. The slaves were no more bound to their Coorg masters.
- 5) Seasonal flow of labour from Mysore and other areas increased. Thus Coorg became a place for labour market.
- 6) Naturally coffee plantation brought money to planters and work to labourers.

According to 1941 census there were two sub-division among Coorg. The first division consisted of 41,026 and the second had only 666 individuals. The latter called themselves Amma Kudagas or Amma Coorg. The Amma Coorg are a highly Brahmanised group of Coorg society.

The Amma Coorg are said to be the descendents of a Coorg man and a Brahmin girl of Wynad. She was the daughter of Tayikat Tambiran. Tayikat Tambrain espelled his daughter from his house as she had attained puberty before marriage. To keep a daughter who attains puberty before marriage in the past was a serious offence. It was sinful and shameful. Born of this union came to be known as Amma Coorgs.

During the reign of the last Raja of Coorg, Amma Coorgs claimed to be kaveri Brahmins. They claimed to be the descendents of the Brahmin disciple of the sage Agastya, husband of kaveri, before the latter flowed away as a river.

In the recent past there were two subdivisions called Sanna Coorg and Malla Coorg. The Sanna Coorgs were the descendents of inter-marriage between the ruling Lingayats and the Coorgs.

8.5 Tribes and Caste in Coorg

There were more than forty tribes and castes in Coorg, but Coorgs were in regular contact with (1) the Brahmin priest (2) the Kaniyas or astrologers (3) Banna (Oracle) (4) Blacksmith (5) Carpenter (6) Goldsmith (7) Washerman (8) Barber (9) Poley or farm servant (10) Meda. In this section we discuss how Coorgs relate themselves to each of these caste groups.

“Under the Lingayat Rajas Coorgs formed the aristocracy. They held important acknowledge their dominance of taking over customs and manners and their speech”. The peasant castes of Karnataka and Gandas of South India tried to pass off for Coorgs.

The Coorgs were a compact unit in relation to other castes. The Coorgs were powerful, economically and politically. They engaged themselves in dancing, competitive games. They were skilful in hunting and soldering. These were the attributes of the kshatriyas of Vedic or classical caste system. Prof. Srinivas maintains that the resemblance between Coorgs and Vedic Kshatriyas is striking in the matters of values and “it is understandable that Coorgs should regard themselves as kshatriyas. He adds that Coorgs do not perform any Vedic ritual, vedic mantras. They do

not recite vedic mantras at the naming ceremony, at marriage or at the funeral. They abstain from eating beef. Their dietary includes pork and liquor.

The Brahmins, kaniyas and Bannas are three important castes in ritual context. The Brahmins are priests in great shrines at Tala kaveri, Bhagmandla and Irpu and at other small temples. The Coorg offer rice balls to their ancestors at the sacred place Tala kaveri. This is done under the guidance of a Brahmin priest. Payment to the priest is made annually at harvest. Every Coorg house in the village makes a certain quantity of paddy. The Brahmin is in no way different from other service castes.

Blacksmith & Carpenters:

- 1) Make agricultural implements and other articles of domestic use.
- 2) Build massive houses for Coorgs.
- 3) They make biers and palanquins used on ritual occasions.
- 4) A sickle used on the occasion of cutting of sheaves.

Goldsmith:

- 1) Makes articles of gold and silver ornaments.
- 2) Bores ears of boys and girls.
- 3) Ear boring was an initiation rite in the past.

Washerman Clothes washed by a Washerman are ritually pure such clothes must be worn on ritual occasions. His services are essential on ritual occasions.

- 1) Supplies clean clothes for bridal pair to walk on.
- 2) Supplies a cloth to spread on the bridal seat to cover the ceiling.
- 3) Supplies clothes at the village festival.
- 4) Purifies ritual pollution caused by birth or death.

Barber: The barber defiles a Coorg. The Coorg undergoes a ritual bath after his shave. Such bath restores the Coorgs normal ritual status.

- 1) The barbers services are indispensable at the time of birth and death.
- 2) Shaving is an essential preliminary act for men on ritual occasions.

Meda: The Meda is an artisan who supplies artifacts like baskets, fish traps and receptacles of cane, reed or bamboo.

- 1) His presence is indispensable at Coorg festival dance or hunt.
- 2) He brings a basket and bamboo vessel for the festival .
- 3) He beats his tom-tom.

Reflection and Action 8.2

Is Srinivas writing about varna or caste? Justify your answer in writing and discussion.

- Poleya:
- 1) The poleya farm servant observes ritual mourning for his Coorg master.
 - 2) He is given gifts at the termination of mourning.
 - 3) He holds torch at Coorg wedding.
 - 4) He does most of the work on Coorg farms.

8.6 The Okka

The Okka is the basic unit of Coorg society. It is a patrilineal and patrilocal joint family. Only male members have any right in the right ancestral estate. Similarly, it is only son who can continue the Okka.

Women born in the Okka cease to be the member of their natal Okka on their marriage. Women who became members of their conjugal Okka do not have any special rights in their conjugal Okka. However, they may marry their husband's younger brother and retain their membership in their conjugal or in their natal Okka.

Sexes are segregated among Coorgs. The outer verandah may be used as a club for men only and woman use kitchen or some inner room to receive guests.

During the harvest festival and the festival of village deities men sing and dance and women watch them from a distance.

For men the ideals are strength, skill in fighting and hunting and courage. Killing a tiger or panther gets a man the honour of mangala ceremony. According to a proverb; Men should die on the battle field and women in child-bed.

Coorg men supervise the cultivation of land while low caste labourers do much of the work on the fields. The army has greater attraction for the Coorg.

"The Coorg Okka seems to be stronger and more sharply structured than the joint family in South India, with the possible exception of the matrilineal Taravad of the Nayers and the patrilineal Illam of the Nambudris. Other territorial groups among the Coorg are the Village and Nad. There are 35 Nads and Kombus in Coorg.

"Every society has a body of ritual and certain ritual acts forming the body of ritual repeat themselves constantly. Now only ritual acts, but also ritual complexes, which are wholes made up of several individual acts, frequency repeat themselves, several such ritual complexes and some individual ritual acts might be together knit into a still wider ritual whole which repeats itself occasionally."

For instance salutation is an individual ritual acts. It may be two kinds, simple and elaborate. In the simple ritual acts a man may fold his hands at his chest and utter Namaskar if the two person involves are equals. In an elaborate ritual act of salutation. The man may bend down up to his knees, touch the feet of an elderly man or woman and carry his hands up to his forehead, at least once. If a person is before a dity, he may bend down to touch the earth and carry his hand upto his forehead three times. Salutation of the elaborate kind is only one of several ritual acts in the ritual complex of murta is again a part of mangala.

Box 8.1: Mangala and Coorgs

There are several kinds of mangala in the past, but now it has been narrowed down to mean exclusively marriage and this is a fairly recent phenomenon.

The astrologer selects the auspicious day and time to murta. Generally, it is performed in the central hall of the ancestral house. The house is colour washed and decorated. A pandal of five pillars is erected. Once of the pillars is of the milk exuding tree. Tom-toms are beaten by the

poleys servants and mudas. Four coorgs play their musical instrument called dudi. The songs sung on the occasion are traditional and are exaggerated. All this shows the social importance of the occasion. It also shows the movement of social status of the person undergoing the murta ceremony.

The person for whom mangala is to be performed is seated on a tripod stool stood in the central hall of the ancestral home. He is in a pure ritual condition as he had a shave and a ritual bath and is in his ritually pure robes. Two lamps are burning on other side of subject. A third stool covered with a red silk cloth is also there. On this stool in dish which contains a burning lamp placed on a rice platform and a vessel containing some milk.

Three women whose husbands are alive perform murta individually. The woman takes rice from the dish and sprinkles at the lamps some from over her shoulders. She then salutes the sun. She takes the vessel from the dish and causes it up to the subject's mouth. The subject sucks some milk from the spout of the vessel. The subject salutes the lamps. The subject touches the feet of the woman and she gives him/her some silver or gold coins blessing a long and happy life. In the past mangala was performed on various occasions.

Examples : (1) Ear boring mangala for boys and girls. (2) Puberty mangala. (3) First pregnancy mangala. (4) A woman whose ten children are alive. (5) Tiger mangala. (6) Plantain mangala. (7) House mangala. (8) Ox mangala. (9) Corpse of a bachelor. All these are defunct today. Mangala today means marriage mangala.

The external world is divided into two parts, the sacred and non-sacred. The term sacred includes good sacredness and bad sacredness. Good sacred means all forms of ritually desirable conditions like auspiciousness and purity forms of ritually undesirable states and condition such as in auspiciousness and impurity.

In Kodagi dialect pole means ritual impurity. Generally, its specific forms may be *kurudu pole* (blowing pollution or and *Tinga pole* (monthly pollution). *Kurudu pole* refers to the impurity of a woman in her monthly periods and *kurudu pole* is birth pollution. In the same way death pollution is called *Tike* and *Tomme* means mourning and *Namme* is festival.

All over India a higher caste person does not touch or come very close to a member of a lower caste because of the structural distance if it is very great. A higher caste person is in a condition of ritual purity in relation to a number of lower castes. The concepts of ritual purity and impurity systematise and maintain distance between different castes. The Brahmin is in the condition of ritual purity in relation to all other castes. The untouchables on the other hand are in a condition of impurity to castes above them.

The Coorgs regard their ancestral estate sacred. A Coorg is not allowed to walk wearing sandals. The most sacred places on the estate are the ancestor shrine and the cobra platform. A woman in her monthly periods may not go near the cobra platform as the cobra deity is very sensitive to pollution.

The ancestral house has an out house in which a woman stayed for three days during her periods. On the fourth month day she attained her normal ritual states after a bath.

Certain part of the ancestral house are more sacred than other parts. The central hall is one such place which is very sacred. In the western wall of the central hall is a niche for burning an earthen lamp. The lamp faces east, the sacred direction. This lamp is known as *Nallakk Boluk*. The south western room and the kitchen are also sacred.

The Brahmin priest may go into all parts of the ancestral house. The *polaya* and *meda* may go up to pavement in front of the house.

The concepts of ritual purity and impurity are intimately related to the permanent features of the social structure, like castes and *okka* and also to village they also occur in non- structural contexts.

A man is in a state of purity while praying or sacrificing to an ancestor or deity. He attains ritual purity by taking a bath, wearing ritually pure clothes. He comes into contact with a deity when he is praying. A mourner also offers food to the spirit of a dead person. He is also in an extreme condition of ritual purity though he is in ritual state of *tike*, death pollution.

Bodily emissions and waste matter are ritually impure. Intercourse makes a man and a woman impure and polluted. The priests at *ketrappa* have to observe continence during 21st days at the festival. They are required to sleep in the outer verandah where women do not enter. A call of nature pollutes a person. Spittle is also ritually impure. A man should not touch his teeth. *Enji* is the term for spittle in Kodagi. Nail and hair paring are impure. If scattered in the house poverty will result.

A Coorg may pare his finger and toenails. He cannot cut his hair. This is the job of a barber. The barber defiles a Coorg. The latter purifies himself by taking a ritual bath and wearing pure clothes. The place where the barber sat is purified; faces; urine semen menstrual blood, spittle and paring of nails and hair are ritually impure. Physical dirt is identified with ritual impurity.

Birth and death result in impurity. A corpse is ritually impure and contact with it results in pollution. The crow is associated with death and is also impure. The spirits of death ancestors assume the forms of crows on certain occasions particularly when rice balls are offered to them. If a crow seen mating brings death. He sends a false latter announcing his death. Mating of crows means their increase and it means a likely death of the person. If a crow falls on someone, s/he will have to dip in tank a thousand times.

Bad sacredness is a wider concept than pollution or ritual impurity. Degrees of ritual impurity are:

- a) Childbirth results in a mild form of pollution. Members of the *Okka* regain their normal status after 7th or 12th days the body on the 60th day. Temple visiting is avoided by *Okka* members.
- b) *Tike* or death pollution is an acute form of pollution while *purudu pole* are milk from it.
- c) *Madi* and *pole* are deviations from the normal. The washer man takes away clothes and returns *madivala*.

Ritual impurity, normal ritual state and ritual purity form a hierarchy. Normal ritual status is a mild form of impurity.

8.7 Aspects of Hinduism

The structural basis of Hinduism is the caste system. Caste system means a hierarchical arrangement of caste, with the Brahmin at the top of the

ladder and the untouchable at the bottom of it. Prof. Srinivas sees this as a fusion of Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit ritual and beliefs. It is common to come across castes with both Sanskrit and non-Sanskrit ritual and belief at the same time. These may vary from caste to caste and region to region. In this background it becomes easy to understand why some people worship trees, plants, mountains, rivers, caste ancestors and village deities etc.

Hinduism has a profound philosophy of its own. Its Upanishads, Vedanta and the mysticism of Bhakti Schools are well-known. Caste system has been so powerful that even some reformist sects have become castes. Jains and Lingayats are the examples. However, some lower caste groups by Sanskritizing their rites have raised their social status in the caste hierarchy. The Coorgs for instance.

It is also true that rites and beliefs have changed in the process of Sanskritization. This change may be seen within and outside Hinduism.

Box 8.2: Analysis of Hinduism

The Sanskrit Hinduism has two aspects, the intellectual and the ordinary. The intellectual Hinduism has the Upanishads, the Gita and the philosophical systems and for the ordinary Hindus numerous feasts, tastes, vratas, pilgrimages, temples and shrines are the stuff of Hinduism. The great literary works like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, the Puranas and the teachings of Saints are also there.

For analytical purposes Hinduism may be made into (1) All India Hinduism (2) Peninsular Hinduism (3) Regional Hinduism and the (4) Local Hinduism.

The ritual and cultural form of Sanskrit Hinduism may be spread all over India. The Brahmins share some Sanskrit ritual and cultural forms in common all over India.

Some ritual and cultural forms are peculiar to a particular part of south India, the Kaveri myth for instance.

Regional Hinduism refers to the ritual and cultural forms found in Malabar, south Canara and Coorg.

A small area in north of Coorg called Coorg proper comes under the local Hinduism.

All India Hinduism may be seen as having horizontal spread in which there is unity and solidarity among the Brahmins.

All India Hinduism spreads in two ways: (1) In the first instance the Sanskrit deities extended their ritual and cultural forms. In the second the groups undergo greater Sanskritization of ritual and beliefs. When the Sanskrit deities extend their area, these deities assume different forms in their travel all over India. In case of greater Sanskritization in groups inside Hinduism local deities assume "Sanskrit labels" the Vedic deity Kshetrapala becomes Ketzappa in Coorg.

The All-India Hinduism absorbs local features with greater ease. The Kaveri myth is the example in which ideas of sin and virtue are attached to them. The Ganga myth becomes a model for the Kaveri myth.

According to Coorg folklore, Malabar Coast was created by Parashurama. Malabar is a strange country. The people here behave in an unpredictable way.

The Coorg folk songs report that deities migrated from Malabar into Coorg. They migrate to Coorg for shelter. Some important deities are:

- 1) Achehayya - - - Vishnu - - - a form of Bhagvati.
- 2) Achchayya - - - Laxmu - - - for Coorgs Laxmi is the wife of Madava.
- 3) Madava - - - Shiva - - - has a shrine in every nad.
- 4) Povvedi Bhagvati - - - (Parvati)- - - has a shrine in every village.
- 5) Kanyamatappa
- 6) Tirchanbarappa
- 7) Bendrukelappa
- 8) Pannangalamme (F)- - - kartandaokka- - - she is a deity worshipped by Poley lower cast.
- 9) Lgguttapa - - - for Coorgs he is Sulnamanya.
- 10) Pallurapa - - - for Coorgs he is Vishnu.
- 11) Tirndli pemmayya - - - he guards against man; the deity of epidemics.

Marriage is preferred condition among Coorgs. Social status of a married man is higher than that of a bachelor. There is no difference between married woman and a remarried widow.

The Brahmin and the Coorg are similar attitude towards widowhood.

The woman with all her ten children alive is entitled to a special honour.

The festival of arms comes at the end of the field season. The astroloser decides the day and time of worshipping weapons. The head of the Okka hands over the weapons from the ancestral building to Coorgs and says to them: "Fight a tiger and boar by stepping aside the charging lease. Do not underrate your enemy, fight him face to face, stand by your friend be obedient to the king and do forget god. "He fires a shot his gun in the direction of woods.

The head of the Okka is in charge of a pack of dogs. He feeds them regularly.

Competitions are held on the village green. Men shot at targets. Men are asked to cut through the three plantains stems planted very close to each with stoke of the sword. There are also a high-jump and stone throwing competitions.

All the adult males have to participate in the collective hunt. This is held after the festival of arms.

Coorgs believe than Aujiyappa, the son of Vishnu and Shiva, roams about forest at night whistling to the pack of dogs. The Coorgs offer clay image of dogs and horse in shrine in jungle.

The material orientation of cords culture is not a recent phenomenon. About 1300 Coorgs joined the army as soldiers to fight in the last war. It is interesting to note that the first Indian commander-in-chief of the Indian Army Journal K.M. Cariappa was a Coorg.

8.8 Conclusion

Preference for a particular way life expresses itself in belief, ritual and myth. Coorg is an agricultural country and the Coorg community is directly dependent on land. Coffee was introduced about a hundred years ago.

Coorgs were pre-occupied with the cultivation of rice from May to January. May was the proper time for the first ploughing of fields. Harvesting of the crop was done in January. After harvesting it was time to participate in the festival of village deities. It was also time for some men to go to Malabar for the sale of their surplus rice. Thus the social activities of a Coorg revolved round and adjusted themselves to the cultivation of rice and the sale of surplus in Malabar.

Rice field is the most important part of an ancestral estate. It is sacred a Coorg is not allowed to walk on it wearing his sandals. He is not allowed to enter the ancestral shrine or a temple with his sandals on.

Every stage of cultivation of rice is marked by a ritual. The main plot of the ancestral rice-field is ritually ploughed on a particular day and decided by the Brahmin priest of Sulnamanya temple. Regular ploughing takes place after the ritual ploughing on the New Year Day.

Stages of the cultivation of the rice crop are ploughing, sowing, plucking of young plants and their transplantation, harvesting, storing the crop in the granary. Then follows the Kaveri festival. A part of it is called bottu which is intended to protect the growing crop, woods on the estate.

Putri is another important festival of Coorgs when the paddy sheaves are ritually cut. The festival lasts for nine to ten days. Seven days previous to sheaf-cutting singing, dancing and playing games are the main activities. After sheaf-cutting there is a domestic feast, a dance and sports and a collective hunt and a dinner for the village or nad.

On the festival day, leaves of different plants and creepers are gathered. These are kept near a dish-lamp in a harvest-basket. In a new bamboo vessel some milk, honey and ghee are poured and a new sickle is kept in it. The sheaf-cutter carries the bamboo-vessel to the field followed by other members. The rice plant is worshipped and everyone shouts poli, poli, deva (increase, increase, O God) and a shot is fired from a gun. The sheaf-cutter reaches home. His feet are washed and given milk to drink.

Prof. Srinivas opines that these rites performed at the harvest festival stress the great value of rice to Coorg.

On the New Year Day a cold of ploughed earth is brought home and deposited in the granary. At the sight of paddy in the ear, a man says "saw paddy in the ear O granary, there is going to be bumper crop". These become *akahaya patra*, the mythical vessel of increase.

8.9 Further Reading

T.R.Singh: *Some Aspects of Ritual Purity and Pollution*, The Eastern Anthropologist Vol. 1. 1966.

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Unit 9

Evans Pritchard: The Nuer

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Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe the concept of Cuong;
- outline the notion of soul and ghost;
- discuss the concept of sin and sacrifice; and
- outline the role of priests and prophets.

9.1 Introduction

The Nuer live in Sudan and according to Pritchard calls themselves as *Nath*. They are about twenty lakhs in number. They are tall, long limbed, and narrow headed. They are from Nilotic group of East-African Cultural type. Their religion is very complicated and is different from the other tribal religion. As we move further, we will be able to distinguish it from other tribal religion. The Nuer calls the god "*Kwoth*" meaning spirit. The *Kwoth* represents both the intangible quality of air, and the breathing or blowing out of air. According to Nuer, God is a kind of spirit, which like wind and air is invisible and ubiquitous. They believe that though God is not these things but God is in them in the sense that he reveals himself through them. It means he is in rain, sky, shines in sun and moon. God also blows in the wind. Nuer pathetically compare to heavenly things. Human beings are earthly person, in Nuer word *ran piny*. According to Nuer general view, the ghosts are not the persons of the sky or some heavenly body but they essentially reside on earth, and only God resides on sky. God is in the sky, but it does not show that he is not at the same time elsewhere, and on earth. God according to them is omnipresent and omnipotent, and thus God may be on earth too. Nuers says that God is everywhere, and he is like wind and like air. God is only the creator and mover of all earthly things. There are many spirits but unlike other spirits God has no prophets or sanctuaries or earthly forms.

Thus we can say that the Nuer conceive God as a creative spirit. Pritchard writes that he has never heard Nuers suggest that God has Human form.

But God being ubiquitous and invisible, can see and hears all that happens and he can be angry and can love also. The most common word to address the God and deity is “*gwandong*”, a word which means “grandfather” or ancestor, and literally old father. Thus god is the father of the man in two respects, firstly he is their creator and secondly he is also their protector.

God is also protector as the Nuer feel that man is fully dependent on God and man is helpless without his aid and that God, though a friend and present in yet he is also remote from the human beings. Nuer frequently use the word “*doar*” which means idiot, stupid, fool, and weak minded. Actually, while praying, Nuer says that they are just ignorant people who do not understand the mysteries of life and death. They also not able to understand the meaning of God and the spirits and why things happen as they do.

9.2 Concept of Cuong

The word can mean ‘upright’ in the sense of standing, as for example, in reference to the support of byres. It also used figuratively for ‘firmly established’ as in phrase “*be gok cuong*” means ‘may his hearth stand’. It is most commonly employed however, with the meaning of ‘in the right’ in both a forensic and moral sense. According to Pritchard, the concept of cuong is important for two reasons. First, it relates directly to man’s behaviour towards God and other spiritual beings along with God and ghosts, secondly, it relates to God in a more indirect way, in that he is regarded as the founder and guardian of morality. The Nuer say that God may forgive and overlook what was done in error similarly they believe that god will pardon a man and not allow a curse to harm a man who has done no deliberate wrong. When a Nuer suffers they sometimes at once know what the cause of their suffering is because they are well aware of some particular fault. If some misfortune falls on them they then know that it is due to the anger of the spirit.

Nuer religion is closely connected with the animal sacrifices. Their prayers are most commonly heard on public and formal occasions, generally, in connection of the sacrifices. If they are in any trouble or anxiety, the head of the Nuer household may pace up and down his kraal brandishing his spear and uttering some supplications. He may less formally, see them standing or squatting with his eyes turned towards heaven and his arms outstretched from the elbows, moving his hands, palms upper most, up and down.

The most common phrase in Nuer prayer and of one with which they start their prayer is “*akonienko*”. This literally means “let us sleep” but here this means “let us be at peace”. The commonest of the Nuer greetings and when others are said, the first to be spoken is “*ci nien*” means “have you slept?” the saluted man replies to this, as to others greetings by a grunt of affirmation. This means have you rested or are you at ease? The Nuer regarded being at ease or at peace as having something to do with being in friendship with God is shown by a further question which may follow: “*cipal*” means have you prayed? Pritchard says that the idea implied here is that being at peace with God as well as with your fellow beings.

Nuer speak of life as walking through pastures and they ask for a path that has no hidden dangers, that is, the path is free from every evil. The general sense of the prayer is that God should protect those who supplicate him as a parent protects his helpless infants. This desire for peace, deliverance and protection is summed up in a common petition “*akoteko*”

means "let us be". Nuer ask for life, but this life should not be just life in the sense of living but of living abundantly, free from all types of troubles and other types of sufferings.

9.3 The Notion of Spirit

In Nuer religion the concept of spirit is of utmost importance. The spirits play an important role because spirits live in sky as well as in the earth too. The spirits for them are of two types, those of the above and those of the below. The spirit of the above is called as "*Kuth nhial*". In other words they are the spirits of the air or of the breezes. The spirit of the air is the most powerful spirit of all the known spirits for them. The spirits of the below are called as "*kuth piny*". Renuer believes that all spirits who are from earth or who are on the earth have fallen from above. The spirits of the below can thus be classified into a number of separate categories, like totemic spirits, totemistic spirits, nature spirits, and other fetishes. There is one spirit called by name "*col*", is associated with rain, lightening. The Nuer has a number of quite different spiritual conceptions. In general, Nuer use the word *kwoth* either in the sense of God or in the sense of one or other spirits of the above or of the below. When Nuer prays to God, they usually address him simply *kwoth* in Nuer totemism, they respect the natural species or class of objects because they regard them as being in some manner emblem or representation of spirit. God may figure in numerous ways in reference to social groups and to persons and in relations to effects which are significant for them. The main reason, why Nuer divide the spirits into two kinds, viz; colwic spirit and bieli spirits means spirits of above and the spirits of below respectively and so forth is that they regard them as different sorts of manifestation of spirits and of varying degree of importance. In other words we can say that the conception of *kwoth* has a structural dimension. At one end spirit is thought of in relation to man and the world in general as omnipotent God. It is the thought of in relation to a variety of social groups and activities and to categories of persons. At the other end it is conceived of more or less in relation to individuals in a private capacity as nature spirits and fetishes. God figured as common father and creator is patron of all men; figured in spirits of air he is also patron of political leaders; is figured in colwic and totemic spirits, and also in unnamed refractions, he is patron of lineages and families; and figured in nature spirit and fetishes and he is patron of individuals.

Evans Pritchard writes that a totemic or totemistic spirit sometimes gives a man certain powers over the totemic species. The rites these people perform might be classed according to some definitions of the term as magic. Nuer does not regard all manifestations of spirit as of equal value, nor do they accept all claims to spiritual guidance at their face value.

The role of medicines is very minimum in the Nuer society rather they believe in the religious rites for their treatments. Nuer medicines do not derive their power from spirit. Pritchard says that Nuer medicines of today are mostly of the nature of talismans for torture-in hunting, fishing, courting, and travelling. Medicines are also used sometimes as infusions, to protect a person from, or cure him of sickness brought about by breach of an interdiction. Nuers also have few samples for treating common ailments, such as constipation, throat or lung complaints, fevers and swellings, and for treating sick cattles. These medicines are thought to be efficacious only in very small matters or as secondary to the performance of religious rites. This means, religion for them is primary activity in treatment of diseases and other form of ailments and medicines are only

effective if the God is happy with them. So in other words God acts like protector in the time of diseases and the medicine is only a means to them.

God for Nuer is the father of every type of higher spirits of the air, and the lesser of them are said to be the children of his sons, of his lineage. According to Pritchard, in a typically Nuer way they represent the interrelationship of the spirits in a geneological metaphor. The totemic spirits are often said to be the children of Gods daughter, i.e. they are not of his lineage. The fetiches come lowest of all in the representation of children of daughters of the air spirit which is called "*deng*".

Box 9.1: Relationship between Spirits

The interrelationship of spirits is represented also in symbolism of height and space, or more accurately in relation of sky to earth. God is thus symbolised by sky and the spirits of the air by the atmosphere, the clouds, and the breezes. On the other hand, the lesser spirits are represented by their nearness to the earth than the greater one. The totemic spirits as spirits are above and as creatures are below. The fetishes are the most earthly of the spirits. Even according to Nuer some fetishes are also beneath the ground. One of the remarkable things about the Nuer is that they do not claim to see the God, nor do they think that anyone can know what he is like in himself. God has no human form. God can be conceived of as in the sky. The celestial phenomena which are of particular significance for Nuer is rain and lightening, because they see a direct influence of God in these type of things. So we can say that the conception of spirit has a social dimension. The spirits plays a significant and most crucial role in the Nuer social structure according to Evans Pritchard.

9.4 Soul and Ghost

In Nuer terminology *tie* means soul. They are very afraid of death. They avoid as far as possible speaking of death and when they have to do so they speak about it in such a way as to leave no doubt that they regard it as the most dreadful thing. *Yiegh* means both 'breath' and 'life'. Thus a man *yiegh may* be stronger or weaker according to the circumstances. If the person is sick he possesses weak *yiegh*, the stronger *yiegh* is for a healthy person. When the person is drunk, he is partially dead, but it is such a death for which the person will not mourn. They believe that life comes from God and when a person dies the God takes back his life as his right. So Nuer regard that when a person die the God has taken his own thing as his own right, because the life of a person is given by the God and it is his right to take it back. Pritchard writes that Nuers presumably see an analogy between a man is shadow and his soul. For them shadow is the best way they can find to figure the sort of things the soul might be. The analogy may derive from the idea of ghosts being shadowy replicas of the living. The fact that other creatures and things have shadows does not lead Nuer to say that they have souls; and since they have no souls, in their case the shadows does not at any time have a figurative meaning. There is a strange thing about Nuer that if a twin child born they regard that they have one soul with two bodies.

According to them only human beings have souls and not other creatures. They regard that only cattles and elephants have soul. The other remarkable thing about Nuers is that they are little interested in the dead mans

ghosts, so long as the ghost does not cause any trouble. The word for ghost in Nuer terminology is *Joagh*, for them the word closely denote plagues, pestilences, murrains and indeed any serious sickness. But they believe that these diseases not occur due to ghost but God has given these. So we can say that the ghosts are not very important in their lives, but they cannot entirely ignore the existence of ghosts in their lives. For them the spirits are far superior to the ghosts and the ghosts are subordinate to spirits. So they do not pray to the ghosts, because they consider that they have no power in themselves to grant requests.

Reflection and Action 9.1

Differentiate between soul and ghost among the Nuer. Note down the points in your diary.

When suppose a ghost comes to trouble the living, it is said to *cien* them. It means bitt, to curse, because both words are closely connected, the ability of ghost to harm being the post mortem operation of the projective power of the psyche, the power to harm another through the mind and the heart. In Nuer society the concept of curse is very important. In Nuer society the curse of certain person is believed to be effective if they have been wronged. If they utter curse without due cause the curse will be either ineffective or harm the speakers of them. Among various curses the curse of fathers and mothers are very serious. On the other hand the blessings are thought to be effective only because God makes them so. According to them just as the curse is an imprecatory prayer, so a prayer is implied in a blessing. It is a benedictory prayer. Pritchard says that the religious significance of cursing and blessings lies in a dominant motif of Nuer religion.

9.5 Concept of Sin

According to Evans Pritchard, sin is the central concept to the study of Nuer religion. Nuers want God to be near as well as far from them, because it is very dangerous to them. The Nuer conception of *thek* is very important in the understanding of their religion. Nuer uses this word for the attitude and behaviour expected of a man towards his wife's parents and to a lesser extent her other kinsmen also. A newly married woman respects her husband's people, especially his parents. Newly wedded wife and husband respect each other. There are also avoidances concerning bridewealth cattle which derive from these relationships of respects relating to marriage. A bride respects the *ghot lipe* means the cattle of her betrothal. These are the cattles her future husband hands over in earnest of his intention to marry her, and then count as the first payment of her bridewealth. She will not drink of their milk, lest she harms the cattle by doing so, till after the ritual consummation of the union, and not even then. Similarly, even when a husband can drink milk in the home of his parent in law they avoid offering milk from the cattle he has paid them.

Nuer uses the word *rual* for some incestuous relations. The incestuous relationships are also a type of sin for them. The degree of the sin varies with the closeness and distance of the relationships with whom the incestuous relationships are made. If any incest is done to any close relative, then even death may follow soon, possibly within a few days, while if they are very distantly related nothing untoward may happen. Nuer does not object to love relationships and love affair as before marriage so long as they are reasonably discreet in them. Thus we can say that adultery is a

sin and when committed by somebody, the pollution and its effects can spread beyond those directly concerned in it. The accused including husband and wife are dangerous to anybody they come into contact, if they are the party of any adultery. There is a provision that once the sin is confessed, its effect and consequences become less. For incest the Nuer word is *Rual*. *Nuesr* is a breach of certain interdictions, and it is also the violent sickness which follows the breach. Different diseases have different names, but if the sin which brought sickness about is known as the name of that particular sin.

A certain *duer* or fault brings about certain divine punishment. It may do so through the action of the curse or of ghostly vengeance. Nuer seems to regard moral faults as accumulating and creating a condition of the person predisposing him to disaster, which may then fall upon him on account of some acts or omission which might not otherwise and by itself have brought it about. There are two types of violations, first the fault which has moral or legal ingredients and second a religious fault.

To quote Pritchard, 'though the notion of *Kwoth* is as ubiquitous as the air to which it is likened and may be evoked in relation to any question of right and wrong there are differences between its association with such sins as incest or eating with the persons with whom one is at feud and its association with faults which have a moral or legal, rather than a religious character, such as lack of deference to an elder or refusal to pay a debt. When an action of the first kind, which is a sinful act, has been committed it is likely, if it is thought to be a serious transgression, to lead to sacrifice before any effects follow from it. This would not happen in the case of faults of the second type. Nuer does not say that any incestuous relationship with kinswomen is bad and thus God will punish it but according to them God causes misfortune to follow it and therefore it is bad. Thus it is bad not in itself but in its consequences. Homicide is not forbidden in them and they say that it is not wrong to kill a man in a fair fight. On the contrary, if a man slays another in combat is admired for his courage and fighting skill. In other words the ethical significance of sin lies in the violation of the interdiction.

9.6 Concept of Sacrifice

Pritchard considers the sacrifice as the most typical and expressive act of the Nuer religion. The sacrifice is made on numerous occasions by them. When suppose a man is sick or he has committed any type of sin they will sacrifice for it in order to eliminate that particular sin and its consequences. They also do the act of sacrifice when a wife is barren. Sometimes they sacrifice, when there is the birth of the first child, at the birth of the twins, at marriage ceremony, at funerals etc. Evans-Pritchard categorised these several types of sins in two main broad categories. They are as follows:

- (i) Personal sacrifice.
- (ii) Collective sacrifice.

Box 9.2: Varieties of Sacrifice

In personal sacrifice the sacrifice offered is for single individuals and for the personal causes. And the collective sacrifices are offered for the social groups. Most of the sacrifices are made to prevent some dangers hanging over the people. The primary function according to

Pritchard of the collective sacrifice is to confirm, to establish or to add strength to, a change of social status, boy to man, maiden to wife, living man to ghost, or a new relationship between social group-the coming of being a new age-set, and the ending of a blood feud. So Pritchard says that the collective sacrifices have a marked structural character. Sacrifices may be made on behalf of the whole community, as in the time of epidemic, but they are made for a great number of individuals. In other words, these sacrifices are indicative of the social activities and social order and it is on the contrary not indicative of relation between men and their natural environment. Their sacrifices are concerned with moral and spiritual, not natural crisis. Sacrifices are made for the God and it is not offered to any Ghosts in Nuer religion. But ghosts must be summoned as witnesses and the matter must be explained to them properly, because it concerns the ghosts also. Ghosts are of course present there but they are present only as a witness as the human being is and what is explained to them is explained to the human being also.

The main sacrificial animal is generally ox, but a barren cow may take the place of the ox also. If there is a closing of a blood feud bulls are sacrificed. This is the only occasion where bulls may be sacrificed. Apart from these oxen, goats, and cows some other beasts may be sacrificed according to the seriousness of the problem. Normally, the head of the family can officiate at personal sacrifice. One thing is clear that women and the children cannot make sacrifices rather they may assist in these acts of consecration. Personal sacrifices may be done any time if the need arises, but the normal time for the sacrifice is the morning and the evening. Before the animal is sacrificed, the entire act of sacrifice passes through four main stages:

- (i) Presentation.
- (ii) Consecration.
- (iii) Invocation.
- (iv) Immolation.

The first act is called the *pwot*, the driving into the ground of a tethering-peg and the tethering of the animal to it. Then the officiate presents the victim to the God. The individual who stakes the animal is called *pwot yang*, the tetherer of cow. Sometimes, after the victim has been staked, a libation of milk, beer or water, is poured over, or at the foot of the peg.

The act of consecration involves the rubbing with ashes. The man who is about to speak the first invocation rubs ashes of cattle-dung lightly on the victim's back. The man does this exercise with his right hand. This is the only step involves in this stage.

In the third stage i.e., invocation, the sacrificer holds spear in his hand and speaks to God over the consecrated victim. This stage states the intention of the sacrifice and the other matters related to this.

In the last stage which is called immolation or *kam yang* in Nuer language which means giving or offering of the victim when speaking of the personal sacrifices. It is called the *nak* when there is a collective sacrifice. One remarkable thing about the sacrifice is that they not wait for the animal to urinate before killing it. When the victim is ox, it is speared on the right side. Sheeps and goats have their throat cut.

A good sacrifice is one when the victim feels well. It should also preferably fall on its right side. The idea of the sacrifice is that when a Nuer is in trouble or they suffer from some sort of illness, they say that when an ox is sacrificed there is the idea that the evil goes into the ox and then into the earth with its blood. In personal sacrifices the animals are the substitutes for men. To this extent sacrifice is an exchange according to Pritchard, but he says that it is also very much more than just a simple exchange.

The cattle play a vital role in the lives of the Nuer. Thus, among cattle the ox is regarded one of the most respected cattle. Ox names are essentially the name of the men. Married women use cow names among themselves. Normally, a man retains his ox name and continues to be called by it, even the ox is departed from mans life. When the ox is departed the Nuer feels immense sorrow. It is the name of that ox that a man shouts out in war, hunting, dancing. Even the men are addressed by his peers. Even when the ox is long before dead, the relationships continue.

Thus when an ox is sacrificed, it in actual sense is substituted for man. Cattles are otherwise very much significant for Nuer. The sacrificial role of cattle is always dormant in cattle, which in sacrifice are being used for an ordained purpose for which they are set apart. Normally, as it is already mentioned above that the women cannot make sacrifice and the men are entitled to do this, among men only the head of the household or some senior members can make sacrifices. The collective sacrifices are made by a person called *gwan buthni*, which means the master of the ceremony. The *gwan buthni* or the master of ceremony functions at the marriages, and in other Nuer rituals and ceremonies. On these ceremonies he calls out the clan or lineage spear name and then makes an invocation, usually before the animal sacrifice. Actually when he utters the spear name it symbolises the lineage representation or it represents the whole clan. Evans-Pritchard says that the role of the *gwan buthani* in the sacrificial ceremony is seen to be a social rather than of religious kind.

9.7 Priests and Prophets

The role of the priests and prophets are not that crucial as in other societies. When there is a sacrifice made for any particular sin committed by the Nuer, the role of priest is desirable. Especially the leopard skin priests are important for them. The leopard skin priests are called as *kuaar* in their local language. But in this society, the priests have no politico-administrative rights like other tribal society. Nuer do not highly esteem cultivation of crops and may be presumed to have engaged in it even less in the past when cattles were more numerous. The priests are associated with the earth. This is a representation which accords with the general idea of man being identified with the earth and the God with the sky. The priest being essentially a person who sacrifices on behalf of man below to God above. Actually the leopard skin priests are not concerned with members of the clan, rather, they are in the category of *rul* means they are strangers. It also shows that their clans are different from the clans for which they serve as the priests.

Reflection and Action 9.2

In which way do priest and prophets figure in Nuer religion? Discuss and write in your notebook.

Pritchard tells us about two main priestly clans i) Goatleak, and ii) Jimem. These priests have no fixed territories, but live as family and small lineages

in most or all territories owned by other clans. These leopard skin priests are not connected with any clans because they are the priests who sometimes settle the old bloody feud between different groups among the Nuers, and thus they act as a neutral judge for them. The main function which a priest perform is with homicide and the importance of his office derives from this essential function, he is the only person who can perform this function. As soon as a man kills another in fight, he immediately contacts the nearest priest, and the priest then arranges for the cow sacrifice to lessen the sin committed by that person who kills another man. The priest acts as a middle man, in case there is a blood feud. Once the priest intervenes in this case nobody can suspect on the role of the priest. In other words everybody of the clan shows an unquestionable faith in him and his judgement. The leopard skin priest conducts the oath taking ceremony also. If a man denies that he has killed and suppose he is the real killer then he has to undergo an ordeal by drinking milk from the head of the dead man handed to him by the priest in the presence of the dead man's kith and kins. It is assumed that if the person is lying then he will soon die in this process. If a man kills another and he is not confessing for his crime, then in the eye of the Nuer it is the most heinous crime and a great offence. So in the Nuer society the act of confession is very crucial, and is very important for them to ward off the sin if they have committed any.

The leopard skin priest may be called any time if close relatives commit incest. To wash this sin the priest then sacrifice an ox. The priest consecrates the ox, makes an invocation over it to the God that may God spare the partners to the sin and the offence may depart with the blood of the victim. The beast is then held down on the ground and then priest inserts his spear in its throat and cuts towards the breast. As the priest makes the final cuts the parties to the offence tug at the carcass on either side and pull it apart. In these two parts one half is taken by the priest and the second half is taken by the relatives of the principals. The priest squeezes out the gall from the victims gall-bladder into water in a gourd, adds incest medicine i.e., *wal ruali* and the principal and their relatives drink this mixture.

The sacrifices which are in connection with homicide, ordeals and serious incest are the exclusive domain of the leopard skin priests. Pritchard says that after examining the critical situations in which the priest is called upon to exercise his functions, then one can regard it either as a political institution functioning within a religious ideas and values. But one thing about this religion is clear that the presence of the priesthood adds nothing to the dominant ideas of Nuer religion. It is rather these ideas which give to a political role, its necessary attributes. In other words, Pritchard says that priests perform certain politico-religious functions, but their religion is not intrinsically a priestly religion like other tribal societies and cultures.

In Nuer a religion the role of prophets is also important and according to Pritchard a prophet is a person who is possessed by a spirit of the air or occasionally a *colwic spirit*. This possession gives him the spiritual powers which other lack, including the leopard skin priests. He compares prophets with priests. A priest is a traditional functionary whereas the prophet is a recent development. The priest acts at sacrificial functions, whereas the prophets' roles are indeterminate. The priests powers are transmitted by descent from the first priest - a social heritage; the prophets powers are charismatic-an individual inspiration. The virtue of the priest resides in his office, whereas that of prophet in himself. The priest has no cultic feature whereas the prophet has cultic features. The priest stands on the earth and looks to the sky whereas the heavenly beings descend from the

sky and fill the prophets. Thus the prophet is the mouthpiece of the spirit, its interpreter, it is who speaks but he speaks under its control.

Pritchard further says that Nuer regards priests and prophets as very different sorts of persons, they do not think of them as being opposed to one another. A prophet may heal the people by rubbing his spittle on them or by sprinkling them with water, milk or butter and his inspiration gives him foreknowledge. But Nuer relies on sacrifice in the times of trouble, which is being done by the leopard skin priests.

9.8 Conclusion

Thus after reviewing their religious practices we have seen that the God conception is essentially related with the concept of kwoth, the spirit. According to them whatever happens in the world is determined by spirits and the spirits can be influenced by different types of prayers and sacrifices. Pritchard terms the Nuer religion as pneumatic and theistic. Whether it can be defined as the monotheistic is largely a matter of definition. He further writes that at one level Nuer religion may be regarded as monotheistic and on the other level as polytheistic, and it can also be regarded as totemistic or fetishistic.

The religion of Nuers is different from their African counterparts according to Pritchard as the conception of ancestral ghosts is altogether subordinate. Animistic ideas are almost entirely absent; witchcraft ideas play a very minor role, and magic a negligible role. Likewise it is understandable that there is no idea of an impersonal force which are the characteristic of some African religions. Another negative feature of Nuer religion is the absence of the ritual of all types, in the sense of ceremonial, interdictions, so prominent among other African religion. Nuer interdictions are not of a ritual order at all, but of a moral one, so that the breaches of them result in a state of moral impurity or in other words sin, of which the resultant situation and the manifestation may be sickness or other misfortune. They consider that the God is great and men are foolish and they are helpless and are like a helpless ant. And this sense of dependence is remarkably individualistic. It is an intimate and personal relationship between man and the God. Man in Nuer religion always plays a passive role. There is nothing Nuer can say of the nature of God other than that he is like wind or air.

9.9 Further Reading

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Unit 10

T. N. Madan: Non- Renunciation

Contents

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Domesticity and Detachment
- 10.3 Life Cycle Rituals
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- 10.8 The Desired and the Good
- 10.9 Living and Dying
- 10.10 Conclusion
- 10.11 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to;

- describe domesticity and detachment;
- discuss the concepts of auspiciousness and purity;
- describe the three stories that are analysed; and
- outline the concepts of living and dying.

10.1 Introduction

The work of T.N.Madan is an ethnographical work taking into account the religious patterns of Kashmiri pandits. The work is based on mainly three sources; first the writer's own intensive fieldwork, second, the important written ethnographical works on the Hindu practices of the brahmins of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, and Karnataka, and the third one is contemporary works on fiction dealing with ancient and recent times in Bihar, North India, Karnataka and Tamilnadu. As brahmins are the custodian of the Hindu religion the book is largely based on their interpretation of the religion, but this book is about the entire Hindu society. The writer has taken the help of the novels on the Hindu society and come up with the sociological interpretation. In this book an excellent description is done on the good way of life and death in the Hindu society and it also throws light on the different relationships between husband and wife, father and son, renunciation of the householder's life, concepts of auspiciousness and other social and cultural practices of the Brahmins. The writer has stressed on the fact that the life of the householder is considered as the prime value in the Hindu society. The Hindu society since long time has found a moral dilemma between philosophical and the mythological tradition. The renouncer and the enjoyers are both towering personalities. The main thrust of the book is then the interpretations of a view which is tradition based and the life of the man in the world as the good life in contrast to

the life of a renouncer. The entire book is divided among five chapters taking into account the different views on the themes of Hindu religion and cultural practices.

10.2 Domesticity and Detachment

The conflict between domestic life and detached life is always a central theme of Hinduism. In pandit society the householders keeps a central position in everyday life. Pandits perceive the human being as the creature who can introspect and reflect and according to them this is the central character which distinguishes human being from the other living creatures. A good Hindu should always perform his social role according to the Dharma. To be identified as the pandit they themselves define their external and internal characteristics. The Kashmiri pandits are called as the Bhatta, which means a learned person. They usually keep his *tuft* of the head top hair. They also wear the cotton thread which is called as *yajnopavita*. Their speech is often laden with Sanskrit.

The pandits are divided into several sub-castes. These sub-castes are helpful in the marriage and other types of the hierarchies in day to day life. The identity of the pandit cannot be acquired by any other means other than he is born in the pandit caste only. One loses the identity of pandit by totally abandoning the traditional way of life, or the important and crucial elements of it, as when one eats and lives with muslims or marries among them.

a) Parenthood: Biology and Morality

The parenthood is very important in the pandit way of life. Barrenness is recognised as a physical deficiency, which may be due to the Karmic causes. This may be due to diseases, sorcery or the curse of the people endowed with supernatural powers. It is believed that male seed contains the entire vital requirement for the making of the complete human beings: flesh, blood, all internal and external organs, hair, nail, intellect, and knowledge. The mother's menstrual blood provides the soil for the seed to grow in when it ceases to flow out and solidifies into the fleshy sack which envelops and nourishes the foetus. The Kashmiri women are said to be child worshippers. Mother for the child is both the human and the divine power. On the other hand the father child relationship is moral, but it has material dimension also. Because the ancestral property of the family is being shared by both father and son. In other words we can say that the relationship between a child and the parent is bound in terms of the dharma.

b) The Concept of Bhattil

Kashmiri pandits consider the bhattil way of life as the most superior way of life. It is constituted of a range of fundamental purposes of life largely centred in the domestic life, and the appropriate procedures for their fulfilment. For pandits the physical self is not that important as the inner self, as the body is fragile and will be destroyed certainly, but the *atma* or the inner self cannot be destroyed. When the body is joined to the inner self (*antaratma*) then it becomes the vehicle of the dharma. They attribute the present life difficulties as the result of the previous life *adharmath* body which is considered as the meeting point between the past, present and the future. The auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are the two things on which the pandits whole life hinges upon. The inauspicious moments are deaths, eclipses; the hooting of owl etc. and they are also not avoidable. The pandits are expected to take the maximum patience and restraint.

They are also expected under the *bhattil* to be ever ready to present to resist the compulsions of bodily appetites until assured of their proper satisfaction as defined in the *bhattil*. The questioning attitude, the exercise of restraint, and the cultivation of the moral consciousness provide the framework within which a *pandit* has to order his life. The basis of the conduct should be of thoughtful discrimination. The *pandit*'s attitude to the wordly concerns and rewards is one of the joyful acceptance. They do not seek immediate release from the present life, but try to accumulate merits for the future. Though they consider *karma* as the chain of bondage, but due to this reason it is not unwelcome. One's attitude should not be filled with the ego and thus one should surrender oneself to the God.

All actions should be performed according to the set procedure and conventions. There are three fires of the domestic life, they are as follows:

- i) The fire in the hearth.
- ii) The fire lit periodically to perform rituals.
- iii) The fire of the body.

10.3 Life Cycle Rituals

There are several life cycle rituals like childhood ritual of the purification, which is performed on the eleventh day of the birth of the baby, the ritual of the feeding of the first solid meals which is called *annaprasana*, the ritual of the first tonsure of the child called *zarakasai*, the *yajnopavita* ceremony in which the child take the holy thread. The next step is marriage which is the principal *sanskara* of an adult life. Marriage stands out as the central ritual and social event in the life of every individual, which enables one to take the role of the householder and this is what is required for the renunciation in the Brahminical life. The last and ultimate step is the rite of cremation, which is followed by post-mortuary rites. Apart from these life cycle rites the routine chores and rites of everyday life which are in other words called as *nityakarma* are the abiding concern of every individual *pandit* and constitute the important and ever present element of his *bhattil*. *Nityakarmas* also includes the observance of death and birth anniversaries of the ancestors, the discharge of other social obligations etc. Thus Madan says that the *pandit* way of life is moralistic and the life is mainly based on the good *karma* which is guided by the dharmic principles.

Box 10.1: Bhakti and Shakti

If there is any lapse which has been occurred in the domestic life, it can be corrected by the help of the *Bhakti*. *Bhakti* is not an alternative way of life but a particular orientation of the householder's life. The *pandits* consider *bhakti* as a value in itself. To get the power of divine love and affection one need not have to abandon the family. The love of God is not exclusive and does not require withdrawal. The prayer of *Shakti* is also a means through which a *pandit* tries to take the strength in his daily life. The *Shakti* can be aroused and rises to the head and enables the seeker to realise his own divinity. The ordinary rule of the *bhattil* does not apply to the *sakta*. There cannot be a family of the *sakta* but he may live in his exclusive household of its own, consisting of his family members. It is an alternative way of life.

In the society of Kashmiri Brahmins there is no concept of living away from the home, ofcourse some individuals may live away from home but they do not go through formal initiation into any *sanyasi* order. There is

no emphasis on the termination of the grihastha ashrama in one's life. The attitudes of pandits towards those who make claim of detachment and particularly of renunciation are generally one of scepticism. In fact, the pandits reduce the renouncer to a caricature of his ideal self.

Thus the greatest ambition of the pandit is to become the householder and perform his karma which is backed by dharma. The ideology of everyday life clearly establishes the pandit as the grihastha. The householder is the man-in-world. As a householder, a pandit may legitimately seek plenitude and joy but only if this endeavour is controlled by dharma. Bhattil is a total view of life which excludes nothing but it is a hierarchial view of both the ultimate purpose of life, and the task of everyday existence.

10.4 Concepts of Auspiciousness and Purity

Madan has tried to clarify the notion of 'auspiciousness' in relation to the notion of purity. According to him the notion of *subha* refers directly to time and temporal events in relation to particular categories of people. A time which may be considered auspicious for one kind of action may not necessarily consider auspicious for the other kind of action. The other use of the word is in using the word with some special occasions or festivals. There may be several *subha* months and days in a month. *Subha* is also employed to refer happy events in life like marriage, birth of a son, etc. the notion of *subha* is also associated with the places and the direction. A pilgrimage centre which is situated near the holy river bank is considered as the *subha* to take the holy dip there. Certain objects in pandits, society is also considered as the *subha* objects like *kalsa* means a metal or earthen vessel containing the water of the holy rivers like Ganga. The *Kalsa* is associated with the commencement of a ritual of religious and social value. The *grahas* are categorised into two categories viz; *subha* and *asubha* category. Among the nine *grahas* only three *grahas* namely, *brahaspati*, *chandrama*, and *sukra* are considered as the *subha grahas*. *Budha* is considered as the impotent and neutral *graha*.

Reflection and Action 10.1

In which way is auspiciousness different from the notion of purity?
Discuss and note down the main points in your notebook.

The birth of a child particularly the son is considered as the *subh* event, but it is not always a *subh* moment; rather it depends on the position of the particular *grahas* and their position at the time of birth. If the position of *asubha graha* are present at the time of the birth of the child, there may be need to correct it with the help of various rituals. In fact the Brahmins perform regular rituals to ward off the evil *grahas* in their home. These rituals are called commonly as *upayas* or in other words the corrective ritual measures. So we can say that the birth in general is considered as the *subha* event and the death is always considered as the *asubha* event. But there is a degree of inauspiciousness in the event of the death. If the death is occurred in the *subh* days its degree of inauspiciousness is less than the which death occurred in the auspicious days. Death is very inauspicious but widowhood is an even more unfortunate event for the Brahmin women. There are many drastic changes which occur in the status of the women whose husband dies. She cannot take part in any auspicious event including marriage and the birth ceremonies. Auspiciousness is an absolute value which manifests as a quality of events in the lives of human actors and involves the dimension of time and space.

The most pure and sacred thing is the *yajnopavita*, the three stranded cotton neck cord that he wears from the time of his ritual initiation and this also symbolises that he is a twice born caste and is different and far superior to other castes. After the completion of the *yajnopavita* ceremony only the Brahmin can take part in other types of rituals. In other words this ritual grants them the power to take part in the day to day ritual ceremonies. Madan writes that the daily life of a Kashmiri Brahmin is beset by *sanka* or doubt. There is always hesitation as to whether to perform a particular action or not. In Uttar Pradesh the encounter with a *Mahabrahmin* (a type of Brahmin who performs rituals at the time of death) is considered as the inauspicious event. The Brahmins of both Uttar Pradesh and Kashmir consider milk as the purest drink according to Madan. Thus, we can say that the notion of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are very important in the everyday life of the people. Madan writes further that the particular expressions and associations of the notion of auspiciousness may vary, but quite clearly it is of basic importance, at least in the schemes of values of the upper castes.

10.5 The Notion of Asceticism and Eroticism

The notion of asceticism and eroticism are described with the help of three novels. The first is 'Chitrlekha' from Bhagvaticharan Varma, the second is a Karnatic novel namely, 'Samskara' written by U.R. Anantha Murthy and later translated in English by A.K. Ramanujan, the third novel is a Marathi novel namely 'Yayati' by Vishnu Shangram Khandekar and translated in Hindi by Moreswar Tapasvi. We will discuss all the three stories in brief.

The story of Chitrlekha is based on the concept of papa and punya. There were two disciples of a Guru, who wanted to know the difference between the papa and punya. The guru says that he does not know what is papa, because he didn't have the personal experience of it. He on the contrary sends these two disciples to discover for themselves the concept of papa and punya. The two disciples were from the two upper castes one was from the Brahmin caste and the other one was a Kshatriya. The Brahmin became the disciple of a great yogi called Kumaragiri and the Kshatriya became a servant to a feudal lord namely, Bijagupta.

The yogi Kumaragiri claims that he is free from the bodily desires and attachments. He claims that because of his detachment from the desires, he possesses a good moral character. On the other hand, Bijagupta is opposite of the Kumaragiri and he possesses all types of bodily desires and joys of the worldly things. He is attracted to a famous dancer namely, Chitrlekha. Though Chitrlekha is a dancer by profession she is an intelligent and cultured woman. The dancer and Bijagupta live together fulfilling each other's bodily appetites. Once they Bijagupta and Chitrlekha by chance meet Kumaragiri and seek shelter into his hermitage for one night. Kumaragiri though did not want to give shelter to any woman but out of compulsion he had to give the shelter to a woman. Kumaragiri considers the women as the darkness of the attachment, desire and illusion. After some time this leads to a thorough discussion between Chitrlekha and him. After the discussion, Kumaragiri was much impressed and his conception about women was transformed and produced a positive attitude about them.

After further discussion, Chitrlekha won the argument and Kumaragiri, felt that despite his being a Yogi he has been defeated by a fallen woman, a dancer, but Chitrlekha came again to his hermitage and told that she has come to receive spiritual instruction by him, but actually she was in

love with him. Chitrlekha tries to teach Kumaragiri a view of the nature of woman contrary to that enunciated by him at their first meeting. She says that woman is a source of Shakti and main source of creation. Slowly, Kumaragiri begins to experience, besides the power of her intellect, the attraction of her bodily beauty. Finally, Chitrlekha decides to leave Bijagupta. Later on Bijagupta met another woman namely, Yashodhara, but he already was in love with Chitrlekha, and did not want to marry Yashodhara. For him this was a question of moral judgement and according to him marriage is not a simple event rather an ever-lasting physical-cum-spiritual bond between man and a woman. On the other hand Chitrlekha started living in the hermitage of Kumaragiri and genuinely shared interest in spiritualism and finally he falls in her love. Now Kumaragiri's conception of renunciation has been changed and according to him the real renouncer must include the love of all beings. In this process Kumaragiri lied to Chitrlekha that Bijagupta had married to Yashodhara. This was like a shock to Chitrlekha and she gives herself up to Kumaragiri. Finally, Bijagupta considered that Chitrlekha left him on her own choice and started getting attracted towards Yashodhara. But after some time Bijagupta didn't marry Yashodhara too and become a renouncer after donating her entire wealth to Yashodhara's new husband. Later on Chitrlekha came to know the truth and then left Kumaragiri and finally joined Bijagupta in the quest of the spirit.

Finally, the both disciples of the guru had returned to their ashram. The guru thus started interpreting that human beings are not autonomous moral agents at all; they are not free and are bound by different situations in life. According to him people neither commit sins nor performs meritorious acts, but they simply do what they have to act according to the situations in life.

10.6 The Story of Samskara

The story of Samskara is from a Karnataka hamlet called Durvasapura. There lived two Brahmins, Pranesacharya and Narappa. Pranesacharya wanted to be free from all the passions. When he was at the age of 16 he married a 12 year old girl, who was born as an invalid child. He had done this to earn austerity and self sacrifice. He thus became engaged in all types of ritual works and started living as a ideal sadhu. Everybody in the village even older persons started giving due respect to him due to his knowledge and humanity. On the other hand Narappa was a corrupt brahmin and was married to a low caste woman. His mother was a prostitute in her time. He consumed meat and liquor. One day he died of the plague. According to rule till his body is cremated nobody of the village will eat, but there was a problem in his cremation, because nobody wanted to take part in his cremation as he was a corrupt Brahmin. Finally, the villagers came to Pranesacharya for advice, but as the task was very complicated, he also could not come out with any type of solution. In the meantime Narappa's wife Chandri unable to withstand the hunger ate some fruits and drank water from the flowing river without anybody's knowledge.

Chandri awaits Pranesacharya's verdict and thanks his gentleness and kindness. Chandri was childless and she recalls that her mother used to say that prostitutes should get pregnant by holy men such as Pranesacharya. But Pranesacharya was not able to get the solution of the cremation of Narappa's body and in the mean time his dead body started rotting. In this process Chandri came into the contact of Pranesacharya and made a sexual contact with him, hoping she would be able to bear a child and her evil will be washed off. Finally, she with the help of a Muslim friend

cremated the body of Narappa, without anybody's knowledge. But Praneshacharya goes back to his home filled with remorse and guilt but internally he is relieved by the sexual contact with one prostitute. He also felt a lightness in the thought even that he had left desire, desire had not left him. Finally, Praneshcharya told the villagers that he is lost and he is no more a aicharya. He finally left the village, his home. He thinks that he is now free without duties or debts. The writer of this story thus concludes that authenticity, rather than an opposition between eroticism and asceticism, as the ultimate criteria of moral choices.

10.7 The Story of Yayati

The third story Yayati is based on one episode of the great epic Mahabharata. Yayati is a king's son. He has a brother also who became renouncer and left the home. Thus his mother takes a promise that he will never leave the home and never become a renouncer like her elder son Yati. As the years progresses Yati became a talented prince, and later on persuaded his father to perform *asvamedha*, the horse sacrifice of world conquest and victory. In the course of his wanderings he meets a *recluse* engaged in the mortification of his body. Actually he happens to be his brother Yati who in his early days became renouncer. Yati says that this body is source of all types of evils and is the main hinderance in the path of spirituality. Yayati's next encounter is with a young man, namely, Kach, who was the son of Brihaspati, guru of the Gods. Kach's viewpoint was that we should not exclude the wordly pursuits like artha, kama and other pleasures as it is the dharma of a man. Later on Kach became the pupil of Sukracharya. Sukracharya's daughter, Devyani falls in love with Kach. But he started avoiding her because her presence will hamper him in the path of the spiritual quest. He also wins the affection of Sharmistha the daughter of the king of demons. He then confesses his love for Devyani but adds that the true love must make one look beyond one's own self. Love is thus not opposed to duty but absorbed into it. Finally Devyani meets Yayati and asks him to marry her and Yayati married Devyani. But their relation as husband and wife was a strained one and their soul was not in unision. Internally, Devyani keeps her love alive for Kach, and one day on the pretext of some ritual performance she invited Kach. Kach came with Yati, whose behaviour was strange to every body. The strange behaviour was due to the fact that in the course of his renouncement he had abandoned his human behaviour. Man acquires merit not by denying the existence of the body but by refining the body appetites and bringing them under the control of his will. Finally as the relationship between Devyani and Yayati was strained, as Yayati was attracted towards Sharmistha and mutual love develops between them. Later on by knowing the fact Devyani forbids Yayati to touch her body. The writer of the story thus suggests that only true moral basis of wordly life can be self-sacrifice, which is what detachment is all about, and not self seeking.

T.N.Madan thus writes that all the three stories question a dualistic conception of the moral domain, therefore, of the viability of the choices which are based on a notion of papa and punya. Morality is thus not an external condition, a mere attribute of the human conduct, but an inner wisdom, a mental state, from which all our acts should flow naturally without an effort of will. Thus the householder should live by the morality of purusartha, as given in the three values of dharma, kama, and artha.

10.8 The Desired and the Good

In the course of studying the pandits of Kashmir, Madan finds one thing repeatedly that is the concern for problem of suffering, i.e., Duhkha,

they also expatiate the causes of these dukkahs. In general it is considered that the cause of every dukkha is the wrong doing by the person. However, these wrongs can be committed in the ignorance and delusion. As pandits believe that the pursuits of wordly pleasures is perfectly legitimate provided it is carried according to dharma. We should thus end our ignorance. Those who attain the moral perfection and discipline does not suffer from the agony of having to face moral dilemmas, he is free from having to make choices. Wrong doings are not committed in a social vacuum: interpersonal relations of the most intimate kinds such as between husband and wife, between parent and child is their principal locus. Moreover, different degrees of wrong doings are recognised, ranging from the ordinary faulty actions to those which are judged as morally reprehensible and evil. What is true to the Kashmiri, a pandit is likely to be true of the other Brahmin communities also.

Box 10.2: Appu's Early Years

T.N.Madan has chosen one novel of T. Janakiraman namely "The Sins of the Appu." The story starts with Appu who is the third and last legitimate child of his mother Alankaram. His other brothers were from the other fathers. Appu's father name was Dandapani, who by profession was an astrologer. Dandapani is a learned person and teaches Sanskrit to some retired person in the city of Madras. On the other hand Alankaram though not a well read woman is an attractive and well built woman. Appu was his mother's favourite child and thus she paid special attention in his upbringing and nurture. She wanted to give him the real education and wanted Appu to learn Veda, and become the scholar of it. Dandapani though opposed to this ideas finally agreed to send Appu for the Vedic study. After 16 years Appu, an adept in the Vedic scholarship was back in his home. Actually, Alankaram wanted that her sins should be washed off as she was not a moral woman, but later on became *pativrata*. Alankaram had hoped to atone for her moral lapse by ensuring the moral perfection of her son and then serving him and thus become herself purified.

Appu wanted to stay on in the village where he learned the Veda, because he is repelled by a morally amorphous city. He also came to know the truth that both his mother and father are morally infirm. Appu was filled with lots of moral and immoral questions about his mother and father. Realising that Appu would not come home; Alankaram visits him in the village. She tells Appu that she is going north far from Madras, to the sacred city of Kashi, to await her death there. Finally, Alankaram goes to Kashi. Alankaram now wants renunciation through divine grace.

Appu met two women at the village Vedic school-its benefactress, Bhavaniammal and her brother's daughter, Indu. Indu was married to one man, but her husband dies soon and she became widow. After the completion of his studies Appu returned to his home to fulfil his familial obligations, but he got the news that Bhavaniammal suffered a paralytic stroke. He rushed back to the village but she was out of danger now and she requested him to stay in the village and teach the children as there were no teachers to teach in the school. Finally Appu accepts the request of Bhavaniammal and, Appu opted to live in the same house where Indu lives and he confessed his love for Indu.

Thus human beings live in the socially created world and the social order becomes the cosmo-moral order. Though one does not choose one's parent, a person may still be faced with a situation involving choice between alternative modes of relating to them. If these choices are not made

wisely, they result in sufferings. Everybody who commits sins thus has to suffer in his own way.

10.9 Living and Dying

According to T.N.Madan the attitudes of a people to death and dying should be viewed in their totality, bringing out the inter-connectedness of belief, emotion and behaviour. Death in every religion including Hinduism is regarded as the divine wish. In Kashmir death is considered as the family affair, though it is not necessary that every members of the family if affected equally from it. Pandits in everyday conversation always says that one has to die one day. The pandits of Kashmir maintained that the ultimate and critical sign of a good life may be available in the manner a person attains his death. In other words when one lived his/her life according to the dharmic principles s/he is bound to attain a good death. The good death here means the death at a good place, a good and auspicious time, and the good physical state of the person at the time of his death. The best place to die for a householder is his own house, because as a householder the person performs his dharma/karma in his own house only. The good death is also one where a person dies in a astrologically good time. One should die in full consciousness of the event, with one's mind fixed on the supreme God or the divine spirit. Good death and the last words spoken by those who attain it, are remembered and talked about for edification for years.

Reflection and Action 10.2

Discuss the notions of living and dying among the Kashmiri Pandits. How are they unique? Write down your observations in your notebook.

A bad death is understood and explained as the result of bad karma of the previous life of the people. The notion of collective death is referred as *Pralaya* but pralaya is a rare event in the life of the pandits. Malefic spirits are held responsible for such type of occurrences. This is also attributed as the decline of dharma in the society. The rearrangement of the social relations that follows a death is different for men and women. A widow has to lead a life of a sufferer, and the man can remarry, widowers suffer from, none of the ritual and social disabilities that widows do, on the other hand a man has to hide his emotional feelings at the death of his wife, and if he expresses his sorrow openly he will be ridiculed, but the women have to display every kind of grief and sorrow.

Killing of any kind is completely prohibited in the pandits' society. Argument is that as nobody can create anything or the birth is given by God and he only can take it back. The killing of Brahmin is the most heinous crime and is called as *brahmahatya*, and it is equivalent to the killing of a cow.

There are lots of rituals involved after the death. The rituals are also prescribed for them at the time of death. The last moments of a pandit's life are accompanied by the reading of the Bhagwad Gita, which describes the imperishability of the soul. If water from the river Ganga is available, a few drops are poured into the mouth of the dying person. As soon as the death occurs, the event of the death is made public through loud weeping and wailing by women and the children. The weeping at the death is a kind of special one, though the weeping by the women in other occasions also happens. At this point of time the neighbours and kiths and kins assemble in the deads man's house. The visitors then try to control the mourners and arrange for cremation of the dead and they also arrange

for the feeding of the family, because no food is cooked in the deceased family for three to *twenty* days.

After the weeping, the body of the dead man is taken for the ritual bath with the recitation of the mantras by the priest. Then the body is taken for the burning process. In fact cremation offers the opportunity for release from transmigration. After the cremation the dead man is considered to live in the state of transition i.e, he is in the state of *preta* (ghost) for eleven days. During this time the various rituals are performed and food offerings are made to sustain the *preta*, for it is very dangerous. The rituals of the eleventh day is considered that the *preta* entered or transformed into the category of *pitr* (manes), therefore, it is a biannual affair to offer food to the dead on the death anniversary.

The post cremation rites are very complex as not everybody is entitled to get the status of the *mane*. If a person dies before becoming a parent s/ he not given the status of the *pitr*. Thus, in the relationship between the living and the dead, the notions of *pitr* and *punarjanma* (rebirth) negate the notion of death as the terminal event. On the other hand a good life and a good death frees oneself from the chain of birth-death-rebirth. Death is thus made bearable in the life of a pandit culture by it being treated as an opportunity for the individual soul to realise union with that from which it had got seperated i.e, *kaivalyam*. Thus, it is the help of various rituals through which a pandit is able to cope with the stress of the death. They conceptualise their death as something necessary for the fulfilment of the life cycle. Moreover, in pandit society death is not considered as a threat to or a sacrilege against the social order.

10.10 Conclusion

In the conceptualisation of Hinduism it is very clear that the Hindus are primarily concerned with the dharma which refers to what people do according to their dharmic doctrine. Madan writes that the distinction between the 'religious' and the 'secular', which is fundamental in western society and in the western thought, is not easily made in Indian society. Such a differentiation, and further elaboration of it (most notably between sacred and profane dichotomy), are a characteristic of the outsider's effort to understand Hindu society and this also entered in the mind of the modern Hindus and modern Indians, who is by definition an alienated person. Thus we can understand the Hindu ethos and culture in its own way and any deviations in interpretations can give an image of a distorted picture of this way of life. Today the challenges that Hinduism faces does not come from an alien religion but from the western ideals of secularism and the concept of western modernisation. Madan considers that the history of Hinduism constitute also the sociology of Hinduism.

From the above discussion it is also clear that the brahminical tradition is more or less similar everywhere i.e, in every part of the country. The notion of *papa* and *punya* is based on the Dharma and its adherence. Another point which is time and again came in the discussion that the life of the householder is of utmost importance and in order to attain renunciation one has to complete the life cycle according to *purusartha*. The Hindu always lives a life of a moral dilemma which is treated since very long in the Hindu literature, the dilemma is between renountcer and the enjoyer, between the self-control and power of enjoyment. For a Hindu thus, the moral awareness is very important and for it one has to lead a good life, the good life here means the consistent effort of self-improvement through attention to the proper dharmic life. The Hindu life tries to overcome the evils of the world, and it teaches not to fear death.

The birth and death are not separate but are recurrent event in a cosmo-moral process. The traditional base of Hinduism is thus interpreted in this work as the view of man-in the world as the good life in contrast with the life of a renouncer.

10.11 Further Reading

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Unit 11

Sudhir Kakar: Shamans, Mystics and Doctors

Contents

- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 The Concept of Healing
- 11.3 The Pir of Patteshah Dargah
- 11.4 Balaji Temple in Rajasthan
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- 11.7 Mystical Traditions: The Sant Mat of the Radhaswami Satsang
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Learning Objectives

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- describe the concept of healing;
- describe some real life mystics;
- outline tantra and tantric healing; and
- discuss ayurveda and society.

11.1 Introduction

Preamble: Cross-cultural studies of mental health were introduced by anthropologists in the middle of the twentieth century after Malinowski did his classic study of testing Freud's hypothesis on the Trobriand Islanders. However, very few psychologists in India actually went to test the psychoanalytical theories in the field and in this Sudhir Kakar is both a pioneer and a recognised scholar. His works have made use of the anthropological techniques of field- work along with the sociological insights of looking into textual traditions and comparative analysis comparing Neo-Freudian theories with non-western, in this case specifically Indian systems of healing.

He follows the post - modern traditions of not privileging western systems of knowledge above all others. Moving away from a positivistic stand he enters into a reflexive analysis where his own status as a western trained Indian psychoanalyst is often foregrounded. This book is both an analytical work as well as a story of Kakar's journey across India meeting healers of various traditions and he is careful to take into account the diversity of Indian life as he journey's from rural to tribal areas and into the modern cities.

The student would be benefited to look at this work as both sociological in content as well as an important methodological statement. The emphasis throughout is to keep ethical comments to a minimum and to privilege each system of knowledge equally. Thus to Kakar there is no essential difference between the tribal shaman and the modern psychiatrist. He is comfortable referring to the *pir baba* as a colleague, a fellow practitioner. This movement away from positivism to an eclectic phenomenological analysis is noteworthy as is the use of subjectivity as a tool of research.

11.2 The concept of Healing

The book opens with a dictionary meaning of the concept of healing that is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “to restore (a person etc.) from some evil condition or affection (as sin, grief, disrepair, unwholesomeness, danger, destruction), to save, purify, cleanse, repair, mend” (p.3). In the category of healers is included the *vaid*s of Hindu Ayurveda and Siddha systems and the *hakim* of the Islamic Unani tradition-plus astrologers, *sadhus*, herbalists, diviners, *matas*, *bhagwans* and a host of other practitioners. The concept of healing is thus firmly rooted in a tradition where healing is not a separate medical domain but falls within the mystical-spiritual sphere, a phenomenon not only widespread in India but in many non-western cultures. In fact even within the Judeo-Christian traditions beliefs in spirit possession and demonic invasion of the body were widespread till they were edged out by western systems of medicine and the hegemony of western scientific mode of thinking. In India during the colonial period the faith in western systems of medicine became deep rooted among elite sections many of which would have dismissed the path tread by Kakar as hocus-pocus (Channa 2004). Kakar seeks to reinstate some of these antiquated modes of thought with respect to health and healing and also provide them with respectability within the scientific mode of explanation by drawing parallels between the philosophy and techniques of traditional system and the modern psychoanalytic systems and medicine.

The Hindu system of thinking does not have the same view of the person as the western system of thought, where the person is seen as situated within the present and also viewed as bounded. In Hindu view the self is not situated in the present but linked to the cycle of Karma that stretches over many lives and so does the social order that extends much beyond the present to include both ancestors and the progeny to be. In other words how a person is, in terms of both mental and physical health is conditioned by the past births the Karma of the ancestors and what the person will do will affect the generations to be. The person is thus not to be viewed as an individual as in western society but as McKim Marriott has put it as a “dividual” composed of many parts. Since each of these parts is derived from various sources past and present therefore, the treatment needs to be holistic, taking care of many dimensions, many of which may have supernatural and mystic origins. Thus health is not a matter of simply what has happened to the body but how the person has derived his/her existence (parentage), how he or she has conducted himself and several other factors like family history, land where born and cultural practices that are observed. In other words healing is a term that needs to be understood much beyond its medical sense and health becomes a concept that encompasses the social, cultural and metaphysical aspects of a person's life, transcending the mere physical.

Kakar is concurrent in his view with Foucault (1965) who considered mental illness to be historically situated within the cultural definitions of particular times and places. Even anthropologists have for long drawn attention to

the fact that the very definition of madness is a social construct and psychoanalytic concepts vary across cultures finding their validity in the symbolic structures in which they are embedded. Thus a shaman who is highly respected in a tribal society because he has visions, may be treated like a schizophrenic with hallucinatory disorders in a modern culture. In fact in the initial stages many anthropologists and scholars including Freud were convinced that the shamans and mystics in non-western cultures were counterparts of neurotics and psychotics in western cultures. However, later it was realised that these people were quite normal and rational in their day-to-day lives but acted according to certain culturally prescribed scripts. Even the physiological transformations that some of them underwent like becoming oblivious to pain or able to perform extraordinary physical feats were a result of deep psychological conditioning some of which is dealt with by Kakar in this book. In fact he coins a term, "cultural psychology" to discuss the interface of culture and psychology.

He admits to a methodological bias in keeping with the reflexive approach of the book that as an Indian he was convinced that there must be some rationality in the Indian way of thinking. However, he does not fail to add that "A degree of alienation from one's culture, a deep exposure to other world-views and even a temporary period of living 'as others' may indeed be necessary for heightening one's perceptions about the culture and society one is born into" (p.9). In this way he is making insightful comments on what in sociology has long been recognised as the advantages and disadvantages of studying one's own culture and the plus and minus points of subjectivity and objectivity as standpoints of analysis. However, he realises that to make his work theoretically acceptable he cannot move away too much from mainstream theoretical approaches of psychoanalysis and he is aware that "the contradiction in simultaneously pursuing cultural relativity and psychological universalism is evident". But throughout this book this is what he does and now let us go into the case studies and their explanations as given in this work. In each case as we shall see there is an attempt to integrate the healer's method and approach within a framework of universalistic psychological theory.

11.3 The Pir of Patteshah Dargah

The Patteshah's dargah, in Delhi, is a small mosque built during the eighteenth century in memory of a sufi saint. The pir who is the object of this case study was at the time he was interviewed and visited by the author, a man of 87 years of age, sitting in a dingy room and having no material possessions worth the name. He subscribed to the ideal that the power that he had to cure people could only be used selflessly. He never demanded any money and since his clientele was of the very poor section of society, rarely got any material returns. However, he had a claim to being special as he was supposed to be born in a miraculous way. Stories of miraculous births have been regarded as claims to special powers in almost all cultures across the world. The descriptions we get of the *pir* does not convey any sense of an extraordinary personality or demeanour that would show that he could impress people by his special personal qualities. A toothless old man in shabby clothes sitting in a dirty unkempt room is what we get to see. Yet the *pir* had a reputation for miraculous cures.

Box 11.1: The Pir's Explanation

The explanations given by the *pir* for most ailments was invasion of the body by some being like a *jinn* which has been converted to a *bala*

The *jinn*, to begin with, are internal to the personhood of every one. It is that part of the self that is dark and covert and is killed by the angels at the time of death. If however for some reason the *jinn* is not destroyed it turns into a *bala* and tries to find a host body to invade. In trying to find some common grounds between the psychological and demonological frameworks Kakar is led to observe that the *jinn*s belong to that covered part of human nature psychoanalysts call the id. It is amoral and primal to which unconscious and socially stigmatised fantasies and desires can be traced. Thus the *bala* are nothing but certain core fantasies of men and women that provoke strong anxieties in the Indian cultural setting. Here the link between psychological anxieties and culture is clear in that only those things that are culturally forbidden or repressed come out in unconscious fantasies. For example, a core fantasy according to Kakar in the Indian culture is of a female demon personifying forbidden female sexuality that sucks and drains even the most powerful men to death. Thus, we have the story of a wrestler who is killed by a female demon who sucks out his life energy. Thus, a good female in Indian culture is not supposed to be overtly sexual yet men have unconscious desires to possess such a woman. It is this forbidden, desire that takes the form of a *chudail* or female ogre.

There are not one kind of healers even within the traditional system thus the mosque that is home to the *pir* also has other specialists like the *hakim* who sits outside under the shade of a tree. The difference between the *hakim* and the *pir* is that between a technician and a priest. The *hakim* gives medicines and considers all *balas* and supernatural beings to be irrational fantasies.

The major requirements of the traditional forms of healing is that the healer is not simply any person who dispenses medicines but a special person who is different from others not simply by having more knowledge and skills but by being transformed from inside. He is a superior moral and ethical being and his powers are not acquired from outside but come from inside. He possesses what is called *Ilm-ul-ruhani* or soul knowledge. The *pirs* are higher than the *sayanas* who have skill but not the superior soul-force of the sacred specialists. The *pirs* and *babas* do not cure by what knowledge they possess but by acting as a conduit for the divinity and it is the divine force that does the actual healing. Thus to be a *pir* a man must develop certain virtues of character, some one whose inner transformation has made him fit to convey the divine healing touch to the sufferer. It is because of this perception that the *pir* does not demand any money for he perceives the healing to be done by God. If the patient gives anything it is only as an offering to Allah or perhaps as a token to take care of the worldly needs of the *pir*.

However, as an analyst what is of most importance to the author and to the readers is how the cure is actually accomplished, for certainly if so many people persist in coming to a healer there has to be a certain number of satisfied patients.

At one level, mostly unconscious the patient evaluates the healer as to the extent to which the healer conforms to an ideal healer in the patient's mind. Thus even if the *pir* is unkempt, dirty and poor, he may project himself as a person of divinity by these very features. Thus, the patient may evaluate him as being other-worldly, pious and having sacred powers, as having inner powers for the very reason that he does not have any material possessions and overt signs of prosperity. These would make him appear holy and also trustworthy in the eyes of poor people.

Moreover, they come with a heightened expectation of getting cured by the social awareness of other cured patients and also stories and folklore that support the miraculous nature of particular healer. As Kakar puts it “The sharing of the demonological framework by the whole culture, where the patient, his relatives and friends are all united on the etiology of the illness and the means of curing it, certainly makes the process of therapy more efficient” (p42). Thus one may explain an inexplicable cure by the faith of the patient that a cure is forthcoming and the sharing of this view by most significant others in her social universe that creates a positive predisposition to getting cured.

Moreover, on the technical side the healers have positive ways of dealing with the psychological ailments. Thus *pir baba* would ask every patient about their dreams and this would open the way for many unconscious emotions and repressions to surface. Both Hinduism and Islam believe in dream symbolism and the interpretations of the *pir* quite often agreed with that of professional psychotherapists. Even the kind of cures like the giving of holy water for cleansing of the ‘insides’ agreed with psychoanalytic interpretation of water as a symbolic cleansing agent.

11.4 Balaji Temple in Rajasthan

From a mosque in Delhi we now move to a temple in Rajasthan in a small town Bharatpur, where a rather nondescript temple is situated whose claim to fame is however phenomenal as it is believed that the god Balaji or Hanuman who is enshrined therein can cure anything from invasion by *bhuta-preta*, madness, epilepsy and barrenness. The mythology of this temple narrates that Balaji sits here in the lap of his mother Anjana, therefore, evoking maternal images of care and healing. Moreover, Balaji is not alone in his abode, he is joined by two other deities namely, Preta - Raja or Dharma - Raja, the other name for the god of death and Mahakal Bhairava who is an incarnation of Shiva. While mythology attributes healing powers to Balaji, Mahakal Bhairava is in control of the demons and *bhuta-preta* and the god of death presides over them all. It is Dharma Raja that keeps an account of the good and bad deeds and doles out punishment accordingly. It is believed that those who die untimely deaths are converted into *bhuta-preta* and they trouble the living as they themselves are tormented by their unfulfilled desires. However, as we shall see these *bhuta-preta* are nothing but the unfulfilled desires of the living that torment them from the unconscious level of their psyche.

The description given of the temple makes it out to be an unusual place full of patients and their relatives who live on the premises for long periods of time. The most unusual behaviours are ignored and taken for granted. A significant feature is the presence of large number of women mostly young who exhibit signs of hysterical behaviour. It is the women who have been especially selected for analysis as they represent according to the author “accumulated and repressed rage of rural women”.

There is the example of the young girl Shakun, nineteen years of age, who came from a small town in Bihar. She had been possessed by a *bhuta* since she was sixteen years of age. The *bhuta* in question was the unsatisfied spirit of her aunt, the wife of her father’s elder brother. She had committed suicide after being caught red handed by her husband in a compromising position with an outsider. It was disclosed that this woman in question was of a loose moral character having illicit sexual liaisons frequently but her husband was quite unaware of them till he caught her. The girl Shakun was only three and a half years old at that time. According to her family members she was too young to remember the incident but

it was the unsatisfied *bhuta* of the aunt that invaded her young body when she became sixteen years of age.

Box 11.2: Aspects of Possession

However, Kakar analyses this case as typical of projection of unconscious and unsatisfied desires of a girl in a conservative society; “Shakun’s *bhuta* is, then a figure of her unconscious, an iconic representation (in the form of her aunt) of the girl’s own sexual (even homosexual) wishes”. According to the analyst at three and a half she was not too young to have any memories of events that must have been very dramatic when that happened. Moreover, as she grew up she must have heard the story repeated many times by members of the family and she must have formed an image of the aunt as representing all that was sinful. When her own body ripened she must have been troubled by the emerging sexuality and the desires that would not go away although in her cultural set up she was made to believe that they were sinful. It would be such tensions in her unconscious mind that became projected on to the image of her aunt and led to her ‘possession’.

The case of Asha can be analysed as typical where as an only daughter she had a too close emotional relationship with her father. The father, who was extremely indulgent and loving even to the extent of fondling her till she was quite old, was very strict about her sexuality. She was punished for her attraction towards a boy when fifteen years of age and even later when she fell in love at a later age was forcibly married off to the younger brother of the same man. The situation then became even worse for her as her lover, who then became her brother-in-law refused to give up the relationship and forced his advances on her, increasing her sense of guilt.

According to Kakar Asha’s case is typical of the hysterical reaction of women who are torn between love and duty. Such instances were quite common among girls in European bourgeoisie society in the late nineteenth century when Freud was practicing psychoanalysis in Vienna. Thus, the unconscious hostility she may have felt towards her father for aborting her first love affair and in not letting her marry her lover later in life was converted to feelings of guilt as she was not supposed to have such feelings towards a very loving father. They then became demons that tormented her. Her stomach-aches could be attributed to her unfulfilled wish to have a baby. It is significant that they were triggered off when she went to visit her pregnant sister-in-law. The unconscious desire to kill the baby would have been converted to another demon thus transferring the guilt on to it. Thus, it was not her but the demon that wanted to destroy the baby. Even her enormous craving for food is translated in psychoanalysis to unfulfilled desires that when they are not satisfied in the right manner are translated into hunger. Thus, people suffering from depression often tend to put on weight as their desires are translated into desire for food.

The interesting difference between the patients at Balaji temple and the middle class Europeans was that although there was great similarity in the hysterical symptoms, the kind of vivid imagery that the patients brought to their *bhuta* in India is completely missing in the western counterparts. The differences are clearly of culture. The Indians are exposed to vivid visual images of gods, goddesses, demons and many mythological beings iconographically represented in many ways and forms that are missing in the less colourful world of the Europeans.

Again as in the previous case, culture plays an immense role in the curing process. The collective efforts that go on in the temple, the public declarations or *peshis*, that always take place before a crowd of people, the participation of every one present in whatever is going on lends a validity as well as a sense of reality to the healing process. The patient's expectations are heightened as a large number of people contribute towards its validity. The demons are publicly exposed and there is visible relief of the patients who are thus able to get rid of their hidden desires and feelings in a publicly approved manner.

The nights that are spent on the terraces when meetings go on between patients and their relatives with each other, where each case is discussed thread bare, compared and also emotional support provided by the people to each other is in itself a part of the healing. The patients get a lot of support from the 'when every one says it will be done it will be done' attitude. Moreover, the complete acceptance given to the phenomenon of *bhuta* and possession gives moral support to the patients who are never made to feel that there is anything wrong with them rather every thing is attributed to the demons.

The male patients usually suffer from the apprehensions of taking on responsibilities and a feeling of being alone. They show symptoms of shying away from growing up into responsible adults and may suffer breakdowns when asked to work or after getting married. Kakar sums it up by saying that "whereas powerlessness is the social denominator of female hysteria – the demands of autonomous functioning and anxiety at the prospect of individuation seem to be the social correlates of male hysteria". In India the prospect of separation from the mother also haunts men as the mother son relationship is unusually close.

11.5 The Oraons

The Oraons are a tribe in the Chota Nagpur plateau of eastern India. They were a forest dwelling tribe till the deforestation process pushed the forest away from most of their dwellings. Today they practice some rudimentary agriculture that barely suffices for their subsistence needs. However, they still have considerable reverence for nature and every Oraon village has its sacred grove of trees and sacred pools and streams that are intrinsically connected with the deities and the spirits of the ancestors. The Oraon have a free and easy way of life and do not suffer from sexual suppressions and repressions usually found among the Hindus. They have the *dhumkuria*, or youth dormitory that is an important education institution where a boy is sent when he is around 8 years of age and he is given instructions in folklore, dance, music and other tribal traditions till he is old enough to get married and take up adult duties.

Reflection and Action 11.1

What is the Shaman of the Oraons called. In what does he specialise?
Discuss and note down.

The shaman is locally known as Ayata or *bhagat* and is a true specialist in that he can distinguish between two kinds of mental illnesses. One is known as *apropi* that is caused by excessive worrying, anxiety or some other physical illness, in short the kind of diagnosis that a medical doctor might do. The other kind is closer to the demonic possession theory and is known as *shaitani* disorders attributed to demonic spirits. The Ayata is also able to recognise ailments that need medical treatment like stomach

worms and ulcers. In that case he advises the patient to get medical help and not waste time and money in demonic cures.

Box 11.3: Treatment for Possession

The Ayata come close to the psychoanalyst when they locate the origins of envy to early childhood. One may compare their theory to that of Melanie Klein that says the first stir of envy occurs in infants when they become aware of the breast as a source of life and all good experience and feel envious that they are not the source of such perfection. Thus, the wisdom of the tribal shamans parallels that of modern day scientists in many ways.

The treatment for *shaitani* possession is to induce the patient to go into a *trance* from where the shaman is able to converse with the invading spirit. Thereafter once the shaman is convinced about what the demon wants he thinks up ways and means to get rid of it. One way is to lure the demon into a bird (chicken or pigeon) that is well fed and looked after for about six months to ensure that he demon does not leave. Then it is killed and fed to a number of people ensuring its destruction.

Raymond Prince, reviewing a number of studies from different parts of the world has suggested that the altered states of consciousness that occurs in a state of possession when another ego seems to take over may be in itself a therapeutic agent. Thus, during the possession ritual the ego is dissolved and a new, more adoptive ego may emerge. There are here two kinds of overt possessions; one of the shaman which is of a presiding deity and that of the patient, by the demon. It is in the latter's case that ego adjustment takes place for the shaman it a routine matter.

The anxieties from which the tribes suffer are more from factors caused by external agents than their own social norms. Thus deforestation, the erosion of the traditional ways of life, forced changes in their life style and poverty are some of the reasons for depression and neurosis among them. In fact their free and easy life style is the object of covert envy by their Hindu neighbours.

11.6 The Lamas of Macleodganj

The lamas are Buddhists unlike the Hindus and Animists we have discussed so far. Yet they too practice shamanism like the tribes and believe in possession rituals. These lamas came with the Dalai Lama when he fled from Tibet and took shelter in Dharamshala. Since then they are having a considerable influence among the local population irrespective of them being Buddhists or Hindus or Animists. There are three kinds of practitioners among the lamas, the mystics, the doctors who practice the ancient art of Tibetan medicines and the shamans who enter into possessions.

The Tibetan view however, is different from the view of demonic possession of the Hindus. To the Buddhists all existence is a mirage of the mind and the absolute reality can be attained only when the cobwebs covering this reality, that we assume is the real world but which is actually *maya*, is cleared. Within this world-view, both physical and mental illness is caused by a fault of the mind, a distortion of perception. A thorough cleaning of the mental and emotional world is necessary for the cure of every type of illness. However, in their actual practice of illness the lamas are confronted with patients who would want instant cure and would not be comforted if

told that this was all illusory. So a healer identifies mainly four immediate causes for any illness, the time of the year, food, habit and behaviour and the three hundred and sixty spirits that crowd the environment. The Tibetan system makes no essential causative difference between mental and physical diseases that are traced to the same origins. Diagnosis usually involves dream analysis, a method popular across most cultures. Other symptoms like a patient's eye movements are also helpful in diagnosing the exact spirit that is invading. However, not all symptoms are traced to spirit invasion and emotional disturbance, grief etc. are also seen as causative of mental disturbances as in modern systems of medicines. Bad times, ill karma and simply bad luck may also be the reasons for ill health and cures vary from changing a person's name to hanging of prayer flags.

Levi-Strauss, the famous anthropologist, has suggested that there is a parallel between the cure brought about by the shaman and that affected by the psychoanalyst. In the case of psycho-therapy the patient is healed by regaining his/her individual myth, related to life history, for example, resolution of the oedipal complex. In case of shamanism the cure is related to the social myth, like that of existence of *bhuta*. However, as Kakar points out even in case of shamanism a successful shamanic ritual is not merely the healing operation of a collective myth subscribed to by the community but also attends to the individual elements of the patient's sickness. For example, the collective may draw upon the concept of Karma but its individual manifestations are rooted in an individual's life history. Moreover, the shaman may draw upon the most frequently occurring mishaps in a culture, often that are a result of culturally imposed inhibitions and restrictions, like on women's sexuality among upper caste Hindus and Muslims, to create collective myths. Thus the separation between the social and the individual is only a matter of degree for individuals live in society and are guided and restricted by its norms.

11.7 Mystical Traditions: The Sant Mat of the Radhaswami Satsang

Radhaswami satsang of the Beas group is an extremely popular movement in northern India and is based upon the *guru shishya* tradition and the need for a living guru to lead one to salvation. The Radhaswami worldview tells that the path to salvation lies in *surat shabd yoga* where one is linked to the celestial sound emanating from the highest region of creation, the abode of the Supreme being.

The Radhaswami satsang makes the most of the notion of the collective in creating an atmosphere of catharsis as thousands of followers sit in unison and chant in the praise of their guru. Kakar, who is a participant observer in the true sense of the word writes. "To anyone sitting within the vast belly of the crowd, a choir of fifty thousand feels like an elemental sound of nature —. Here I am deliberately emphasizing my subjective experience of the Satsang, on this day as on the following days and the fantasies that bubble up to the fore of consciousness as one sits esconced in the warmth closeness of thousands of bodies"— further "Distance and differences - of status, age and sex-disappear in an exhilarating feeling (temporary to be sure) that individual boundaries can indeed be transcended and were perhaps illusory in the first place".

However, the author does not think it fit to refer to the *satsangis* as a society or as a community, he prefers to say that they seemed to be living in a communion, referring perhaps to the temporary and situation nature of the brotherhood and communication between the believers.

How does healing take place in such a situation? Taking the example of a young man who saw the face of the *baba* in his dream and came looking for him it can be said that this vision of an old bearded man (that is how the *baba* looks) may be linked to the search for and yearning for a father figure at the time of deep personal crises. A Jungian analysis may look for the archetypical vision of the 'Old wise Man' as drawn from the collective unconscious. As a part of therapy the *sasangis* tried more and more to identify with the guru and in the process to forcefully project all positive qualities that lay within them. Thus, in psychoanalytic terms one may look for an explanation in the process of idealisation and identification. Thus, as each follower strives to follow the path of *sadhna* laid down by the guru and which involves many acts of self-purification like giving up eating of non-vegetarian food, consumption of alcohol, telling lies etc. he or she comes closer to this identification as the guru is upheld as the perfect state to be in. As people progress further and further in the path of *sadhna* the guru, Maharaj ji becomes the fount of omniscience and omnipotence and the supposed power of the guru is absorbed into one's self. It is this sense of power and internal purification that comes with greater and greater identification that leads to healing of the inner self.

11.8 Tantra and Tantric Healing

Tantric practices are part of Hinduism yet they are regarded not quite in the line of conservative Hindu thinking, in fact they go against most of the moral values and beliefs of what is regarded as mainstream Hindu traditions. Even geographically speaking Bengal, Assam, Kerala and Kashmir, where Tantric practices and cults were historically located are socially and politically on the boundaries of mainstream Hindu society.

Because it deals with the forbidden things, Tantrism is closest to a psychoanalyst. There is similarity in the manner in which both look at the emancipation of the self. In the case of psychoanalysis, healing involves the "enlightenment" that is not only individual but also societal in nature in that the person must be acceptable to society in order to be considered, 'normal' and in case of Tantra, a 'liberation' not only in the mystical sense but one that is emancipative even in the context of one's life history and situation. Both psychoanalysis and Tantrism look upon healing involving a recognition and even celebration of human sensual nature.

In fact Tantra concurs with psychoanalysis in its diagnosis of human mental diseases. Leaving aside the experience of birth of which we have very little knowledge, most of the psychic pain experienced by the ego on its path towards development are of separation and differentiation. The very process of realisation by the infant that it is separate from its mother, especially from her breast is a painful process and so is its realisation of gender. To begin with infants have no notion of being differentiated but once they realise that they can only be one, that is either male or female, another kind of pain takes over. Freud has discussed these aspects in great details in his theories of the development of the ego when the infant Narcissus painfully separates a 'me' from a 'non-me' in the "prehistoric phase" of human psyche that extends from birth to three years of age.

Box 11.4: Tantra and Psychoanalysis

Just like psychoanalysis that roots much of mental problems to the unconscious trauma of assuming a gendered identity, Tantra too looks upon sexual differences as a major problem of human life. Tantra

claims that wholeness and spiritual liberation can only be achieved if a person gives up his/her gender identity and dissolves his/her self into an undifferentiated bisexuality. Unlike other belief systems Tantra refers to sexuality on both symbolic and concrete physical ways. For the male Tantric a major part of his spiritual experience is to apprehend and experience the feminine sexual experience within himself and the reverse is required of the female Tantric. Tantrism is in essence free of gender bias and regards men and women equally. In essence it invokes the breaking of all taboos, thus sexual experience with one's mother, sister and daughter is one of the highest attainments of spiritual liberation. In actuality most schools of Tantra requires the Tantric to perform all his sexual practices with his wife and the images of the mother, sister and daughter are invoked in the wife herself. Thus Kakar analyses this "As post-Freudians, we know the child's unconscious incestuous fantasies, consequent to the momentous discovery of gender identity, provokes major anxieties which the child's immature ego copes with by building defensive structures in the psyche. Tantric practice not unlike psychoanalysis, seeks to resurrect the elemental fantasies around incest" (p.159). Not only Freud but Jung too would have been at home with Tantric practices as according to Jungian analysis one might say that Tantric practices bring to a conscious level the "inherited collective image of the Woman which exists in every man's unconscious and through which he 'knows' women".

A Freudian analysis is aptly suitable for Tantrism for such an analysis would be sensitive to the developmental aspects of bisexuality and its cultural variations. However, Kakar does not believe that one should either go for psychological reductionism or for thoroughgoing cultural relativism, but should take a middle path testing the psychological theories in a cross cultural framework.

According to Stoller (1968) masculinity in men is not a naturally occurring state and some rudiment of femininity is there from the beginning as a result of the primary identification with the mother that is common to all infants. Only in the developmental process the realisation comes that one is only of one sex and this remains as a primary anxiety due to differentiation. However, the process of differentiation takes different forms in various cultures and in India the mother son bond is especially long and enduring as well as among the most intense known in any culture. This memory remains latent in the unconscious mind of the Indian man and influences adult personality. However, in those men where the early experience with the mother is of hostility it comes out as aggression towards women in later life and masculinity is not tempered by any feminine qualities of nurturance. The ideal Indian man is however, not devoid of nurturing qualities and as we had seen in the temple of Balaji, the myth situates Balaji in the lap of his mother. Bisexuality is found in many Indian myths such as that of Shiva as *ardhanarishwar* and of Vishnu taking on the garb of a woman; holy men such as Rama Krishna Paramhansa often manifest the feminine qualities.

Apart from psychological anxieties that are resolved perhaps by the Tantric rites themselves, overtly the system also has an explanation for ill-health. The Tantric view of the body divides it into *chakras* that are situated from the base of the spine to the top of the head. The life energy (*kundalini*) rises from the base to the top of the head as the person reaches enlightenment. Ill health is attributed to the disturbances in the *chakras*. And why such disturbances are created? They are created because of undigested Karmas. In the Hindu metaphysics especially in Tantrism,

there is no concept of good and bad but by undigested is meant those Karmas that are not befitting to the lifestyle or situation of a person. When the disturbances become too pronounced a *bhuta* is generated. Thus like psychoanalysis Tantrism also believes that the *bhuta* or demons are produced inside us and are not invasions from outside. Thus the demons within us are the uncontrolled instincts. The Indian *bhuta* can be both good (obedient) or evil (disobedient). Thus, there are four steps to becoming ill. The first is undigested karma that leads to *chakra* malfunctioning, that when intense generates *bhuta* that lead ultimately to mental illness. A Tantric healer must “know” the *chakras*, especially his own and also be a master of demonology or *bhuta-vidya*. Thus we see that to become a Tantric one must successfully overcome one’s own unconscious anxieties that can be attained by the practices prescribed. Only thereafter a person gains qualification to get rid of the anxieties, manifested as *bhuta* of the mentally ill.

As an example of a practicing Tantric although of a variety quite different from what is normally regarded as one, Kakar takes the example of Nirmala Devi, famed to be able raise the *kundalini* in no time at all.

11.9 The Cult of Mataji: Nirmala Devi

Mataji can only be understood as against her background, that of a former medical student and also belonging to a Christian family. Although she believes in the basic tenets of Tantrism, namely, the *kundalini* and the *chakras*, she is critical of the practices of the Tantrics that are sinful according to her Christian upbringing. She combines Hatha -yoga and Tantrism to practice healing.

Here one must again go back to the question of privileging a particular point of view over others. In the Indian system the correctness of something is judged not by any external system of providing proof but by the inner experiential reality of any one who has attained a degree of self- realisation to perceive the truth.

The followers of the guru or Mata or whatever else the realised person is known as accept the truth because the person, the teacher or master in front of them tells them it is true. No other proof except tradition and the word of the teacher is required. Thus, the weight of tradition, of the ‘inner vision’ is acceptable over and above the requirement of empirical proof.

Reflection and Action 11.2

How is Mataji different from an Oraon Priest. Give reasons for your answer and put it in your notebook.

Thus, when Mataji preaches her version of the human existence to her disciples it is taken as the truth unquestioningly. The imagery of the physiology of the human body locates the psychic energies at various parts of the body, the bulk of it at the base of the spine, the *sushumna*. The human infant that is born of the universal consciousness is cut off at birth from the source by the severance of the umbilical cord. The naval then separates the individual consciousness from its universal roots. It is thus a very important center in Hindu vision of the body. The ego and the super ego are located at the right and the left side of the brain and as they develop during the lifetime of the individual, the consciousness is cut off from the super consciousness. In other words as one develops the

sense of "I", one is moving away from the source of consciousness. Liberation would mean a realisation of the link to the super consciousness and a movement back to it. The left side or the super-ego is home to the demons, emotions, passions and the right side, the ego, is thinking, planning, organising etc. (Here one must remember that Mataji's version of the ego and super ego are quite different from the psychoanalytic concepts). In most people the psychic energies oscillate between the left and the right side. Ideally they should settle down in the middle, at the center of the forehead, where they bring peace and tranquility. There movement die this or that side provokes the energies characteristic of that side. Thus, too much swing to the left side brings bout mental illness. Healing consists of balancing and cleaning of the channels and the removal of the constrictions that affect the *chakras* is the first step towards getting well. Ultimately self-realisation of the movement upwards of the *sushumna* to the top of the head, brings healing.

Any one who has become Mataji's follower and has received self-realisation is simultaneously credited with the potential of becoming a healer. The person who becomes a true follower develops an ability to sense the vibrations emanating from others as well as the status of their charkas and channels. From the point of view of modern medicine the healer's use of his own emotional reactions to the patient as a means of diagnosis is not completely ruled out, for one does hear of intuitive reactions of doctors to the status the patient's health.

However, it is still left for us to understand the basis of the faith and the cures that may actually take place by such methods. What is more important to understand is that even if the cures do not occur the faith is not shaken. Thus, as Paul Watzlawick and Leon Festiner among others have pointed out, once a tentative explanation has taken hold of our mind it is difficult to dislodge it. Even if we receive information to the contrary what happens is that further explanations are built up to save the earlier information. Thus, the explanation itself can not be dislodged or refuted and on the contrary there is distortion of reality to fit the explanation as to give up what we hold dear and may have been acquired ate considerable emotional expense might prove too traumatic.

Thus, the belief in the powers of a Mata, or a guru may itself have considerable therapeutic power and the followers make such heavy emotional investments that they would rather close their eyes to reality than give up the comfort of believing. And quite often it is this trust and faith that actually may bring about a cure.

Thus, in psychological terms the healing power lies primarily in the patient's mind. Thus, as Kakar explains, the miracle lies in the power of the mind to influence the physiological processes of the body. Thus at the time of possession, people can do miraculous feats that they would never in normal times even think of. It is very difficult to explain why hot iron does not burn or piercing the flesh does not produce pain or bleeding.

The faith cures can also be explained in psychoanalytic terms as the "rebirth" of the patient through the various rituals where at the same time he is giving birth to a new set of parents, the guru. Thus, this new parent, mother or father will heal the wounds inflicted by the original parents and "free him from the burden of his life history".

11.10 Indian Medicine: Ayurveda

Like Hinduism, Ayurveda is believed to be something that has always existed, having no beginning or end and springing from the laws of nature

itself. The concept of the person in Ayurveda is a holistic one where physical, psychological, social and metaphysical aspects are all given equal importance in defining what a person is. Thus the person is seen as a microcosm of the entire cosmos. All that exists outside in the universe, is contained within the person. This is reflected in the Pancha-Bhuta theory where a person is composed of the five elements, fire, water, earth, air and *akash* (ether). In the same theory it is believed that to have good health there must be balance between the three humors, wind, bile and phlegm. In other words there is an appropriate sense of harmony between the body and the universe and all the elements that compose it for the body is not seen as separate but as continuous with the nature, the universe and the divinity.

Thus ill health is viewed as a range of "cultural diseases" where a person falls ill because of his conviction that he has lost too much of a body fluid, leading to an imbalance in the body. Thus any disturbance in the balance of the humors would manifest itself in causing both physiological and mental ill health. In this way Ayurveda too makes little difference in the causation of illnesses, treating mind and body as equivalent.

Thus according to the Guruji, taken as case study by Kakar for his study of Ayurveda, the struggle against disease is a moral struggle, not only against illness but also against all those who cause this imbalance to occur.

In his observances of treatment done by the Guruji, Kakar observed that he considered himself solely responsible for the patient and not for his family members or any else. And here Guruji follows the tradition set by Freud, in that he too considered himself as solely devoted to the treatment of his patient and having no obligation either to the family or society at large.

Since Ayurveda is concerned with balance, food is a very important factor of both diagnosing of disease and of its cure; for a person is what she eats. Psychoanalytically this heightened concern with eating and defeating points to a cultural prominence of "oral fantasy".

11.11 Conclusion

In this book the author has journeyed through a very wide range of healing practices available in India focusing on both the key practitioners and the philosophy regarding the causation and prognosis of ill health. A very important theoretical assumption that underlies the entire work and which is very relevant for the student to understand is the way in which cross cultural healing practices have been approached. For many practitioners of medicine as well as qualified psychoanalysts, the truth has always been ascertained and reachable only by the methodology and paradigms of western science. What ever lies beyond has been condemned as superstition or plain deception. This book has been written to specifically counter the condemnation of the mystical world on "social and historical grounds" and the ethnocentrism and sense of superiority of the west.

Kakar specifically puts forward his views on knowledge and recognises that there are four levels of knowledge; commonsense, rational knowledge of the scientist, the imaginative knowledge of the artist and the spiritual knowledge of the mystic. All four have their relevance and none is to be discounted.

Healing of a psychological kind has to do a lot with what both spirituality and psychoanalysis recognise as liberation of the mind to a pure and

balanced state. In traditional Hinduism this liberation is seen as primarily an inner state of mind. It involves the increase in the capacity to experience different inner states but the outer practices are limited and follow traditional stereotypical behaviour. Thus liberation is strictly of an other-worldly kind while this-worldly affairs remain confined within a more or less static model of behaviour.

The west believes that the inner consciousness defined in terms of a rational, waking sense of self, remains constant. Liberation is to be achieved by increasing the potential to act in the outer world and by increasing choices. Expansions of the inner realm are dismissed as irrational and even a sign of mental illness. One may recall for example that non-western shamans and mystics had often been designated as neurotics or psychotics by western thinkers.

Healing in India is also seen as something that belongs to the collective and not to the individual. In India the patients are always surrounded by relatives and well-wishers and this is seen as part of a therapeutic process. Under the western system of medicine such collectives are viewed as an intrusion into the privacy of the patient and as something that may be actually detrimental to the patient's health. But as Kakar has shown in the case of the Balaji temple, collective action actually informs the patient that he/she is part of a larger whole and the problems are not only his/hers but are shared by the larger group. Active communication between patient's and the relatives, the cultural support given to such beliefs as spirit possession go a long way towards providing a positive frame of mind and a feeling of being absolved of guilt that restores the ego to a more adaptive stage.

Social support and cultural translation of diseases within an acceptable framework provide real therapeutic support and in many cases the patient is restored to a normal life. For example if the patient believes that his/her condition is not as a result of anything wrong with his/her physiology but only because of illegal possession by a evil spirit, then the anxieties are displaced on to this negative figure and when it is believed that this spirit has left the body, the patient believes and is actually restored to mental health by this belief that the negative forces have left. Many times the negative figures are culturally negative too, for example, the *bhuta* are often believed to be that of muslims, therefore, the irrational fantasies and urges are not that of the patient but of this culturally negative category of person. The psychoanalytic concept of displacement is supported and made effective by social and cultural means.

Thus society and culture provide what even in western system can be defined as a sign of mental health, namely a balance between inner needs and the outer reality. Since needs are defined in cultural terms most normal individuals are brought up or socialised to be fit members of their own society. However, under special life historical situations the persons may not be able to cope with the tensions between their inner sub-conscious urges and the demand of society. Sometimes the social demands may go beyond human levels of tolerance as is often seen in the case of women in conservative societies. Here the cultural mechanism comes in to provide an outlet. Thus, possession by a *bhuta* enables the patient give vent to those inner feelings that can never be expressed by her in normal life; thus, an otherwise demure woman may speak in filthy language and abuse her husband or even engage in overt sexual behaviour, thus providing cathartic relief to the ego, but at the same time is culturally absolved of all the consequences of her action as these are attributed not to her but to the invading demon.

Thus society and culture play important role in healing and mental health and this has been recognised under the concept of cultural psychology of which this book provides a very good analysis.

11.12 Further Reading

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