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# UNIT 28 LIFE CYCLE RITUALS-I : BIRTH AND MARRIAGE

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## 28.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you have read the unit you should be able to

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

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## 28.1 INTRODUCTION

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

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## 28.2 ASPECTS OF RITUAL

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

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

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

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

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

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### 28.3 FUNCTIONS OF RITUALS

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

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

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

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

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

### Check Your Progress 1

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

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## 28.4 BIRTH AND RELATED RITES

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

### 28.4.1 Hindu Birth Rites

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

### 28.4.2 Syrian Christian Birth Rites

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

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

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

#### Activity 1

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

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

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

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

### 28.4.3 Sikh Rites of Birth

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

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

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

#### Box 28.01

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

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

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

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

#### 28.4.4 Korku Birth Rites

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Check Your Progress 2

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

## 28.5 MARRIAGE RITES

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

### 28.5.1 Marriage Rites Among Hindus

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 28.5.2 Marriage Rites Among Syrian Christians

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

### Activity 2

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

### 28.5.3 Marriage Rites Among Sikhs

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

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

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

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

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

### Check Your Progress 3

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

a) .....

b) .....

c) .....

d) .....

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

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

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

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

### 28.5.4 Marriage Rites Among the Korkus

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

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

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

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

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

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

#### Box 28.02

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## 28.6 LET US SUM UP

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

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## 28.7 FURTHER READINGS

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

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

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## 28.8 KEY WORDS

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

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## 28.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

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

### Check Your Progress 2

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

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i)
  - a) Worship of Ganesh
  - b) Ancestor and Goddess Working
  - c) Kanyadaan
  - d) Saptapadi
  
- ii) Among the Sikhs *Guru Granth Sahib* occupies a supreme position. The couple has to bow before it and later go round it clockwise four times as hymns of Guru Ram Das are sung. Only then is the marriage considered solemnized.



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## UNIT 29 LIFE CYCLE RITUAL-II: DEATH

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### Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 The Idea of Death
- 29.3 Hindu Funeral Rites
  - 29.3.1 The Bier of the Corpse
  - 29.3.2 The Funeral Procession
  - 29.3.3 Collection of Bones
- 29.4 Syrian Christian Death Rituals
  - 29.4.1 Procession of Graveyard
  - 29.4.2 The Purification Ceremony
- 29.5 Sikh Death Rituals
  - 29.5.1 Cremation, A Family Affair
  - 29.5.2 Karah Prasad
- 29.6 Death and Funeral Among the Korkus
  - 29.6.1 The Funeral Procession
  - 29.6.2 Post Funeral Customs
  - 29.6.3 The Memorial Feasts
- 29.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.8 Key Words
- 29.9 Further Readings
- 29.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 29.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying the following unit you should be able to

- describe Hindu death rituals
- discuss Syrian Christian death rituals
- explain Sikh death rituals
- describe death rituals of the Korku
- discuss some approaches to ritual.

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### 29.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we will describe and analyse the rituals of death in four communities. These are the Hindus, Syrian Christians, Sikhs and the Korku tribals. Before proceeding further it is advisable you to go over Section 28.2 of Unit 28, *Life-Cycle Rituals-I: Birth and Marriage*. This section discusses aspects of ritual. You should then read Section 28.3 which is Saraswati's *Functions of Ritual*. These are important to an understanding of this unit (Unit 29). We point out here that birth, marriage, and death are integrally related. The form part of a whole. This whole process can be of two types

- i) cyclical
- ii) linear

In the case of a cyclical process we find as in the case of Hinduism, that there is no belief in the permanent cessation of life. Birth leads to marriage, old age and then death. This is followed by birth again. The soul, which is vital to life and living simply gets a new body to inhabit. In many tribes too of which the Todas and

Korkus are good examples there are similar beliefs. This is often held to be traceable to their Hinduization but it is not necessarily so. Tribes can have these beliefs without being accused of borrowing them from Hinduism. Thus reincarnation and *Samsara* make our study of ritual of Hinduism into one that is governed by the essentially cyclical nature of these concepts. Life does not stop for more than a moment. It goes on and on until *Moksa* or absorption into godhead is reached. This is not meant for any but the most elevated souls. A majority of Hindus must travel in *Samsara*. From one life to another working out their *Karmas* or deeds until in some hypothetical future they too draw very close to sainthood and the consequent *Moksa*.

In the case of linear rituals of life cycle we have the case of Christianity and Mohammedanism. Here birth, marriage, death and heaven or hell form a linear stretch. In Christianity it is heaven or hell and in Islam it is again heaven or hell. There is no return to the earth. Death is a full stop so far as life on earth is concerned. It then continues in some other world. The sources for this unit are given in the section on Further Reading.

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## 29.2 THE IDEA OF DEATH

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Unlike birth and marriage which bring pleasant memories with them, death is another name for horror. Death shocks the relatives, friends, and acquaintances very deeply. Death ceases normal relations and the fear of the body decomposing is very great. There is a non-acceptance of the same. In order to ward off the fear and malignancy of death many rituals arose. So stark a reality as death has to be accepted and rituals devised for the next stretch of life whether cyclical or linear.

According to primitive beliefs of Hinduism the soul survived the body. Thus death was that process by which the soul separated from the body. Again in dreams and sickness the soul separated temporarily from the body. But death was unique. The soul went away never to inhabit the same body again. Those who were alive felt mixed sentiments towards the dead. These were primarily feelings of dread release and fear.

Additionally there was the practical need to dispose of the dead body. Decomposition which occurs after death makes it difficult to keep the body for a long while. It was thus removed with care and disposed off with ritual. The rituals connected with disposal of the dead are to free the survivors from pollution of death and to put the dead to rest with dignity. We will now describe death rituals among various communities.

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## 29.3 HINDU FUNERAL RITES

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There are several variations all over India of the Hindu funeral rites. After death the body is bathed and laid out on view for all those who want *darshan* of the departed soul. A picture or some article belonging to the dead person is garlanded and joss sticks lit around it, if this is possible.

In some cases *mantras* are repeated at the side of the dead body. In some cases *tulsi* (basil) water is dropped into the dying persons mouth.

### 29.3.1 The Bier of the Corpse

A structure is made of bamboo which looks like a six feet ladder upon which the corpse is laid. The big toes of the corpse are tied together. The corpse is already covered with a white or red sheet depending upon the status of the dead. It is a married women then a red shroud is used. There are several other rituals for a



married woman. White shrouds are used for everybody else. The dead body needs to have been washed and cleanly clothed. These are preliminal rites which take place before the funeral itself. In a sense they are rituals which have the function of maintaining ritual order and securing the corpse to the bier.

#### Box 29.01

Cremation is the most recognised form of disposal of a corpse among the Hindu from the Vedas upto the present day. This custom is believed to be the most refined by the Hindus. Some causes could have led to this belief.

- i) Tribes which were nomadic found it convenient to cremate and carry only some bones of the ancestor.
- ii) Desire to be free of the ghost is also a powerful motive. When the body was gone the ghost could not stay.
- iii) Fire which consumes entire forests at times probably suggested its utility in burning away the dead as well.
- iv) These reasons were strong in the early phases but later on it was the prestige and honour given to 'Agni' (fire) that made it the method par excellence to exhume a corpse.

Once it is put on the bier and secured firmly onto it with rope, the near male relatives shoulder the bier and carry it towards the cremation ground. Shoulders are changed several times on the way to the cremation grounds. In urban areas however a hearse-van is usually requisitioned and the body is driven to the cremation ground. It is led by the eldest male, a son preferably.

### 29.3.2 The Funeral Procession

The procession then goes to the cremation ground by foot. Here the body is put near the cremation shed and wood is piled up into the pyre for the corpse. Meanwhile the priest performs certain ceremonies on the corpse for its betterment in the next world.

Thereafter the corpse is laid on the pyre without the bier and covered up with wood. The pyre is always lit by the eldest living son. Except in the absence of the same, a male relative lights the pyre. The main mourners go around the funeral fire keeping their right shoulder, towards the pyre. This is not always so. Among the Coorgs and the Kumaonis some groups go in an anticlockwise manner keeping the left shoulder to the pyre. This varies from group to group. The fire is then left to burn and the cranium is staved in by the eldest son. This is to free the trapped soul. This is a liminal stage in which the body transits from flesh and blood to bone and ashes.

### 29.3.3 Collection of Bones

The bones are collected a day later when the pyre has cooled off and put in earthen pots. These pots are taken to a river and immersed there. Holy men's bones and ashes are made into a memorial called a *Samadhi*. On the fourth day from death a prayer is organised for the peace of the departed soul. Finally a prayer is held annually for the departed soul. We must remember however that this is a variation not found all over India. It is also to be remembered that a funeral is a polluting event and the mourners either go home and bathe or bathe in the cremation ground itself if the inclination and facilities are there. There may also be a funeral feast later on. Collection of bones and their immersion into a holy river are all postliminal customs. They indicate an incorporation into the world of ancestors. This postliminal

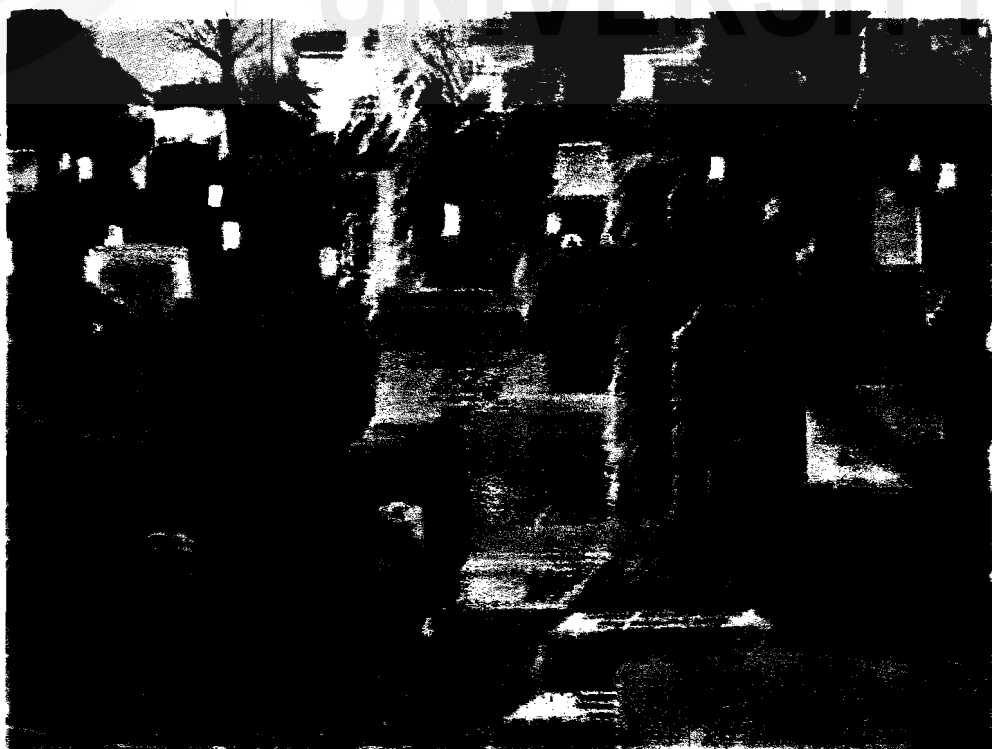
phase include rituals like *Chautha*, *Pagade* and *Shraddha* among the Punjabis which comprise the postliminal phase. *Chautha* is held on the fourth day after the death and towards its termination *Pagade* is given to the eldest remaining survivor. It vests him with the authority of the head of the household. *Shraddha* is kept annually in memory of the deceased and the welfare of his or her soul.

## 29.4 SYRIAN CHRISTIAN DEATH RITUALS

The death ceremonies of the Syrians reflect reverence and solemnity. In the Syrian Christian church there is no such ritual as the extreme unction or last rites. But there are certain rituals at the time of illness. The priest is usually at the bedside and as the end approaches, prayers are chanted. The priest whispers the basic doctrinal beliefs in the dying person's ear. When death occurs women commence weeping and beating their breasts. It becomes obvious to the neighbourhood that death has taken place. Kitchen fires are extinguished and no cooking is done until after the funeral has taken place. The body is washed and dressed and placed in a room facing East with a cross at the head and candles to either side. Incense is burned. Prayers and hymns are chanted throughout the time the body is in the house. Clearly these are preliminal rites when the priest is at the bedside of the dying person. However death does not occur gradually all the time. There may be an accident. In such a case the rest of the rites are observed as given above. They are rites of separation. The group is attempting to separate themselves from the deceased and preparing themselves for transitional/liminal rites.

### 29.4.1 Procession to Graveyard

The dead body is anointed with oil by the priest. The sign of the cross is made on the face, breast, and knees with oil. The funeral procession then leaves for the Church to lay the body to rest. Graveyards in Kerala are usually in the church compound. The body is placed in a coffin and carried to the graveyard. Women of the household do not accompany the procession. The elaborate funeral service comprises prayers and hymns. When the coffin is lowered into the grave the priest throws mud into it in the sign of a cross. Each mourner also throws in mud while



A graveyard with symmetrically laid out graves with epitaphs on the head stones.

the prayers are said. The Syrian Christians bury the corpse with head to the west so that it faces the east. This follows the firm belief that the messiah will come from near Jerusalem. The ceremony right from the anointing of the corpse with oil and the priest making signs of the cross, till when it is laid into the ground, head facing west are all rites of transition. The body is in the grave and mud is being thrown in. It will gradually disappear and will not longer inhabit the social world. These rites indicate this liminal phase. This ritual communicates this 'disappearance' nonverbally.

After the funeral the mourners return home. Here they are served a simple meal of rice.

### 29.4.2 The Purification Ceremony

In older times mourners were considered to be under pollution till the eighth or tenth day. A purification ceremony known as *pullakuli* was held thereafter. This custom was borrowed from the Nambudiris. Except daily wage earners the mourners do not keep engagements till the fortieth day. On this day a special ceremony is held at the end of which the priest blesses everybody by letting them kiss the back of his hand. A non-vegetarian meal is provided and this brings to end the period of official mourning. On each death anniversary a ceremony is performed. A requiem mass is held in the church. A candle is also lit on the grave and some charity is distributed to the needy. It is clear the rites of post liminality are somewhat extended among the Syrian Christians who do not keep social engagements till the fortieth day. The priest then blesses and declares this phase closed and after several ceremonies described above. Further mourning is kept to a death anniversary.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the main points of the Syrian Christian funeral. Describe the same in about 5-7 lines.

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- 2) Discuss the significance of the collection of bones among Hindu death rituals. Use about 5-7 lines.

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## 29.5 SIKH DEATH RITUALS

Sikhs are of the view that in a hot climate the funeral should take place quickly, preferably a day after the death has occurred. They practice cremation. Burial at sea is permitted and not considered wrong, but cremation has been the tradition of five hundred years. The ashes can be buried and this has happened in the case of samadhis and shrines of saints. However, usually the ashes are immersed into a nearby river. Funeral moments are not considered desirable and the Gurus forbade any such thing in their case, but we find that *gurdwaras* sprang up in such locations. Thus the preliminal customs are done quickly and with efficiency and cremation is the favoured method.

### 29.5.1 Cremation, A Family Affair

Cremation is attended by the entire family, unlike the Hindus where the women stay behind. The body is washed and it is ensured that the five Symbols of *Sikhism* adorn it, that is the *Kirpan*, *Kaccha*, *Kanga*, *Kara* and *Kesh*. It is taken on a bier to the cremation ground in a procession. The mourners sing hymns. The funeral pyre is lit by a close male relative and the evening hymn is sung during the cremation. Prayers are also offered, including the *Ardas*.

When the mourners get home again it is customary to wash one's hands and face and many of them bathe as well. A complete reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* begins and goes on for the next ten days intermittently in stretches of about an hour of reading followed by intervals, till the include reading is completed. The preliminal customs do include getting the body ready and dressed. However when the fire is lit we are with the transitional/liminal rites. The post-liminal rites then begin and go on until the mourners get home, bathe and the complete reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is done in the next ten days as described. These rituals indicate aspects of ritual as an occupation by those who chant (*Guru Granth Sahib*) and ritual as a way of life in that death will always be where life is.

### 29.5.2 Karah Prasad

An important social custom which has deep cultural significance in Sikh rites is the distribution of *Karah Prasad*. The mourners are given *Karah Prasad*. The sharing of the food has deep meaning and signifies the continuity of social life at a time when it is ruptured due to death. This method of affirming life contrasts with such practices as going into isolation, fasting, and manifestations of ritual grief *Karah Prasad* is also a postliminal rite and indicates that the transitional phase has ended. **It is also a ritual which rejuvenates society as it is given to all present in the ritual.**

It is believed that good *Karma* leads to birth as a Sikh. It gives one a chance to come into contact with *gurbani* and to seek liberation. Dying persons are read *gurbani* to, the message of which is that the holy name is the most precious possession and those who do not chant it will repent their ways.

#### Activity 1

Describe in two pages the details of any Hindu/Christian/Sikh death ritual that you have attended and can remember. Try to interpret the meaning of the various rites according to popular explanations. Compare your notes with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

When a man is close to death among the Korkus, the dying person is served rice water or plain water to drink. If he is unable to swallow it he is considered to be close to death. He is then laid on the ground. If a Korku dies on a bed, then that bed is discarded forever. No one would sleep on such a bed for fear that the dead persons spirit would come and bother him.

Korkus lament every death in the Clan. The women strike themselves on their head and chest. They cry words of sorrow. These words express a longing to go with the dead person. A bier is made by the men with bamboo poles and seven cross bars. The corpse is denuded of all clothes and jewellery. The dead body of males is wrapped in a white sheet. The corpse of married women is wrapped in a red cloth and that of widows in a white sheet.

When a women becomes a widow she laments and takes off all her jewellery. On the other hand a widower does not do anything like that. He sits mourning near the corpse of the wife. A Korku widow is allowed to put on her jewellery after ten days. These are all preliminal aspects of a funeral and the Korkus are similar to Syrian Christians in the beating of the chest in sorrow. Among the Hindus too a widow removes her jewellery, just as a widow does among the Korkus.

### 29.6.1 The Funeral Procession

When all funeral arrangements are ready the procession begins. The eldest son carries with him an earthen pot containing rice water. If the eldest son is not there, a younger brother or a close relative takes over. At half distance to the graveyard the group stops. The bier is put on the ground and carriers change place from left to right. Women do not accompany the procession as their wailing and crying disturb the spirit world.

The Korku villages have their own graveyards where graves are dug somewhat haphazardly and mounds are seen covered with stones and thorns.

In the burial ground a hole 3-4 feet in depth is dug. A north-south direction is kept, the face being kept looking north. The Southern bottom where the head is kept is coated with cowdung and leaves. Before putting the body into the grave a few copper coins are thrown in. Flour and turmeric is sprinkled around the grave. The body is placed on its back with head to the south facing north. A coin is sometimes put into the mouth of the diseased, so that he or she may use it in the next world. The grave is half-filled with mud and lined with thorns. It is then filled with earth. The earth is loose and not pounded since this may hurt the dead person. When he or she will be reborn, they believe, the signs of such pounding will be on his body. The 'packing' of thorns and boulders into the grave is to keep wild animals from gnawing at the body. Occasionally a coin; flute or other articles are buried with the body. The pot with rice water is broken at the head of the grave. This is for the diseased to eat if he is unable at once to find something to eat in the other world. **We can see so far that these rituals are those of separation from the social world and incorporation into the other. These are rites of passage.**

All these rites are also an expression of affections at the separation of the dead person. They feel obliged to send off the dead person in the best possible way. The liminal customs are such that they make it clear to everyone who is participating that the man or woman has passed over to the world of the dead. They are rituals of socialization and spiritual merit. They also have an aspect of therapy in them. Once the man or woman is buried the liminal aspect gradually closes with the pot of rice being broken at the head of the grave.

### Activity 2

Note down the main features of the Korku funeral. Compare these notes with those you have made in Activity 1. What similarities and differences do you find in the Hindu/Christian/Sikh funerals as compared to the Korku funeral. Try to analyse the differences and similarities of the ritual. Compare your efforts to those of other students, if possible at the Study Centre.

### 29.6.2 Post Funeral Customs

When the funeral is over the mourners (men) bathe in a closeby river or bathing area. They wear a turban which is washed later. The bonds with the diseased are broken at about the half way point under a *ber* tree. Here they each pluck a leaf and pick up a stone. They wave them overhead and throw them away. This is a rite of purification and segregation. It expresses the breaking of all bonds with the diseased. A brass pitcher full of water is carried back and a little water is poured in each persons hand. He waves it over his head and drops it on his left foot. This foot is held over the fire at the door. **This is a purificatory ritual that accompanies every funeral.**

The postliminal rites continue. In the evening at the house of mourning a flour silhouette of the man is drawn. It is usually 10 cm long. A top of this a basket is kept upside down. After an hour the basket is removed and the silhouette is examined. From any changes in the patter made by insects the people try to find out why the man died and how his spirit would be. If changes are found near the stomach, for instance, it is said he died of stomach disorder. Disturbances during these rites are also taken as signs of witchcraft. The divination especially the aspect concerning the spirit can be viewed as a rite of incorporation in the other world. The postliminal rites here among the Korkus are very specific and include bathing, throwing leaves overhead and pouring water from a brass pitcher into the hand of each mourner. These rituals are communicating that there is a distinction between the dead and those who are alive. These actions also have a therapeutic value giving the mourners something to do. The flour silhouette, 10 cm long also serves to convince the bereaved group of people that there was specific reason for the death.

After divination is over a chicken is killed and roasted. It is eaten with rice. After this meal, often a woman goes into a trance and the belief is that it is the dead person who possesses her. She advises the mourners often about the future.

Then a dinner is proposed in the house of the mourners. No food is cooked while the body is there. Dirges are sung each morning in this house. They become shorter and shorter as the separation becomes complete.

The memorial banquet is held about two weeks later. All the guests contribute to it. At the start a goat and some chickens are sacrificed. These are an offering to the dead and helps the spirit to find peace. Once this sacrifice is over the spirit comes to the "middle post" of the house. here a prayer is offered for forty-five days after the banquet. As mentioned earlier these postliminal rites through which the dead person will become incorporated into the 'other' world are more elaborate among the Korkus including the forty-five days prayer offered at the "middle post" of the house.

After death people become spirits if they are old, and if they die young they are devoured by an evil soul. **Naturistic beliefs are there and spirits are believed to exist in whirlwinds and other natural phenomena.** Belief in rebirth does exist among the Korkus. They also believe that dead people are usually indifferent

to those who are alive. They place memorial stones in a pile under some shady tree just outside the village. There are basic beliefs of retribution and reward according to the deeds that have been performed in heaven by the individuals concerned. Good deeds mean good rewards in heaven and bad deeds punishment in hell.

### 29.6.3 The Memorial Feasts

The postliminal rites described above are not complete and after one year a memorial feast is given. *It is only after the sidoli feast that the spirit is finally laid to rest that incorporation into the other world is considered to be complete.* All this while liminal aspects remain and the spirit exists but only in transition.

The feast is served, organized and arranged by the family. All kinsmen and affines are invited to the feast. The feast sets the spirit at rest. All their remains are aken to the riverside. A memorial post called '*munda*' is erected out there. It is made of teak wood. It is usually two feet below the ground and three feet above it, and is square in shape. If a man dies at a foreign location the *munda* must be rector at his original home. However not all clans of the Korku erect *mundas*.

Further a *mando* hut facing a north-south direction is also erected. Inside it are seven cone shaped stones got from the river. Each stone represents a deity. Such a hut is meant only for shamans and village priests.

Several other feasts follow and they are indicative of an attempt by the living to remove the dead person, body and soul, from them. It is also an attempt to help the dead person to be incorporated into the other world. In between, it may be said, lies a type of liminal phase for the dead person's spirit. One interesting rite of solidarity is the carrying of the basket with a light (*diya*) in it to every neighbours' house since the last *sidoli*. Then hymns are sung. The chief organizers of the feast dress like groom and bride. Their garments are knotted together. A boy or girl may substitute for them with no obligation to marry subsequently. After midnight the two are separated and go to opposite sides of the room and shout at and abuse each other. The other guests soon follow suit. This is an old ritual and the abuse may even seem grossly abscent to outsiders. It is quite obvious that their concerns are now with this world and with each other rather than any spirits. On the third day of the feast the *munda* is carried to the place of the *Kharkia* where holi is celebrated.

A male goat is killed here. On the fourth day of the feast the *munda* is erected near a river. Several other rituals occur. However, they all express incorporation for the dead persons spirit from the world of the living, and life in the world of the dead.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the significance of the post-funeral customs among the Korkus. Use about 5-7 lines for your answer.

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2) Describe the main points of the Sikh cremation in 5-7 lines.

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## 29.7 LET US SUM UP

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This unit is the second part of the life cycle rituals and deals mainly with death rituals. It is not separate from the unit on birth and marriage but has been put in a separate unit due to reasons of convenience. The unit begins with the idea of death and Hindu funeral rites. We next studied Syrian Christian funerals followed by Sikh funerals and lastly Korku death rites. We have therefore covered the subject adequately.

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## 29.8 KEY WORDS

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- Cremation** : The act of burning a dead body with fire so as to exhume it completely e.g. Hindu funeral.
- Cyclical view of ritual** : A ritual which occurs periodically such as the death anniversary. Also applied to the cyclical view of life cycle ritual e.g. the Hindu where death leads to life and life to death in an endless cycle till liberation or *Moksa* is attained.
- Linear view of ritual** : A ritual which has a full stop such as death among the Christians. The dead person never returns to earth, hence death is an ending on a linear path, which moves from birth to death.
- Samsara** : The Hindu view that the soul moves from one body to another for an indeterminate number of times till it attains *Moksa*.

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## 29.9 FURTHER READINGS

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

Pandey, Raj Bali. 1976. *Hindu Samskaras : Social Religions Study of the Hindu Sacraments*. Motilal Banarsidas : Delhi.

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

Fuchs, Stephen. 1988. *The Korkus of the Vindhya Hills*. Inter-India Publications : New Delhi.



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## 29.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) The main points of the Syrian Christian funeral are that it is a burial presided by a priest and mourners. The graveyard is in the compound of a church when the coffin has been lowered into the grave each mourner throws in some mud. The face is put facing towards, east, that is Jerusalem, from where the Messiah is expected to come.
- 2) Among Hindus the bones are collected the day after cremation when the pyre has cooled off. These bones are usually immersed into the nearest river. Holy men's bones and ashes are made into a memorial mound called a *Samadhi*.

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) The post-funeral customs of the Korkus are that they bathe after the burial. They pause half way back and throw a leaf and a stone away. A local diagnosis of the death is made with a flour silhouette. Two weeks later there is a memorial banquet. After an year the *sidoli* feast is also held.
- 2) For the Sikhs cremation is the preferred method of disposal. Funeral mounments are not made. The corpse is washed and the five K's are put in order. The body is cremated amidst prayers. The mourners return and a reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* is begun. *Karah Prasad* is given prayers and *gurbani* is also sung.

THE PEOPLE'S  
UNIVERSITY

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# UNIT 30 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PILGRIMAGES

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## Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 What are Pilgrimages
  - 30.2.1 Definitions of Pilgrimage and Pilgrim
  - 30.2.2 Individualistic Aspect of Pilgrimage
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- 30.3 Socio-Historical Background of Pilgrimages Specially in India
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  - 30.4.6 Socio-Political Aspect of Pilgrimage
- 30.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.6 Key Words
- 30.7 Further Reading
- 30.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 30.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit aims at introducing you to the meaning and nature of pilgrimages. After studying this unit you will be able to

- understand the meaning and nature of pilgrimage as an expression of the religious sentiment — as both an individual's behaviour and a socio-cultural institution
- appreciate the social significance of pilgrimages, i.e. the effect of pilgrimage on the socio-economic life of a people and on social solidarity and unit among the people
- have a comprehensive idea of how pilgrimage has evolved through history in response to change in the social, economic and cultural spheres, specially in India.

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## 30.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we begin with the question : what is a pilgrimage ? We then go on to define what a pilgrim is. Following this we provide descriptions of pilgrimages in different traditions. We then go on to examine pilgrimages in various contexts and features, including temple going. We then examine the merit (*punya*) producing aspects of pilgrimage. Next we discuss the institutional aspect of a pilgrimage and the sacredness associated with it. Following this we examine pilgrimage centres and their liminality and the nature of auspiciousness in pilgrimage.

Next to this section is the one on the socio-historical background of pilgrimages. This examines the typology of pilgrimages and gives the various interpretations of the meaning of the word *Haji*. It also examines continuity of pilgrimages in India. We also examine the social significance of pilgrimages. We examine pilgrimage in the arts and education, material culture and economy, and the socio-political aspect. We begin with the social integration aspect of pilgrimage.

## 30.2 WHAT ARE PILGRIMAGES ?

All major religions of the world have laid great emphasis on the sacredness of certain localities and have either enjoined or recommended with great insistence, pilgrimages to them. These places are famous for miracles and the inspiration for religious life of the faithful or the revivification of faith. A religious believer in any culture may feel the call of such a place which may lie at a distance and resolve to journey there, i.e., to undertake a pilgrimage to the sacred site.

### 39.2.1 Definition of Pilgrimage and Pilgrim

Most people understand pilgrimage as a journey to a holy place or shrine, either in the pilgrim's native land or abroad. The object of pilgrimage is to obtain some benefit — material, symbolic, moral or spiritual — which the sanctity of the chosen spot is believed to confer. A pilgrimage may be undertaken because such a journey is considered *meritorious*. The idea of the acquisition of divine favour, either directly or through a saint, is generally associated with such a journey. The benefits expected out of the *labour or travail involved in the journey or expedition* to the destination of pilgrimage, i.e., holy place, may range from the satisfaction of mundane interests to the highest spiritual attainment. But the journey has a root in the religious beliefs of the person(s) undertaking it. The journey to the sacred spot is always associated with some religious motive or motives which are, in one way or another, religious ideas and beliefs.

From the above definitions it is absolutely clear that two significant features which do recur in pilgrimages are

- i) sacred places and
- ii) the act of travelling or journeying itself.

“Pilgrimages are sacred journeys extraordinary” (Saraswati, 1985 : 103). True, pilgrimage as practised in India and elsewhere is guided by the highly diversified motives of the pilgrims.

Pilgrimages are not mindless movements or migrations either. They are voluntary and individual, *unlike the mindless collective migrations* familiar in ancient and medieval times. Each is a personal act, following a personal decision, and resulting in a wide range of significant personal experience. Pilgrimage is thus a journey in quest of some ultimate value or some spiritual experience. Is every visit to a nearby holy place a pilgrimage ? For answer to this question see Box 30.01.

#### Box 30.01

Is a visit made daily or occasionally by a devotee to the local or next-door shrine a pilgrimage ? No, it is just a ‘journey’ to a sacred spot. Pilgrimage or pilgrim's journey usually covers long distances and extends over a considerable duration of time. Indeed pilgrimage implies a movement away from home and the severing, though temporarily, of the enduring bonds which bind the individual there. A Hindu pilgrim is a “Yatri” (one who

goes). The pilgrim's journey begins amid the entanglements of the domestic social setting. The pilgrim then moves out and away from these, across distance, to a place that is set apart from the complex problems of everyday mundane life. The journey to the pilgrimage centre provides the opportunity for preparation of the devotee's mind for the proper attitudes needed in the pilgrimage centre.

### 30.2.2 Individualistic Aspect of Pilgrimage

Notwithstanding the collective aspect, associated with organisation of pilgrimages (discussed in sub-section 30.4.1), various studies of pilgrimages in Hindu, Buddhist or Christian cultures have revealed the *individualistic aspect* of pilgrimages. Hindu pilgrimage, more specifically, Kashi pilgrimage, is essentially a personal quest for salvation both in space and in time. All rituals are aimed at earning the merits which are not collectively shared. **The merit of a pilgrimage is earned individually; and moksa, the ultimate aim of pilgrimage is salvation of the individual soul.** Pilgrimage is an affair of the individual. There are, of course, cases where motives for going on pilgrimage originate in a general atmosphere of piety, devotion and communal and social loyalty. But very often a pilgrimage is "the result of a vow. Something is wrong, or some danger threatening, or some good things highly desired are missing". And, hence the journey (*ibid.*, 255). The pilgrim goes to the holy place in pursuit of some personally desired end. Buddhist pilgrims rituals of circumambulation (*pradakshina*) of the sacred shrines of the relics of Buddha is symbolic of a journey representing personal spiritual ascent.

There are specific motives concerned with mundane existence. They usually involve a commitment or vow to the deity whose blessing is sought for the solution of a problem which is of great concern to the pilgrim, e.g., the desire for the birth of a male offspring. The second category of motives consists of earning religious merit. It is hard to define such motives. It may be interpreted as the desire to purify the soul rather than to pray for wealth or success in business. Each pilgrimage has a related sacred complex. Turner (1974 : 189) views pilgrimages as processes or flows of activities and observes that "pilgrimages will constitute objectively a connected network of processes each involving a journey to and from a particular site. Such sites (are) places where, according to believers, some manifestation of divine or supernatural power had occurred, what Mircea Eliade would call a 'theophany' (Turner 1974 : 189).

### 30.2.3 Sacredness of Pilgrimage

The sacred is a category of things and actions set apart as holy and entitled to reverence. Such a category is often held to represent symbolically the key values of a society. The sacred is often understood in contrast with the profane. What is profane is ordinary, not sacred. Emile Durkheim (see Block 1, Unit 3, p. 42-43 of ESO-05) declares that all religions divide the universe into two opposed realms—sacred and profane and establish rules distinguishing the former from the latter. Dichotomy of the sacred and the profane in absolutist terms has been subjected to wide-ranging empirical and conceptual criticism. For instance, the idea of polar opposition between the sacred and the profane is to be applied in the Indian context with *caution*. For, Indian religious thought is hierarchical (in the sense of encompassing of the contrary) rather than simply dualistic (recognising the binary opposition). That is the profane, though the opposite of the sacred, is included in the latter and thus subordinated to it (Madan, 1991 : 3). Even in a place of pilgrimage like Kashi which is renowned for its sacredness, "it is difficult to make clear-cut distinction between the sacred and the secular in its organization of space, in the performance of its rituals and in the profession of ritual specialists".

Two illustrations may be given. The unseemly bargaining and even unscrupulous dealings of the Brahman priests with the pilgrims for extorting money from the pilgrims in temples or during the performance of rituals at the *ghats* of the Ganges are a common scene in Kashi. The other notable fact is the doms' custodianship of the sacred fire required for of the deceased including the Brahmans to ensure their salvation.

**Box 30.02**

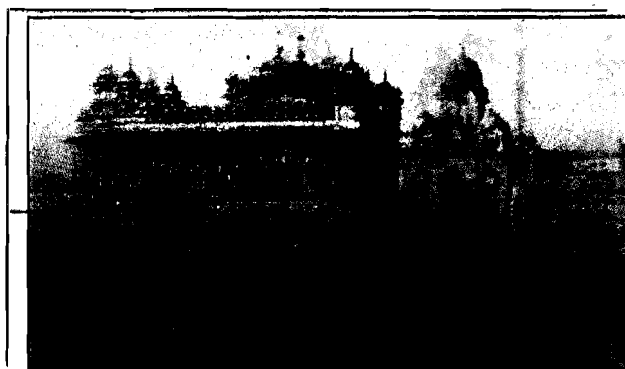
The quality of sacredness characterizes various aspects of the journey to and activities in pilgrimage centres. Liminality of pilgrimage centres becomes clear when it is likened to a *ford*. A ford is a shallow stream where it is possible *to cross safely on foot*, in a vehicle, etc., and without using a boat. Indeed, the Sanskrit equivalent for a centre of pilgrimage is *tirtha*. The Sanskrit word, *tirtha*, is translated as a passage, way road, ford, stairs for landing or descent into a river, bathing place, place of pilgrimage. *Tirtha* has other connotations and usages as well. But the plurality of the uses of *tirtha* shares a *symbolic value of holiness* prescribed to certain exalted categories of place, state or person. The significance of *symbolism* lies in the notion of "crossing over" (transition or passage). The notion of fording or crossing over, implies a crossing place — a *liminal*, media location between two realms (of the sacred and the profane). A *tirtha* is such a place, and in symbolic terms. *so is every place of pilgrimage*. Similarly, a learned, purified, initiated or devout individual rises above mundane society to stand between man and God, and so is able to act as a point of intersection and, therefore, fording.

The sacredness of the site accounts for the great concern with purity among pilgrims. The pilgrims must remove the taints of impurity from their body and mind. In case of Hindu pilgrims, for instance, the journey is itself a purification by austerities. For the quality of sacredness attached to pilgrimage and pilgrim centres, see Box 30.02. Also see, the next sub-section, 30.4.2 to find out the difference between being sacred and being auspicious.

### 30.2.4 Auspiciousness in Pilgrimage

Auspiciousness is an important element in pilgrimage. Auspiciousness/inauspiciousness is distinct from purity/impurity. *The former refers primarily to events* and ultimately to life itself as an event-structure. Purity-impurity is basically an attribute of objects.

A *tirtha-sthana* or place of pilgrimage of the Hindus, located on the bank of a river or body of water, is regarded as holy and a pilgrimage (*yatra*) to it is considered auspicious. The holiness of the place and the auspiciousness of the visit are greatly enhanced, if two or more rivers merge there (Madan 1987 : 52). *Auspiciousness*



The Golden Temple at Amritsar; the most holy temple of the Sikh faith.

*implies benediction and well-being.* An auspicious or *subha* time, or event or conduct is considered conducive to well-being.

*Pilgrims attach great importance to objects or persons supposed to bring about subha or auspiciousness even if such objects or persons may suffer from impurity.* Thus the pilgrims to the temple of Jagannath at Puri are told that viewing the circumambulating of devadasis is auspicious, i.e., these actions result into well-being. Some worshippers in the temple pick the dust from the feet of the dancing devadasis, or roll on the ground where they have danced, in the hope of attaining well-being, of winning divine grace (Marglin 1985 : 109). For, they are told that the devadasis are the living embodiments of Jagannatha's consort, Lakshmi, indeed, the devadasis have the exclusive right to sing and dance in the outer sanctum of the temple at various times of the day and the year. **They are associated with many other auspicious rites and events in the temple complex. They are, therefore, venerated by the pilgrims.**

But the devadasis are denied entry into the inner sanctum of Jagannatha's temple. This prohibition is linked with the devadasis' status as courtesans. Their body is thus impure. But the sight or worship of the devadasis is auspicious for the pilgrims (Marglin 1985 : 35).

### 30.2.5 Pilgrimages in Different Religious Traditions

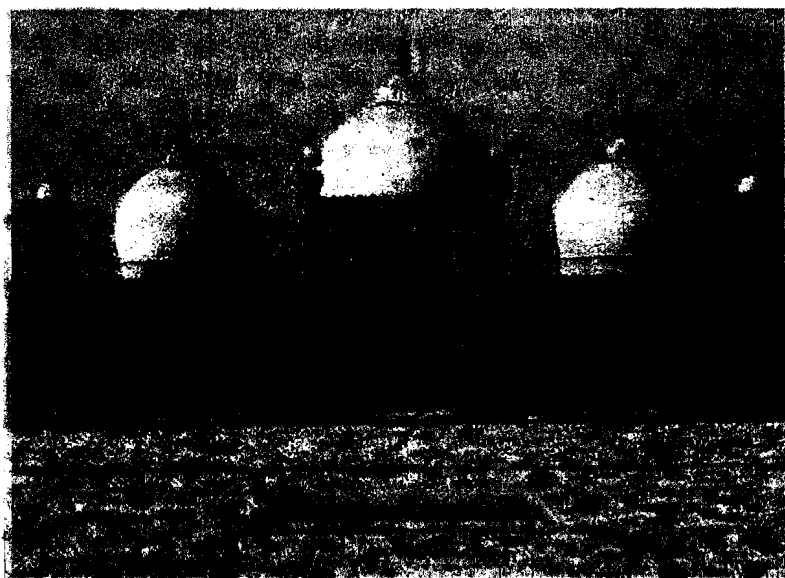
A brief description of pilgrimages as they are practised by the followers of certain major religions may help us better understand the nature and functioning of pilgrimages.

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## 30.3 SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF PILGRIMAGES

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Pilgrimages have arisen in different periods of history and have taken different paths. Pilgrimage traditions vary from one culture to another. We shall first examine Turners' typology of pilgrimages through history. The typology is based mainly on the experiences of the west and Christianity, though its universal validity is claimed. We shall then see the changing interpretations of *hajj* through time. Finally, we shall discuss the continuity and changes in the meaning and practice of pilgrimage in India.



Prayer congregation in front of a mosque with three prominent domes, and two flanking

### 30.3.1 Turners' Typology of Pilgrimages in History

Victor and Edith Turner have attempted a typology of pilgrimages depending mainly on European history and history of Christian pilgrimages (Turner and Turner, 1978).

- i) *Archaic Pilgrimage*: Archaic pilgrimage traditions have come down from very ancient times, and little or nothing is known of their foundation. Archaic pilgrimages are those pilgrimages which bear quite evident traces of syncretism with older religious beliefs and symbols'. Turner and Turner cite Glastonbury, Chalma in Mexico, Croagh Patrick in Ireland and Pandharpur in India. Pandharpur is included in this category because "its equivocal deity Vithova Bhave may well have Dravidian, pre-Indo European associations" (Turner and Turner, 1978 : 18).
- ii) *Prototypical Pilgrimages*: Pilgrimages established by the founder of a religion by his or her first disciples or important evangelists of his faith may be called prototypical. Examples are: Jerusalem and Rome (Christianity), Mecca (Islam), Banaras and Mount Kailas (Hinduism), Bodh Gaya and Saranath (Buddhism).
- iii) *High-period Pilgrimage*: In the hey-day of a pilgrimage tradition an elaborate shrine, crowded with symbols is created. In the middle ages when the growth of Muslim power in the Mediterranean hampered Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the loss was compensated by the creation of shrines all over Europe. Chartres, Canterbury, Walsingham, Compostela, Loreto, Assisi, Czestochowa, etc., are important examples. Eventually, at many European centres routinization and decline set in and meaning was lost in the jungle of symbolic objects and rites. Hence during the era of Reformation and the era of Puritanism many of them like Walsingham became targets of iconoclasts and were suppressed.
- iv) *Modern Pilgrimages*: All over the world in the last two centuries a new type of pilgrimage characterized by "a highly devotional tone and the fervent personal piety of their adherents" has developed. This modern pilgrimage is "deeply involved with mass technological and scientific culture". Pilgrims travel by automobile and airplane. **Pilgrimage centres publish newspapers and pamphlets. The catchment areas of modern pilgrimages are great and flourishing urban industrial cities.** However, the message of the shrine is "still traditional, at variance with the values of today". Both apparitional and saint-centred pilgrimage abound in Europe as well as in other parts of the modern world, e.g. Japan or Israel.

### 30.3.2 Pilgrimages in India : Continuity and Change

India is well known for the antiquity and continuity of her institution of pilgrimage. All sections of its population attach importance of the institutions. For example, the



A collage of pilgrimage centres in India.

*hajj* is the only pilgrimage enjoined by the Quran the Muslims in India and Pakistan visit many pilgrim centres. The veneration of tombs is against the 'Ulema law of orthodox Islam and the Wahabis prohibit any such pilgrimage. However, Bharati seems to be correct in pointing out that hardly more than 5 per cent of Indian and Pakistani Muslim population would pay heed to such stricture. "The Muslim practice is clearly a copy of the Hindu model, and the observances hardly differ from those of Hindi pilgrimage..." (Bharati 1963 : 142). Some modern Hindu sects like the Arya Samaj oppose the worship of tombs and shrines and pilgrimages to them. Prior to this, the monotheistic Lingayat sect of Mysore or the Sahajiya Vaishnavas of Bengal placing reliance on Bhakti or devotion expressed a similarly negative attitude to pilgrimage. Despite these objections to pilgrimage it remains an increasingly popular Hindu practice. The nature of Hindu pilgrimage is encased in the Sanskrit expression *tirtha-yatra*, which literally means "undertaking journey to river fords".

The glorification of *tirthas* and *tirthayatra* in the literature was prompted by a very practical consideration on the part of the priests : The offerings made at sacred places are sources of livelihood for the officiating priests. The latter are, therefore, extremely zealous to extol the merits of sacred places, particularly where they are the controlling priests. In this way numerous *sthalapuranas* and *mahatmas* has been essayed to bolster the attraction of scores of *tirthas*. The vested interests of the priests become markedly manifest in the institution of Gayawals in Gaya. A Gayawal claims the monopoly of performing rites for the pilgrims who he can contact as well as their descendants. He gets paid for this religious services. The *gadi* or *gaddi* (office) of a Gayawal where the account of the pilgrims and descendants is kept is thus a source of pecuniary gain. It can be inherited or bequeathed or offered as a gift. The right to a *gadi* became in many cases subject of litigation in the Privy Council (during the colonial period) and the High Court.

The sacred places or *tirthas* form important nodes, both as

- i) repositories of *traditional* Hinduism and as
- ii) propagators of *reinterpreted* values and beliefs.

The basic factor supporting this role is that Hindus from diverse regions visit these places and thus provide opportunity and convenience for the growth of such institutions. **The sacred places during the major fairs become visible centres for the diffusion of new ideas, innovations and improvisations.** Thus above religion, the spread of information with widespread cultural consequences receive vital impetus. It is mainly because modern means of mass transportation, communication and services have made it possible for a larger number of individuals to undertake what were once arduous pilgrimages. The number of pilgrims each year visiting for instance the well-known Hindu *tirthas* is to be reckoned in several millions. Specific occasions, such as the *Kumbhamela* at Hardwar and Allahabad attract literally countless devotees who are eager to bathe in the sacred rivers and partake in the religious celebrations.

It is nevertheless difficult to say from the increasing number of pilgrimages to holy sites whether the Hindus have become more or less religious in modern times. But it is an undeniable fact that new cults, built around saints, either alive or deceased, have come into existence in recent times. And, they have given a great impetus to pilgrimage and its prospects in the future. Agehananda Bharati mentions "two almost contemporary cases of intensified 'pilgrimization' due to the one-time presence of a saint" (Bharati 1963 : 150). One is the Kali temple at Dakshineswar near Calcutta which drew an increasing number of pilgrims from all over Bengal, from other parts of India and more recently from the United States and Europe as well. The importance of Dakshineswar to the pilgrims lies in the fact that Ramakrishna



complex at Dakshineswar. The other case of pilgrimage mentioned by Bharati relates to Ramana Maharishi's hermitage in Madras. Srinivas talks of Saibaba, a saint of modern India whose tomb in Shirdi in Maharashtra has become a favourite place for pilgrimage. The shrine of Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamatai is also visited though his cult is not as popular as the Saibaba cult (Srinivas 1970 : 132).

**The national Government and various State Government in India increasingly recognize that vast numbers of people crowding pilgrimage centres can also be used as a convenient stage for the diffusion of new ideas bearing on the social, economic and political development of India.** Take the example of *Ardha Kumbha* at Hardwar where the Health Department had set up a large (temporary) family-planning exhibition and a clinic, which familiarised thousands of pilgrims with family-planning devices. It even extended individual advice to numerous people. Similarly, the ministries of Agriculture and Industries had their exhibitions. The large number of pilgrims who assemble at sacred places with very little cost to the government can provide an inexpensive method for the dissemination of new ideas even to the remote corners of the country.

### 30.3.3 Hindu Pilgrimage

According to (Eck 1981 : 323-25) the Hindu tradition of tirtha has three principal sources.

- i) the Vedic tradition of rituals and sacrifices
- ii) the Upanishadic wisdom and knowledge tradition; and
- iii) the "locative strand" of piety of indigenous India.

In the Vedic and Sanskrit usage a *tirtha* means a 'crossing place' or 'ford' where one may cross over to the far shore of a river or to the far shore of the worlds of heaven. Hence, in the course of time, *tirtha* has come to refer to those places of pilgrimage where the crossing might be safely made.

**The Hindu pilgrimage tradition recognises not merely the sacredness of specific spots but the holiness of vast regions or rather, the entire territory of India.** The recognition of India as a sacred landscape woven together, north and south, east and west by the routes of pilgrims has created a powerful sense of India as Bharat Mata-Mother India (Eck 1981 : 336). If all the temples in a tirtha area polluted or demolished to the ground, the sanctity and efficacy of the *kshetra* shall remain unaffected and hence new temples may be built at new sites within its sacred territory. This is how the *tirthas* of the Hindus have survived numerous invasions and destructions (Saraswati, 1978 : 88).

Once the pilgrim's *puja* or direct communication with the deity in the shrine is over, a part of what the pilgrim has offered in *puja* is returned to him as *prasad* or blessed object. It is believed that to eat the blessed food, to wear a string, bangle or amulet or to carry a flower returned from the Puja will bring about the desired goal. These objects are ritually energized i.e., they are infused with the power of the deity by their contact with its image. The pilgrim seeks to continue the pure status attained in the *tirtha* as long as possible. Hence, *a Hindu pilgrim does not perform any ritual of desacralization prior to his or her departure from the tirtha.*

The openness of *tirthas* is illustrated in Saraswati's analysis of the diversity of performances and performers in Kashi (Saraswati, 1978). In Kashi one will find pilgrims belonging to all the different cultural traditions of Hindus — oral, textual and transcendental. Thus a potter pilgrim belonging to the oral cultural tradition

(*Laukik Sanskriti*) feels satisfied if a Brahman priest takes him to the shrine of Viswanath in Kashi for worship and to the river Ganga for a holy bath. The priest may take him to some other Brahmanic shrines also. But what is really important for him and what he does on his own is to visit the non-Brahmanic shrines of defied heroes, known as *beers*, such as *Agiya beer* and *Lahura beer*, and bathe in the *Krimikunda*, a sacred tank located in Keenaramka Astar.

It would appear that by generating an essentially continuous religious space, the circulation or “flow” of pilgrims to sacred places helps them transcend the great linguistic and regional-cultural differences of India.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) What are pilgrimages ? Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a brief note about pilgrimage in Hinduism. Use about five lines for your answer.

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### 30.3.4 Buddhist Pilgrimage

Buddhist pilgrimage is a concrete example of the statement that mysticism is an “interior pilgrimage” and pilgrimage is “exteriorized mysticism”. The internal pilgrimage or meditation brings a Buddhist closer to the goal of *nirvana* (pali, *nbibbana*). But the turning toward the Buddha who is iconically represented in the marks of his presence on earth or in relics is considered an important preliminary step along the path to enlightenment. In addition to bodily relics (Pali, *sariradhatu*), Buddhist tradition also recognises

- i) *paribhogikadhatu* or relics or objects that the Buddha used (e.g., his alms bowl) or marks (such as a footprint or shadow) that he let on earth and
- ii) *uddesikadhatu* which refer to routine reminders, such as images and stupas, known not to contain actual relics. *Stupas* or *chaityas* related to these indications of Buddha’s presence in the world have grown into centres of pilgrimage by Buddhists.

The secondary tradition makes Buddha himself determine the goals of pilgrimage

- i) where he was born (Lumbini in Nepal),
- ii) where *bodhi* or the highest insight or enlightenment was achieved. (*Bodh Gaya in India*).
- iii) where he “turned the wheel of the Law”, i.e. preached his first sermon (the Deer Park at Sarnath near Banaras), and
- iv) where he passed into the state of *nirvana* (Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh).

On these places, the Chinese pilgrims have reported at length. **Today more than in the past centuries, these sites are being constantly visited by pilgrims from the Buddhist countries, and many different denominations belonging to several countries have built monasteries in these areas.** The Indian Government built a rest house for pilgrims at Sanchi (Gwalior); the stupa connected with the Buddha’s main disciples Sariputta and Mahamoggallana. The number of Buddhist Indian places of pilgrimage is limited. There is no unequivocally Buddhist tirtha in South India”. During the long period between the decline of Buddhism in India (the first millenium CE) and the late nineteenth century Buddhist pilgrimage was confined mainly to Buddhist lands outside India. The emerging importance of certain sites — the so-called sixteen great places in Sri Lanka and the twelve shrines related to the twelve-year cycle in northern Thailand — was associated primarily with the linking of political and moral communities in the world to a sacred Buddhist cosmos. *In mainland China there have been various pilgrimage sites, related to both Buddhism and Taoism. But with the advent of the Communist regime in 1949 pilgrimages in China seem to have disappeared.*

### 30.3.5 Jain Pilgrimage

Jains are “the pilgrims par excellence, ever on the move” (Madan, 1991: 18). Indeed, Jains hold the *sramana* or wandering ascetic to be the essential exemplar of the true path of renunciation. One important way to follow the ideal of the exemplars is found in pilgrimage. According to Diana L. Eck the Jain notion of *tirth/tirtha* has a close connection with the words of passage, *tirtha* (ford or crossing) and *tareti* (crosses) in the Vedic and Upanishadic literature. These terms were used in early Jain literature to express profound spiritual transition. Although the earliest Jain literature refers. So the enlightened teacher as a *jina*, “a victor” before long he became known as *tirthankara*, a “ford maker”, who has crossed the stream and reached the far shore (Eck 1981 : 333).

Jains divide their *tirthas* (sacred pilgrimage sites) into two categories: (i) *Siddhakshetras* from where the ascetics realised their liberation and (ii) *atisavgakshetras* which are sacred for other reasons, including *murtis* which bestow favours on their devotees (Sangave, 1980). Interestingly, the Jains economic success is attributed by many to the magical power of their *sadhus* and sacred statutes. There are many sectarian differences among the Jains. **The idea and practice of pilgrimage is, however, one of the important features common to all Jains.** Common pilgrimage sites, despite sectarian claims for ownership, reveal the shared symbol of Tirthankar (founding exemplar of Jainism) in which all repose faith (Singhi, 1991 : 140). Mass pilgrimages held to celebrate sacred anniversaries reveal the reality of community in the life of Jains divided into so many sects and subsects. Virtually all Jains take part in these at some point in their lives. Some people spend a remarkable amount of time trundling in trains, or buses, or even walking as a penance or to acquire merit, to distant holy sites. At these places there can be an immense convergence or assembly of Jains.

### 30.3.6 Sikh Pilgrimage

Earlier, the founder of Sikh religion had said: "Religion does not consist in wandering to tombs or cremation grounds, nor of sitting in meditative postures" [quoted by Bharati (1963); see Macauliffe, *The Sikh Religion* (Oxford, 1909)]. Guru Amar Das, one of the ten preceptors of Sikhism, tried to prevent the Sikhs from visiting Hardwar, Banaras, Allahabad, etc. "However, Sikhs — especially women — frequent the Hindu pilgrim centres, particularly Hardwar, which is close to the Punjab" (Bharati, 1963 : 143). It is thus interesting to note how Sikhism which developed into a distinct religion with belief in the ten Gurus, and reverence for the Holy Book *Guru Granth Sahib*, as also for certain symbols and shrines and initial opposition to pilgrimage came to incorporate pilgrimage. Bharati (*ibid*) informs that Guru Nanak himself visited the tomb of a Muslim saint (Shaikh Farid of Ajodhan).

Guru Nanak visited the Hindu places of pilgrimage like Hardwar, Kurukshetra, Puri, Rameswaram, Varanasi, Kailash, etc. as much as the places sacred to the Muslims but only to attack the hollow rituals, the superstitions, and the exclusiveness of both. Gopal Singh (1970) quotes from M.A. Macauliffe's *Sikh Religion* which records the opposition of Sikh religion to idolatry and "pilgrimages to the sacred rivers and tanks". But the same Sikh writer writes in another place that in the historic *Gurudwaras*, as at Amritsar, a large number of trained musicians are kept in employment to treat the pilgrims to devotional music at almost any time of day or night" (Singh 1970 : 84).

*Gurudwara* (the *Guru's* door) has a pivotal role in the life of the Sikhs whether in villages or towns. There are in India today four famous *Gurudwaras* — at Amritsar, Patna (the birthplace of Guru Govind Singh), Nanded (where he died) and Anandpur. The Golden Temple at Amritsar is the holiest and attracts an unending stream of pilgrims round the year. Amritsar was earlier known as *Guru ka chak* or Ramdaspur, named after Guru Ram Das who founded here a rallying point for the Sikhs. Guru Arjan Singh, known to have infused vigour into Sikhism, increased the importance of Amritsar by making it his headquarters, completing the construction of the tank, and building a temple — *Har mandir* (Temple of God — in its midst). He also built a temple at Tarn Taran and founded the city of Kartarpur, both of which became important places of pilgrimage. The shrine at Dera Baba Nanak is another famous centre in Punjab. Delhi has two famous shrines — *Gurudwara Sis Ganj* (the place of Martyrdom of Guru Teg Bahadur) and *Gurudwara Rakabganj* (where his dead body was cremated).

### 30.3.7 Pilgrimage in Islam

The annual pilgrimage of Muslims to Mecca, in West-Central Arabia, is known by the term *hajj*. The term *hajj* itself, like its Hebrew cognate *hag*, seems to reflect an ancient semitic notion of "going around" or "standing" in the presence of a deity, or sacred mountain or shrine, or the journey to it. Muhammad incorporated the pre-Islamic rite of pilgrimage of early Arabia to Kabah as one of the five Pillars of Faith in Islam, the other four being the profession of faith in Allah and his apostle, prayer or performance of divine worship five times a day, fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Saum*), compulsory alms giving (*Zakat*). In 1982 from an estimated world Islamic population of 750 million, approximately 3 million Muslims were reported to have made the journey. The *hajj* experience is an important expression of social and religious unity and equality in Islamic culture. The duty of performing the *hajj* rests on the authority of scripture (the Quran) and the recorded practice of the prophet Muhammad (*sunah*).

Although *hajj* is a duty which a Muslim man or woman owes to Allah, the decision as to whether and when one should undertake the "journey to the house" belongs

ultimately to each individual Muslim. This element of individual decision makes room for voluntariness in *hajj-hajj* becomes in a way a voluntary act. Hajj is valid at any stage of adult life.

### Activity 1

Read Sections 30.3 to 30.3.8 on pilgrimages in different religions. Write a two page note on the similarities and differences that you find. Compare and discuss your findings with other students at the Study Centre.

The *Hajj* proper or the *Great Pilgrimage* begins on the eight of Dhu-al-Hijjah, the day of setting out for Arafat, some thirteen miles east of Mecca. At Arafat the rite of *wukuf* or “standing” at the Mount of Mercy, the themes of brotherhood and repentance dominate the afternoon sermons and supplications. At sundown the rite of *ifadah* (“pouring fourth”) or *nafarah* (“stampede”) or “hurrying” to Muzdalifah begins. During the overnight or shorter halt at Muzdalifah, pilgrims gather small stones for ritual lapidations or the ceremonial stoning of devil at Mina the next day. The tenth of Dhu al-Hijjah is the final official day of the *Hajj* season. Most of the ritual activities of this day take place in Mina and include (i) the casting of seven small stones at the pillar of Aqaba, symbolizing the stoning of the devil who waked Ibrahim not to obey the command of Allah, (ii) the feast of major sacrifice (*Id al-adha*), (iii) the rite of deconsecration from the condition of *ihram*, and (iv) the visit to Mecca for the *tawaf*, called *al-ifadah* (P.D.: 1966).

Those who complete the *hajj* will be entitled to the epithet *hajj* or *hajji* (*hajjah* or *hajjiyah* if female). This honorific title indicates socially perceived status enhancement. It is a recognition by one’s peers that a sacred duty has been performed. It is a matter of universal value and spiritual merit, if not universal spiritual achievement in Islam.

### 30.3.8 Christian Pilgrimage

Pilgrimages played a very important role in the religious life of the Christian church, particularly in the middle ages, and it is still in vogue among the Christians in different places like Palestine. Pilgrimage, or making one’s way to holy places, is regarded by devout Christians as an ascetic practice that lets the Christian find salvation through the difficulties and dangers of temporary exile. It is also a means of coming in contact with that which is divine and obtaining grace or the blessings of the supernatural power associated with the pilgrimage site. Pilgrimage is undertaken by Christians also to give thanks to the supernatural power for obtaining the blessing requested.

Pilgrimages to Christian shrines in India have two noteworthy features. First, the most popular shrines attract pilgrims round the year not only from among the Christians but also from among “Indians of other faiths as well” (Moore 1964 : 47). “Even Muslims have been known to overcome their aversion to graven images and to pray at the shrines of Mary” (*idem*). Secondly, norms associated with most of these Christian pilgrimages reflect a significant impact of Hinduism on them. For example, a Christian pilgrim suffering from an ailment in any part of the body offers a wax replica of the affected organ to St. Mary at Bandra. It resembles the practice of offering silver or other metallic replicas of eye, nose, ear, hand or foot to Lord Venkateswara at Tirupati by the Hindu devotees for the cure of ailment of particular organs. The walking pilgrimage of the Christians from Howrah to Bandel (in preference to the very convenient travel by train) to visit ‘Our Lady of Happy Voyage’ reminds one of similar pilgrimages by the Hindus to many places like Tarakeswar (West Bengal) or Baidayanath Dham (Bihar), where they carry water from a sacred river, walking all the distance on foot. To collect money from aims to visit a place of pilgrimage and *Bhakhaoti* (sacred vow for a wish fulfilment) as

found among the Christian pilgrims to the shrines of Virgin Mary at Bettiah and the village of Rampur in North Bihar or elsewhere are also Hindu attributes. **The pilgrimage by two Christianity in early fifties to Kedarnath and Gangotri as an instance of indigenization of Christianity in India and an attempt to understand Christianity with the use of Hindu idioms and vice-versa.**

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Enumerate the types of pilgrimage that have been described by Turner. Use about five lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write a brief note on pilgrimages in India. Use about 5 to 7 lines for your answer.

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## **30.4 THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PILGRIMAGES**

For a comprehensive understanding of the social significance of pilgrimages we shall first examine Turner's thesis on pilgrimage as a social process, where he emphasizes the *communitas* in pilgrimages and their *liminal* (see Key words) character. We shall then see how pilgrimage is related to different aspects of social life, namely, social and cultural integration, educational, economic, political and other kinds of activities.

### **30.4.1 Turner's Thesis**

Victor W. Turner begins his thesis on pilgrimages as social processes with the idea that pilgrimage has the classic three-stage form of a rite of passage (as described by Van Gennep)

- i) separation,
- ii) the liminal stage (the journey itself, the sojourn at the shrine, and the contact with the sacred, and
- iii) reaggregation (the home-coming).

In this context Turner asks us to consider two modalities of social experience

- i) of structure and
- ii) of *communitas*.

## Activity 2

Have you ever been on a pilgrimage or do you know someone who has been on a pilgrimage? Do his/her experiences conform to Turner's classic three stage form of a rite of passage? Try to put the experiences into the three stage frame provided by Turner. Put these experiences down on a sheet of paper and discuss them with your fellow students, if possible at your Study Centre.

In structure people are differentiated by social role and position and linked in an often hierarchical political system. By contrast, *communitas* presents itself in an undifferentiated community of equals who may recognize each other in an immediate and total way. *Communitas* "is almost everywhere held to be sacred or 'holy', possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency". Turner (1974a : 203) remarks that *communitas* emerges where social structure is not and reaffirms the bonds of essential unity upon which the social order ultimately rests.

Pilgrimages seem to be regarded by self-conscious pilgrims both (i) as occasions on which *communitas* is experienced and (ii) journeys towards a sacred source of *communitas*, which is also seen as a source of healing and renewal.

The intervening period and flow of activities between departure from home for the pilgrimage centre and return therefrom to the familiar world is marked out by "liminality, the optimal setting of *communitas* relations, and *communitas*, a spontaneously generated relationship between levelled and equal, total and individuated human beings" (Turner, 1974a : 202).

Liminality and *communitas* together constitute anti-structure. Anti-structure is not the total reversal of structure but rather *the source and origin of the all structures and their critique*. It suggests new possibilities. In the pilgrimage situation the ethos of *communitas* becomes manifest in the social bond which develops among pilgrims and which welds them into a group. Relations among members of the group of pilgrims cut across the social divisions which are typical of social order in the home sphere. Pilgrims are relieved for a time from the nets of social structure wherefrom they journey to the pilgrimage centre. Since it allows temporary release, pilgrimage is designated as a form of anti-structure compared to the highly ordered and structured sedentary life of the place of residence. Pilgrimage involves the establishment of a temporary bond of camaraderie/comradeship and quasi-fraternity among those en route.

### 30.4.2 Pilgrimage and Socio-cultural Integration

The contribution of pilgrimages to social and cultural integration of a people is observed at three levels.

- i) First, pilgrimage promotes national or regional integration cutting across group boundaries.
- ii) Pilgrimage has a great impact on the group of participants themselves in maintaining and strengthening the values and ideals held by the group.
- iii) Pilgrimage serves in many cases to reinforce the existing patterns of social relations within the area from which the pilgrimage draws pilgrims.

India is well known for diversities of race, region, language, sect, caste etc. Here too pilgrimages have been a very important vehicle of the idea of essential unity of

the Indian people. Noting this M.N. Srinivas (1962 : 105) writes, “The concept of unity of India is essentially a religious one”. Famous centres of pilgrimage lie in every part of the country. Even in pre-British times when the means of communication and transport were very poor, pilgrims occasionally walked hundreds of miles across territories infested with fierce animals and dacoits and braved disease and privation to reach the sacred places for earning religious merit. The grand pilgrimage was *pradakshina* or clockwise circumambulation of the territory of India.

In a sacred centre like Banaras many kinds of people and many local and regional elements of culture are juxtaposed and ordered in a small place. A Maharashtrian priest intending to study the Vedas in Banaras will look for and get a Maharashtrian scholar in the city where he will also meet Bengalis and Tamils and rituals bearing the colour of their specific regional cultures. For example, the deity Murukan enshrined in several pilgrimage centres throughout the State of Tamil Nadu, stands as a symbol for Tamil Nadu and its people. Pilgrimage practices are a feature of Tamil regional identity. *Pilgrimage forges a social bond within the local area.* Sectarianism and factionalism are widespread in the regions from which the pilgrims come. But the pilgrimage is non-sectarian and is joined by all segments of the population to perform non-sectarian agricultural rites which concern the entire population of the area.

*Some pilgrimages transcend national boundaries and therefore function to bring together communities larger than the nation-state. The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca links all the separate communities of Muslims into one community of the Faithful centred on Mecca.*

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are Turner’s views on structure and communities ? Use about 5 lines for your answer.

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- ii) Write briefly on the socio-cultural aspect of pilgrimage. Use about 5 lines for your answer.

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### 30.4.3 Pilgrimage and Education

Pilgrimage has been one of the important sources of education, information and cultural awareness for the pilgrims. The Hindu pilgrimage affords, for instance, an opportunity to countless people living in distant villages to know India as a whole and also her varying manners, life styles and customs. Karve (1962 : 13-29) noted that three characteristics of education were present in the pilgrimage —



- i) the preservation of traditional knowledge,
- ii) its cultivation,
- iii) and its transmission to the next generation.

This education was also many-sided. Besides religion and philosophy, the three arts of music, dancing, and drama were included in it. It also encompassed the living together for some time of the whole array of communities, castes and classes within Indian society.

#### 30.4.4 Pilgrimage and the Arts

Dance and music, architecture, sculpture, and painting receive ample encouragement and transmission through pilgrimage. Many of the temples in Hindu and Jain *tirthas* are commendable for their artistic beauty and admirable design and conception which set examples for other such constructions. *Temples in India may rightly be said to represent both poetry and philosophy in brick and stone, and temple worship was in a way responsible for the great development and subsequent refinement of sculpture and painting, and music and dancing to extraordinary levels of excellence.* It is difficult to find temples of great antiquity in North and West India as these parts of the country were vulnerable to repeated invasions and destruction by the foreigners. In north India's *tirtha* tradition a *tirtha* is created through the deification of the land or territory. Temples are less significant than the sacred territory on which they stand. By contrast, the creation of a *tirtha* by building temples and housing the deity is largely a south Indian tradition. Hence, the large temple complex and the walled sacred territory are the characteristic features of the South.

#### 30.4.5 Pilgrimages, Material Culture and Economy

Pilgrimages have a role in the spread of material culture through the exchange of ideas and goods among the pilgrims along the routes of pilgrimage. The route-pattern of ancient pilgrimages suggests at least two favourable zones or corridors of contact between the North and the South. These corridors seem to have been favoured for the southward expansion of plow agriculture. The areas less suited for plow agriculture remained outside the zones and hence the pale of Hinduism and partly inhabited by tribal peoples. The *Purohits* (popularly known as *Pandas*) at Hardwar also maintain an elaborate system of record keeping on long leaders called *bahis* which contain genealogies of their clients *Yajman*. The *bahis* have been kept for generations and are handed down from father to son or even sold to other *purohits*, given in dowry to a son-in-law, or otherwise exchanged as property. This is so because of their association with the means of livelihood of *Pandas* who depend for their living on the custom provided by pilgrims visiting pilgrimages. *Constant coming and going of pilgrims in a pilgrim place gives impetus to growth of business activities in the area, small and big needs of pilgrims have to be catered and as a result appear a variety of marketing arrangements.* Apart from deity requirements of temporary shelter, food, articles for worship, several forms of entertainment, recreation also appear as a side-business activity. For example, the Pushkar *tirtha* in Rajasthan is famous for both its sacred character and its fair, where brisk business in animal trade is transacted between buyers and sellers from a wide area.

#### 30.4.6 Socio-Political Aspect of Pilgrimage

The close association in a common purpose, namely, the purpose of pilgrimage, of large numbers of people from different tribes, communities and localities affords the

basis for the development of political unity and stability of political authority. Pilgrimages played as vital a role in pan-Hebraism (Hebrew system of religion) as in modern pan-Islamism. Pilgrimages provided in the past the ideological legitimation for empires. Christian pilgrimages can be traced back, to the glorification of the Palestinian and Syrian 'Holy Land' perpetrated by the Emperor Constantine and his ecclesiastical retinue. The crusading spirit of the Christian intending to visit Jerusalem was generated when the hardship in the way increased because of the seeming intolerance of the aracen rulers. No doubt, notice of political conquest and worldly ambition entered into the Crusades in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries as well as in the practice of pilgrimage. Similarly, the Buddhist and Islamic holy places were generated out of the respective efforts of King Asoka and Muhammed and their priestly functionaries to establish Buddhism and Islam as state religions, respectively.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) How is pilgrimage a source of education, information and cultural awareness ? Answer in about 5-7 lines.

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- ii) What is, in your opinion the link between pilgrimage places and advancement in performative arts ? Answer in about 5-7 lines.

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- iii) Why do markets develop around pilgrim places ? Answer in about 7-10 lines.

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## 30.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have seen what pilgrimages are: This includes the definitions of pilgrimages, temple going, merit producing aspects and so on. Also covered were the institutional aspects of pilgrimage and its sacredness. Pilgrimage centres and liminality and auspiciousness in pilgrimage were also examined. We then examined Turner's typology of pilgrimages, the interpretations of *Hajj* and pilgrimages in India. Finally we turned to the social significance of pilgrimages. This included Turner's thesis, cultural integration, the arts and education. It covered economy and the socio-political aspect of pilgrimage we have therefore covered the topic adequately.

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## 30.6 KEY WORDS

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- Antistructure** : this is not the reversal of structure, but the source of all structures and their critique.
- Canon** : something that is fixed, a rule or norm. The canon of scripture means that fixed list of books that are determined to belong to sacred scripture.
- Communitas** : in the context of pilgrimage, communitas is a feeling of being one with other pilgrims, experiencing a release from all societal constraints, from class or creed. This lasts while the pilgrim is at the shrine.
- Liminal** : the state of being on the journey of a pilgrimage, visiting the shrine or pilgrimage spot, and returning we may say pilgrimage takes place in a liminal atmosphere, of being 'in between' two places the home and the pilgrimage shrine.
- Merit** : religious practices that have the calculated aim of improving the future spiritual welfare of oneself or others.
- Reaggregation** : this could be also called the homecoming or returning home to where the pilgrimage ends.
- Tirtha Yatra** : this is a Hindu expression of pilgrimage. It literally means undertaking a journey to river-fords.

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## 30.7 FURTHER READING

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Agrawal, B.C. 1980. *Cultural Contours of Religion and Economics in a Hindu Universe*. National : New Delhi.

Jha, Makhan (ed.) 1985. *Dimensions of Pilgrimage* Inter-India Publication : New Delhi.

Madan, T.N. (ed.) 1991. *Religion in India*. Oxford University Press : Delhi.

Saraswati, Baidyanath. 1975. *Kashi : Myth and Reality of a Classical Cultural Tradition*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study : Simla.

## 30.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) A pilgrimage is a long-often strenuous journey to an old or sacred place or shrine. It is undertaken for its spiritual merit. This could also lead to satisfaction of one's mundane desires. It is nevertheless essentially a individualistic pursuit for salvation or material wishes.
- ii) According to one view, the Hindu tradition of pilgrimages derives from the Vedic tradition of rituals and sacrifices, and common folk wisdom. In the pilgrimage traditions of India one finds that the Upanishad wisdom and tradition in the entire territory of India. This is why, according to Saraswati, pilgrim places in India have survived through invasions and wars during the past. The pilgrim places accommodate a variety of sacred sites and interests belonging to the different categories of pilgrims.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The types of pilgrimage enumerated by Turner are
  - i) archaic pilgrimage
  - ii) prototypical pilgrimages
  - iii) high-period pilgrimage
  - iv) modern pilgrimage
- ii) India's pilgrimages are both ancient and continuous. the *tirthas* were glorified by the sacred literature. As the offerings made at the sacred places are a source of livelihood for the priests. They extol the sanctity of the *tirtha* they serve. Tirthas are repositories of tradition and propagators of reinterpreted values and beliefs. The government of India is providing all facilities and accommodations possible at these sites. It is also using these places for its programme of family planning or exhibition of agricultural and industrial products.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) In a structure-situation we find that people are differentiated by status and position. This is often manifested in a hierarchical manner. On the other hand 'communitas' dissolves structure and erects bonds of essential unity.
- ii) Pilgrimage causes socio-cultural integration. In Banaras, for example all regions are represented, including Tamils, Maharashtrians, Bengalis and Punjabis. Many social bonds are formed, indeed some of the transcending national boundaries.

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) While on a pilgrimage, people get the chance to interact with persons from different regions, with different socio-economic backgrounds. This interaction gives them a chance to learn about people of other regions, their life styles and customs.
- ii) In most pilgrim places, there are often side-shows which give ample scope for proliferation of performative arts of drama, dance, singing and playing of instruments. Many temples are famous for their devadasis and their performances. Besides, many temples are unique examples of architectural designs and they have beautiful paintings and sculptures.

- iii) Basically, markets appear in pilgrim places to cater for the needs of pilgrims. Pilgrimages involve fulfilment of the daily needs of pilgrims on their way. Apart from daily needs, supply goods related to worship and other sacred duties is also another reason for setting up shops. In addition, for recreation and entertainments, different types of arrangement are made in and around the pilgrim centres.



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# UNIT 31 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

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## Structure

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Scope of the Unit
  - 32.2.1 What is a Religious Festival
  - 32.2.2 Meaning of Social Significance
- 31.3 Some Religious Festivals
  - 31.3.1 *Sanjhi*
  - 31.3.2 *Karwa Chauth*
  - 31.3.3 *Ravidas Jayanti*
- 31.4 Social Significance : A Discussion
  - 31.4.1 Adjustment Between Man, Nature and Society
  - 31.4.2 Emotional Social Security of Individual
  - 31.4.3 Identity, Solidarity, Differentiation and Conflict
  - 31.4.4 Social Stratification
  - 31.4.5 Ritual Art
  - 31.4.6 Unity in Diversity
- 31.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.6 Key Words
- 31.7 Further Reading
- 31.8 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 31.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit seeks to help you to

- comprehend, sociologically, the phenomenon of religious festivals
- analyse its relation with individual, society and culture in general and in India in particular
- delineate its social significance, both positive and negative
- enrich your overall understanding of the relation between Society and Religion.

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## 31.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this block we have so far covered three previous units on life cycle ritual (birth and marriage; and death) and a unit on pilgrimage. These units indicate that the social significance of religion pervades every aspect of our living right from birth onwards to marriage and death. *It also pervades our efforts at a better life and an attempt to come in contact with the sacred.* This unit shows us a colourful side of the significance of rituals. It indicates how some religious festivals are celebrated and therefore reveals to us another facet of the importance and significance of religion.

We begin this Unit by describing what a religious festival is and what the meaning of its social significance is. We then go on to examine certain religious festivals including those of *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth* and *Ravidas Jayanti*. We then analyse the social significance of religious festivals. We point out the adjustment between man, nature and society. Next we probe the emotional social security of the individual. We then analyse identity, solidarity, differentiation and conflict. Stratificational setting, ritual art and unity in diversity close our discussion.

Religion takes birth where man seeks to derive emotional social security not through science and technology but through the Supernatural, the Transcendental and the Otherworldly Power which he himself conceives and creates. Hence, religion is vitally connected with those elements of human experience which derive from contingency, powerlessness and scarcity as conditions of human existence. If they change, religion also changes.

In this connection, your understanding of the distinction between religion and magic, their interrelatedness and intertwined continuum into each other shall be of strategic importance. This is because both religion and magic can also be viewed as a consequence of what Max Weber conceives as 'routinization'. This leads to the institutionalization of norms, values and rituals and also symbols. They enter into social relationships at the individual and collective levels. The collective level manifests itself in such social spheres as family, caste, community (village/city) and at the levels of communal and religious groupings.

Social ceremonialization of rituals takes place not at individual but at the collective level. Of course, rituals of black magic are hardly ever collectively ceremonialized. And, to this is added recreation, mirth, merry-making (singing, dancing), tension-management, fast and feasting. Socially, all this remains intertwined with kinship, social stratification, economy, and with the polity of caste and village; and of religious groupings like church, sect and *panth*. And, thus, is created the realm of religious festivals. The sources for this unit are to be found in *Further Reading* of the end of the unit.

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## 31.2 SCOPE OF THE UNIT

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In view of what is stated, in this unit, your learning part is related to two questions: What is a religious festival? What do we mean by its social significance and how can we comprehend it sociologically?

### 31.2.1 What is a Religious Festival ?

Derived from the adjective festive (meaning festal, mirthful), festival means joyful celebration, feast (Chamber's Twentieth Century Dictionary). It also means day or season for public celebrations or merry-making (Oxford Progressive English Dictionary). Sociologically, too, a joyful public celebration or merry-making on or within a fixed day or season is the essential ingredient of a festival. Usually, such a celebration also includes feasting.

When because of its association with the Supernatural, a festival also acquires the rites and ceremonies of prayer/propitiation as a means of salvation from evil, it becomes religious. In India, festivals mostly fall on the continuum of religion and magic, some carrying the overtones of religion and some of magic. Mostly, they tend to combine both.

#### Box 31.01

In the Indian situation, the line between sacred and profane, prayer and propitiation—in short, between religion and magic—becomes very thin and, in many cases, even flimsy. As an exercise, we can take a festival—*Holi/Deepawali*/or any other popular festival of your region or village or city. Then, we can try to find if its rituals and ceremonies are entirely religious or magical or they range from religion to magic and are religio-magical or magico-religious.

Because of its association with the Supernatural, a religious festival is viewed as sacred. It is a tradition which has routinized rituals and ceremonies. Highly routinized

and sophisticated rituals and ceremonies may be conducted by the priest/magician but others may be informally performed at the group level. In celebrating *Deepawali*, the worship of the goddess Lakshmi at the family level is not as highly routinized and formal as that of Shiva in a prestigious temple as a part of the celebration of the festival of *Mahashivaratri*.

#### Activity 1

Write, in not more than two hundred words, your views for or against this statement: *Deepawali* is a religious festival. Compare if possible your note with the note of other students of ESO-15 in the Study Centre.

### 31.2.2 Meaning of Social Significance

By its very nature, the religious festival gets set in the patterned network of social relationships. This patterning may take place at the level of a society and/or also at the levels of groups. That is, as in our society, at the levels of family, caste, village, city, region and religious groupings of various kinds.

The religious festival is a social expression of what sociologists/anthropologists conceive as 'religious experience'. Emile Durkheim pointed out that questions about all sorts of things which surpass the limits of knowledge are the basis of the human social experience we call religion. Let us begin our discussion by taking the following examples.

- i) In the celebration of *Shia* and *Sunni* Muslims show a differing network of social relationships, attitudes and theological ideology. For Muslims, Moharram is both a measure of group-identity and intra-group differentiation and conflict.
- ii) Celebration of *Holi* does not exhibit the same patterned network of social relationships and religious attitudes at the urban and rural levels. In the city, Holi is mostly celebrated through formally organized groups. The underlying orientation to fertility cult, crop-prosperity and intercaste relations, as occupationally ritually defined, have tended to disappear in the city. So does Nature's exuberance, motivating the well-known gay abandon of the ruralite.
- iii) The Bengalis celebrate *Basant Panchami* with greater enthusiasm than others. The same festival acquires an altogether different significance for the followers of Shivanaraini Panth of *Bhakti*-cult. On this day, at night, they organize a *gadi* (the seat of the Guru). It is presided over by the local *mahant* (the local religious head). At this gathering is arranged public singing of hymns, composed by Shiva Narain, the founder of the *panth*. The meaning of these hymns is expounded to the laity. It is a ceremonial occasion for initiating the new converts to the path shown by the Guru. Here, the Guru seems to replace the Goddess Saraswati, with whose worship *Basant Panchami* is associated.

In the light of the above example let us now raise the question as to what should we mean by the social significance of a religious festival. As per the dictionary meaning of the term significance, should we simply confine ourselves to the 'meaning' and 'importance' of the festival? We would do that definitely. But, it should not be the meaning and importance as seen by you or by me. To do so would be arbitrary, subjective and highly unsociological.

**In order to be social, significance is to be interpreted in the context of meaning which practitioners of a festival assign to it. Its importance is to be interpreted in relation to the patterned network of social relationships in which the festival in question is set. Both meaning and importance are to be seen in the context of the individual's society and culture and their interrelatedness**



and structuring at the level, we may have in mind. As for example, social significance of *Basant Panchami* among the Shivanarainis is to be interpreted in the context of the *panth*, its social structure and worldview. As a student of sociology, you may be already familiar with the concept of function which, largely, includes both meaning and importance. To be precise, in sociology, function is conceived as observable consequences of a cultural trait, an institution, a patterned social activity and a role or a set of roles in relation to the operation of the patterned social network it belongs to or of which it is a part. Consequences can be positive or negative or partly positive and partly negative. From the point of view of group solidarity and identity, for Muslims, *Moharram* is partly positive and partly negative.

To enable you to delineate social significance of the religious festival, in the next section are presented the details of a few selected religious festivals.

## 31.3 SOME RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Religious festivals are occasions when ritual is seen at its height and picturesque best. We now describe some religious rituals.

### 31.3.1 Sanjhi

In Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan and certain parts of Madhya Pradesh (Malwal and Nimar), *Sanjhi* is largely associated with the worship of the Goddess (Devi). She is known by various names—Devi, Durga, Shakumbari etc.

It is celebrated just after the fall of *pitripaksha* (annual fortnightly ancestor worship held in the month of October). It coincides with *navaratri*s—the week devoted to the worship of the all prevailing female-power (*shakti*). That power is generally symbolized as Devi/Durga. *Sanjhi* seems to be a regional expression of the *Shakta* Cult (worship of Shakti), the roots of which are traced back to India's prehistoric past. In some form or the other, *Shakta* cult is found all over India and has been a powerful thematic stream of the religious experience of Indians. It forms a continuum from little tradition to great tradition. For the concepts of little tradition and great tradition, see pp. 38-40 of Unit 3, Block 1 of ESO-02.

Celebration of *Sanjhi* is virtually related to women and to the art of clay-modelling. The idol of the Goddess (*Sanjhi*) is modelled, dried, coloured and fixed in a canvas, created on a wall by using cowdung. The idol is dressed in *lahanga* (skirt), *choli* (blouse) and *chumri* (scarf). Highly bedecked in local ornaments, the *Sanjhi* appears to be a true replica of the local rural woman.

#### Box 31.01

*Holi* is a popular North Indian festival celebrated each year at the full moon in the lunar month of March-April. The celebration can start a few days earlier or a few days later. First of all the holi fire is prepared by piling up wood around a central pole. This is kindled at the time of the rising moon. Both men and women circumambulate the fire. Coconuts are thrown into the fire and new barley is roasted on it. The coming harvest, and how good it will be are cast by the direction of the flames. Sometimes embers are taken out from the fire to light fires in their own homes.

Ashes are also collected from the *holi* fire to guard against disease. The holi fire is also regarded as a holi pyre which buried the demon Holika. Holika had a boon that she could never die by fire. She went into the fire catching Prahlada a faithful devotee of Vishnu and son of her brother Hiranyakasipu. Prahlad survived through his devotion to Vishnu while Holika the evil one, die in the flames.

During playing of *holi* people of all caste drench each other with water stained with colours and rub 'gula' coloured powders on each other. Men are even beaten with sticks by women in Mathura. McKim Marriott has called Holi the feast of love.

Along with this, models of the Sun, Moon and stars, parrots perching on a green branch of a tree, comb, fan, brass-band players, *Sanjhi's* brother and a thief are also made and hung upside down. Other symbols from every day life can also be modelled and arranged on either side of *Sanjhi*. Modelling of symbols depends on the skill and ingenuity of the local artist. Modelling and arranging of *Sanjhi* is mostly done by women, particularly young women.

*Below the Sanjhi, in a container, is placed mud (mitti) sown with barley seeds. Every evening, women worship the Goddess and collectively sing songs in her praise and to invoke her blessings. Worship and singing is also mingled with mirth and merry-making. It is an occasion of recreation in the otherwise busy schedule of village-women.*

The worship culminates on the day of *Durgashtami*, though it continues up to *Vijayadashami*, the day *Dashahra* is celebrated. By that time, the barley seeds sprout into creamish green shoots. On the day of *Dashahra*, in the morning, small bundles of these shoots are placed on the ears of the males of the family. Then, after final worship, *Sanjhi* is dismantled and ceremonially immersed in a nearby river/pond/canal.

Many streams of socio-cultural life seem to intermingle in the festival of *Sanjhi*. It is linked with the Indian philosophy of *adiprakriti* (The Eternal Female) which, in the unison with *adipurusha* (The Eternal Male), constitutes the eternal unity of life and is a source of reproduction and continuity. Sowing of barley seeds and placing of barley shoots on the ears of males symbolize an endeavour to attain agricultural prosperity with the help of the Supernatural. It, thus, seems to be related to the fertility cult which is widely practised among the peasantry. Interestingly, it is more popular with the agricultural castes of the region.

Some women also feel that the worship of *Sanjhi* in the modelled symbol of married woman is intended to attain the longevity of marital state of a woman. because, socially, the marital state is considered a sign of good luck (*saubhagya*) for her. Green parrots perching on a branch of a tree are said to symbolize prosperity. As believed, a parrot is supposed to ward off an impending evil of which one may not be aware.



A Hindu religious festival in progress with three straw figures in the background.

Modelling of *Sanjhi*'s brother is for the longevity of life of the worshipper's brother(s). The thief hung upside down is supposed to magically ward off thieves. Other symbols like those of brass band players, *chat*-seller, sweet seller and hookah etc. seem to be related to the joy of artistic creation.

### 31.3.2 Karwa Chauth

It is a festival of married women, confined mostly to the upper strata of Punjab and Hindi-speaking belt of the country. It is characterized by fast, feasting, worship of *Girija Gauri* (the consort of lord Shiva and a symbol of woman's devotion to her husband), Moon and Sun and the art of drawing and painting. As in *Sanjhi*, the art-aspect of *Karwa Chauth* is not intrinsic to it and, hence, is not universally associated with it. It is not practised in every family and region. In the villages around Lucknow, in the linguistic-cultural region, called Awadh, *karwa* is drawn and painted on a wall. It looks like a wall painting.

*Within the bordered canvas is painted the symbol of the goddess. It symbolizes the married woman.* Here are also painted Sun, Moon and Stars. Other usual symbols are—married women being carried in a palanquin, brother carrying *karwa* (a kind of earthen/bronze vessel used in the worship) to his sister's house as a ritual present.

*Karwa* is observed on the fourth of the black fortnight of the month of *Kartik* (Oct.-Nov.), twelve days before *Deepawali*. In this month fall a series of festivals having *tantrik* (magical) undertones. *Karwa Chauth* is one of them. It starts with a daylong fast by the woman observing it. In the evening, in the twilight of rising moon, the goddess is worshipped and water-oblation is offered to the moon. In some places, after offering water, women view the moon through a sieve. After the worship is over, the woman touches the feet of her husband. It is followed by a family feast.

Through *Karwa Chauth*, a woman prays for and ritually seeks to derive emotional security for the longevity of her married life. As it seems, it is observed where remarriage of woman is not permitted and widowhood is viewed as an evil. That explains its non-observance among low castes, and the untouchables where divorce, remarriage by women and widow remarriage have been permitted. It is not a tradition in Garhwal where even among high castes remarriage has been permitted.

As seen in Dehradun, in some Garhwali families living in the cities of plains, it has now been adopted. Women of low castes of new generation are now gradually adopting it as a customary symbol of prestige. Motifs of *Karwa* painting are being innovated and new motifs are being added. An educated girl, in a village near Lucknow, added a television set and a farmer behind the plough as new motifs to the *Karwa*-painting. Her painting of the Sun and Moon is of course symbolic but more anthropomorphized.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Describe the festival of *Sanjhi*. What is the importance of this festival? Give your answer in 10-12 lines.

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Gambling is rampant and is done in limitation to see how the gods settle the fate of men.

In North India the second day of *Deepawali* is for hill Govardhana, near Mathura. Legend has it that once Indra captured all the world's cattle, but Krishna freed the cows. However the angered Indra sent down a deluge of rain on the animals. It was then that Krishna raised Govardhana to save the cows. Offerings are thus made to mounds of cow dung. Finally the ritual also includes feasting especially for brothers on whose wrists the protective thread (*rakhi*) had been tied.

In the early thirties of this century, celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* was instituted. In the then prevailing politics of reform and revival through caste, Ravidas was rediscovered as the divine symbol of the unity of the Chamar endogamous groups (Jatis) and also of the Chamar's move towards upward social mobility through protest and Sanskritization. *Ravidas Ramayan* and *Ravidas Katha* were composed to take the place of *Tulsidas Ramayan* and *Satya Narain Vrat Katha*.

Celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* was thus instituted as a politically motivated religio-festive platform. It was first organized in the cities and then it spread to the villages. It became a socio-political movement among the Chamars of Northern India. Here and there emerged Ravidas temples as centres of preaching the philosophy of Ravidas and motivating the Chamar for social mobility.

Over the last six decades, celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* got routinized with overtones of a religious festival. On the day of its celebration, the highly devout observe a fast. In the morning, a flag with seven colours, symbolizing the main teachings of Ravidas, is unfurled. At the foot of the pole, a painting of Ravidas is kept. It is worshipped like a divine idol. In front of it, a *hawan* is performed.

Depicting and portraying anecdotes of miracles from Ravidas's life, a procession is taken out in the afternoon. On that day, the Chamars mostly refrain from work, don new clothes and join the procession. Next day, a gathering of caste-members is invited. Games for children are organized and prizes are given away to the winners. Referring to Ravidas, political and caste leaders make politically oriented speeches. As in *Deepawali*, at night, houses are decorated with earthen lamps.

## 31.4 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE : A DISCUSSION

We now turn to examine the social significance of the festivals described. It is quite clear that society has given an importance place to religious festivals and that they are of integrative value. They also have significance for socialization purposes.

### 31.4.1 Adjustment Between Man, Nature and Society

O'Dea (1966 : p. 115) points out that in the annual social cycle of life, there occurs 'the patterned alternation of sacred and profane periods, of periods of celebration and periods of work'. If we keep in mind our festivals of *Basant Panchami*, *Shivaratri* and *Holi* on the one hand, and *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth*, *Deepawali* and *Govardhan Puja* on the other, we notice that our religious festivals mostly fall in the periods of transition alternating between well-set seasons—Rains, Winter and Summer.

The months of *Agahan* and *Paush* do not have any festivals. As against this, in the polyandrous tracts of Garhwal (Jaunsar Bawar, Jaunpur and Rawain), the last days of the month of *Paush* are characterized by a series of festivals falling one

after the other. They are characterized by a festive gay abandon expressed through singing, dancing, eating, drinking and merry-making.

*By tradition, young married girls return to their father's houses to join the winter festivities. These festivals are partly religious but mostly this worldly, given mainly to recreation and merry-making. It is to be noted that because of intense cold and snow, agricultural activity remains at a standstill, in some places.*

#### 31.4.2 Emotional Social Security of the Individual

Certain festivals like *Karwa Chauth* are intended to provide emotional social security to the individual. *Karwa Chauth* may be said to have a loose group-character in so far as it is observed only by married women or by the women of a family or neighbourhood. It is intended to provide salvation against the evil of the social curse of widowhood. Festivals seeking to attain emotional-social security tend to acquire a magical undertone. They may or may not have group-character.

Festivals relating to fertility cult, agricultural and otherwise prosperity, longevity of husband brother and son, and annual collective propitiation of gods or goddesses to ward off the evils of misfortunes and diseases (small-pox and cholera) fall in this category.

#### 31.4.3 Identity, Solidarity, Differentiation and Conflict

Socially, religious festivals are also related to group identity and solidarity and to intra-and-inter-group differentiation and conflict. It tends to lend identity and solidarity to different types of groups, namely, a *panth* (religious brotherhood), a caste, a spatial group (village/region/nation) and an ethnic group (as for example, the Parsis).

To illustrate : *Moharram* lends identity to the Muslim, the *gadi* Panchami to the followers of Shivanaraini *Panth*. *Karwa Chauth* and *Sanjhi* are not all-India but regional festivals. Likewise, *Dala Chhatha* is essentially a festival of the Bhojpuri region. It is characterized by rituals ensuring fecundity of a woman, fulfilment of longing for a male offspring and longevity of the son's life.

Celebration of *Moharram* is also linked to the *panthic* differentiation between the *Shia* and the *Sunni*, as in Lucknow, it often leads to a conflict between them. Sometimes, it even takes a violent form. When celebration of *Moharram* and *Holi* or *Dushahara* coincide, the danger of Hindu-Muslim tension, leading to violent conflict, remains an imminent possibility.

Celebration of *Ravidas Jayanti* has not united endogamous groups of its followers into a socially solid group. At Dehradun, the *Raidasi* and *Jatiya Chamars* join the procession but hold other celebrations in their respective Mohallas (Bhatt, 1961). Even the *Raidasis* now hold their celebration at two places though they live in the same ward and in a more or less contiguous settlement. Now there are separate organizations to manage the celebration of *Ravidas Jayanthi*.

#### Activity 2

List five religious festivals which have not been dealt with in the text. Compare your list with the list prepared by other students of ESO-05 in the Study Centre. How many of them in their lists are the same ?

#### 31.4.4 Social Stratification

In the Indian situation, there is a close linkage between the celebration, of a

religious festival and social stratification. Social stratification on India consists largely of hierarchically arranged castes. Each caste has a traditionally ordained occupational role. Traditionally, caste-based occupational roles have been subservient to agricultural economy and to the social-economic position of the agriculturist.

Because of the growing impact of urban-industrialism, the traditional synchronization between caste and occupation is fast changing. Still, in the rural situation, it continues though in a fragile form. However, largely speaking, in the celebration of a religious festival, the Brahmin performs a priestly role, members of artisan castes meet the requirements relating to the craft of their respective castes and members of low castes play the role of the menial. In the celebration of *Ram Lila*, in many places, the effigy of Ravan is made by Muslim artisans.

### 31.4.5 Ritual Art

Ritual art relates to the expressive aspect of religion in society. As the previous descriptions of *Sanjhi* and *Karwa Chauth* indicate, art finds a crucial place in the celebration of a religious festival. It may be found associated with various forms of art—drawing, painting, modeling, sculpturing (out of stone and/or wood) and decoration, floral and otherwise.

As already indicated, *Karwa* is characterized by the art of drawing and painting and *Sanjhi* by that of clay-modelling, technically speaking, by the art-form of tile mural. In Brij Mandal, at Mathura, floral decoration enters into the arrangement of *Sanjhi*. Here, *Sanjhi* symbolizes Radha and Krishna. In the month of *Shravan* (August), with fresh leaves and flowers, their figures are arranged on the ground inside the temple.

Artists may be specialists as well as non-specialists. Where rituals are directed by a specialist and celebration of the festival is set in the stratificational structure, creation of relevant art-objects may become a job of one or more specialists. In a village, in the polyandrous tract of Garhwal, the wooden idols of Hanuman, bear and sheep, are carved by the village carpenter (the *Badi*). Otherwise, as in the case of *Sanjhi* and *Karwa*, it may be done by non-specialists.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write about identity solidarity differentiation and conflict and religious festivals. Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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- ii) What is ritual art? Can you give some examples of it? Use 5-7 lines for your answer.

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### 31.4.6 Unity in Diversity

In a pluralistic society like ours, emotional realization of unity in diversity is our socio-cultural ethos and philosophical worldview. Our religious festivals are also seen in the corresponding socio-cultural matrix.

*Like cultural traits, religious festivals, too, have the tendency to diffuse. Diffusion is both vertical and horizontal. Shakti cult, for example, has diffused both vertically and horizontally. In the horizontal diffusion, in which the process of spread, assimilation, integration and consequent modification come into operation. Consequently, there develop regional forms of a religious festival.*

To illustrate, the concept of Goddess emanates from the philosophically conceived all-pervading supernatural female power. But, that manifests itself in various forms—Vashno Devi, Shakumbhari, Kamakhya, Durga, Kali, Shitla etc. Each of them is regionally located. But, all are viewed as manifestations of the same power.

Unity in diversity of *Shakti* cult manifests at another level—at the level of region and habitat. In Malwa, in M.P., *Sanjhi* is celebrated during *pitripaksha*, in the West Uttar Pradesh after *pitripaksha* and at Mathura in the month of Shraavan. In Malwa, *Sanjhi* symbolizes a divine unmarried girl who, year by year, leaves for her *sasural* (father-in-law's house). In Western Uttar Pradesh, it symbolizes the Goddess and in Brij Radha and Krishna.

In Bundel Khand (U.P.) it is a form of Mamulia and, in Maharashtra, a form of Gulabi. In Eastern U.P. and Bihar, it is Jhinjhia and in Bengal, the powerful Durga cult. In Tamil Nadu, it becomes a festivals of dolls. In Gujarat, it takes the form of vigorous and glamorous Garba festival. And, in all these regional forms of *Shakti* cult, young unmarried girls play a crucial role.

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## 31.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we examined what a religious festival is and analysed the scope of its social significance. In this context, some religious festivals were discussed, these were *Sanjhi*, *Karwa Chauth*, and *Ravidas Jayanti*. We then discussed the social significance of religious' festivals. This included adjustment between culture, nature and society. Next we looked at the emotional and social security of the individual. Following a discussion of identity, solidarity differentiation and conflat the issue of stratification was examined. Ritual art and unity in diversity in relation to observation of religious festivals were also dicussed.

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## 31.6 KEY WORDS

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- Anthropomorphic** : Representation of God as having the form, personality or attributes of man.
- Festival** : A religious celebration incorporating ritual elements.



<b>Identity</b>	: Affiliation with a group and being aware of it, in terms of behaviour and thinking.
<b>Karwa Chauth</b>	: Festival of women who worship Goddess Durga and God Shiva for the long life of their husbands.
<b>Sanjhi</b>	: Fertility cult ritual of Devi/Durga/Shakumbhari.
<b>Supernatural</b>	: Concerning phenomena which is paranormal—like the Gods, Ghosts, and Demons.

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### 31.7 FURTHER READING

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### 31.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The festival of *Sanjhi* is held in Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan. It is held in the month of October. The idol of the Goddess (*Sanjhi*) is made with clay. Below her is mud sown with barley seeds. In the evening women sing her praises. On *Dashahra* the sprouted seeds of barley are placed on the ears of the males of the family. The idol is then dismantled. The importance of this worship is that it is linked with Indian philosophy and is a symbol of fertility and prosperity.
- ii) *Karwa Chauth* is a festival of married women in Punjab and the Hindi speaking belt. It is characterized by fast, feasting, and worship of *Girija/Gaura*. An idol is made of goddess Durga with canvas painted variously. *Karwa* is observed 12 days before *Deepawali*. In the evening the goddess is worshipped and water oblations are offered to the moon. After this the women see the moon through a sieve. The women then touch their husband's feet and there is a family feast. The importance of this ritual lies in the desire for the longevity of one's husband. It is observed where remarriage of the woman is not permitted, and widowhood is viewed as an evil.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Religious festivals are related to group identity and solidarity and to group differentiation and conflict e.g. *Moharram* lends identity to the Muslims the *gadi* of *Basant Panchami* to the followers of Shivanaraini faith. Again celebration of *Moharram* is linked to the differentiation between *Shia* and *Sunni*.
- ii) Ritual art is that which is done within a context of religion and society. An example of this is the clay modelling of Goddess *Sanjhi*, the *Tazias* at *Moharram*, and the making of the *karwa* in *Karwa Chauth*.



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# UNIT 32 FUNDAMENTALISM, COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM

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## Structure

- 32.0 Objectives
- 32.1 Introduction
- 32.2 Basic Concepts
  - 32.2.1 Fundamentalism
  - 32.2.2 Communalism
  - 32.2.3 Secularism
- 32.3 Aspects of Fundamentalism
- 32.4 The Communal Divide
  - 32.4.1 Recent Communal Riots
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  - 32.4.3 Economic and Social Dimensions
  - 32.4.4 Inter-community Dynamics
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- 32.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 32.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you have studied this unit you should be able to

- describe fundamentalism
- explain communalism with the help of relevant examples
- clarify what is secularism and how it works in India.

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## 32.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we begin by clarifying the basic concepts of fundamentalism, communalism and secularism. We then explain up each of these basic concepts and expand on them. We take up first the concept of fundamentalism and describe it. Next we turn to communalism and note down the reasons for communal riots and examine their economic and social dimensions. This is followed by an analysis of inter-community dynamics.

Finally we turn to secularism which is seen, in some ways, as a panacea to fundamentalism and communalism. We examine some different views on secularism, including Gandhiji's viewpoint.

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## 32.2 BASIC CONCEPTS

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Let us put forth the basic concepts of our unit first.

### 32.2.1 Fundamentalism

Fundamentalism is the first of our three concepts and it stresses the infallibility of

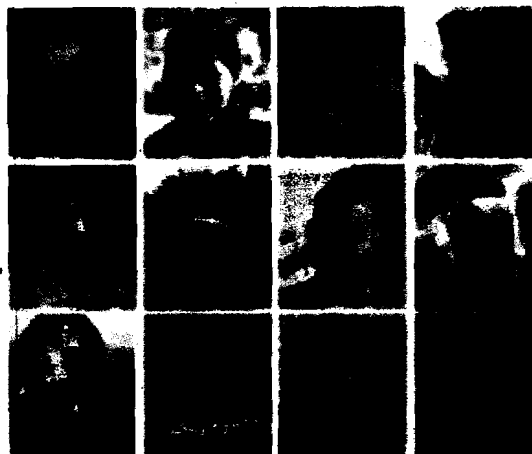
a scripture (e.g. the Bible, the Granths, the Gita or the Quran) in all matters of faith and doctrine. The believers accept it as a literal historical record. The result is that a militant stand is taken by the followers; often preceded or followed by a desire for a separate homeland. At times, this too is taken as a prophecy in the scriptures. Fundamentalism thus separates a certain community from the mainstream. However, society, by its various arms (the police, army and so on), attempts to suppress or eliminate the fundamentalists. This is especially so when they begin acting outside of the law. Communalism is associated with eruption of violence and riots, these conflagrations may not have any particular aim or goal (apart from communal ascendancy or supremacy). Fundamentalism however is an organised all encompassing movement which aims at promotion of societal goals specifically in the light of religious enshrinements. Operational strategy includes peaceful as well as war-life uses and movements.

### **32.2.2 Communalism**

While discussing the nature of politics in the new states of Africa and Asia, Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist (1963 : 105-157), wrote, "When we speak of communalism in India we refer to religious contrasts, when we speak of it in Malaya we are mainly concerned with racial ones, and in the Congo with tribal ones". Here the significant link is between communal and political loyalties. Thus when we talk of India we are talking mainly of religion based oppositions. Communalism has been described as a sectarian exploitation of social traditions as a medium of political mobilization. This is done to punish the interests of the entrenched groups. Thus communalism is an ideology used to fulfill socio-economic hopes of a community or social groups. It requires proposals and programmes to ensure its very existence. These become active in phases of social change. Communalism arose in India during its colonial phase. Communal politics bases its strategies on religion and tradition. The interpretation of history is for purposes of mobilisation. Communal organisations have little room for democracy. Secondly they may also involve racist contrasts and perpetrate the same. They consider egalitarianism as abnormal and support patriarchy as a familial and social norm. Communalism is therefore a

- i) belief system
- ii) social phenomenon.

Communalism arises out of a belief system, and assumes great solidarity within a community which is not always true. We find that there are often intercommunity quarrels. Further, the protagonists of communalism hold a particular view of history and take care to point out that a community has been identified with common



Members of different communities. Why is that only particular communities are antagonistic to each other?

sufferings and goals as a whole. The exclusiveness of the community is stressed vis a vis other communities, and it is therefore considered logical to fight for one's rights in a literal way.

Communalism in India has, as noted earlier, a colonial legacy wherein the rulers (Britishers) used religious contrasts, existing among the different communities to their advantage by giving them prominence.

After Independence economic modernization of India expanded economic opportunities but not enough to curb unhealthy competitiveness. Job sharing among the different communities from a smaller pool of opportunities in causing much heartburn. Independence from the colonial power unleashed a horrendous communal holocaust, caused by the partition of the country into two parts on the eve of Independence in 1947.

### **32.2.3 Secularism**

The conceptual construct of secularism is adopted in India by way of a solution to the problems, posed by fundamentalism and communalism. Ideally speaking, it denotes a situation where there is a clear distinction of religion from such spheres of life as political and economic systems. Each religion is to be respected and practiced in private. In ideological terms it is not a system of beliefs and practices that is to be mixed with political ideology, with a view to wooing any particular community into the voting booth. By and large, secularism separates religion and polity. It endorses the view that there should be provided equal opportunities by the state to all the communities. Further, for secularists all religious beliefs are to be approached rationally and finally social life is to be approached in an equalitarian manner.

Further the term secularism refers to the ideas opposed to religious education. It has been linked to the process of secularization. This is the process by which various sectors of society are removed from the domination of religious symbols and also the domination of religious institutions. Finally the idea of secularism has been transferred from 'the dialectic of modern science and protestantism' in the west to South Asian societies. This transference is full of problems and cannot be conceived in terms of a smooth process.

#### **Box 32.01**

India cannot cease to be one nation, because people belonging to the different religions live in it ... If the Hindus believe that India should be peopled only by Hindus, they are living in a dreamland. The Hindus, the Mohammedans, the Parsis and the Christians who have made India their country are fellow-countrymen, and they will have to live in it only for their own interests. In no part of the world are one nationality and one religion synonymous terms; nor has it ever been so in India.

— M.K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (1908)

## **32.3 ASPECTS OF FUNDAMENTALISM**

Fundamentalism as a concept was first used in 1910-1915 when anonymous authors published 12 volumes of literature called them 'The Fundamentals'. In the early 20s the print media used this word with reference to conservative protestant groups in North America. These groups were concerned about liberal interpretations of the Bible. Alarmed by this the conservatives insisted on some "fundamentals" of faith. These included belief in the virgin birth, divinity, the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ and the infallibility of the scripture. As mentioned these and other fundamentals

were published in 12 pamphlets called *The Fundamentals* between 1910-1915. Thus began the specialised usage of the concept of “fundamentalism”. Thus a fundamental movement is one which takes infallibility of a scripture as a basic issue and as a guide to life. Some fundamentalists add that there is no need to even interpret the scripture as meaning in it is self-evident. *This often amounts to intolerance of any form of disagreement or dissent. Thus there is an apprehension that fundamentalists are narrow minded, and bigoted.*

T.N. Madan (1993) has pointed out that the word Fundamentalism has gained wide currency in the contemporary world. According to him it refers to a variety of norms, values, attitudes which either judge the fundamentalists or condemn them outright. This word is sometimes erroneously used in place of communalism. In fact the word fundamentalism has become a blanket term. That is to say that various fundamental movements across the world are actually not identical but differ in various ways. But they are linked by a ‘family’ resemblance.

Fundamentalist movements are of a collective character. They are often led by charismatic leaders who are usually men. Thus the 1979 Iranian movement was led by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the recent Sikh fundamentalist upsurge by Sant Bhindranwale (Madan, *ibid*). Fundamentalism leaders need not be religious leaders. Thus Maulana Maududi, founder of the Jamati Islami in India was a journalist. K.B. Hedgewar, founder of the Rashtriya Sewak Sangh was a physician.

**The fundamentalists are a practical people and try to purge the way of life of all impurities (religiously speaking). They reject all corrupt lifestyles. An example of this is Dayanands critique of the traditional, superstition filled way of life (see Unit 26 of Block 6 for details on this). Thus Maududi characterised the present Muslim way of life as ‘ignorant’ and Bhindranwale talked of the ‘fallen’ Sikhs who shave off their beards, cut their hair and do not observe the traditional Sikh way of life. Thus fundamental movements are not only about religious beliefs and practices, but lifestyles generally.**

Thus fundamentalist movements are reactive and a response to what the persons involved—the leaders and participants, consider a crisis. The crisis calls for urgent remedies. The basic programme is presented as a return to the original tradition. That is to say to the contemporarily redefined fundamentals, which cover the present-day needs. This usually involves a selective retrieval of tradition. It may even be an invention of tradition.

The case of Dayanand (see Unit 26, ESO-05 for further details) illustrates this very well. He tried to evolve a sanitized Hinduism in response to the challenge for conversion by Christian missionaries (Madan, *ibid*). He claimed that the Vedas were the only true form of Hinduism and his call was back to the Vedas.

In Iran Khomeini developed an Islamic state based on the guardianship of the jurists. Again Bhindranwale gave a selective emphasis to Guru Gobind Singh’s teaching rather than those of his immediate successors. **Assertion of spiritual authority and criticising the culture are two aspects of fundamentalism. A third crucial element is that of the pursuit of political power.**

The pursuit of political power is very important to fundamentalism, for without it we would be presented with a case for revivalism. The Arya Samajis were ardent nationalists in North India, and the movement had its political overtones. Again the RSS which has been described as a cultural organisation has had close links with political parties, and contemporarily with the Sangh Parivar. This covers both cultural and political aspects of Hindu nationalism. This explains why fundamentalist movements often turn violent, and the ideology of secularism is rejected. They are

totalitarian and do not tolerate dissent. However these movements also perform a particular role in modern society which cannot be ignored.

Thus an objective intellectual analysis should consider fundamentalism as a distinctive category. It is not theocracy or backward communalism.

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## 32.4 COMMUNALISM IN INDIA

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The ideology of communalism in India was, and still is, that the different communities in India cannot co-exist to their mutual benefit, that the minorities will become victims of Hindu subjugation and that the historically created situation nor culture will allow cooperation.

Communalism took deep roots in Indian polity during the later phase of the national movement and this was encouraged by the colonial rulers. This process was a continuation of the weakness and inadequacy of secularism as conceived and practised during the anticolonial struggle.

Implicit in all the theories has been the assumption that the growth of Hindu-Muslim tension was not the natural and inevitable outcome of changes taking place in the Indian society. Partition was the culmination of the conflict which could and should have been avoided. Further this line of reasoning states that nation building essentially means obliteration of communal moulds and creation of a common identity which decries the existence of differentiated groups based on religion, caste or language. Communal forces are therefore viewed as division and a sign of political underdevelopment. *Communalism arises when one or two characteristics of an ethnic identity e.g. religious beliefs are taken and emotionally surcharged. Communal movements are often brief and exist in a dyad, comprising an opposing force or ideology which has to be countered. Unlike fundamentalism, communalism can only exist dyadically.*

Hindu-Muslims riots reflected the religious fears and socio-economic aspirations of the Hindus and Muslims. Sometimes these riots occur for very minor reasons such as quarrels between Muslim and Hindu shopkeepers (Ghosh, 1981 : 93-94).

**The important point is that these are not isolated acts but often deliberate mechanizations of various socio-religious organisations.** Recurrent collisions were engineered on festivals by stopping them and various religious occasions by interfering in their process. This was done to inflame communal passions and bitterness. According to Ghosh (1981) the acme of communal rioting was reached in August 1946 in Calcutta when the Muslim League observed a 'Direct Action Day'. Bombay did the same in the following month. Thus Independence was erected on the corpses of many thousands of people. With Mahatma Gandhi's assassination the riots abated awhile, and this situation was basically sustained by Nehru. Again the passing away of Nehru in 1964 and the deteriorating socio-economic circumstances led to the resurrection of communal violence.

### 32.4.1 Recent Communal Riots

Thus during the late 60s and 1970s there was large scale communal rioting in Ahmedabad, Baroda, Ranchi, Jamshedpur etc. Communal configurations in towns such as Ranchi cast a shadow over predictions and beliefs in the future of workers unity. Again in Bhiwandi where there was a carnage in 1969, it was a shock for the leftists. The grassroots movement among the handloom workers fostered by committed communists was unable to stem the onrush of communal violence.

In 1969 itself a communal riot occurred in Ahmedabad. The inflammatory factors

were insults to holy scriptures and sacred cows. It was suspected however that these riots were politically motivated.

These riots indicated clearly that there were various political factors behind the surface level factors of religion based tensions and confrontations. In the mid seventies the communal riots abated a bit both due to the Emergency and the Janata Regime. The first exercised iron control and discipline the second aroused the hopes of both Hindus and Muslims. The first six years of the eighties once more created an upward incline in the riot-graph. Patel (1990) feels that Communal violence is backed by religious arguments and backing. He feels that those resorting to it are neither true Hindus or true Muslims. Religion does not preach enmity. However the causes which are often given for communal violence are hurt religious sentiments. The causes are flimsy such as playing music before a mosque, insulting the Prophet or the Holy Quran. This is sufficient to provoke violence among some of the Muslims. So also disturbing by Muslims of a religious yatra is enough to rouse Hindu ire. (Patel, 1990 : 41-42).

### 32.4.2 Reasons for Communal Riots

In the context of our section of recent-communal riots we turn now to some further reasons for the same. As Ghosh (1981) points out the several arguments have been forwarded for the existence and continuation of communal riots. These are:

- i) riots are part of progress in an under developed country. The class struggle is converted into a communal struggle weakening the solidarity of the proletariat class. Further the middle and backward classes have acquired greater political and economic strength and influence and these often assert themselves. Economic conflicts lead to riots as in Bihar Sharif and Bhiwandi.
- ii) Electoral politics determine the objectives and direction of communal violence e.g. Delhi 1986.

These explanations cannot be binding—they cannot be held to the necessary and sufficient. Often economic reasons emerge after (not before) the rioting has begun. Again in a developing society economic factors where competitive or one lagging behind the other can lead to a riot. The same applies to reductionist political causes. The idea of behind-the-scene political manipulation may not be valid.

### 32.4.3 Economic and Social Dimensions

Regarding gaining economic benefits after the eruption of communal riots we find that in Godhra, Hindu Sindhi refugees from Pakistan gave competition to Hindu merchants. But riots have frequently emerged between Sindhis and Muslims. Again in Punjab while Ramgarhia and other Sikhs have gone beyond the Hindu Khatri in commerce there have been no riots because of this.

Lastly in the Punjab tragedy, the terrorist acts while antagonising the Hindus, are not considered to be the acts of the Sikh community as a whole.

Hindu-Muslim riots in recent times have been confined to medium sized towns and cities. These include areas like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Pune etc.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Give three reasons for Communal rioting.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....



c) .....

2) Fill in the blanks:

Hindu .....riots have in recent times been confined to .....towns.

The people in a riot tend to be crowd oriented, and the conflict tends to be very violent. These people tend to be merciless. A "cause" is often espoused: for example in 1969 the handbills have a call for *dharmayudha* by the Hindu militants. Thus in recent decades from the 60s onward the trend has been for collectivity orientation and in-group loyalties. Moreover, the functional independence of caste and community are disintegrating and replaced by competitive patterns. This makes for greater tension in interactions between people let alone communities.

### Activity 1

Read carefully sections 32.4.2 and 32.4.3 on the reasons for communalism and communal riots. What reasons for the existence of communalism can you add to this analysis? Ask people of different communities their opinions and note them down. Then write a note of about 300 words offering your explanation for the phenomena of communalism. Discuss this with other students at the Study Centre, if possible.

### 32.4.4 Inter-Community Dynamics

Medium sized towns/cities are being divided on communal lines. We find that the workers don't have class consciousness. The educated middle class professional act as a bridge between Hindus and Muslims. During prepartition there were Muslim doctors, lawyers etc. who also attracted Hindu clients—Similarly Hindu professionals were patronized by Muslim clients—Thus

- i) common bonds developed
- ii) there were common networks and patronization.

Again the existence of Muslim professionals administrators etc. created a positive image for the Muslims. Post partition mass migrations saw these advantages vanishing. Many trade and economic activities are run by Hindus and there were no problems so long as the Muslims were not competitive. There was an interdependence between Hindu employers and Muslim artisans. However, in recent time economic competitiveness come from Muslims and has turned into a religious threat to Hindus. Again channelling of Arab money into mosque renovation and lavish festival celebrations has resulted in an admixture of economics and religion which creates intercommunity tensions and eruptions of violence.

### Box 32.02

Biharsharif owes its name to the *mazar* (tomb) of a Muslim saint. It is considered a cultural heritage in Bihar on the lines of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Trouble began over a piece of land near a mosque called 'Mughal Kuan'. Muslims claimed that piece of land as its own. The Hindus planted a tulsi sapling and installed an idol on it. The dispute worsened by 1979 and led to the death of a harijan.

What are the factors which can remedy the communal divide in India. Some suggestions have been given (Verma, 1990, 63-65). The suggestions include that religion should be separated from politics and communal bodies should be banned. Further the freedom of press should not extend to spreading communal ideas.

**Communalism needs to be denounced by political leaders and all leading citizens. Measures should be taken for raising the economic lot of the minority community.** About all overall ethos should be created which leads to peace between communities and an end to communal violence. Community leaders should explain the situation to the community and defuse tensions. Let us now turn to secularism.

Thus communalism has an ugly aspect and goes against national integration. Religion should not become the whipping boy of political ambitions.

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## 32.5 ASPECTS OF SECULARISM

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While fundamentalism and communalism are widely held to be the problematic and disintegrative, the ideology of secularism is held to be a palliative solution to the above. Although there is no single definition of secularism which could be applied world-wide, yet it was first applied to separate the Church from the King. This was the political dimension. In the social sphere secular meant separating the strangle hold of religion over the individual's life. In the Indian context it proclaims the existence of spiritual values which can be stressed in a variety of ways. See also Block 3 Unit 6, ESO-05 'Secularism and Secularization' which deals with this. Thus the word secularism has a variety of connotations in India. As Madan (ed. 1991 : 394-412) notes these dimensions are:

- i) the separation of state from religion.
- ii) equal and impartial treatment of all communities by the state.
- iii) approaching religious beliefs in a spirit of objective rationality.
- iv) ensuring a just standard of living for all people irrespective of community.

### 32.5.1 Secular Views

Through the judicious use of the philosophy of secularism fundamentalism and communalism can be curbed. On combating fundamentalism and communalism through secularism there are three views that can be presented. These are:

- i) An ideological campaign against communalism can be waged to *decommunalize* people at all levels. The logic of this approach is that communalism will die out only if the communal ideology is removed.
- ii) Grassroot politics is another approach mooted for the eradication of communalism along with a democratic rights approach. That is to say there has to be an awakening at the grassroots level. Secondly a new type of activity is required which is politically oriented but not the grassroots type. The problem however is that unless this grassroots approach has an All-India spread and a unity within it we do not find it likely to do well.
- iii) A major issue concerning fundamentalism, communalism and secularism is religion. How do we approach religion in a secular view ? Firstly we should not dismiss any religions or pronounce them to be false. Second we should try to locate the democratic and the secular in the social basis of religion. Thirdly the irrationalities of religion should be exposed and a rational approach taken.

As Madan (1983) explains India is defined as a secular republic in the Preamble to the Constitution. Secularism in India does not imply abolition of religion but the separation of state from religion. However the separation of politics from religion is not envisaged. The people are free to form religion based political parties. What then is secularism in a multireligious society such as that which India represents.

## Activity 2

Do you feel secularism is only an ideology, or can it and is it operating in everyday reality in India? Go to individuals of different communities and ask them this question. Note down their answers in a notebook. Discuss your findings with other students in the Study Centre, if possible.

That secularism can be defined in various ways has been pointed out earlier. However we can say now that secularism implies the separation of religion from state and its relegation to the sphere of personal belief and private commitment. It is important to point out at this stage that this description is not true of any society as this separation happens to be analytical rather than actual. As things stand there are some politics with an anti religious stance. Other are natural towards religion. And finally there are those which follow a secularism which falls between these extremes.

How does the secular policy of India reflect in the pre and post-independent politics of India? In the closing decades of the 19th century the "liberal-plural" theory was advanced by the moderate nationalists. *This approach believed that religion should not be mixed with politics. Its proper sphere was that of private belief.* This would preserve both religious sentiments and those towards the nation would remain intact. This theory demanded sophisticated understanding but the wider society could not grasp it. *This was replaced due to its obvious shortcomings by the "orthodox plural" theory of secular nationalism. This was forwarded by Gandhi. He picked up religion as basic to political action and national identity.*

### 32.5.2 Gandhiji's Views

The 'nation-to-be', argued Gandhi, should draw from Hindu, Muslim, and all other communities. The idea was to draw popular symbols into the political mainstream creating a national identity. This ideology which was successful in political mobilization has certain problems so far as the post-independent 1947 era was concerned.

- i) Gandhi's idea that religious cleavages which could be handled by using religious loyalties and thus lead to nationhood proved wrong. The idea of orthodox pluralism heightened rather than reduced the rift between different religious communities.
- ii) The ideologies drew the rich and powerful into the national struggle and ensured that they dominated post-independent India.
- iii) Another theory (the radical socialist) which gained some ground had the dream of a secular polity which reflected the dream of the poor masses, both in rural and urban areas. Religious loyalties were relegated away from national identity. National identity it was felt could only be based upon politics, which linked socio-economic facts with the reality of nationhood. Religion was to be a private thing and not to trade upon the domain of politics. This stance resembles the liberal plural theory of religion. However the radical socialists addressed themselves to the poor and attempted to bring about social redistribution of wealth.

This theory of radical socialist secular nationalism took the stage during the second quarter of the 20th century, but could not last much longer. Despite its poverty orientation and orientation toward equal redistribution of wealth this theory failed in the light of Gandhian ideas.

Gandhi's orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism was popular due to various reasons:

- i) the strong religious feeling among different classes and communities. This Gandhi mobilized for a popular base to nationalism.
- ii) Again while desiring to uplift the downtrodden it did not deprive the rich, industrial, commercial classes from the control over social and economic power.

**Box 32.03**

Nehru wrote in 1961 that being Secular did not mean being opposed to religion. This he stated was not correct. What was true was the existence of a state which held all faiths in equal esteem and provided for them equal opportunities. He also added that this was not fully reflected in mass living and thinking (Gopal, 1980 p. 330).

This theory killed two birds with one stone: it mobilized mass support for nationhood; it also left alone the theory issue of capital and property. The rich felt that the theory did not nail them. At the same time Gandhi never stated that he wanted to sacrifice the interests of the poor to the greed of the rich. Thus we can say that in India the orthodox plural theory of secular nationalism on the one hand and communal tension on the other can provide us some insights into national integration. Thus theories of secular nationalism which are religion or community based cannot be healthy for the polity. However, the theories of secularism which distinguish between religion and politics are the best for the field of politics. Such secular politics can use either the rich or the poor as a base for their activities.

Thus we see that education of the masses is the way to secularism. Being educated they would eschew all fundamental and communal paths and seek to achieve a true democratic republic.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) Mention two connotations of the word 'secular' in the Indian context.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
- 2) What were Gandhiji's views on secularism ? Use 7-10 lines for your answer.  
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**32.6 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit we began by explaining the basic concepts of fundamentalism, communalism and secularism. We then turned to an examination of communalism and secularism. The reason for communal riots, and some of the inter-community dynamics were then laid bare. Finally we turned to secularism, examined its various views, and also presented Gandhiji's views on secularism. It was felt that secularism, in its true sense could counter fundamentalistic and communalistic tendencies.

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## 32.7 KEY WORDS

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- Communalism** : This is a situation wherein religion and religious communities view each other with hostility and antagonism. They may often come out in open conflict such as in communal riots.
- Fundamentalism** : This word stresses the infallibility of a scripture in matters of faith and doctrine. Certain groups take this to espouse a militant stance and claim sovereignty of a territory based on the same principles.
- Secularism** : This is the principle which believes that all matters of religious faith be separated from other fields of interaction economic, political, administrative and so on. In doing this it hopes to create a harmonious and integrated nation state.

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## 32.8 FURTHER READINGS

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## 32.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) Economic reasons  
b) Political reasons  
c) Sociological reasons.
- 2) *Muslim, Medium, Sized.*

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) a) separation of state from religion.  
b) equal and impartial treatment of all communities by the state.
- 2) Gandhiji felt that the nation-to-be should take ideas from all communities, not only from Hindus and Muslims. This idea was to draw symbols of religion into the political mainstream. This ideology however failed in post independent India and increased the rift between communities. Also the rich and powerful came into the national struggle and dominated post Independent-India.

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