
UNIT 31 SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

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31.0 OBJECTIVES

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.

31.1 INTRODUCTION

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.

31.2 SCOPE OF THE UNIT

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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2) Describe the religious festival of *Karwa Chauth*. What is the significance of this festival ? Use 10-12 lines to give your answer.

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31.3.3 Ravidas Jayanti

On the full moonday of the month of Magh (Maghi Poornima : Jan.-Feb.), members of the Chamar caste celebrate the birth anniversary of Sant Ravidas, also known as Raidas. He came from the Chamar caste and was a disciple of Kabir. Like his *guru*, in his sayings and compositions, he denounced both formal Hinduism and institutional Islam. He preached the eternally formless unit of God, equality of one and all before Him and recourse to unconditional devotion (*bhakti*) as the assured road to salvation. Rejecting renunciation, he advocated the value of a pure and simple worldly life, dedicated to one's family life, caste-occupation and therein to the formless God who transcends all religions and all faiths.

Box 31.02

Deepawali is an important annual festival celebrated all over India in the autumn equinox. *Deepawali* can be translated as "row of lights". These lights stand for the hope that is kindled by the new season coming at the end of the dangerous monsoons. In many ways the festival is a celebration of a new year. Deepawali is a three night festival, the last night of which is the first night of the waxing moon. Much care is taken to cleanse and purify home and shops. Oil lamps are lit by every home and fine crackers are exploded to frighten off evil spirits and welcome Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity. Lakshmi is propitiated with money food and clothes. Gifts are given to neighbours and servants.

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 Bhojpur 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 Western Uttar Pradesh after *pitripaksha* and at Mathura in the month of Shravan. 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 Jhinhia and in Bengal, the powerful Durga cult. In Tamil Nadu, it becomes a festival 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.

31.5 LET US SUM UP

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 conflict the issue of stratification was examined. Ritual art and unity in diversity in relation to observation of religious festivals were also discussed.

31.6 KEY WORDS

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

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

31.7 FURTHER READING

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31.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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*.