

Ritual is not Religion by A.C.Sekhar

Most of the rituals practiced by human beings during various types of ceremonies, seem to have their origin in some sort of traditional social beliefs designed by priesthood in all religious groups.

Strictly speaking they do not constitute the basic religion itself. On careful analysis rituals seem to serve only two main purposes (1) to impress on the members of society, the earnestness of one's thoughts and deeds and (2) to instill greater strength in and to discipline one's mind. Beyond these objectives the often quoted 'Moksha' or the divine grace for the performer of rituals, seem to be somewhat ridiculous though many priests believed in the same and convinced others also.

Of the two possible purposes mentioned above the first naturally implies that with changes in society, the nature of rituals also have to vary. In fact they have been varying over years though some sort of respect to traditions have been keeping up some of the rigors of traditional forms of rituals from time to time.

For example, during marriages the basic hymns i.e. 'Mantras', the quotations from religious books, and the sequential ritualistic acts remained virtually the same for many years, though the methodology of rituals, and their relative importance varied with times, with societies, and their economic conditions. Thus it looks there was really no fundamental or permanent basis of rituals for whatever purpose they were originally designed.

The second aspect considered above namely, to strengthen the mind or discipline oneself to undertake rituals, seems to be of secondary importance as it is related to the subjectivity of the person concerned. The object of strengthening the mind or disciplining oneself can be achieved also by various other means such as through one's own will power, or by concentration, or by practice of Yoga exercises of varied nature.

In fact from the angle of strengthening the mind etc. rituals in several cases can also be considered as Yoga of a sort, but because of their collateral function of impressing other members of the society such consideration may not be fully viable. In some cases rituals seem to form a sort of legal acceptance of the deeds performed, but again the legal system itself being a man-made social code even the so called legal aspects of rituals fall only under the first purpose indicated above which remains as the main purpose of rituals.

Hence it is felt that rituals should be least expensive, least time-consuming and also of least physical and mental strain on the performer if they cannot be avoided and replaced entirely by other acts of one's own conscience and strength of mind. Essentially the priesthood also should fall in line and explain to the performer the various symbolic aspects involved in the rituals. For example in almost all rituals water, fire, eatables etc are brought into action in some form or other. These are symbolic of the sustaining powers energy and matter which are part of the Creation and without which Man cannot exist. Recitation of slokas are only praise of the Creator who created these and invoking their power for the benefit of the performer of rituals and also mankind in general. Usually most of the rituals end with Sarvajano Sukhinobhavanthu-Om Shanti Om Shanti Om Shanti which means 'Let all people live in peace'.