

An Anthropological Study: *Chel Kachaloon* Ritual in Iran

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ABSTRACT The cultural folklore and customs have been considered as one of the most valuable sources that have enlightened the spirit of the people's lives, with the help of symbols, metaphors and signs, filled with allegories and allusions; which have transformed the customs and the rituals to something more than an amusement, that is, a representation of the people's beliefs. Through the rituals of the people living in the southern part of Iran, people try to establish a relationship with the nature by taking a deeper insight into the world and the inevitable events. Nature and people's beliefs have always been in a consistent connection. In this research, an attempt is made to make an anthropological study of one of the most important rituals in the southern part of Iran, named *Chel Kachaloon* that is meant to establish a relationship between nature and the people's beliefs and the desire for rainfall.

INTRODUCTION

Art is the production of a man's behavior. Human being, enjoys and understands the problems of life better through the power of his or her own imaginations. Art can be easily traced in the rituals of the nations. In order to study art as a cultural and anthropological phenomenon, one needs to collect whatever information is required pertaining to the cultural activities. The bond between art and anthropology has been one of the most important debates that has manifested in the field of anthropology; due to this inseparable bond, the anthropologists have paid attention to a variety of rituals and people's beliefs pertaining to these rituals.

"The performance of ceremonies that has persisted since the old times, differ in different places. People in different cities perform different rituals depending upon the tribal, historical, and climactic situations" (Rouhul Amini 2015). The number of societies and the presence of various rituals requires a better recognition of the elements and the factors influential in those rituals in every society, because different nations respond differently to their own beliefs and rituals; one of these responses occur in the form of drama that has turned into a public media. For this purpose, it is necessary to concentrate on the dramatic aspects of the rituals. Since these rituals are based on people's beliefs, therefore it is necessary to study the relationship between the people's beliefs and the rituals with the dramatic movements and the elements.

METHODOLOGY

An important issue discussed today in the modern societies, is the issue of rituals one nation might use in order to find a possibility of reconstructing its past; for this purpose, an analysis of the nation's rituals and beliefs is required. This study is based on a qualitative and a descriptive research methodology; it also uses a library based study of the theories expressed by the anthropologists on the issue of the rituals. The researchers have raised questions and interviewed people and they have also made use of the library data and reliable critics.

OBSERVATIONS

Rituals and Rites

Rituals, rites and religious beliefs are inseparable. Eversince man was created, there has been a kind of horror dominating the life of mankind, the horror of the persisting unknown forces and the fear of being exposed to the lightening, famine, disease and storm. Thus man created dance and represented his disappointment, hopes, sorrows and happiness through dancing; it was here that the secrets of life and different metaphors revived.

There is no doubt that most of the religious rituals manifest themselves in the form of a dramatic manifestation and theatrical acts. In these

rituals, not only the actors play important roles but the audience, whose beliefs are displayed, participate in the rituals. It is here that people's lives, accidents, needs, sorrows, happiness, along with their sacrificial rites are enacted. Prayers, singing, and dancing, all form a spiritual atmosphere. Most of people's beliefs are materialized in the rituals; these rituals are so strong that they can demonstrate the feelings of different people in different situations (Anasori 2014).

Those who enact these rituals, are sincerely committed to the people's cultures and beliefs. Therefore, each one of these dramas is limited to the beliefs and thoughts of the people belonging to certain areas in the country.

The act of turning to dramatic acts as means of displaying people's beliefs attracted the anthropologists' attentions in the second half of the 19th century. "It was in the period ranging from 1875 to 1915 that the anthropologists led by Sir James Fraser¹ claimed that all cultures follow an evolutionary pattern; as a result, the primitive societies present in the modern societies can present authentic sources about theatre belonging to thousand years ago" (Brocket 1997).

In other words, from the anthropological point of view, this process is summarized as follows: In the beginning, man believed in such forces that were believed to possess the substantial food materials and other sources required for his survival. Since these people did not have any knowledge of the supernatural elements, they associated these beliefs with the supernatural and the magical sources and they were determined to attract their support. People turned to certain methods leading to the formation of the rituals.

The second phase of the anthropological progress began from the year 1915; it was at this time when Bronislaw Malinowski² rejected Fraser's deductive method, and introduced an inductive method. The new method is employed in the concerned area and raises the question: What are the functions of certain societies? This particular school is called functionalism; this new school points out to the peculiarity of each culture individually and considers the preceding school of thought doubtful as long as the roles of the old cultural institutions pertaining to the primitive societies are concerned. The new school maintains that different cultural institutions develop through different processes.

It was after World War II that a third phase was introduced by the anthropologists, called Structuralism. The pioneer of this school was Claud Levi Strauss.³ It is necessary to add that most of the modern anthropologists follow the functionalist method. Levi Strauss believes that every society produces its own special cultural pattern. What is most important for Strauss is the way the brain functions; he looks for the answer in analyzing the myth. He is aware of a form of logic, and believes that this logic is not less complicated than the logic present in the scientific researches in the advanced societies. He finally concludes that there are, at least, two kinds of thoughts: scientific and mythical-magical; this latter pays attention to the problems from a different point of view, and its credibility is not less than that of the first method (Brocket 1997).

The advantages of rituals are as follows:

1. Ritual is a form of knowledge pertaining to a myth, people's beliefs in the world, because it tries to define man and his relationship with the world.
2. Ritual can be an educational method, because the primitive societies lacked in written language, and for this reason, the performance of a ritual is considered as a means of transferring knowledge from one generation to another.
3. Ritual might be performed in order to avoid the probable accidents in the future.
4. Rituals are used to glorify a supernatural force, a victory in the war or hunting, the past of a tribe, a hero, or a totem.
5. Ritual can be amusing and pleasant (Brocket 1998).
6. Ritual and theatre have many things in common: music, dance, dialogue, clothes, performers, audience and stage. Antonin Artaud⁴ supports a kind of theatre based on the myths and the magical rituals. For him, rituals make people get rid of the destructive forces present in the man's unconscious mind; this serves as a kind of catharsis, helping people achieve peace (Artaud 1958).
- a. Another important point pertaining to the ritual is the one used by Augusto Boal (1999)⁵, who used rituals in his folkloric theatre. He makes use of dance, music, songs and folkloric customs of the people.

- b. Nazerzadeh Kermani refers to the 12 characteristics persisting in the ritualistic performances:
- 1- The main objective of dramatic rituals is to define and express the world, involve nature, overcome the dominating forces, releasing one of the horrors and fears, and looking into one's own self; in general, it is meant to represent the attitudes of different people towards the world.
 7. Rituals, unlike the theatre of protest that is meant to display the cultural or ideologic perspectives, are not meant to impose a fixed thought or propaganda; its aim is to show the secret the supernatural values, and more than anything else, release the audience of the obligations and the limitations.
 8. In performing the rituals, the mysterious and symbolic movements are highlighted. The participant takes a step beyond himself.
 9. The traditional performance of the ritual is lead by a religious leader or a priest.
 10. Rituals are performed when a relationship between the man and the nature is established. It takes place when men move beyond himself and takes refuge in the nature. It usually takes place at sunset, or early in the night when, according to the sorcerers, the mysterious forces of nature are awake. Since most of these rituals are connected with birth and death, or with holding of the untamable supernatural forces, they occur during the seasons of cultivation.
 11. Performance of the rituals should be limited to certain places. They should be performed in the sacred places that are cleaned and prepared.
 12. One of the most important features of the rituals is that it does not only deal with worshipping God or gods, it is also meant to pay homage to the sacred entities belonging to the past of each nation.
 13. Rituals point out to the eternal truths, not the ephemeral realities.
 14. The characters enacting in the rituals, are of the types, and they are endowed with universality; these characters represent either divine or the evil, and everyone is given a certain responsibility.
 15. Although these rituals are performed for all of the people and there are interactions between characters performing them and the audience, but the identity of the characters should be of someone who has well established himself in the mind of the audience.
 16. The performance of these rituals is not limited to acting and the limited senses, but besides visual and audio senses, such senses like scents and tastes also affect the audience. For example, they might burn aloes in the holy rituals.
 17. The performance of the ritual takes place in circular places, surrounded by the audience (Nazerzade Kermani 1994).

DISCUSSION

Dabaron

It is a kind of prayer for rainfall that is performed by the women and the children. It takes place during the rainless seasons when rainfall is expected.

In ancient Iran, sky was believed to be a male, and earth was believed to be endowed with femininity. Indeed, rain is the cause of the earth's fertility. That is why some rituals, were created in order to express the need for rainfall (Anasori 2014).

In the *Dabaron* ritual, the women and their young children walk towards the mountains, carrying packsacks filled with pieces of bread (*Nan*) and local water bags, called *Mushk*, along with a wooden tripod called *Malar* used to hang the water bag, tightened to the shoulders with a piece of strip called *Veris*. Along the way, the crowd keeps on shouting: "*Dateshnameh* (Mother, I'm thirsty), *Bogoshnameh* (Father, I'm hungry)". Then they stop at a spot far from the village and start praying, asking God for rainfall. It happens that some elders approach and request the former not to continue on their way in the hope that there will be rainfall, for God is so compassionate that he would not deprive his creatures of rain and other blessings. They would return to their village and hopefully wait for the rainfall.

Chehl Kachaloon

As the above-mentioned ritual is meant to increase rainfall, there is another ritual meant to reduce the excessive rainfall; the ritual is called *Chehl Kachaloon*. Excessive rainfall that might

lead to storms creates anxiety and worries for the people, thus there is a need for another ritual called “*Chehl Kachaloon*” meaning “rain preventer”. Here people do not play important roles; there are symbols in the forms of woods that are hung from a piece of rope tightened to the sticks erected in front of each house. In the ritual, a man writes the names of forty skinheads, hanging them from the afore-said rope. He then keeps on beating the wooden pieces and singing: “*Chehl Kachaloon Vadareh, Khoda Baron Vadareh,*” meaning “Forty skinheads are hung from the rope, O God, stop the rainfall.”

There is only one actor playing a role in the ritual, and the rest of the people serve as an audience who watch the ritual from within their houses. It is believed, that the clouds part and thus the rainfall stops.

This ritual might also be performed in another way; that is, sometimes the youth gathers in a local area, carrying a long string and keeps on calling the names of the forty skinheads belonging to the locality, tying the string once they have called each of the individual’s names. Then they tie the concerned string to a tree, and in this way, they believe that the rainfall will stop.

Like *Haroonaki*,⁶ *Chehl Kachaloon* ritual is filled with important dramatic elements. Both *Chehl Kachaloon* and *Haroonaki* are meant to evade the forthcoming accidents (Shahbazi 2013). This ritual is more concerned with the signs rather than the human characters. Each one of these concepts is endowed with a symbolic concept. The ritual has a particular plot; the rain is so heavy that it might cause destructive storms. The fear of horror of the storm makes the people ask God to stop the rainfall. There is a conflict present in the ritual, that is, the conflict between the nature and the man. There are no actors playing in this ritual. Wooden symbols replace human characters representing the forty skinheads. These symbols represent the evil omens. The setting of the ritual is expected to be a place in front of a house.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of performing the rituals is to establish a relationship between man and the spiritual world, and to make proper use of the God’s blessings. It is performed in the form of a dramatic play which is meant to identify with the people’s real desires and beliefs. They are meant

to bring peace for the people. Different elements in nature are effective in improving the rituals.

Environmental, geographical, and economic factors are influential in the formation of different cultures in every society. Every ritual in different societies, should be performed by the people belonging to those societies; these rituals represent people’s beliefs and dreams. They are natural, and they establish a relationship between the man and the nature. The people’s culture and rituals are important sources used for reviving the values of the same people; they reproduce people’s hopes and dreams. These rituals, are endowed with dramatic features and are quite effective in the lives of the people. The actions and the dialogues used by those playing a role in these rituals are accompanied by dances and music that serve as inseparable from the people’s lives. They represent the people’s feelings and desires; these rituals represent people’s identities. What is more important in that these rituals are not the difficulties faced by the people, but the unity and the sense of brotherhood that make the people closer together and more united. These rituals, along with dances and music, unite the people with their own past, and in this way stabilize people’s lives and customs. Therefore, it is required that these rituals survive the inefficiencies of the modern world, so that the new generation is well acquainted with a culturally rich past.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the rituals are rooted in the culture of every nation and they support the cultural perspectives of recognition and protection of the past rituals, and since the present generation is interested in these rituals in their lives, the introduction of these rituals with an anthropological perspective can be an important effect on the betterment of the social relationship and their survival in the society.

NOTES

- Sir James Frazer wrote a book entitled *The Golden Bough*, that is considered as one of the most important sources in anthropology.
- 1 A 20th century Polish anthropologist, sociologist and ethnographer.
 - 2 A French anthropologist and ethnologist who was influential in the development of structuralism and anthropology.

- 3 A French dramatist and theatre director, influential in the development of as one of the European avant-garde.
- 4 A Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician. He was the pioneer of Theatre of the Oppressed.
- 5 A dramatic ritual in the Bakhtyari Tribe in Iran, meant to overcome draught.

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