

Homo Ritualis

Hindu Ritual and Its Significance for Ritual Theory

AXEL MICHAELS

Homo Ritualis

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Contents

Tables and Figures x

Preface xi

Acknowledgments xv

Abbreviations xvii

Pronunciation of Indian and Nepalese Words xix

Introduction 1

PART I: *Framing*

1. The Beginning of Rituals 43

    1.1 The Solemn Intention (*saṃkalpa*) 43
    1.2 Greeting and Ritualized Greeting (*namaskāra*) 58
    Conclusion 69

PART II: *Formality*

2. Repetitive Rules (*vidhi*) 73

    2.1 The Grammar of Rituals 74
    2.2 A Preliminary "Grammar" of Newar Life-Cycle Rituals 94
    2.3 Rituals in Handbooks (*paddhati*) 112

3. Agency in Ritual 118

3.1 Ritual Competency (*adhikāra*) 118
3.2 Atonements for Ritual Mishaps (*prāyaścitta*) 127
3.3 The Comic Side of Ritual Formality 136

4. Playful Rituals (*līlā*) 146

4.1 Music and Ritual Music 147
4.2 Dance and Ritual Dance 151
4.3 Emotions and Ritual Emotions 159
Conclusion 170

PART III: *Modality*

5. Individualized and Domestic Rituals (*saṃskāra*) 179

5.1 The Boy's Initiation 185
5.2 The Girl's Initiation 191
5.3 The Marriage 193
5.4 Death Rituals and Redemption 198

6. Collective and Public Rituals 211

6.1 Temple Festivals (*utsava*) 214
6.2 Vows (*vrata*) 219
6.3 Pilgrimages and Processions (*yātrā*) 221

7. Transcendence in Rituals 228

7.1 The Vedic Sacrifice (*yajña*) 231
7.2 The Fire Sacrifice (*homa*) 237
7.3 Worship and Prayer (*pūjā*) 247
7.4 E-darshan and Cyber-puja 258
Conclusion 261

PART IV: *Meaning*

8. Meaning and Function 269

8.1 The Cultural Studies Approach 269
8.2 The Cognitive Sciences approach 279

9. The Pūrvamīmāṃsā Theory of Ritual Efficacy 293
Conclusion 308

PART V: *The Hindu Path of Ritual—Summary*

Appendix: Automatic Detection of Ritual Structures 319
Glossary 325
References 329
Index 361

Tables and Figures

Tables

Table I.1	Components of ritual action	32
Table 1.1	Spatial levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*	51
Table 1.2	Temporal levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*	52
Table 1.3	Personal criteria mentioned in *saṃkalpas*	55
Table 1.4	Parallels in rules for gift exchange and greeting	66
Table 2.1	Ritual action repertoire (selection)	85
Table 2.2	The marriage rituals according to Dadhirāma Marāsini's *Vivāhapaddhati*	95
Table 2.3	Ritual elements in a Newar *Daśakarmavidhi*	99
Table 2.4	The Newar marriage pattern	103
Table 2.5	Elements in Newar life-cycle rituals	106
Table 3.1	The system of ritual ablution in Hinduism	137
Table P.1	Harvey Whitehouse's imaginistic und doctrinal modes of rituals	175
Table 5.1	Hindu life-cycle rites	186
Table 6.1	Major Hindu Festivals	214
Table 7.1	Differences between sacrifice (*yajña*) and worship (*pūjā*)	248
Table 7.2	The Sixteen Traditional Gestures of Respect (*upacāra*)	250

Figures

Figure I.1	Two modes of ritual behavior	39
Figure A.1	Preparing the ritual handbook for CL analysis	321
Figure A.2	Detecting similarities and differences in rituals	322

Preface

"Was ist das Allgemeine? Der einzelne Fall."[1]
J. W. von GOETHE, Maximen und Reflexionen

FOR TOO LONG, a certain asymmetry has prevailed in the academic order of things. "The West" supplied the theories and methods that the rest of the academic world more or less had to accept. If one does not want to prolong this asymmetry, one must ask what other, for instance, Indian terminologies and theories of rituals look like and what one can do with such an alternative view. This is what I tried in this book, which therefore is primarily a study of rituals at work in a culture-specific and religious context. It, however, also aims at contributing to ritual theory. The regional focus is Hindu South Asia, especially Nepal and the Newars, but from there, I try to elaborate what Hindu rituals can contribute to ritual theory in general.

The selection of Nepal is not only due to the fact that rituals are regionally rooted and most of my fieldwork has taken place there but also because Nepal has preserved a great number of unique rituals. Niels Gutschow and I have worked continuously for over three decades in this field, the Kathmandu Valley, and have thus been able to establish communication channels and structures that permit the often family-bound and intimate rites of passage to be documented. These are, among others, birth, the first feeding, naming, initiation, acceptance into the clan, marriage, and rituals of aging and of death, which we have documented in the trilogy Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 2008, and 2012).

Our team worked in a wide variety of ways. On the one hand, we were interested in the urban social and sacral topography with its own forms of settlement and its numerous temples and holy places. At the same time, we

1. "What is the general? The particular case."

investigated the topography of the highly complex festivals and rituals of the life cycle, which may show considerable deviation from one another within the space of a few kilometers, not least because Hinduism, Buddhism, and popular religion mix within the smallest spaces. We concentrated mostly on exemplary, sometimes rare rituals, at a certain place and time, with identifiable protagonists, priests, and their clientele, since we wished to let the individual ritual take place and to observe it; we did not want to miss anything specific by generalizing too much.

It was also important for us to take a certain level of text traditions into consideration because even the experienced priest has a notebook with him so that he can remember the sequence of ritual procedures and find the key words for recitations. These manuscripts, mostly written in Sanskrit, Nevārī, or Nepālī, and which are part of the ancient Indian ritual tradition, are, in a sense, scripts for courses of action, but even more knowledge is passed on orally from father to son and from teacher to pupil. In the end, the text and current practice, as well as what happens at home and in town, combine to make up the multifaceted representation of a ritual practice, which is exposed, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, to rapidly moving social dynamics and threats. The present book is based on such an ethno-indological approach and tries to gather these features and bring them into a theory of (Hindu) rituals.

The book is the outcome and summary of almost thirty years of research on rituals in South Asia. It is also my "collected papers" on rituals (roughly 1997–2013) and more. These papers have often been written for lectures, and they have been published at various places, in edited volumes, journals, and monographs—some in English, some in German. I have deliberately incorporated material, passages, and arguments from these publications in order to present a consistent and reasoned product here. For this purpose, every article or book part mentioned herein has been revised or reformulated, shortened, extended, or transposed; transliterations and bibliographic references have been standardized; and repetitions have been reduced (even though, at some points, they had to be kept for the sake of the argument).

The Introduction has been newly written, but for the section on the term "ritual," I have used material from Michaels 2006b (Brill), and the section on the ethno-indological approach is based on Michaels 2004c (Manohar).

Chapter 1.1 is a revised version of Michaels 2005a (Harrassowitz), and Chapter 1.2 is partly based on Michaels 1997a (Brill) and 2010c (Wilhelm Fink, translated by Douglas Fear).

Chapter 2.1 is a revised version of Michaels 2010e (Harrassowitz) and small parts of Michaels 2012b (Oxford University Press); Chapter 2.2 is an abbreviated version of Michaels 2012b (Oxford University Press); Chapter 2.3 is mostly newly written with the exception of some parts of Michaels 2010a (Harrassowitz).

Chapter 3.1 is based on Michaels (and Buss) 2010d (Harrassowitz), and 3.2 on Michaels 2007c (Brill). Chapter 3.3 is a revised translation of Michaels 2004d (Synchron, translated by Douglas Fear).

In Chapter 4, sections 4.1 and 4.2 are revised translations of Michaels 2005c (Chronos) and, 2007b (Wilhelm Fink, both translated by Douglas Fear); parts in 4.3 parts have been taken from Michaels 2005b (Wallstein), 2012a (Routledge, also translated by Douglas Fear), and Michaels and Wulf 2012 (Routledge).

Chapter 5 is based on Michaels 2004b (Piper Verlag), 2007a (Winter, both translated by Douglas Fear), 2010b (Brill), parts of Michaels 2004a: ch. 3 (Princeton University Press), and Gutschow and Michaels 2005, 2008, and 2012 (all Harrassowitz).

Chapter 6.1–6.2 has been newly written with the exception of some parts on the *Vatsalājātrā* (Michaels 2008, 97–107 and 183–92; Oxford University Press). For 6.3, parts have been taken from Michaels 2004a, 276–304 and 288–91 (Princeton University Press), as well as 2008, 193–208 (Oxford University Press).

Chapter 7 is new, with the exception of parts of Michaels 2004a, 246–52 (Princeton University Press) in Chapter 7.1, and Gutschow and Michaels 2012, 166–74 (Harrassowitz) in Chapter 7.3.

Chapter 8.1 is a shortened and revised version of Michaels (2006b); Chapter 8.2. is new, apart from the section "Ritual and Angst," which is based on Michaels 1997b (Peter Lang) and 2006a (Brill).

Chapter 9 is new.

Part V takes portions from Michaels 2006b (Brill) and forthc./a. The Appendix is based on an unpublished project report by Anette Frank, Oliver Hellwig, Axel Michaels, and Nils Reiter.

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As mentioned in the Preface, much of this book has come out of my research project, "Life-Cycle Rituals in Nepal." In that project, a team of Indologists and fieldworkers worked on almost all rites of passage in rural and urban Buddhist and Hindu areas of the Kathmandu Valley. Thus, Niels Gutschow, Christian Bau (a filmmaker), and I had been working on Hindu death and mourning rituals in Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, supported by Johanna Buß (an Indologist, now in Vienna) and Nutan Sharma (a cultural historian and journalist). In the second phase, we, together with Nutan Sharma, Manik Bajracharya, Astrid Zotter, and Christof Zotter, concentrated on initiation rituals, and in the third phase on marriage rituals, supported by Manik Bajracharya, Christiane Brosius, and Tessa Pariyar. Alexander von Rospatt (Berkeley) worked on aging and death rituals among the Buddhist Newars of Patan. I am grateful to all of them for their help and critical comments, but special thanks go to Niels Gutschow for his friendship, intellectual support, and stimulation over more than thirty years, and providing his experience and excellent material from the fieldwork in Bhaktapur. I would also like to thank the priests Mahendra Sharma and Hari Sharan Sharma, as well as Nutan Sharma and Manik Bajracharya, for sharing with me their detailed knowledge of ritual practice, and Laxmi Nath Shrestha for the support over the years.

Likewise, I wish to express my gratitude to friends and colleagues who have read parts of the book and/or have given me their inspiring comments

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Special thoughts go to my late wife Annette Wiemann-Michaels: having observed with her rituals in Nepal—sometimes accompanied by our beloved children Lena, Elias, and Katharina—is a treasured memory for me. The most central person in writing this book has been Christiane Brosius, who always encouraged me to continue with wrapping it all together and from whose criticism and enthusiasm I have greatly benefited. Above all, however, living together with her has never become a ritual. It is to all of them that I dedicate this book with affection and gratitude.

Abbreviations

AitBr	AitBr
AKP	Antyakarmapaddhati
ĀpDhS	Āpastambadharmasūtra
ĀpŚrS	Āpastambaśrautasūtra
AS	Arthasaṃgraha
BaudhDhS	Baudhāyanadharmasūtra
DhS	Dharmasūtra
GautDhS	Gautamadharmasūtra
GPS	Garuḍapurāṇa-Sāroddhāra
GS	Gṛhyasūtra
HB	Personal Handbook of Mahendra Raj Sharma
KātyŚrS	Kātyayanaśrautasūtra
Kkh	Kāśīkhaṇḍa
Manu	Manusmṛti
Mbh	Mahābhārata
MBh	Mahābhāṣya
MS	Mīmāṃsāsūtra of Jaimini
Nep.	Nepālī
Nev.	Nevārī
Pc	Puruṣārthacintāmaṇi
PG	Pāraskaragṛhyasūtra
ṚV	Ṛgveda
ŚBr	Śatapathabrāhmaṇa
Skt.	Sanskrit
SR	Saṃkalparatnāvalī
ŚrS	Śrautasūtra

TaittBr	Taittirīyabrāhmaṇa
TS	Taittrīyasaṃhitā
Tss	Tristhālīsetu
VS	Vājasaneyisaṃhitā
Yājñ	Yājñavalkyasmṛti

N.B: If not otherwise indicated or evident, all non-English terms are Sanskrit.

Pronunciation of Indian and Nepalese Words

CITIES AND WELL-KNOWN persons of recent history are written in their Anglicized form; on the other hand, gods and shrines are written in the internationally common transcription of Sanskrit, Hindī, Nepālī, or Nevārī. This transcription oriented to Devanāgarī writing enables a precise pronunciation, in which two rules are especially to be observed.

1. A line over a vowel indicates its length: *bh**ū**ta* pronounced like the English "mood"; both *e* and *o* are always long.
2. An S (ś, ṣ) is pronounced like the English "sh," when it is provided with an additional sign: *ś**ā**stra* like ***sh**ā**stra*** and *mokṣa* like *mok**sh**a*; without a diacritical mark, it is always a sharp (dental) S.

In addition, the following rules of pronunciation apply:

C like the English *ch: cakra* like **ch**urch
J like the English *j: jātrā* like **j**ungle
Y like the English *y: yogī* like **y**ogurt
V like the English *v: Viṣṇu* like **v**ine.

A dot under a consonant (except *m)* indicates retroflex pronunciation, that is, with the tongue bent back.

A dot or a tilde over an N (*n, ñ*) and a dot under an M (*ṁ*) indicate the conformed nasalization of the succeeding consonants (see the English "end").

A dot under an R (*ṛ*) is often pronounced *ri* (*mahāṛṣi* as "Mahā**r**ishi").

An H behind a consonant is a clearly strengthening aspiration of the consonant (see the English "tea")

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Introduction

WHEN A GREAT tradition re-ritualizes. . . . This was one of the issues Nanda Meera tackled in her popular bestseller *The God Market. How Globalization is Making India More Hindu*. In the Introduction of the 2011 edition, she pointed out that "the demand for religious services—from worship ceremonies at home and in public, visits to temples, pilgrimages, etc.—is growing, especially among the urban, educated, and largely Hindu middle classes,. . . [and] the supply of these religious services that cater to the majority community is being facilitated by the neoliberal policies of the state" and that "the net result of this is the mindset of majoritanism, which identifies the national culture of India with Hinduism" (Nanda 2011, xvi).

Does this situation reflect the present stage of rituals in India? It is indeed necessary to work out the differences between rural and urban India with regard to the performance of rituals. It is also necessary to research the influence of urbanity, education, adult literacy, globalization, and the new media. However, in order to understand the present-day situation, it is indispensable to study the changes and dynamics in a long history of rituals and ceremonial or festive events in South Asia, especially Hindu South Asia. That is what this book is all about. I will show how some major types of rituals have been appropriated, assimilated, adjusted, modified, transferred, expanded, reduced, and "modernized" in various times and contexts.

Nanda is right to say that religious life in India and most parts of South Asia is occupied with rituals. In nearly every Hindu household, people, mostly women, worship daily to "their" gods; in the car, Gaṇeśa is invoked; merchants in small stalls or modern malls adorn their premises with a picture of the goddess Lakṣmī and with flowers and incense. Along with this vivacious everyday religiosity, there are innumerable ritual occasions and events that present to us an abounding and colorful religious life, with religious services and worship, fire sacrifices, life-cycle rituals, esoteric initiations in sects, festivals, pilgrimages, vows, and other events: "When rites that

are celebrated weekly, monthly, and annually are taken into account, one or another festival is observed almost every day of the year" (Freed and Freed 1998, 3).

Is this richness and diversity of rituals and celebrations unique? Can we speak of a *homo ritualis* when it comes to India or the Hindu? Are Indians or Hindus more involved in rituals than other people? And, if so, what makes them special? Such questions certainly depend on the definition of the term "ritual." However, even with a clear and limited definition of the term "ritual," it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain whether India is unparalleled in the number of rituals.

Mary Douglas once stated that the more rule-governed the behavior of a social group and the stronger its coherence, the higher would be the frequency of rituals of the group.[1] Stanley J. Tambiah, too, opined "that Balinese life . . . is more ritually patterned, more suffused with aesthetic values than contemporary American life; that English society during the time of Jane Austen was more 'conventionalized' than it is today" (1979, 115). Similarly, Max Gluckman and Cyril Daryll Forde (1962, 2) asked: "Why is it that in tribal society there is on the whole greater ritualization of transitions in social status, and greater ritualization indeed of social relationships in general, than there is in modern society?" However, the implicit assumption in these theories that modernity has fewer rituals performed is certainly difficult to prove. It appears as if certain rituals in the Western industrialized countries have become fewer, and many traditional rituals are less celebrated. But it also appears that many new rituals have been created, and the variety of such events has grown.

Despite such terminological and analytical problems, to which I will return below, I hold that traditional Hinduism, by and large, is indeed in love with rituals in a highly differentiated way. Not only does the Hindu calendar show many rituals and festivals, but also these events often last remarkably long. Hardly any part of life escapes this comprehensive disciplining of life that transforms any natural behavior into cultural and, in the end, often ritual forms. I propose that Hindu India is special in that ritual surpasses belief and that surviving in such a socio-religious environment is only possible through participation in a great number of rituals. In other words, what you believe is less important than what you do—in and through rituals. Interviewed on Hinduism and modern India by

1. Douglas 1966, 13f.; cf. Whitehouse 2001; McCauley and Lawson 2002, chap. 2.

Fred de Sam Lazaro, Ashis Nandy rightly said to the *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*:

> Traditionally, the South Asian faiths depended not on belief systems like modern Christianity does, but on religious practices. What you did was important, not what you believed. Nobody asked you do you really believe in Krishna, do you really believe in Ram?[2]

I do not propose that only Indians or Hindus are *homines ritualis*. Assyrian, Jewish, or Japanese cultures might equally be seen as highly ritualized societies (and when we practice rituals, we are all members of such a species). But I do hold that Hinduism is widely characterized by a very elaborated habitual preference for ritual forms of communication and action. Even one of the most important key terms of Hinduism, *dharma*, was initially mostly related to ritual before it also encompassed the morality of actions (Olivelle 2009, xxxviii).

Elsewhere (Michaels 2004a), I have suggested that Hinduism is characterized by an identificatory habitus that encompasses and often ritually regulates most parts of life: communication, work, dining, hygiene, or sexuality. I regard this habitus as one of the main features in "Hinduism," that is, the capacity to follow various paths or religions by identificatory ideas and practices.[3] A Hindu can be a Brahman ritualist in the life-cycle rituals, philosophically an Advaitin, a devotionalist (*bhakti*) in terms of practice, and a worshipper of some folk deity in his popular religion—not to mention a Christian or Buddhist in terms of ideas that he might propagate as well. A Newar in Nepal, asked whether he is a Hindu or Buddhist, could well answer:

---

2. de Sam Lazaro 2010.

3. The term "Hindu" is highly problematic since it often comprises a large number of religious (and nonreligious) movements that have not defined, and do not define themselves by the unity that the term suggests and that is almost impossible to construct. In *Hinduism: Past and Present*, I have elaborated on this problem (Michaels 2004a, 12–30) and will therefore confine myself here to the result of such considerations. I understand "Hinduism" as a collective term for certain religions, religious communities, and socio-religious systems that fulfill the following five criteria: "a) they emerged or spread on the South Asian subcontinent; b) their social organization is characterized essentially by special rules of descent and marriage (the so-called caste system); c) Vedic-Brahmanic values, rituals, and myths dominated (originally); d) a manifestation of Śiva, Devī, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, or Gaṇeśa is worshipped as god or divine force, or is at least not explicitly rejected; e) an Identificatory Habitus prevails, closely connected with a salvation linked to descent, derived from the ancient Indian sacrifice, but which has broken with that to a large extent" (ibid., 20).

"Yes!" This habitual identification of various forms of belief fosters ritual behavior, because to perform a ritual means to enact the claim of unchangeability, that is, the claim that the same is acted out again and again or that it is mimetically repeated (although this is hardly true, as many studies on ritual dynamics have shown). Rituals try to avoid change and decline, to the extent that they even deny any alteration and difference. In Hinduism, it is often through rituals that such inclusivism of "other" beliefs is practiced and experienced.

There are three more reasons for the ritual affluence in Hinduism. First is its polytheism, that is, the large number of deities that are worshiped. This is mostly carried out by the "path of ritual" (*karmamārga*), the most widespread form of Hindu religiosity, and by addressing deities, which outweighs other forms of religiosity such as meditation or inner devotion. Tradition differentiates between three salvational forms or paths (*mārga*) of religiosity: the path of ritual and sacrifice (*karmamārga*), the path of knowledge (*jñānamārga*), and the path of devotional participation (*bhaktimārga*).[4] Though all of these paths intermingle, *karmamārga* is certainly the most favored path, and the largest part of the extensive Sanskrit literature deals with texts on *dharma* and *karma*, that is, on rituals.

Second, South Asia has not only a great variety and number of rituals but also a long history of ritual traditions. Many rituals have been preserved in normative texts from Vedic times until the present. There are not many cultures that allow such a historical depth in ritual studies. Assyrian or old Egyptian cultures were probably equally rich in rituals, but these traditions have died out, and the number or character of texts is limited. In other cultures, there are no written ritual texts at all. South Asia, however, preserves countless old texts on ritual practice, and many of them are still used for performances, as was aptly (though slightly too optimistically) remarked by Alfred Hillebrandt:

> Compared with Classics and Antiquity Studies, Sanskrit philology has the advantage that it must not gather its knowledge of all sacral customs from individual, arbitrary information. Instead it possesses manuals, which build the basis for the priestly knowledge of sacrifice. Supported by several tools, the information of these records and systems is precise in such a way that it is possible to reconstruct various

4. To this, a path of honor and heroism (*vīramārga*) and a path of humor (*hāsyamārga*, cf. below Chapter 3.3) may be added. Cf. Michaels 2004a, 23f.

> ancient sacrifices without participating in their performance. (Hillebrandt 1897, 1; my translation)

A third reason for the large quantity of rituals is India's great variety of local and regional religious practices. From the Himalaya down to the south of the peninsula, India—with her many cultures, languages, and literatures—offers a never-ending source for rare forms of rituals and a broad spectrum of variations that Hinduism, more often than not, has integrated.

Given these four arguments—the identificatory habitus, the polytheism, the rich historical and textual tradition, and the large variety of rituals—it might be justified to speak of a Hindu *homo ritualis*—not meaning that every Indian or Hindu is a *homo ritualis*, but that a certain kind of action habitus perhaps makes Hindus more inclined to ritual than others, Hindus and non-Hindus. One of the major themes of my book is to find out what kind of culture-specific behavior this is.

Does this reading of Hindu culture entail too much essentialism, thus making all Hindus the same? In writing this book, I have tried to avoid this by historicizing and localizing rituals wherever possible, but I do hold that, to quite an extent, Hindus follow similar cultural patterns by going the ritual way in solving individual or social problems. These habitual patterns made me think of a Hindu *homo ritualis*, a term which, of course, resembles the title of Louis Dumont's famous book, *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980, 1st ed. in French 1966). Dumont's seminal study was often criticized for its essentialism—a criticism I share. However, I do believe that Dumont was correct in proposing that ritual behavior in India has much to do with a highly segmented caste society. This society changes according to the needs of modernity, that is, acculturation, migration, globalization, transculturality, social, political, and cultural entanglements, but it is still widely rooted in ancient ritualized forms of behavior and communication, as well as caste- and class-oriented separations and distinctions. To a great extent, it is also still rooted in rural life; according to the 2011 census, 72 percent of the Indian population lives in a rural environment.

There is another book similar, in its title, to my *Homo Ritualis*; it is Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (1955). In fact, Huizinga lists a number of features for play that are also characteristic for my definition of ritual. Play, for instance, steps "out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own ('limitation of time'); it also takes place in a marked-off space, the playground and ritual stage sharing this 'limitation of space'; it assumes a fixed, culturally ordained form, constituted of 'elements of repetition and alternation (as in a refrain) [which] are

like the warp and woof of a fabric'; it is a 'contest for something' as well as a 'representation' of something . . . it 'creates order, and is order' and in an imperfect world brings temporary perfection" (Tambiah 1979, 117). However, the difference between *homo ludens* and *homo ritualis* is obvious: the performance of rituals is more strict than in plays (in a game, for instance, the winner is not known beforehand); and mostly, the religious connotations are stronger in rituals than in plays. The primary purpose of plays and games are amusement and aesthetic values; the primary concern of rituals, at least religious ones, is some kind of transcendence or elevation.

Holding that the (Hindu) *homo ritualis* is characterized by a special attitude or habitus, I will argue in the present book that (a) ritual is a distinctive way of acting, which, like theater play, can be distinguished from other forms of action; (b) there is a characteristic structure of Hindu rituals based on the Brahmanic-Sanscritic sacrifice as a model; and (c) this structure is often shown in practice by the identificatory habitus to be one of the characterizing and unique features of Hinduism. In other words, while many religions tend to develop less ritualized or more open forms of belief, (Brahmanic) Hinduism has internalized ritual behavior to the extent that it has become its most important and characteristic feature, one that permeates most social and personal life. Hinduism, then, can perhaps be seen as a strong case in the history of religions, where (ritual) form dominates belief and develops a sweeping autonomy.

However, rituals might have a religious background, but need not be religious in every aspect. Saying "God bless you" when you meet somebody need not presuppose the belief in God, nor does the *añjali* gesture, the folding of hands for greeting, necessarily imply a religious feeling. Nevertheless, both gestures have a religious background. My main argument, therefore, extends the realm of religion and Hinduism, though it is based on both.

The Term "Ritual"

Humanities and social sciences are full of big and small terms. Big terms are "space," "time," or "society." Small terms are "syntax" or "cross-cousin marriage." Big terms interest many people. They bring people together to reflect on big problems and to facilitate applying for research funds and organizing conferences, and many scholars discuss them in articles and books. Why are big terms big? It appears that they help to explain the world, the human condition, and universal structures. It looks as if they have to do with something important, but that is difficult to grasp and therefore needs continuous efforts to be defined again and again.

"Ritual" is such a big term. Scholars from diverse disciplines and regions, using various methodologies, for example, fieldwork or philology, and focusing on different periods—from antiquity to modernity—have elaborated on it and tried to define it (cf. Platvoet 1995, App. 2; Grimes 2014, 185–97). Edmund Leach notes: "[There is] the possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood" (Leach 1968–1972, 526). The large conference "Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual" at Heidelberg in 2008 (Michaels et al. 2010–2011), the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, or the almost comprehensive overview on recent research by Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg (2006 and 2007) suggests that there are no cultures without rituals. Does that mean we cannot live without them? And if not, to what extent are we *homines ritualis*, and do we "need" rituals? And if so, why?

Strangely, the term "ritual" in the sense of symbolic behavior and ceremonial custom is rather recent; it appears only in the 1910 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Asad 1988). In South Asian Studies, one finds thousands of publications on rituals with very ancient, Vedic roots, but for hundreds of years, one could speak about these events without any need for the big term "ritual." The same is true for similar terms such as routine, etiquette, cult, sacrifice, séance, custom, ceremony, celebration, game, play, festival, festivity, theater, or sports. In current nonacademic debates, these terms are more or less used interchangeably, or only loosely distinguished. Routine, etiquette, or customs, for instance, include everyday behavior; festival, plays, and theater focus on the staged aspect; play and sport focus on the playful character. But the borders between these terms are not sharply drawn. There are tea ceremonies, Christmas celebrations, shamanic séances, the customs of some tribe, the routine of daily teeth brushing, and so on. In all of these cases, the terms could be substituted with "ritual."

The classification or typology of rituals does not really serve to clarify this terminological mixture. Nearly all actions can be combined with the term ritual. There are sacrificial rituals, temple rituals, procession rituals, purity rituals, harvest rituals, political rituals, coronation rituals, dance rituals, interaction rituals, and many more. Greeting, eating, drinking, walking, sitting, speaking, laughing, crying—all this and much more can be ritualized and then become a ritual type, or the title of a big book.

Nor does linguistic history help to reduce the multiple connotations of the term ritual. Even the etymology of Latin *ritus*, the adjective *ritualis*, or the adverbs *rite* and *ritualiter* are not clear. These words could be derived from *ṛta*, "order, truth," or from the Indo-European root **srew*, "to flow"—see, for example, Greek *panta rhei*, "everything flows" (cf. Turner and Turner 1978, 243–44). In the first case, the cosmological order is in the foreground; in the

second, the dynamic aspect is in the foreground. However, in Mediterranean antiquity, this lexical field was mainly limited to festive and religious customs; it does not, of course, explain the semantic extension of the term ritual in contemporary times.

The term "ritual" thus stems from a religious background and kept this connotation until the 1960s. Only then did the concept of ritual beyond religion come up (cf. Platvoet 2004). It was mainly Erwing Goffman (1967) who extended the notion of "ritual" to the description of everyday interactions. This extension of ritual in a narrow sense to ritual-like activity or ritualization made the term applicable to many activities and events—to an extent that it became an almost empty term, denoting everything from animal behavior to greeting gestures, birthday parties, examination celebrations, and coronation ceremonies. This conceptual ambiguity still exists (cf. Grimes 2000b).

In other than European languages, there is mostly no single word or term that could be considered equivalent to "ritual" (whatever that may mean exactly). Instead, there are a number of terms that come close to it. For Sanskrit, these are: [5]

1. *karma(n), kriyā* (both from the verbal root *kṛ-*, "to do, make"): "Action, work, religious rite, ceremony." In Vedic texts (ca. 1750–500 BC), *karma* predominantly denotes a religious rite, especially the sacrifice (see below). From the early Upaniṣads onward, it also denotes all deeds leading to the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*) and the ethical perspective that good action leads to higher forms of life. *Karmakāṇḍa* means those parts of the Veda that are related to sacrificial rites and the merits resulting from them.
2. *maṅgala*, "rite, ceremony, any auspicious event": this term was used by Aśoka and others.[6] In the ninth Rock Edict, Aśoka differentiates *maṅgalas* practiced during illness, or at the marriage of a son or a daughter, or at the birth of a son, or when setting out on a journey. He also speaks of vulgar and useless *maṅgalas*.
3. *saṃskāra* (from *sam-kṛ-*, "to put something correctly together, to make something perfect"; cf. "Sanskrit" from *samskṛta*, lit. "the well-formed (language)"): "Making perfect, purificatory rite, rite in general, especially life-cycle rite," e.g., *upanayana*, "initiation," *vivāha*, "marriage," *antyeṣṭi*, "death ritual"; also, though it is not a *saṃskāra* in a strict sense, *śrāddha*,

5. What follows is partly from Michaels 2006b; in the same volume, one can also find similar lexical fields for several other languages. Cf. also Grimes 1987.

6. Cf. Aśvaghoṣa's *Buddhacarita* 1.83; GautDhS 11.17; Bronkhorst 2011, 16.

"ancestor ritual." The term often denotes the twelve "canonical" life-cycle rites. As was aptly argued by B. K. Smith (1989, 86), through *saṃskāras* somebody is made fit or suitable for the sacrifice or what is holy, because gods only accept what is correct and perfect.

4. *kalpa* (from *klp-*, "to bring something in proper order," cf. *sam-kalpa* below): "A prescribed sacred rule, manner of acting (especially in rituals)": *kalpa* generally refers to a set of ritual rules or laws which are prescribed and which one has to follow, but also to procedures or manners of acting. It does not refer to a specific ritual or ceremony.
5. *pūjā* (probably from *pūj-*, "to honor"), "worship, adoration, respect, homage." *Pūjā* basically denotes the worship of deities according to a ritual script traditionally including sixteen elements of service (*upacāra*), which can be reduced to five essential parts (*pañcopacāra*): anointment of the deity (*gandha, anulepana*), flowers (*puṣpa*), incense (*dhūpa*), lights or lamps (*dīpa*), and feeding of the deity (*naivedya*). The difference between it and Vedic sacrifices (see below, 6.) is that in *pūjās* all food is mostly[7] vegetarian, and that women and members of the "low" Śūdra class (*varṇa*) are, by and large, also entitled to perform it. The *pūjā* has been analyzed as honoring a deity like a respected guest (Thieme 1939), a deliberated subordination under the power of the deity (Babb 1975), or a commensal act, which shows the union between worshiper and god (Fuller 1992).
6. *yajña, yāga* (from *yaj-*, "to sacrifice"): "Sacrifice, sacrificial rite." In Vedic religion, there are essentially two major types of sacrifices: (a) domestic sacrifices, e.g., life-cycle rites (*saṃskāra*, see above) or morning and evening rituals (*agnihotra, saṃdhyā*), and (b) public rituals (*śrauta*) performed by a sacrificer (*yajamāna*) and a Brahman priest. These rituals have been classified variously: according to the sacrificial objects involved, e.g., vegetarian food (*haviryajña, iṣṭi*), human sacrifices (*puruṣamedha*), animal sacrifices (*paśubandha, aśvamedha*), sacrifices including pressing the *soma* drink (*agniṣṭoma*), according to the time, e.g., new and full moon sacrifices (*darśapūrṇamāsa*), or, according to the function, e.g., royal consecration (*rājasūya*). The Vedic sacrifice is basically a fire sacrifice. If sacrificial objects are poured into the fire (*agni*), the sacrifice is also called *homa* (from *hu-*, "to pour").
7. *utsava* (from *ud-sū,* "to rise"[8]), *melā* ("fair"; from *mil-*, "to meet"), *līlā* ("play"): "Festival."[9] These terms commonly denote communal festivals,

7. Cf. A. Zotter 2013, 318 n. 97.

8. See, however, Gonda 1947, who derives *utsava* from *ud-su*, "to press."

9. In the ninth Rock Edict of Aśoka, such festivals are also called *samāja*, "meeting, assembly."

which are related to mythological events, the harvest cycle, ancestors, and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*). Festivals often include worship (*pūjā*), sacrifices (*yajña, homa*, etc.), vows, such as fasting or night vigil (*vrata*), dances, music, and/or gift exchange or donations (*dāna*). Hindu festivals are generally characterized by a large number of folk-religious elements, even if they are based on the Brahmanic-Sanskritic tradition.

This variety of terms related to rituals requires differentiating between types and structures of such events, which I will do in the following chapters. I will also try to use this indigenous terminology in order to underpin the culture-specific connotations.

Ritual Studies—An Overview

While there is no single term for a common and universal form of action such as ritual, we should be capable of saying how we define ritual (although below, it will become clear that the answer to the question "what is a ritual?" seems almost impossible). Anthropologists have often defined ritual "as culturally standardized, repetitive activity, primarily symbolic in character, aimed at influencing human affairs (or at least allowing humans to understand better their place in the universe), and involving the supernatural realm" (Kerzer 1988, 8 f.). However, this definition is limited to religious rituals. In the early period of anthropological theory, this was the normal case (cf. Durkheim 1912, 56), but later secular and interaction rituals, too, were included in definitions of ritual.

We are now in the middle of a theoretical rally[10] where competitors want to explain the function or meaning of rituals. The functionalists claim "rituals are necessary for this or that individual or social purpose or effect; they are, for example, necessary for personal crisis or social alliances." The theologians insist that "rituals exist because god or some supra-human power manifests himself or itself in it; rituals are, then, somehow hierophantic events." The formalists, perhaps the largest group, say "rituals are actions with common features; in this sense they are basically (pure) form." Let us take a closer look at these theoretical arguments, which, of course, we mostly find only in hybrid forms:

Rituals are necessary for this or that individual or social purpose or effect. Functionalist theories are mostly (a) psychological, or (b) sociological and political theories.

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10. For other overviews, cf. Grimes 1982; Platvoet 1995, App. 2; Kreinath, Snoek, and Stausberg 2006 and 2007.

Psychological theories,[11] for instance, those of Sigmund Freud (1907), Bronisław Malinowski (1925), or Theodor Reik (1946), often emphasize the angst-reducing or emotional-crisis-softening aspects of rituals for individuals—an aspect that is similar to my notion of *individualitas* (see below). Such psychological theories are still popular because they explain why many rituals are often performed in changing and sometimes frightening situations—the passages of life, for example. Rituals are then seen as therapies, and the efficacy of such rituals, especially of healing rituals, is especially stressed. The threat, so it is said, that lies in the transformations or passages demands reactions and tests of courage. However, the theory of the angst-reducing function of rituals can easily be rejected by counterexamples. Malinowski, for instance, claimed that easy, unrisky fishing in the lagoons of the Trobrianders did not demand rituals, whereas the dangerous and frightening deep-sea fishing went along with a number of rituals. But already his colleague, Arthur Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, debunked this theory, showing that the number of rituals does not depend on any angst-reducing function (Radcliffe-Brown 1945).

Modern psychological theories often underpin the ways in which, in rituals, the individual is linked to society (Kerzer 1988, 10), or they pinpoint the efficacy of rituals, especially in healing rituals (Quack, Sax, and Weinhold 2010), or they highlight the emotional intensity in different modes of rituals (Whitehouse 2004[12]). In all of these cases, rituals are understood as a formal behavior that serves or functions to channel, stabilize, or control emotions or behavior.

Victor Turner (1985a,1985b) also suggested in his last articles that rituals might lead to a reduction in ergotropic or trophotropic stimulation. And even Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994, 99) are of the opinion that the cathartic effect (though not the meaning) of some rituals is one of the reasons for their performance. Freud, however, did not ascribe any positive value to rituals. He analyzed obsessive actions and ritualizations in everyday life as a semi-religious ceremony. Such psychological theories are still favored by many scholars of ritual. They help to explain why, rituals are apparently practiced more often in a crisis than in calm periods. Mary Douglas (1966) even tried to relate the frequency and intensity of rituals to types of societies. Thus, rituals are often considered a form of therapy for individuals or societies.

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11. Cf. the overview of Argyle 2002.

12. For more, see below, the introduction to Part III.

Sociological and political theories of ritual, for instance those of Emile Durkheim (1912), Radcliffe-Brown (1922), or Max Gluckman (1952), often point to the aspects of solidarity, power, control, social hierarchy and stability, or rebellion in rituals—an aspect that I call *societas*. Their ceremonies, training, public shows, and theatricality are then seen as a form of strengthening or regenerating societies or social groups in order to subordinate or integrate individuals. For Durkheim, worship of a god in rituals is a symbolic method to worship one's own society. Says political scientist David Kerzer: "What is important about rituals, then, is not that they deal with supernatural beings, but rather that they provide a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed" (1988, 9). Robin Horton (1972, 349) and Harvey Whitehouse (2014; cf. Jones 2013) regard rituals even as a "social glue." Rituals are then seen as alliances that help to organize and govern social groups:

> [C]ollective ritual can be seen as an especially dramatic attempt to bring some particular part of life firmly and definitely into orderly control. (Moore and Myerhoff 1977, 3)

Rituals are religious events. In the early period of anthropological and religious studies, ritual was strongly linked to religion and magic acts. It was mostly regarded as a primitive or irrational form to express religion. Confessional or (quasi-)theological theories of rituals,[13] for instance that of the Romanian historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1957 and 1959), are basically religiously motivated. They emphasize the transcending and mythic aspects of rituals (which I will call *religio*), separate the profane from the religious, and highlight the contact to the other, superhuman world that is looked for in rituals. In a different way, some regard the belief in superhuman agency as instrumental for the efficacy of rituals.[14]

Rituals are (pure) form. Many theories focus on the formalistic aspects of rituals. They are not so much interested in function or efficacy; instead they stress the *modus operandi* of rituals (Van Gennep 1909), or analyze their language,[15] symbols (Jensen 1963); communicative aspects;[16] social and interactive

13. Boyer (1993, 219–22) called all cultural approaches to religious rituals "theological."

14. See, for instance, Lawson and McCauley 1990; Barrett and Lawson 2001.

15. Lawson 1976; Tambiah 1979; Werlen 1984; Staal 1989; Lawson and McCauley 1990.

16. Douglas 1966; Leach 1976; cf. Bell 1992, 72–74.

pragmatics,[17] as well as performance or dramatization.[18] Since language, symbols, and performance also have functions, such theories are often also functionalist or "theological," but there are also theories that claim that rituals are pure or predominantly formal and thus meaningless.[19]

Once again, none of these theories can be reduced to these simplifying prototypes or models since they mostly overlap. But the problem is now obvious: which is the best theory? Whom should we follow? My answer: all of them, whenever it is appropriate. For most rituals have various functions and meanings (although they are intrinsically meaningless). They are psychologically and socially helpful and thus functionally efficient in certain situations (in others they are not), and they often refer to another, extraordinary, superior world (but also are entirely worldly). This complexity has to do with the broad spectrum of different rituals and persons involved in them, that is, the authors or agents of rituals, the participants and observers, the people who make them and those who observe or tell or write about them, or those who film or visualize them. Rituals may have multiple functions and meanings, depending on the conditions in which they take place and the perspective of the performers, participants, and observers. They may thus have and generate several causes; they may be purposeful or completely empty. Any theory that tries to comprise all these aspects is too all inclusive.

But one thing has become clear in this multiplicity of theories: there is not *the* ritual—independent of its specific historical, regional or linguistic context. In other words, there is no essence of ritual. There are only persons who, for various reasons, regard this or that as a ritual. It is therefore useless to ask "What is a ritual?" or "Is this event a ritual?" It is much better to ask: "Who denotes this event as 'a ritual' and why?" Then it becomes clear that the term "ritual" itself is not independent of time and locality, but belongs to a certain culture and period, despite its frequent use for claims of eternity and stability. Then it becomes obvious that there are a lot of dynamics in events called "ritual," and that these rituals are never the same again, but change in the course of their transcultural transfer from one period or religion or culture to another.

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17. Geertz 1966; Goffmann 1967; Soeffner 1992.

18. Turner 1969,1964, and 1982; Tambiah 1979; Schechner 1977 and 1990; Fischer-Lichte 2008.

19. Staal 1979a; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Michaels 2006b.

It is only toward the end of the nineteenth century that we notice a widespread use of the term "ritual" as an umbrella term, and it might be worthwhile, in an excursus, to bring to mind the difficult birth of ritual studies in India.

Excursus: The Production of Knowledge on Indian Rituals

Since Edward Said, we cannot discuss the production of knowledge of Asia independent of the colonial conditions under which it was produced. Similar to South Africa, the production of religious knowledge or knowledge of religions in India was in the hands of three groups, which David Chidester (2014) has elaborated: (a) metropolitan academics and intellectuals—Chidester calls them "imperial theorists, surrounded by texts, in the quiet of their studies"—, (b) "colonial agents on the noisy frontlines of intercultural contacts" (ibid.), that is, administrative or missionary people, traders and travelers, and (c) "indigenous people struggling under colonial dispossession, displacement, containment, and exploitation but also exploring new terms of engagement that included the term, *religion*" (ibid.), for example, informants, pandits, local authors.[20]

But—in contradistinction to South Africa—India created a problem for the early nineteenth century European view of the world—a view that was fundamentally based on the opposition between the dark-skinned savage and the white civilized European. For India was a civilization *with* dark-skinned peoples. The solution to this conundrum was the idea

> that India's civilization was produced by the clash and subsequent mixture of light-skinned civilizing invaders (the Aryans) and dark-skinned barbarian aborigines (often identified as Dravidians). (This racial) theory of Indian civilization has proved remarkably durable and resistant to new information, and it persists to this day. (Trautmann 2004, 3–4; cf. Oldenberg 1917, 2)

It also seems that the history of religions developed by denigrating the anthropology of rituals and postulating an "aristocracy of book religions" (Masuzawa 2005, 210). In this sense, it was an imperial project in a contact zone which did not leave room for indigenous notions of what is now called ritual.

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20. Cf. Trautmann 2004, 18: "The production of knowledge of India current today . . . is by the production by a wide variety of types such as Orientalists, missionaries, and administrators."

Until the mid-nineteenth century, most scholarly interest in India was on language, but not on rituals. Only missionaries, though focusing on educational and linguistic pursuits, collected early information on rituals (cf. Dirks 2001, 2). The tenor of these writings was a more or less explicit disguise of primitive religions with their strange customs and habits. Especially influential was Jean Antoine (Abbé) Dubois (1766–1848), the first to elaborate extensively on Indian rituals, describing them in 1816 as horrific and immoral practices. Interestingly, Dubois used the imagery of Africa for this view as later also did Indological philologists, starting with Max Müller:

> I am persuaded that a nation of Pariahs left to themselves would speedily become worse than the hordes of cannibals who wander in the waste of Africa, and would soon take to devouring each other. (Dubois 1906, 29; cf. Dirks 2001, 24)

This assessment by Abbé Dubois, who regarded Indians as not convertible, indirectly led to the British polity of noninterference in religions and customs:

> It is in the nature of the Hindus to cling to their civil and religious institutions, to their old customs and habits. . . . Let us leave them their cherished laws and prejudices, since no human effort will persuade them to give them up, even in their own interest, and let us not risk making the gentlest and most submissive people in the world furious and indomitable by thwarting them. Let us take care lest we bring about, by some hasty or imprudent course of action, catastrophes which would reduce the country to a state of anarchy, desolation, und ultimate ruin, for, in my humble opinion, the day when the Government attempts to interfere with any of the more important religious and civil usages of the Hindus will be the last of its existence as a political power. (Dubois 1906, 97)

Another idea of Abbé Dubois was that rituals had obsessed Hindus. This was also proposed by scholars like James Mill whose book *The History of India* (1817) became a canonical text for the East India Company. His main idea was that uncivilized rituals, which, in the end, only favor the Brahmans, regulate the whole life of the Hindus:

> As the greater part of life among the Hindus is engrossed by the performance of an infinite and burdensome ritual, which extends to

> almost every hour of the day, and every function of nature and society, the Brahmans, who are the sole judges and directors in these complicated and endless duties, are rendered the uncontrollable masters of life. Thus elevated in power and privileges, the ceremonial of society is no less remarkably in their favour. (Mill 1817, 50 f.)

However, Mill's knowledge on rituals and Hinduism is not built on observation, either by himself of by others, but on reading Manu's Law Book (*Manusmṛti*), a Sanskrit text that since William Jones' translation has "taken on a general anthropological significance it could never have had before, with enormous consequences for the refashioning of basic assumptions about religion and society" (Dirks 2001, 34). The ignorance of and aversion to rituals among the metropolitan academics in the first half of the nineteenth century was thus primarily based on such textual knowledge and the lack of empirical knowledge.

Mill even claimed that these rituals distracted the observer and blended their knowledge of India. In his view, the mere observation of rituals remained at the level of sense impressions, which had to be overcome by higher-level mental functions such as intellect and reading:

> As soon as every thing of importance is expressed in writing, a man who is duly qualified may obtain more knowledge of India in one year in his closet in England, than he could obtain during the course of the longest life, by the use of his eyes and ears in India. (Mill 1826, xii; Trautmann 2004, 119)

Thomas Trautmann rightly comments on this passage:

> Mill purports to show that the India hand's expertise is limited to the gathering of facts presented to his senses in the colony, while the higher-level mental functions are associated with the metropole. (Trautmann ibid.)

This attitude favored the metropolitan philologists and gave them a feeling of superiority over the people in the field, that is, administrators, traders, and travelers. Interestingly, the philologists were supported by Brahmans who themselves developed a theory of superiority: the hierarchical caste or class (*varṇa*) system based on purity-impurity categories that were close to racialist theories. Thus, both the metropolitan academics and the Brahmanical assistants did not take much interest in the practice of rituals or, if so,

only to denigrate them. The frontier zone was an alliance of Victorian British and purist Indian would-be scholars reducing practiced rituals to idolatry, juggernaut, sexualized yoni-lingam worship, child marriage, and widow burning.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the situation changed—especially through Friedrich Max Müller, one of the most prominent armchair academics who, however, never went to India. Müller, by today's standards an academic star, did not fall into the Indophobia of James Mill or Thomas Macaulay. On the contrary, he set out to discover the soul of Indian civilization in the unspoiled Vedic age. Based on the discovery of Sanskrit as the root language for all "Aryans," he created not only the "Aryan love story as a family reunion" (Trautmann 2004, 15) between Europe and India but also an Indomania that, in the end and until today, idealizes and spiritualizes India.

With regard to ritual, Müller historicized such action by describing an evolution from ancient Vedic sacrifice to the decadent ritual practice of the present, which he regarded as a decline from the golden Vedic age. Accordingly, reading about rituals in old Sanskrit texts was again and still is held in higher esteem than observing performed rituals.

Contrary to this view of one of the foremost metropolitan academics, the administrators on the ground more and more discovered that India could be ruled only with more anthropological knowledge of its people. This led to the many gazetteers and manuals "in which the local castes and tribes were listed and described, with more detail reserved for certain caste and tribe groups specific to the area, under the heading of 'manners and customs'" (Dirks 2001, 46), that is, rituals. It also led to the Decennial Census reports starting from 1872. This quest for anthropological knowledge not only provided facts of the peoples of India but also was instrumental "in installing caste as the fundamental unit of India's social structure" (Dirks 2001, 49).

Both not only the "I read it" perspective but also the "I saw it" perspective were based on the same indigenous figure as the key interlocutor and broker of local knowledge: the learned Brahman or the pandit. Often educated in English, the pandits were the helpers of the British scholars and also of the administrators in preparing the vast knowledge on tribes and castes and their manners, customs, and rituals. Both joined the academics in the European metropoles, where the preference of Indological textual knowledge of rituals remained dominant, to denigrate the practiced rituals.

Through the influence of William Robertson's influential book, *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889, 2nd ed. 1894), as well as James Frazer's *Golden Bough* (1890), their evolutionary view on rituals postulating a "primacy of ritual, over a notion of souls" (Bell 1997, 4) led to the widespread idea

of rituals as survivals in religion. Müller's comparative philology was thus supplemented by a kind of comparative (historical) anthropology.

In 1897, Alfred Hillebrandt published his *Ritual-Literattur, Vedische Opfer und Zauber*, probably the first comprehensive book on Indian rituals with "ritual" in its title. In the very beginning, he speaks of rituals as the "petrified survivals of an already vanished life" (Hillebrandt 1897, 2). It is perhaps not by accident that Hermann Oldenberg (1854–1920) dedicated his *Vorwissenschaftliche Wissenschaft. Die Weltanschauung der Brāhmana-Texte* (1919) to the memory of Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), a biblical scholar and orientalist who had greatly influenced Robertson Smith. In this book, Oldenberg describes the system of the *brāhmaṇas*, exegetic texts on the Vedic ritual, and characterized ritual as an inferior, even lunatic—"das Gerede von Irren" (p. 3)—historical episode to be overcome by the anti-ritualistic Upanishads and Buddhism.

All of this was very much in line with the idea that Müller and others had proposed that religion is a higher state of development and that savages had no religion; ritual, especially magic, sensuous ritual, is such a primitive, "early state of human race at large" (Tylor 1891, 13). "The great divide between civilization and savagery" (Chidester 2004, xv) was also in India kept up, but the frontier zone was different because metropolitan philologists played a much more important role in the process of historicizing and separating what belonged together. In this process, the pandits "misused" the colonialists as much as the philologists the pandits. And it was the study of ritual that mainly served the imperialist ideas of an evolution in cultures or civilizations with Christianity and Europe at the highest position. Thus, metropolitan philologists, colonial agents, and indigenous people contributed to the separation of ritual and religion and the evolutionary relationship between both.

Despite its imperialist origins, Indological and anthropological studies of Indian rituals have significantly influenced ritual theory. An older generation of anthropologists and sociologists focused on Indian textual material: Georges Dumézil (1989–1986), Edward B. Tylor (1832–1917), Marcel Mauss (1872–1950), and Henri Hubert (1872–1927) on sacrifice; Louis Dumont (1911–1998) on marriage rituals; Max Weber (1864–1920) on asceticism; or Arthur M. Hocart (1883–1939) on kingship—to mention just the most prominent scholars, who mainly relied on translations or secondary sources. But only since the middle of the twentieth century has the perspective on Indian rituals turned from the macro-level of the so-called "Great Tradition" to the micro "fieldwork" level of the villages and the small cities—with the consequence of innumerable empirical studies on rituals in India.

In more recent times, the Dutch Indologist Frits Staal (1930–2012) developed his well-known theory on the meaninglessness of rituals; anthropologists Bruce Kapferer, Stanley Tambiah, and Richard Schechner concentrated on ritual performativity using material from South Asia; and Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, focusing on Jaina forms of worship (*pūjā*), have published an influential theory on liturgical and performative rituals. However, despite one brilliant exception (Clooney, 1990), the value of the indigenous theories of ritual, for instance the Pūrvamīmāṃsā school, or the theory on (*rasa*) aesthetics of theater and dance performances, have not yet been sufficiently recognized in ritual theory.

Moreover, Hindu rituals have been descriptively compiled by Indological scholars such as P. V. Kane (1968ff.) and Jan Gonda (1977, 1980). There are high quality examples of work on rituals that combine textual studies with fieldwork, for example, Gonda (1980), Tachikawa (1983), Einoo (1993), and Witzel (1986) on Vedic rituals; and Bühnemann (1988), and Einoo (1996) on Hindu worship (*pūjā*). One also finds several studies of Hindu life-cycle rituals (see Gutschow and Michaels 2005, 2008, and 2012 for references).

Ritual Studies—An Overview (Continued)

As the above excursus has shown, calling certain events a ritual became a trend at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century—not only in Indology. Academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and religious studies were established in the middle of the nineteenth century, and the founding fathers or pioneers of these disciplines were also the first to publish ritual theories: William Robertson Smith's *Lectures on the Religion of the Semites* (1889), James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890), Arnold van Gennep's *Rites de passage* (1909), and Emile Durkheim's *Formes élementaires de la vie religieuse* (1912).

Already in 1920, Sir Julian Huxley compared ritual behavior among animals and humans and thus extended the use of the term "ritual" to ethological research, coining the term "ritualization." In what follows, ethological-psychological, socio-biological, and socio-ecological theories[21] regard rituals as a mechanism of biological selection (survival of the fittest) or social regulation.

Until the 1960s, the term "ritual" was loaded with negative connotations referring to the odd, obsolete, and primitive—in short, the unchangeable that

21. Lorenz 1966; d'Aquili 1983; d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus 1979; Burkert 1996; Rappaport 1999.

is not modern and progressive. Ritual only became a positive term through encounters with other cultures and due to the increase of tourism, so that exotic rituals were no longer known only through books and photos but were also observed in the field. Around the same time, especially in 1966, anthropologists and scholars of religious studies, such as the anthropologists Victor Turner (1967a, 1969), Mary Douglas (1966), Clifford Geertz (1966), Edmund Leach (1966, 1968–1972), and Richard Schechner (1966) increasingly viewed rituals as performative and communicative events full of colorful and stimulating experiences. This so-called performative turn in cultural studies made it possible to see relations between ritual and drama, or ritual and (everyday) interactions (Goffman 1967).

However, with the exception of Ronald L. Grimes (1982), comprehensive theoretical monographs on ritual that include sociological, psychological, performative, and other concepts were published from the 1990s onward only, by Thomas E. Lawson and Robert N. McCauley (1990), Catherine Bell (1992), Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994), Roy Rappaport (1999, cf. Robbins 2001), and Harvey Whitehouse (2004)—to mention only a few of the most prominent theories.

Given the fact that the history of the term "ritual," in its modern sense, is just a little more than a hundred years old, how did it come to be such a influential term? I suppose this development has related causes. "Ritual" became a less confessionally loaded and thus more widely accepted substitute for "religion"; it is evident that the rise of the term "ritual" accompanied the decline of the major religions, or with the fact that, at least in Europe and North America, more and more people were less practicing traditional forms of religion. However, this does not mean that these people have necessarily become less religious. On the contrary, the stress on formality in rituals basically signifies a stability that seems to be desired, especially in times when present and future appear unstable. Many rituals keep humans in a quasi-religious mode without the necessity of openly demonstrating their religiosity.

The problem with influential terms is that they become too influential and then suddenly explode or implode. "Universal definitions of RITUAL nullify the possibility of comparison before it begins," says Israeli anthropologist Don Handelman (2006, 37). Since Jack Goody's article "Against Ritual: Loosely Structured Thoughts on a Loosely Defined Topic" (1977), criticism of the term "ritual" has come up every once in a while. Handelman (2006) sees "conceptual alternatives to ritual" and proposes to substitute the term with "public event." French historian Philippe Buc speaks in one of his books, *The Dangers of Ritual* (2001), about the study of antique and medieval texts proposing that only careful consideration of the contexts of rituals will make it

possible to reconstruct from medieval texts how events called "rituals" could have functioned. In the end, Handelman, Goody, and Buc all continue using the term "ritual."

However, until now, the boom of the term "ritual" has shown no signs of declining. This sometimes entails the problem that ceremonial or public events are too readily attuned to the big term "ritual" and its theories. This, in fact, is the greatest danger of influential terms. They might become hollow, empty, and finally useless before you notice it. This is why one should look at things, events, and actions in situ and not too hastily try to generalize the unique phenomenon—a warning time and again proposed by Ronald Grimes. Only then can influential terms survive, because they are refilled with new insights. For this reason, as distinguished from most other theories mentioned above, and despite my somehow presumptuous claim to contribute to ritual theory in general, this book is largely a study on specific rituals and festivals in South Asia.

The Dynamics of Rituals

The reasons for the stability of rituals are manifold. They build a sort of capital of trust (comparable to French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of symbolic, cultural, and social capital) that helps to stabilize social, political, and even economic relations. They guarantee security and help to avoid uncertainty, contingency, and arbitrariness. Since rituals often exclude the meaning of social behavior; they become habitus, behavioral mastery, or "cultural memory" (Assmann 2011), in which the appropriate and suitable behavior is not always to be negotiated and legitimated anew. Rituals are also often supported by the authority of a person or institution and combine history with the present and therefore require respect and deference: "Rituals are orgies of conscious deference" (Bloch 2006, 506). And they are an expression of tradition and a legitimation of norms, values, statuses, power, and so on.

All of this makes ritual change difficult and problematic. Whoever wants to fundamentally change such loaded events risks being blamed, ridiculed, or punished. Even though such change often happens, it is more often than not denied. Only rarely are rituals completely newly invented, as Roy Rappaport rightly noted:

> Rituals composed entirely of new elements are, thus, likely to fail to become established. . . . Rituals composed entirely of new elements are, however, seldom if ever attempted. "New" rituals are likely to be largely composed of elements taken from older rituals. (Turner 1973, 1100). (Rappaport 1999, 32; cf. Moore and Myerhoff 1977, 8–9)

Ritual change happens because of cultural and political influences, economic changes, (media) technological inventions, or religious criticism of the outward forms of rituals. Often, they also come into existence owing to marginalized groups who create them as a sign of their new identity.

Most people, then, refrain from changing rituals fundamentally, even if they believe them to be obsolete, ridiculous, or meaningless. This leads to the general perception that rituals follow strict rules and that they are invariable, static, and unchangeable. If everything changes and becomes fluid, there are still the rituals that "never" change and thus preserve the past. Formality thus stands for the stability of rituals. Catherine Bell remarks that "[f]or some big theorists, this feature (i.e., the quality of invariance—A.M.) is the prime characteristic of ritual behaviour" (Bell 1997, 150).

However, with the performative turn mentioned above, several scholars highlighted the dynamic aspects of rituals. Among the first to do so was the American anthropologist Sherry Ortner (1978), who demonstrated that (among the Sherpas of Nepal) rituals such as founding temples are a forum to negotiate status, question existing power relations, and develop new social structures. Clifford Geertz (1980) has similarly argued that rituals are places to invent new cultural orders. Catherine Bell summarizes this debate as follows:

> Hence, rituals as a performative medium for social change emphasizes human creativity and physicality: ritual does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold their world. (Bell 1997, 73)

The notion of fixity has indeed long been overvalued; in contrast, we must also look at the changes in rituals. These changes happen for a number of reasons, which I classify according to three facets of ritual dynamics: historical dynamics, social dynamics, and structural dynamics.

(a) Historical dynamics encompasses notions of agency, ritual transfer, ritual criticism, and the new or innovative as a constitutive element of rituals. The agency of rituals has a lot to do with the invention of rituals. The questions "Who are the creators, designers of rituals?[22] Who are the authors of rituals?" have, for instance, long been neglected. Modern rituals can help to clarify this question, as they make it sometimes possible to trace the makers and agents of rituals. The notion of the "transfer of

22. Ahn 2010; Radde-Antweiler 2006; Karolewski, Miczek, and Zotter 2012.

rituals" is also extremely important for understanding the changes in and of rituals. For rituals are transferred from one context or period to another, during which they change. Good examples for such alterations are the ritual performances in diaspora contexts (R. Langer 2006). In the course of such transfers, rituals usually undergo significant changes and transformations. Moreover, ritual criticism helps to adjust rituals to new contexts, but it also threaten their stability.

(b) Social dynamics include notions of identity, power, hierarchy, solidarity, control, and efficacy, which are negotiated and contested in rituals. Rituals are enacted to be successful; hence, ritual efficacy is a matter of concern. However, if we talk about a ritual's efficacy, do we mean the verifiable physical, psychological, or social effects of a ritual, or do we speak of the postulated effects of the ritual action? These concern the identity, power, hierarchy, solidarity, and control of social groups and individuals. But how do rituals affect people? Do they change them? Do they stabilize them? And what, then, would be the success of a ritual? Not only are rituals tools for shaping social realities, but they also are shaped by their social context.

(c) Structural dynamics encompass the change of media, structure, and event, and the phases of rituals. Rituals are produced, disseminated, and "handed over" to us by all kinds of media technologies, domains, and social agents. The chosen method for communicating rituals strongly influences ways of participating in them, their perception, the retrospective control of the rituals, and, consequently, their future performances. How are rituals a form and forum of today's social practice? How is the reality of ritual mediated by technologies? To what extent are rituals changed by their new forms?[23]

Given all this, I propose the following interlinked and partly overlapping hypotheses (with examples from South Asia) that are constitutive for the dynamic aspects of rituals.

1. The formality of rituals necessitates their variance (cf. Kerzer 1988, 12). Because rituals claim to be stable and invariable, they are criticized for being obsolete and old-fashioned. They therefore have to be adapted. More important, no ritual performance is the same as the previous one. From this fact arises the question among actors and participants of rituals as to

23. See Brosius and Polit 2010; Grimes, Huesken, Simon, and Venbrux 2011.

which performance is the right one and how many variants, adaptations, inventions, additions, or modifications are tolerable. Ritual specialists ask themselves again and again: Did we get it right? (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, III, 128).

2. Ritual criticism (Grimes [1990] 2010; Grimes and Hüsken 2013) then is an accompanying part of most rituals that provokes frequent changes. Rituals have always been regarded as an inadequate, inappropriate, or even ridiculous form of approaching deities or celebrating events. The main argument, even in the case of changed religions, such as Catholic Christianity (through Protestantism), or Vedic Religion (through Buddhism), has been that rituals are too external, that is, that people can perform them without believing in what they are doing because they function by themselves (*ex opere operato*) (cf. Michaels 1999b). The consequence in India was that critics, especially among the Bhakti and Sant, Sufī, or Nirguṇa traditions, every once in a while, would propose internal (*mānasa*) rituals as the appropriate equivalent to external rituals.
3. The new is an integral part of rituals. This follows from the first proposition. The Pūrvamīmāṃsā even called the new unseen result of ritual *apūrva*—"the unpreceded"—even though its meaning is related to the sacrifice (see Chapter 9). However, it is also a fact that new parts in rituals are often denied or played down. Sanskrit ritual handbooks generally do not mention such alterations. Often one hears the argument that rituals are there right from the beginning (Nep. *ādi/aghi dekhi*) and that they have always been alike, neglecting the fact of many modifications and innovations.
4. Transfer, invention, and reinvention of rituals are the norms rather than the exceptions. Rituals are a kind of commodity that is dealt with like other goods. One finds ritual elements easily transferred from one context to another—in Pūrvamīmāṃsā, this transposition is called *ūha*—from one religion into another: in Nepal, for instance, from (Smārta) Hinduism into (Vajrayāna) Buddhism.
5. Rituals do not exclude alternatives, contingency, or freedom, but include these aspects. They are not as strict, stereotypical, and unchangeable as often believed. To the contrary, they are a mode of action that is again and again negotiated, contested, and altered according to specific situations. Brāhmaṇas, Śrautasūtras, and the Dharmaśāstra, as well as the commentaries or philosophical treatises, often openly discuss deviating opinions on ritual practice. The Mīmāṃsā theory of ritual also is concerned with the question of the relation between archetype (*prakṛti*) and ektype (*vikṛti*), that is, the original form and its tolerable variations.

The Transculturality of Hindu Rituals

All of these aspects also contribute to the transculturality of rituals—a facet that for too long has been overlooked in ritual studies. Rituals pretend to be insulated in a culture. Sometimes they are seen as symbols of a culture or social group. If there is something typical of a given culture, it is the ritual. Almost every local or ethnic group keeps its folkloristic rituals as signs of its identity. However, as argued before, rituals are by no means cut off from the changes that take place in the world. On the contrary, rituals are copied, imitated, or transferred. In fact, rituals are, by definition, transcultural, for they are often seen and used as cultural markers of distinction and difference. They are used to express cultural identity in contrast to other cultures that have influenced them.

In contemporary times, rituals rapidly change due to the new media, tourism, business exchanges, accelerated communication and transport, migration, urbanization, and acculturation processes. Diaspora situations create the transfer and sometimes even almost new rituals. At times, it is difficult, if not impossible, to explore them within their social, political, or historical context of production and enactment. There is no "pure" ritual that has not been influenced by other cultures.

Rituals wander around the world without completely giving up their cultural identity or origin. The Munich Beer festival (Oktoberfest) is nowadays also celebrated in New York and Peking; every year, hundreds of "German" Christmas trees are sent to Gulf States to there celebrate "authentic" Christmas or derivations from this festival; Hallowe'en, originally Scottish, later popular in North America and best known from there, is no longer just an American festival; and Valentine's Day has also become an Indian day of love (Brosius 2011).

In this way, a new sense of togetherness is formed in which the question of whom the rituals belong to is increasingly debated. New actors adapt rituals to local and cultural conditions in such a way that, upon closer examination, the rituals are no longer homogeneous. V. S. Naipaul's description of the death ritual of his sister Sati, first published as "The Ceremony of Farewell" in the *New York Review of Books*,[24] may serve as an example. In this story, Naipaul tells how the bereaved family in Trinidad came together and arranged for a Hindu funeral and a *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* a few days later. For this, they

24. Naipaul 1987; also in Naipaul 2002. Cf. Gerholm 1988.

employed a pandit from Trinidad who guided the son of Naipaul's sister through the ritual. Neither the widower nor the son (nor Naipaul himself) regarded themselves as religious but wanted the ceremony to be performed.

> Sati had not been religious; like my father, she had no feeling for ritual. But at her death her family wished to have all the Hindu rites performed for her, to leave nothing undone. (Naipaul 2002, 379)

At some point, the apparently uneducated pandit started to preach about Hinduism to the participants, comparing it with Christianity and Islam, quoting in English from the *Bhagavadgītā*. The son, who knew little about all of this, was interested in it, but also felt troubled:

> He seemed to be looking to the pundit for consolation, a support greater than the support of ritual. He was listening to everything the pundit said. The pundit . . . said that our past lives dictated the present. Sati's son asked in what way Sati's past had dictated the cruelty of her death. The pundit didn't answer. But Sati's son, if he had been more of a Hindu, if he had more of a Hindu cast of mind, would have understood the idea of karma, and wouldn't have asked the question. He would have yielded to the mystery of the ritual and accepted the pundit's word as part of the ritual. (ibid., 380)

As this example of a transferred ritual shows, all three—the pandit, Sati's son, and Naipaul—are estranged from the ritual. The son does not know the ritual and its "official" meaning, but he feels touched by it; the pandit feels obliged to introduce an otherwise uncommon sermon into the ritual; and Naipaul has vague memories of this ritual, but feels distanced from it by the many ambiguities and displacements. In other words, the Trinidad death ritual has become a truly transcultural ritual.

Modernity has also developed its new forms of rituals. Rituals now take place in the new media without the participants taking an active part or coming together. These Internet rituals make it possible to light a candle or enter a virtual temple by mouse-click (cf. Chapter 8.2). Rituals are now in new public spheres that have brought out new forms of enactments and foci: the state, the nation, sports, or television events.

Hindu rituals have influenced other cultures and have been influenced by them. Holi, the Indian spring festival, has become part of rave parties in the United States and Europe, taking place all through the year. Other examples are the new *homa* or *yāga* rituals that have been organized over the past few

years (cf. below, Chapter 7.1). Such rituals are very different from the traditional *homa* sacrifices because they take place in the public for the welfare of mankind or world peace. They no longer need an individual ritual patron (*yajamāna*), but an organizing committee. Even noninitiated "once-borns" can now learn to perform *homas*, and the World Wide Web has become a major platform to announce and distribute such events. Such entanglements can also be observed on a lower level, for instance, when life-cycle rituals are filmed and, via YouTube, distributed or adjusted to the needs of such media.

The historical, social, and structural dynamics of rituals and their changes are not part of modernity. In the past, many structural changes in Hindu rituals have been introduced through the influences of folk religion, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. Transculturality has always been a part of Indian history.

The Ethno-Indological Approach—A Note on Methodology

With regard to Hindu rituals, basically two forms of methodological approaches are common: studying texts (mainly ritual handbooks) and fieldwork (including the use of visual materials such as photographs and films). Sometimes both methods are combined. This combination I call the ethno-indological method, which needs some justification.

The perhaps most significant turn in a post-modern approach to texts is the concern for the anthropology of texts that cares not only for the words and letters but also for the context of the texts, that is, its agents, users, and readers, and their use in rituals. The study of texts becomes a study of situations and structures that generate the texts, of the application of texts (e.g., in rituals), of the performance and reception of texts, and of the historical conditions.

In this approach, culture is claimed as an entity that encompasses everything made by humans. It is not another realm beside politics or religion. It is the cover term for the study of all artifacts and mentifacts. Culture is here defined as an assembly of complex and dynamic signs that show social, material, and mental dimensions. Each cultural object or sign presupposes a class of users, belongs to a group of signs (texts, pictures, gestures, etc.), and is generated through mental codes, but none of these symbolic forms are beyond history and can thus be established as an ahistorical entity.

What is most important in this theory is the deconstruction or avoidance of any essentialism (in the sense of ascribing a certain "soul" to India), dogmatism, or naive empiricism, so that arguments of orientalism can no longer be easily formulated. In his book *Imagining India* (1990), Ron Inden has

criticized the open and hidden colonial and orientalist backgrounds of many Indological studies. Given the great amount of works in which authors claim to discover the soul or frame of India, and given the holistic errors that have been presented so often and that have been often unveiled as more or less racist arguments, this cultural turn was justified. It helped to concentrate on the agents, and by doing so, a number of new topics have been made visible: the gender aspect, the subaltern perspective, the everyday life, and the performative and transformative parts in texts. All of this furthered the understanding that culture is more than "high" culture, and it was due to such a turn in the humanities that Indology questioned the relationship between small and great traditions and fostered the importance of regional studies and vernacular languages.

Another outcome of this turn was that texts were no longer understood as monolithic documents, but as products driven by particular interests and conflicts. This means that, in reading texts, one must also consider those who are not within the text. Texts are often produced as arguments against differing positions—this is especially true for ritual and philosophical texts, and they thus reflect a more or less hidden reality. Such texts are written not only as a passive store of information but also for reasons of power, influence, honor, prestige, and so forth.[25]

As a consequence of the cultural turn in the humanities, the stress on the collaboration of philologists and anthropologists has been emphasized, although such arguments had been adduced before. In his pioneering work, *Le Népal* (1905), French Indologist Sylvain Lévi, considered for example, the anthropological aspects of texts, or the contexts of text, to such an extent that anthropologist Andràs Höfer wrote an article on him with the significant subtitle: "What We Anthropologists Owe to Sylvain Levi." His conclusions are worth quoting, because they underpin the necessity of cooperation between these two academic fields in certain regards.

> Lévi is generally considered as an indologist. In reality, he saw himself as an historian. Although a philologist by training and acquainted with an amazing number of languages (cf. Renou 1936, 57), the documents of the past were, for him, not ends in themselves, but sources of information to be decoded with the suspicion of the historian. As Renou (1936, 8–9) aptly states, Lévi developed a particular sensitivity

25. As an example of the forms of rhetoric structures to influence the audience, see McClintock 2010.

> for meanings hidden "beneath the words" (*un sens profond des réalitées sous les mots*). In fact, Lévi extended his quest for meaning into the realms of what we now call ideology, ethnotheory and contextual analysis. [. . .] he kept a close watch on the social functions of his sources. What fascinated him was the intricate relationship between the author and the public, rather than the mere literary value of a source, the process which produced a source, rather than the product, the source itself. (Höfer 1979, 176)

Such a recognition of the work "of the other side" is rarely stressed by Indologists, who often do not deny the importance of fieldwork, but generally do not appreciate its methods. However, the reason for a combination of Indology and anthropology is the still existent link between tradition and modernity in South Asia—a point that has led to a number of seminal early articles.[26] Only within this new trend (and the cheaper and facilitated possibilities for research in South Asia) has a considerable and coordinated number of studies been possible: the village studies in the 1950s (see Kolenda 1978), the first Orissa Research Programme of the German Research Foundation in the 1960s and 1970s, the "Agnicayana Project" (Berkeley), "The Nepal Research Program" in the 1980s (Kiel), or, more recently, the Collaborative Research Centre "Ritual Dynamics" (Heidelberg), and many more.

Indology participated in these projects and quite often was their motor. However, old prejudices between anthropology and Indology have remained. Anthropologists generally still believe that Indologists are primarily concerned with diacritical marks, and Indologists still believe that the study of contemporary phenomena are popularizations and vulgarizations, deviations and corruptions of the ancient traditions (cf. Tambiah 1987, 188).

However, Dumont and Pocock aptly argued that "[t]he first condition for a sound development of a sociology of India is found in the establishment of the proper relation between it and classical Indology" (1957, 7). And Tambiah added history to it: "In due course I found that there was something lacking in this credo: a sociology of India (and of Southeast Asia) must establish a relation between three terms, the third being history" (1987, 188). Tambiah even claimed: "Today virtually no South or Southeast Asian anthropologist can afford not to engage with Indology and history even if his or her work is focused on the study of contemporary phenomena" (ibid.). If Indologists had adopted a similar approach, many discussions could be easier, but quite often

26. Singer 1972; Dumont and Pocock 1957; Tambiah 1987.

Indologists do not read the theoretical works of anthropologists. The results of this difference in methodological assumptions are often the naive application of theories or the use of everyday arguments.

The unparalleled richness and variety of material on Hindu rituals—the sacrifices, rites of passage, and optional rituals; the performative rituals such as dance, theater, and musical performances; or the indigenous theoretical works on the exegesis of rituals, as well as texts on the aesthetics of performances—has been collected and studied in a vast number of publications. Yet only a few of these studies contribute, deal with, or refer to the theoretical discussion of rituals.

It was a great insight of the cultural turn in the humanities that there is no way to study cultures without theory, and that any work of culture is already theoretical by definition. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1966), the most famous proponent of this argument, demonstrated that culture had to be studied as texts and by creating texts. Culture can only be construed, and it is the anthropologist (or Indologist) who does this job. As a consequence, the interpretative work of the researcher and author became more and more important. Culture itself became a text. Culture was written, not discovered. *Writing Culture* by James Clifford (1986) was a significant title by one of Geertz's students. The question was no longer *what a* culture *is* or *was like*, but how it is or was seen by others or within itself. In other words, any form of empiricism was rejected; each statement on culture had to consider the producers. Writing on culture did not mean the search for truth, but rather for discourses.

All of this has consequences for the relation between texts and contexts and especially for the study of Hindu rituals. It implies (a) broadening the concept of texts, (b) contextualization of texts, and (c) textualization of texts.

First, a broadened concept of texts, in the well-accepted corpus of traditional textual material (Sanskrit, Pali, and Prakrit texts and inscriptions, chronicles, records), also incorporates texts in vernacular languages, mainly the ritual handbooks, which often combine vernacular languages with Sanskrit mantras; oral literature; "grey" literature (pamphlets and small booklets of various institutions); Internet sources of religious organizations and communities; texts communicated by mass media, such as journals, comics, television, and video recordings; and visual sources, such as paintings, posters, maps, and material objects.

Second, the contextualization of texts concerns an increased awareness of the importance of the communicators (Brahmans, mendicants, storytellers, scholars, pandits); the patrons (kings, institutions such as *maṭhas*, etc.);

the presentation in ritual performances; the negotiations and contestations (e.g., debates (*śāstrārtha*) of rituals; the locality (city, village, or neighborhood); the community (family, clan, caste, working group, or specialists); and the economy of texts (production costs, printing, and manuscript distribution). All of this symbolic and semiotic material contributes to the transformations of rituals.

Rituals follow their own dynamics and are, as Don Handelman terms it, "rituals in their own right" (2004), because they depend on situational factors. The dynamics of ritual are therefore best discussed from the perspective of an identified case, for example, the prescriptions of the Brahmans and the textbooks of the high culture. Rituals, then, show their "individuality," their uniqueness as a specific event—despite the fact that they also belong to various categories and genres. My methodological approach is therefore to focus on individual rituals and then to try to understand them by using the priests' texts and the locally used or distributed texts of the so-called Great Tradition. This method is inductive rather than deductive. The starting point is the actual ritual practice, considering each ritual as authentic and not, compared with the Great Tradition, as deviant. What happens in situ is not a more or less accurate realization or enactment of what is textually prescribed, but a ritual performance in its own right.

Third, the textualization of texts means that scholars are not only readers or recipients of texts but also creators of (primary) texts. As I have argued above, Indology also produces "primary" sources, for instance, in the form of descriptions of rituals. This is a normative act, because most of these texts did not exist before an Indologist reconstructed them from observation, manuscript material, or tape recordings. For this reason, we must also consider indigenous concepts and notions of ritual.

Defining Ritual and the Conceptual Outline of the Book

Given the mentioned abundance of rituals in Hinduism and the problems of defining the term "ritual" and separating it from similar terms—like ceremony, play, theater, or event—it is necessary to clarify how one uses and limits the term. Similar to a number of theories,[27] I distinguish between different modes of ritual acts, and, in fact, I regard the ritual itself as a specific mode of action, comparable to plays in the theater, where one can be sure that Othello will not *really* murder Desdemona. I propose that rituals must be distinguishable from ordinary, everyday acts by a number of components that

27. E.g., Bell (1992); Rappaport (1999); Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994); Platvoet (1995).

Table I.1 Components of ritual action

1. Framing: causal inducement, ceremonial decision (*intentio solemnis, saṃkalpa*)
2. Formality: repetitiveness, publicity, variation (and performativity)
3. Modality: individual implications (*individualitas*), social implications (*societas*), transcending or elevating qualities (*religio,* Skt. *apūrva*)
4. Transformation and confirmation of identity, role, status, or authority

constitute the basic structure of ritual performance. The components of this structure, which also form the conceptual structure of the present book, are essential for an understanding of ritual. This operational approach is therefore not a polythetic definition (cf. Snoek 2006), in which, out of a principally open number of characteristics, a sufficient number must be verifiable. In my understanding, all components must be recognizable in order to speak reasonably of ritual. I do not regard my definition as universally or eternally valid or applicable, but as a heuristic model. With minor and major modifications, I have followed and tested the components in a number of cases over the past several years.[28] These are brought here into a coherent whole. What follows is, therefore, to a large extent, an unpacking of the components of ritual as given in Table I.1.

In other words, I cautiously and heuristically define the term "ritual" to denote the framed and structured performance of formalized, that is, repetitive, in principle public and variable, action(s) or enactments in variable, intense modes with individually or socially elevating implications or qualities that transform or confirm the identity, role, status, or authority of participants and social groups. Action or enactment in this definition is understood in the sense of Ronald Grimes:

> Ritual is a kind of action, but not just any action. It helps to remind ourselves of its difference from ordinary action by assigning it a special verb, "enact." To "enact" is to put into force or into play. Since ritual acting is different from stage acting as well as from quotidian activity, we need a verb different from but related to "act." Ritual action is special; in this respect, it is similar to "acting," the sort that transpires onstage or in film. But ritual is not identical with pretending. However

28. Michaels (1999; 2004a, 233–35); Michaels and Wulf (2012, 29–32).

made up, it is not regarded by participants as mere fiction or a game—hence "enactment." (Grimes 2013, 196; cf. ibid., 243)

(1) *Framing* (*saṃkalpa*): Rituals concern, involve, and frame temporal or spatial changes: life-cycle rituals, for instance, refer to biological, physical, or age-related changes, or festivals refer to calendrical changes. Mainly, if not exclusively, border crossings, alterations, or other changes induce rituals: house-warming parties, examinations, beginning or ending work, change of day, year, and month, naming ceremonies, birth, initiation, marriage, and death. Together with the fourth component, these causal changes mark the frames of rituals, which, thus, are generally not unprompted, accidental, or arbitrary happenings. In many rituals, "people create an orderly environment that is quite different from the one of everyday action" (Liénard and Boyer 2006, 817). People then delimit a certain space and "emphasize the boundaries between this space and the rest, for instance by special prohibitions . . . or by restrictions on communication between marked and unmarked spaces" (ibid.). In analyzing one ritualized form of everyday interaction—greeting (*namaskāra*)—I will try to demonstrate the differences between ritualized behavior and ritual action. One difference between the two is that rituals mostly require a formal, usually spoken decision to perform the ritual: an oath, vow, pledge, or written invitation. Almost any Hindu or Buddhist ritual without such a formal decision (*saṃkalpa*), whether explicit or implicit, has no effect. I call this component *intentio solemnis*, which transforms an everyday or customary act into a ritual act.

(2) *Formality*: Ritual acts are a) repetitive, formal, and stereotypical (therefore imitable); b) in principle public; and c) variable. They therefore may not be spontaneous, private, singular, or optional for everyone. Formalism with its "grammars" and structures forms a central criterion in most definitions of ritual—as it does in mine; it makes them repetitive, choreographed, and staged, and often a very rigid activity with elements of "coercion, commitment, habit and belief" (Liénard and Boyer 2006, 815). Because this activity can be repeated, rituals are in principle (but not necessarily in practice) public events, and because ritual is in one way or other staged or performed anew, i.e. never exactly the same, there is space for variation, innovation, and spontaneity.

   (a) *Repetition*: Ritual acts are not deliberately rational, they cannot simply be revised to achieve a better or more economical goal, because the actions are disconnected from their "normal" goals,[29] or "given over to technical routine" (Turner 1967a, 19). A sacred fire is not substituted

by a gas heater; a candle, if prescribed, is not easily substituted by an electric light. Rituals are mostly created out of a culturally given set of symbols, decorum, and ritual elements, and often these elements are performed several times within the same ritual. Ritual action is, indeed, stereotypical and standardized behavior. It is repetitive, ordered, patterned, and, to a certain extent, predictable action. Therefore, rule-governed repetitivity forms a central criterion in most definitions of ritual. Ritualism as a form of religiosity—in a way, religion without belief—is based primarily on this characteristic. I will demonstrate this with reference to formal structures in rituals and their "grammatical" rules (Chapters 2.1 and 3.1), which, at least when textualized, can be modeled in computer linguistic programs. Since rules can be trespassed or misused, I will also deal with mishaps in rituals, which require some sort of atonement (*prāyaścitta*) (3.2). In cases of very strict rules, the failure of a ritual occasionally provokes amusing situations; this is exemplified with the ritual bath (*snāna*) (3.3).

(b) *Publicity* (in the sense of impersonal intersubjectivity): Since rituals follow rules, they cannot be singular private actions in Wittgenstein's sense; they can be imitated, staged, handed over from one generation to another, or put into handbooks that anybody can read. They are, in principle, public, often attention-grabbing and include an externally vocalized intention. Publicity in the sense of intersubjectivity (but not in the sense of openness to all), is thus another formal criterion—even if it concerns only a small secret circle of initiated specialists, for example, certain tantric rituals. "As interaction, ritual needs a minimum of two participants—a "sender" and "receiver," either of whom, however, may belong to the class of putative beings. All rituals are "collective in this minimal sense" (Platvoet 1995, 28 f.). I will elaborate on this point with reference to the medium of ritual handbooks (*paddhati, vidhi*, etc.) as scripts of rituals.

(c) *Variability and performativity*: As mentioned in the section on the dynamics of rituals, such events are much more variable than usually assumed. Many rituals also contain a component, which Victor Turner (1969) has described as "liminality" (from the Latin, *limen*, "border"). He means the non-everyday and yet reversible, paradoxical, sometimes absurd and playful parts of rituals, especially in festivals or in life-cycle border situations, such as the playful time of learning (*deśāntara*)

29. Turner 1967a, 17; Liénard and Boyer 2006, 815f.

during the Hindu initiation. The liminality of rituals often comes together with dance and music, which I will treat in Chapters 4.1–4.2. I call this aspect "variability," since it contrasts and depends on the repetition category. No ritual performance is always exactly the same:

> "[E]very field anthropologist knows that no one performance of the rite, however rigidly prescribed, is exactly the same as another performance because it is affected by processes peculiar to the oral specialist's mode of recitation, and by certain variable features such as the social characteristics and circumstances of the actors which (aside from purely contingent and unpredicted events) affect such matters as scale of attendance, audience interest, economic outlay, and so on." (Tambiah 1979, 115)

Turner (1969) rightly suggested that the liminality, or variability in my terms, is not accidental to, but constitutive of, ritual process, since it causes the generativity of rituals. As Theodore W. Jennings aptly said with reference to Turner:

> These reflections suggest that variation in ritual performance is by no means the incidental and extraneous phenomenon it has often been thought to be by those who define ritual action in terms of unvarying repetition. Instead the variation in ritual performance may be understood as a decisive clue to the character of the ritual action as a relatively autonomous form of noetic exploration and discovery. To be sure, this exploration and discovery take place within the already known repertoire of ritual action. (Jennings 1982, 114 f.)

(3) *Modality*: Any everyday action can become ritual action. But whether the act of "pouring water" is performed to clean or consecrate a statue is not to be decided solely on the basis of these external, formal criteria, but also depends on modal criteria relating to individual or collective intentions and symbolically condensed meaning (cf. Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 95) that, however, does not limit the ambiguity and "variety of meanings attached to the same symbol" (Kerzer 1988, 11). I distinguish three modal criteria of acts, which are only partly similar to the three categories of theories on ritual that I have discussed above in the overview of ritual studies. I call these modal criteria (1) *individualitas*, (2) *societas*, and (3) *religio*. They can be noticed in the ritual on a range or scale from "very weakly" to "very strongly," depending on the ritual type and the

perspective of the participants. As we will see, Hindu rituals are also differentiated in such a way: a *saṃskāra* (life-cycle ritual) is never called *utsava* ("festival"); a *vrata* ("vow") has a lot of *individualitas*, even though it may amount to a large festival, as in the case of Śivarātri; and a *tīrthayātrā* (procession) may be performed individually or in a group.

(1) *Individualitas* denotes aspects of rituals focusing predominantly on the individual. I will elaborate this with the paradigmatic example of major life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāra*). It encompasses also the individual reactions and emotions in rituals, such as alleviating anxiety, experiences, or enthusiasm, desire and the lack of it. This aspect of ritual, that often involves or incites emotional and sensual reactions (Michaels and Wulf 2011, 2012, and 2013), will be predominantly treated in Chapter 4.3.

(2) By *societas*—deviating from Turner, who uses the term *communitas* in this connection—I understand all functions of a ritual referring to the community, that is, solidarity, hierarchy, control, or establishment of social norms. I will elaborate this with reference to festivals (*utsava*), vows (*vrata*), and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*) in Chapter 6.

(3) *Religio*—in a way the central criterion in my analysis—encompasses transcendental intentions relating to the other, higher, or sacred world. There often is a hidden *religio* in seemingly ordinary activities, which makes them into rituals. With *religio*, everyday acts acquire sublimity, and the immutable, nonindividual, non-everyday, extra-mundane is staged. The criterion of *religio* is particularly controversial because, in a certain sense, it links religion with ritual. Nevertheless, I mean that rituals without a portion of *religio* (which is not to be equated with "religion" or "religiosity") would not be distinguishable from routines. Ronald Grimes is right in saying that in this sense, *religio* is the awareness that the act in question is carried out because a transcendental or heightened value, a "nonempirical referent" (R. Firth 1951, 222), a "sacrosanct character" (Tambiah 1979, 121), or "mystical notions" (Gluckman 1952, 30 f.) are attributed to it. Ritual is not just ordinary action. "It is more condensed or elevated than quotidian behavior," according to Ronald Grimes (2013, 195), adding that "In ritual, you become, one might say, more than who you normally are" (ibid., 252). Ritual is something more than routinized behavior as it is expressed in Victor and Edith Turner's definition of ritual: "Formal behavior prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (Turner and Turner 1978, 243). In the majority of religious rituals, this

> "more" is a belief in postulated supernatural beings or powers. Similar to Max Weber's category of extraordinariness in his notion of charisma, I therefore regard *religio* as that aspect of action which is considered as "extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary. . . ." (Weber 1968, 241).[30]

I would not go so far as Lauri Honko (1979, 373), who says: "A ritual is thus traditional, prescribed communication with the sacred," but the belief in some kind of elevated principle, like the total order (*dharma*) of a society or social group, the unseen result (*apūrva*), or "anything towards which an 'unquestioned' and 'traditionalizing' attitude is adopted" (Tambiah 1979, 121) should be verifiable. Every participant in the ritual need not have or share this belief, but *religio* must be demonstrable in some place; usually it can be recognized in the *intentio solemnis*, but other signs of a higher order or value might also indicate it. *Religio*, thus, is different from religiosity by objective signs of transcendence, whereas religiosity would encompass predominantly the individual, psychic, and emotional sides of religion.

In order to limit the term "ritual" to a useful entity, I suggest the following solution for the differentiation between ritual and ritualized behavior. In ritualized behavior, we also find formal, repetitive, and performative patterns of action, but it lacks the component of being extraordinary and elevated (*religio*, or *dharma* in the Pūrvamīmāṃsā sense). Ordering signs of *religio* are, for instance, insignia, metaphors, or media of transmission (scripts) related to transpersonal, often religiously justified ideals and values. These require a higher form of commitment and respect than individualized everyday behavior. Ritualized behavior is more or less daily and regularly performed and is thus close to routine. It is also characterized by embodied formality and the modalities of *individualitas* and *societas*, but, in addition, rituals show elevating features of being outside the ordinary and of transformation. To be sure, the category of "the everyday" is rather vague, but it is discrete enough to juxtapose it to "the extraordinary." It might be useful to speak here of scales of intensity ranging from ritualized behavior to complex rituals.

The extraordinary is also a change in the mind of *homo ritualis*. Moore and Myerhoff (1977, 7–8) suppose that, in rituals, "most, if not all of it is self-consciously 'acted' like in a play by the use of stylization and an evocative,

30. For the discussion of Weber's notion of extraordinariness, see D. N. Smith 2013, 20f.

presentational style"; and they speak of "actions or symbols that are extraordinary in themselves, or ordinary ones used in an unusual way." In rituals, there is more attentiveness, but often also "an even greater commitment of some kind through manipulation of symbols and sensory stimuli . . . and an awareness that they [the rituals] are different from 'ordinary' everyday events" (ibid.).

Instead of "ritual behavior," Bell (1992), Houseman and Severi (1998), and others use the term "ritualization." They regard ritualization as the process through which actions become ritual actions or as a "particular 'mute' form of activity. It is designed to do what it does without bringing what it is doing across the threshold of discourse or systematic thinking" (Bell 1992, 93). In ethology, the term "ritualization" is also used for animal behavior, the evolutionary aspect of it being still an open question (Huxley 1966).

In analyzing the development of the sacrifice (*yajña, homa*) from the Vedic origins to modern forms of e-pūjā (Chapter 7), I will try to show the different forms of *religio* attributed to similar acts. The *religio* aspect, of course, also concerns the meaning (or meaninglessness) of rituals, which I will treat in Chapter 8.

(4) *Meaning*: Seen from a doctrinal point of view, transformation and affirmation are the main goals of rituals. They either transform individuals or groups, or affirm and strengthen existing social structures. However, often rituals are also effective independent of their meaning, *ex opere operato;* this means that they cannot easily be reversed, because they are irrevocable. Girding with the sacred thread (*yajñopavīta*) makes the initiate a Twice Born, even if he notes during the ritual that he would rather like to become a Muslim or a Christian—which naturally does not happen. That then requires a new ritual. Yet many rituals entail such a tangible change or confirmation of identity, role, status, or authority; this is their efficacy.[31] For example, the participants in the ritual must acquire an ability they did not previously have, or a new social status with social consequences: a scholar becomes a candidate for an academic career with the PhD; a patient is healed through the healing rituals of a shaman; a crowned prince receives a new status as king; the village is annually renewed; and so on. I will discuss these problems with reference to the meaning of rituals and the Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of ritual efficacy.

31. See Quack, Sax, and Weinhold 2010; Quack and Töpelmann 2010.

With these four components, a ritual can clearly be delineated from ceremonies, games, sports, routines, customs and practices, dramatizations, and other such events, without assuming a theistic notion of religion or the often-misleading and inadequate distinctions between sacred and profane. A few examples may illustrate this difference: *religio* is usually lacking in sports; a rowing competition is not a ritual, but the annual regatta between Oxford and Cambridge may contain a portion of *religio*, the belief in one's own tradition-rich university as an expression of elevated social status. Irrevocability and the liminal aspect of acts are lacking in routine, in customs, and in practices, as is the *intentio solemnis*. The four components help in analyzing formal and modal grades of rituals. Thus, rituals always have to demonstrate a formal, stereotypical portion, but the modal and intentional criteria can make a religious service more or less devotional or formalistic.

However, it is important to see that the components can be differently valued. In some rituals, the aspect of *individualitas* is significant; in others, the aspect of *societas* or *religio* is important. This depends on the perspective of the individual participants (priests, officiants, sacrificers, helpers, observers, etc.). Some rituals are more formal, and some more variable than others. My definition is open enough for this variability of rituals (Figure. I.1) and takes into account the multiplicity of approaches to ritual. It presents itself more in the form of different rosettes with large or small petals, rather than in a rigidly fixed form, even though I hold that all four components must be given in order to denote an action as ritual. Thus, for the performers of a boy's initiation, the portion of *individualitas* would be higher for the boy than, for example, for an adult in a regular Christmas celebration, during which the social group of the family, and therefore the portion of *societas*, might be more important. However, even individuals may experience rituals in diverging forms, ranging from ignorant and "mechanical" or mimetic to highly attentive and reflexive modes of action.

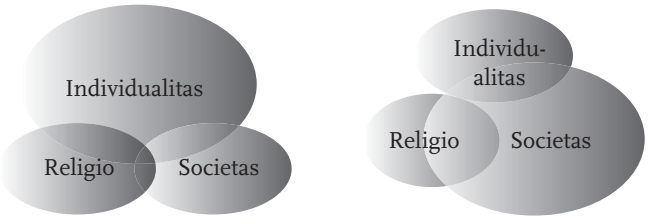


FIGURE I.1 Two modes of ritual behavior

In short, I follow the widespread definition of ritual as standardized and repetitive behavior that is symbolically loaded by linking the present to the past and the future (Kerzer 1988, 9 f.), and thus elevating the performers. For, in rituals, we try to overcome the changes and uncertainty of life, and "(t)he very fixity and timelessness of ritual are reassuring parts of this attempt to tame time and define reality" (ibid., 10), but the *homo ritualis* is not just a victim of compulsory and rule-governed behavior in rituals, he can also shape and change these events.

However, there can be another reading to it, for instance, the one from the Indian or the Pūrvamīmāṃsā conception of ritual: The "attempt to tame time" and thereby to counter the uncertainties of the future through ritual or the "timelessness of rituals" is only possible if the ritual is related to a transcendental or higher unchangeable realm. Often this is a certain (social or religious) order of non-human (*apauruṣeya*) or ancient origin, which the individual normally does not question. He submits himself to this order—out of reasons or motives that do not matter unless they do not change the ritual—and demonstrates his acceptance of the order through his participation in the ritual. The second presupposition is that the order (*dharma*) can be fully represented in ritual (e.g., in the sacrifice or *yajña*) and thus symbolically enacted. From this follow certain injunctions to act accordingly that are also considered as given since the order and its representation are regarded as an inseparable action unity. There is neither arbitrariness nor contingency in ritual, but the question how to act and how to arrange or substitute action elements, the notion of modification (*ūha, vikāra*), is the most pertinent in ritual practice. Finally, the transformation or new result (*apūrva*) of the performance, for example, auspiciousness or blessedness, and thus the efficacy of ritual is mostly unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) and might come into effect later, in heaven (*svarga*) or next life, but it is nevertheless an immediate confirmation of the order, which results in social or religious merit (*puṇya*). This construction is, of course, based on faith but it neither needs an interfering deity nor moral self that bridges the epistemological gap between action and result. In short, what we can learn from this Indian conception of ritual (and what makes it different from most modern theories of ritual) is that there is no ritual without faith (*religio*) in a higher order.

PART I

Framing

Ritual is a mode of action that is indicated, tagged, or marked, and thus separated from everyday activity. Because there are markers or cues (Weinhold, Rudolph, and Ambos 2006, 23) that frame and indicate this ritual action, participants of rituals almost always know which part of an event belongs to the ritual action and which does not; they are aware that in the performance, another reality takes place in which things are stipulated and rule-governed.

These markers are signs of beginning and end, but also of special, non-ordinary times and places as well as decorum. Thus, in the Mahotsava festival as described by Aghoraśiva (twelfth century), "a special flag marks the beginning and end of the festival period. It is raised (*dhvajārohana*) to open the festival and lowered (*dhvajāvarohana*) to conclude it" (Davis 2010, 30). There are many more such markers for framing and setting the time and place of rituals apart from ordinary, everyday life:

- Body changes: The clothes and dresses are changed (festive or new robes, costumes, masks, veils, a change of footwear, a removal of footwear); jewelry is worn (chains, rings, feathers, face paint); head coverings change (hats, crowns, wreaths); the hair is altered (tonsure, new haircut, wigs); the body is salved or washed; sometimes some physical injury is caused (wounds, tattoos, circumcision); the movements are not normal ones of daily life (change of place, processions, perambulations, practiced strides, parades, escorts); many collective rituals are associated with community meals (regalement, sacrifice, fasting), the exchange of gifts, and games.
- Communicative changes: Language and gestures (greetings, kisses, bows) are altered, and facial expressions are different. There is more writing (minutes, documents, charters, ritual texts, myths), greater festivity (speeches, singing, reciting texts), restricted codes (asking for blessing, prayer, intercession), new names, or silence.
- Place and time changes: Places (temples, sacrificial places, holy places, ornamented arenas—often decorated with flowers, fire, incense, light, candles,

etc.—are signified, and times (leisure time, working hours, evenings, horoscopes, drumming or bells) or certain ritual elements[1] mark the formal beginning and end.

These patterns of action are so typical of rituals and so widespread that scholars have come close to seeing in them ritual-related universals that could be used to establish the species of man.

Moreover, since rituals generally do not just happen spontaneously or accidentally, but are purposive and arranged activity, they follow causal inducements. Biological, physical, or age-related alterations, for instance, produce life-cycle rituals; other major border crossings or alterations in life trigger additional rituals: moving house "causes" housewarming parties, academic or similar examinations "cause" special celebrations, and there are beginning- or ending-work welcome or farewell parties; and calendrical or seasonal changes bring special rituals, for example, rituals of day, year, and month.

In this context, it is necessary to differentiate between everyday or interaction rituals[2] and staged or deliberately performed rituals. Occasionally, ritualized behavior, such as brushing the teeth or walking the dog, is also regarded as a ritual. However, if the notion of rituals as a special mode of action (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 268) or as "a particular modality of action" (Houseman and Severi 1998, 202) makes any sense, one must keep both forms of action separate. Ritualized behavior is repeated behavior that generally lacks a clear framing and the elevating aspect of *religio* (cf. Table I.1). This does not mean that everyday action cannot become ritual action. On the contrary, ritual action is framed, formalized, and stipulated everyday action with certain modal qualities. This was also the position of Jaimini in his *Mīmāṃsāsūtra*.[3]

It is obvious that not all action within rituals is part of the actual ritual performance, for example, the accidental conversation between participants, the spontaneous smoking of a cigarette, or any individual activity and emotions that accompany the rituals. It is also clear that there are frames within the frames (cf. Handelman 2004), but generally, most performers and participants are aware of those parts of the complex event that belong to the formalized ritual and of those that do not. If this is not clear, disputes or even conflicts might arise in which the matter is discussed and sometimes resolved (cf. Grimes et al. 2011).

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1. For instance, the *samiṣṭayajus*, which is declared the end (*anta*) of the sacrifice (ŚBr 4.4.5.2, 4.5.1.15).

2. Cf. Goffman, 1967; Collins, 2005.

3. Cf. Clooney, 1990, 132; and below, Chapter 9.

1

The Beginning of Rituals

IN THE FOLLOWING, I will try to elaborate and demonstrate the differences between ritualized behavior and ritual action. As an example for a clear marker of the beginning of rituals, I will discuss the formal decision (*saṃkalpa*) that indicates the beginning of many Hindu and Buddhist rituals (Chapter 1.1) and contrast it with ritualized forms of greetings (Chapter 1.2), which often become a ritual element within rituals. It is important to differentiate between these two forms of ritual beginnings: the *saṃkalpa* makes action a ritual; the ritualized greeting is either a ritual itself, which also requires a kind of *saṃkalpa*, a ritual element within rituals, or ritualized behavior and thus an action that does not fulfill the criteria of rituals. To be sure, framing is a part of the formality of rituals (see below Part II), but due to its importance, it deserves separate treatment.

1.1 The Solemn Intention (saṃkalpa)

Almost every ritual requires a ceremonial or formal resolution or a kind of ritual (self-)commitment to undertake the ritual. In many Brahmanic-Sanskritic ritual handbooks, this formal decision or declaratory formula is called *saṃkalpana* or *saṃkalpa*, which must meet certain formal criteria. Thus the resolution must be uttered consciously and verbally before the actual ritual begins; quite often, this happens in public. In addition, the time and place of the ritual must be named precisely: continent, land, district, village, river, and so forth; era, year, month, lunar and solar day, hour and minute, and so on. The ritual participant is given, as it were, a sacred location and thus removed from everyday life. It is the *saṃkalpa* that first makes an action a ritual action. Or, as Jaimini says, it is the injunction that precedes the action.[4]

4. *codanā punar ārambhaḥ* (MS 1.1.5; cf. Chapter 9).

When, for instance, pilgrims walk for five days on the Pañcakrośīyātrā around Varanasi, they first contact the Vyāsa Brahman at the Muktimaṇḍapa temple in order to formulate the *saṃkalpa* for the pilgrimage. Only then is it possible to acquire spiritual or religious merit. In other words, a tourist who accompanies a pilgrim on the Pañcakrośīyātrā is not a pilgrim, because he has not formulated the *saṃkalpa*. In looking at these formal elements, we learn to differentiate between action (e.g., walking around) and ritual action (religious circumambulation).

Features of a saṃkalpa

Generally, *saṃkalpas* imply localizing and timing the ritual, as well as incorporating some other features (discussed below) on the basis of ritual handbooks. Thus, the *Saṃkalparatnāvalī* (SR), "Gems of [religious] Decisions,"[5] of Harinātha Śarmā, a pandit from Nepal, defines a *saṃkalpa* as follows:

> The use of a sentence as a *saṃkalpa* in the beginning is always necessary for obligatory, casual (or) optional ritual action and for a *prāyaścitta*. "The fruits of whatever a man does (ritually), o Brahmin, without a *saṃkalpa*, will be extremely low and its Dharma will diminish by half"—thus it is said in a quotation from the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* quoted by the *Ratnāvalī*. "Who does not completely mention the month, fortnight, lunar day and purposes (of the ritual) will fall into hell"—such is the saying of Śātātapa (quoted) there. (SR 10)[6]

It is obligatory not only for certain rituals to commence with a *saṃkalpa* but also for a *saṃkalpa* to be characterized by some distinctive features, which Harinātha Śarmā lists as follows (they will be listed in a more systematic form in the tables below):

> In the *Puraścaryārava*, the *Ratnāvalī* and the *Merutantra* (the following verses are given): "After one has placed in a copper vessel *kuśa* grass,

5. The text, published in 1923 AD in India, is a collection of *saṃkalpas* for a great number of rituals, such as the ritual recitation of a text (*pāṭha*), rites de passage (*saṃskāra*), rites of gift-giving (*dāna*), vows (*vrata*), and so forth.

6. *saparikarasaṃkalpavākyaprayogaś ca nitye, naimittike, kāmye, prāyaścitte ca karmai sarvatra āvaśyakaḥ. 'saṃkalpena vinā vipra yatkiñcit kurute naraḥ, phalaṃ cālpālpakaṃ tasya dharmasyārdhakṣayo bhavet' iti ratnāvalīdhṛtabhaviṣyavākyāt. 'māsapakṣatithīnāñ ca nimittānāṃ ca sarvaśaḥ, ullekhanam akurvāṇo narakaṃ pratipadyate' iti tatraiva śātātapokteś* ca. Cf. Kane 1968ff., vol. 5.1, 650.

> sesame and grains of rice, one should formulate the *saṃkalpa* facing north, starting with the year and ending with the wishes (regarding the ritual), altogether 23 items: the year (*saṃvatsara*), the (northern or southern course of the sun or) half-year (*ayana*), month (*māsa*), fortnight (*pakṣa*), and also the five parts of a traditional calendar (*pañcāṅga*), that is, lunar day (*tithi*), weekday (*vāra*), lunar mansion (*nakṣatra*), conjunction (*yoga*), half of the lunar day (*karaṇa*) the position of the nine planets (*graha*), the zodiacal sign (*rāśī*), hour (*muhūrta*). One should mention the parts of one's own country together with the suitable wishes, in such and such a (mythical) continent (*dvīpa*), in such and such a subcontinent (*khaḍa*), in such and such a part of the world (*varṣa*), in such and such a kingdom (*nīvṛt*), in such and such a region (*kṣetra*), one should proclaim the (name of the) clan and the clan segment (*gotra, pravara*), one's own name, up to the name of the subcaste (*jāti*), (and additionally) in the case of Twice-born (men): Śarmā (in the case of a Brahmin), Varmā (in the case of a *kṣatriya*), Gupta (in the case of a *vaiśya*), and Dāsa (in the case of a *śūdra*)." In the *Puraścaryārava*, the *Sanatkumārasaṃhitā*, the following verse, which is to be formulated in a *saṃkalpa*, (is quoted): "*oṃ tat sat*, today and here, month, fortnight and lunar day, such and such a clan, such and such a person (*aham*)." (SR 10–11)[7]

From this definition and the *saṃkalpas* practiced, it follows that a *saṃkalpa* must be formulated (a) prior to the ritual, (b) consciously, and (c) verbally; it must also (d) mention the purpose of the ritual and should (e) be accompanied by certain ritual gestures. I will now take a closer look at these characteristics.

(a) Within the sequence of a ritual, the *saṃkalpa* is part of the preliminary or preparatory sub-rites (*pūrvāṅga*). A rough scheme of the ritual procedure in which *saṃkalpas* occur is the following:
   (1) Preparatory rites (*snāna*, etc.)
   (2) Formal decision for the ritual act, including the mentioning of its purpose (*saṃkalpa* or *saṃkalpana*)

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7. *puraścaryāravaratnāvalyor merutantre: 'tāmrapātre kṛtvā kuśatilākṣatān.'* [Four syllables are missing in this *pāda*]. *udaṅmukhas tu saṃkalpaṃ kuryāt saṃvatsarādikān, kāmanāntān uccaret tu trayoviṃśatisaṃkhyakān. samvatsarāyane māsaḥpakṣaḥpañcāṅgam eva ca, navagrahasthitiṃ ghasrabhāgaṃ muhūrtakaṃ tv iti. svadeśabhedāṃs tattulyān kāmanāsahitān vadet, dvīpe 'muke 'muke khaḍe 'muke varṣe ca nīvṛti. amuke cāmuke kṣetre gotrapravaram uccaret, svanāmajātināmāntaṃ dvijāccharma ca varma ca, gupto dāsa' iti. puraścaryārave sanatkumārasaṃhitāyām praṇavaṃ tatsad adyeti māsapakṣatithīr api, amukagotro 'muko 'haṃ ceti.*

(3) The main actions of the particular ritual (*tīrthayātrā, homa, pūjā, vrata, utsava*, etc.)
(4) Supplementary actions, such as fasting or night vigils (*upavāsa, jāgara*, etc.)
(5) Communal actions, such as feasts (*bhojana*)
(6) Gifts (*dāna, dakṣiṇā, prasāda*)
(7) Concluding actions, such as farewell rituals to the gods (*visarjana*)

Important in this sequence is the fact that the *saṃkalpa* precedes the core of the ritual actions, though for some ritualists, it constitutes part of the preparatory sub-rites (*pūrvāṅga*). Benveniste (1973) has differentiated between two types of oaths: "declaratory" or "judiciary," which pertain to past events, for instance, swearing the truth of past actions in a law case, and "promissory," which refer to future events, such as pacts, promises, or vows. Clearly, the *saṃkalpa* belongs to the second category since it is a promissory speech act. For this reason, the future tense is generally prescribed in the formulation of a *saṃkalpa*, for example:

> On the morning, o god, on the fourteenth, I shall keep awake in the night. (GPS 1.124.12ab)[8]

(b) However, the decision to take a religious vow must not only be well articulated and formulated prior to the performance of the ritual, but it must also be consciously declared—usually, but not necessarily, in a public and outspoken form. If, therefore—as Śridatta in his *Samayapradīpa* states—"a man of weak intellect or an ignorant man observes a fast without *saṃkalpa*, it would be simply so much physical hardship but not a *vrata*."[9] Many Dharmaśāstrins stress the necessity of the mental (*mānasa*) act in a *saṃkalpa*.[10] Thus, a *saṃkalpa* has to be intentional, as stated by Jabara on *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* 6.2.20:

> A *vrata* is said (to be) a mental act, which is an intention (formulated with a phrase like:) "I will not do this (e.g. eat during a fast)." (MS 6.2.20)[11]

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8. *prātar deva caturdaśyāṃ jāgariṣyāmy ahaṃ niśi.*

9. Quoted in Kane 1968ff., vol. 5.1, 30f.

10. See, for instance, Medhātithi on Manu IV:13, Mītākṣara on Yājñ I:129 [quotation]; cf. Kane 1968ff., vol. 5.1, 28f.

11. *vratam iti mānasaṃ karmocyate idaṃ na kariṣyāmīti yaḥsaṃkalpaḥ.*

(c) Third, a *saṃkalpa* should be phrased in a certain linguistic form, which leaves little room for alterations. Harinātha Śarmā, quoting from various sources, reflects the use and importance of *saṃkalpa*s in an analytical way and is also precise regarding the formulation:

> *ratnāvalyām ‹kuśodakaṃ samādāya saṃkalpeta hi vākyataḥ / tiṅsuvantayutaṃ vākyam ātmanepady ucyate / madhye kāmañ ca hetuñ ca tithyādyaṃ vākyam uccaret [›] / [. . .] saṃkalpeta vākyataḥ, mānasaṃ karma vākyena prakāśayet /* (SR 11)
>
> In the *Ratnāvalī* (the following verse is given): "After he has taken *kuśa* water, he should explicitly (lit. in sentences) formulate the *saṃkalpa*, he should use a sentence with finite verb forms in the medium (*ātmanepada*); in the middle he should proclaim a sentence (which contains) the lunar day as well as the wishes and reasons (for the ritual)." . . . "He should explicitly formulate the *saṃkalpa*" (which means:) The mental act (or what one does by thoughts) must (in rituals) also be proclaimed by means of sentences (SR 11).

(d) The phrasing should contain the essence of the ritual action and its purpose (*artha*) or the wishes (*kāma*) it incorporates, as can be seen from the *saṃkalpa* formulas, which follow in the next section. Traditionally, a *saṃkalpa* is regarded as an act of willing. If there is no desire, there will be no ritual and more importantly no fruit of the ritual. Thus, the *Manusmṛti* says:

> Desire has *saṃkalpa* as its root, and sacrifices are caused by a *saṃkalpa*; vows and all the *dharmas* of restriction are said to come from *saṃkalpa*. (Manu 2.3)

However, in this verse, *saṃkalpa* is not a technical term but means "desire, will." The restrictive behavior so essential in most pilgrimages, which results from a *saṃkalpa*, is imposed by the self-restrictions (*yama* and *niyama*) of which various lists exist.[12] They can be classified as (a) ethical, e.g., nonviolence (*ahiṃsā*), not stealing (*asteya*), speaking the truth (*satya*), etc.; (b) purifying, e.g., bathing (*snāna*), purification (*śauca*), etc.; or (c) ascetic, e.g., celibacy (*brahmacarya*), fasting (*upavāsa*), vigil (*jāgaraṇa*), silence (*mauna*), etc. It

12. See Kane 1968f., vol. 5.1, 29 n.57.

seems, then, that everyday behavior has to be intentionally directed toward religious aims in order to be ritually acceptable. Unknowingly, unconsciously, and unwillingly performed rituals have no religious result (*phala, puṇya*). This idea, common to many religions and theologies, is again mentioned *expressis verbis* in the SR:

> The way to compose a *saṃkalpa*:
>
> Even if a *saṃkalpa* in the form of a resolution (or decision) that I shall truly do this (and that) is (basically) a mental action, the sentence expressive of such is also called *saṃkalpa*. "I compose a *saṃkalpa*," "I read (or recite) a *saṃkalpa*," "I make a *saṃkalpa*"—thus (it is formulated) with a view towards the (daily) usage (of these sentences) and because of an agreement on its fixed meaning. (SR 10)[13]
>
> Because of the locative meaning of place and time one should use the locative. Then the declaration of a *saṃkalpa* is in accordance with the tradition, because it follows what was mentioned step by step. (SR 11)[14]

(e) Finally, a *saṃkalpa* must be accompanied by certain ritual gestures to support the truth of the speech act. Thus, it is usual to touch a vessel filled with water or to sprinkle water with *kuśa* grass on the palms. One should also wear a ring because it is inauspicious to perform rituals with bare hands. If one does not have a metal ring, one should make a ring out of *kuśa* grass:

> One should not perform a *saṃkalpa* with just a (bare) hand, (but) with vessels made out of oyster shell, stone, silver or clay. And in Raghunandana's *Durgākṛtyakaumudi* (it is stated): "Here the prohibition of the hand means that one should take one hand, if there is no other vessel." (SR 11)[15]

---

13. *saṃkalparacanāprakāraḥ. yadyapi saṃkalpo nāmāham evaṃ kariṣyāmīty adhyavasāyarūpo manaso vyāpāraḥtathāpi tadabhidhāyivākyam api saṃkalpaḥ, saṃkalpaṃ racayāmi, saṃkalpaṃ paṭhāmi, saṃkalpaṃ kuru iti vyavahāradarśanena nirūḍhalakṣāṃgīkārāt.*

14. *deśakālayor adhikaraṇatvāt saptamīvibhaktyā prayogaḥ, tataś ca pratipadoktāsandarbhānusāreṇa sāmpradāyikaṃ saṃkalpavākyam.*

15. *śuktiśaṅkhāśmarūpyamṛnmayapātraiḥkevalena hastena vā saṃkalpaṃ na kuryāt, atra ha staniṣedhaḥpātrāntarasadbhāvaviṣaya ekahastaparoveti raghunandanīye durgākṛtyakaumudyāṃ* ca.

> Having placed three blades of *kuśa* grass, sesame seeds, and water in a copper vessel, having taken that vessel, or having taken *kuśa* grass, sesame seeds and water in the right hand cupped in the left hand . . . (SR 12)[16]

To be sure, not all five features of a *saṃkalpa* are found in the written sources, but they can generally be observed in ritual practice.

Saṃkalpa Formulas

Saṃkalpas belong to the practical knowledge of priests that is often only orally preserved. However, many priests follow a *saṃkalpa* formula such as the following from the *Saṃkalparatnāvalī* of Harinātha Śarmā. The *saṃkalpa* is explicitly formulated as a sample (*svarūpa*):

> (SR 12f.)
>
> A sample for the formulation of a *saṃkalpa*:
>
> *oṃ tat sat*.
>
> Today, in the second (half of the life) of Brahmā, in the Śvetavarāha period (*kalpa*), in the Vaivasvata period (*manvantara*), in the 28th *manvantara*, in the Kaliyuga, on the Bharatavarṣa continent, in the northern part (of it), in the holy field (*kṣetra*) of Paśupati, in Nepal, which is a part of the Āryāvārta region, in the *prabhava* (i.e. name of the year), in the southern part of the year (i.e. when the sun is in the southern hemisphere), in the autumn season, in the month of Āśvina, in its dark part, on the second lunar day, on Saturday, in the Revatī zodiacal sign, in the union called *dhruva*, in the *karaṇa* called Elephant *gara[ja]*, when the sun and Venus are in the sign of Virgin, when Ketu is in Cancer, when Saturn and Mars are in Gemini, when the moon and Jupiter are in the Fishes, when Rāhu is in Capricorn, (and) when Mercury is in Libra, I, Harinātha Śarmā, belonging to the clan of Kauḍinya, and to the three clan segments (*pravara*) Kauḍinya, Vāśiṣṭha, and Maitrāvaruṇa, shall take the bath in the Gaṅgā in order to destroy all (my) evil. Having thus ritually decided, he shall throw water to the north. (SR 12f.)[17]

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16. *tāmrapātre kuśatrayaṃ tilāñ jalañ ca nidhāya tatpātram ādāya vāmahastānvārabdhena dakṣahastena kuśatilajalāny ādāya vā.*

17. *saṃkalpavākyasvarūpam. oṃ tatsat adya brahmao dvitīye parārddhe śvetavārāhakalpe vaivasvatamanvantare ‹aṣṭāviṃśatitame kalau yuge jambūdvīpe bhārate varṣe uttare khaḍe āryāvartāntaragate nepāladeśe pāśupater kṣetre prabhave samvatsare dakṣiṇe ‘yane śaradi ṛtau āśvine māse kṛṣe pakṣe dvitīyāyāṃ tithau śanau vāsare revatyāṃ nakṣatre dhruve yoge gare*

On the basis of such formulas, any *saṃkalpa* has ideally the following form (in brackets the grammatical essentials, the sequence of n°s 3–8 is not fixed): (1) mantra (e.g., oṃ *tatsad*), (2) *hic et nunc* (usually *adyeha*), (3) place names, (4) time parameters, (5) genealogical and kinship data, (6) personal name(s), (7) aim or purpose, (8) ritual action, (9) verb (mostly in the present tense used as a future tense).

As we have seen, by means of the declaratory formula, the performer of a specific ritual has to specify and identify himself in accordance with (1) spatial, (2) chronological, and (3) genealogical criteria. I call these criteria "localizing," "timing," and "personalizing," respectively. It would appear that the space and time parameters are construed in a similar way to the dating of inscriptions. There are significant differences, however, as I will try to show in the concluding section. The following tables list the most common criteria and divisions used in *saṃkalpas* (see SR 23–30).

(1) Localizing

The spatial criteria resemble in a way the well-known Russian toy consisting of a series of dolls encapsulated in increasingly larger ones. Among the geographical coordinates are those shown in Table 1.1 (the spatial levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*):

In the ritual context, the supraregional aspect is more subject to debate than the regional or local criteria. The supraregional level can be open to ideological arguments since cosmographical and even political definitions of the borders of a sacred land or territory vary. Although terrestrial features, such as mountains or rivers, are mentioned early (see Manu 2.17–2.24), the sacred land in which the ritual can take place is more often defined in distinction to a foreign region or country, for instance, *mlecchadeśa* (Manu 2.23), which is not considered sacred and which the pious man should avoid. Conceptually, it seems to me that only at this point can new religious and ideological concepts of space enter the formula of a *saṃkalpa*—for instance, the concept of India as a nation (*bharata*), the idea of Hindusthāna, or, recently, Rāmarājya. However, sacred geography has always been political in the Durkheimian sense that religion also serves the solidarity of social groups.

The sacred space of rituals is therefore not defined by "objective" geocentric criteria but by religious concepts. In other words, sacred space in rituals is construed, not measured. It is not only out there, but it is also *in illo loco*.

karaṇe kanyārāśisthitayoḥsūryaśukrayoḥkarkaṭarāśisthiteṣu ketuṣu mithunarāśisthitayoḥśani bhaumayoḥmīnarāśisthitayoś candrajīvayor makararāśisthite rāhau tulārāśisthite budhe kauḍinyagotraḥkauḍinyavāśiṣṭha maitrāvaruṇeti tripravaro, harināthaśarmā sakalapāpakṣayārthaṃ gaṃgāsnānam ahaṃ kariṣye iti saṃkalpya jalamaiśānyāṃ kṣipet.

Table 1.1 Spatial levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Supraregional level	*Regional level*	*Local level*
brahmāvārta—Brahmā's region	*(sva-)deśa*—country: *nepāladeśa*, etc.	*grāma*—village
āryāvārta—region of the Āryas	*kṣetra*—region, usually named after a god: *paraśurāmakṣetra, rāmakṣetra, -rājya, hindusthānadeśa, paśupatikṣetra*, etc.	*nagara*—city
khaḍa—continent, usually *bharatakhaḍa*	*pātha*—directions: *dakṣiā-, uttara-*, etc. (see *ayana* in Table 1.2)	*nadī*—river
dvīpa—subcontinent: *jambudvīpa, puṣkaradvīpa*, etc.		*tīra*—bank
bharatavarṣa—sacred land of India		

From this, it follows that the sacred land of India is not just the territory of the nation. The sacred land of India is also beyond India. It creates no serious problem for Brahman or Hindu priests to reformulate and adapt the *saṃkalpa* in foreign countries, as has been observed by M. Deshpande in two Hindu weddings in the United States.

On one occasion, the priest recited the formula *bharatakhaḍe bharatavarṣe* and so on without any modification. After the ceremony was over, I asked the priest for an explanation. The clever priest, who had not thought of this problem before, responded by saying that all the regions of the world where Indian immigrants have settled are now included in the region referred to by *bharatakhaḍe bharatadeśe*. On the other hand, I have observed other Hindu priests in my state of Michigan adjusting the traditional formula of *saṃkalpa* to reflect the changed geography: *amerikākhaṇḍe amerikādeśe miśiganrājya anārbarnagare huron-nadyās tīre*—"in the continent of America, in the

country of America, in the state of Michigan, in the city of Ann Arbor, on the bank of the Huron river" (Deshpande 1996, 425).

(2) Timing

With regard to chronology, the following divisions and subdivisions (shown in Table 1.2) are made and mentioned in *saṃkalpas*.

Table 1.2 Temporal levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Cosmological divisions	Calendrical and chronological divisions	Astronomical divisions, i.e., zodiacal signs occupied by the sun, moon, Jupiter, and other planets
kalpa—a day of Brahmā = 1,000 *mahāyugas*	*saṃvat*—era: *vikrama, śaka*, etc.	*nakṣatra*—27 lunar mansions: *aśvinī, bharaṇī, kṛttikā . . . uttarabhādrapadā, revatī*
	varṣa, vatsara—a year of 360 lunar days	*yoga*—27 conjunctions: *viṣkumbha, prīti, āyuṣmān, . . . aindra, vaidhṛti*
	ayana—half of the year according to the position of the sun in the northern (*uttara*) or southern (*dakṣiṇa*) hemisphere	*rāśi*—12 solar mansions or zodiacal signs: *meṣa, vṛṣabha, mithuna,. . . kumbha, mīna*
yuga—4 ages of the world: *kṛta, tretā, dvāpara* and *kali* = 1 *mahāyuga* or 1 *manvantara* (Manu-period) = 4,320,000 years	*ṛtu*—6 seasons: *vasanta, grīṣma, varṣā, śarad, hemanta, śiśira*	Position of *sūrya, candra*, and (other) *grahas* or *navagrahas*

Table 1.2 (continued) Temporal levels mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

saṃvatsara—usually according to the 60-year cycle of Jupiter: *prabhava, vibhava, śukla, pārthiva, vyaya, . . . kṣaya*	*māsa*—12 months: *vaiśākha, jyeṣṭha, āṣāḍha, śrāvaṇa, bhādra, āśvina, kārttika, mārga, pauṣa, māgha, phālguna, caitra*
	pakṣa—half of a month according to the size and position of the moon: *śukla, kṛṣa*
	tithi—15 lunar days including full or new moon: *pratipad, dvitīyā, tṛtīyā, . . . caturdaśī, pūrimā, amāvāsyā*
	karaṇa—11 divisions of a day: *vava, vālava, kaulava, taittila, gara, vaija, viṣṭi, śakuni, capuṣpad, nāga, kiṃstughna*
	vāra, dina—7 weekdays: *ravi, soma, bhauma, budha, vṛhaspati, śukra, śani*
	yāma—quarter of a day
	muhūrta, ghaṭī, pala—divisions of an hour (1 *muhūrta* = 48 minutes, 1 *ghaṭī* = 12 minutes = 60 *pala*)

Timing a ritual can be an extremely difficult task. It therefore lies in the hands of specialists, that is, astrologers and astronomers, even if educated Indians can read and use a traditional calendar (*pañcāṅga*). I do not deal here with astronomical or calendrical problems involved in timing rituals, but with concepts of time relevant for ritual actions. From this point of view, ritual time and "real" time are not only different but may also conflict with each other. To give just one example: for most rituals, festivals, or pilgrimages, the lunar day (*tithi*) is decisive; a *tithi* can cover two or even three solar days (*dina, divāsa*). What is to be done, then, if a certain natural time is prescribed for a specific ritual, for example, the night vigil in the case of Śivarātri, but the *tithi* happens to fall during the daytime? In this case, most traditional experts refer to the *yugmavākyā*. According to this rule, it is the *tithi* that lasts until sunrise or is just beginning that gives the solar day its name and number. However, since a *tithi* can be very short, lasting only a few hours, a lunar day may not cover the nighttime. In this case, the decision must be made as to whether the night vigil should be held the night before or the night after the *tithi*; both are possible (see Michaels 1996, 325). But more important is that the conceptual night is independent of the natural daytime or nighttime. The timing of the ritual performance must be in accordance with biorhythm, the organization of the festival, and so on, but the religious timing can be independent of it: *in illo tempore*.

(3) Personalizing

Apart from localizing and timing, it is necessary to involve the performer of the ritual (the *yajamāna*) according to the criteria set forth in Table 1.3.

Interestingly, personalizing can be a ritual act with spatial and chronological implications. Thus, for the matching ceremony in the selection of a suitable marriage partner, it is necessary to compare not only the genealogical criteria of bride and bridegroom, but also, for example, the names. If the name of the bride begins with a syllable that, according to the usual calendars (*pañcāṅga*), is combined with the lunar mansions (*nakṣatra*) and other categories (*vara, yoni, gaṇa*, etc.), and if these categories do not fit with those of the bridegroom, then the marriage will not bode well. Personalizing is therefore not individualizing but, on the contrary, is de-individualizing: the individual is associated and sometimes even ritually identified with "greater" spatial and chronological criteria, which transcend the ego to a sphere beyond the human world.

Table 1.3 Personal criteria mentioned in *saṃkalpas*

Genealogical criteria	Personal criteria	Educational criteria
gotra—clan names of the eponymous seers (*ṛṣi*), from which all Twice-borns are believed to descend, usually *viśvāmitra, jamadagni, bharadvāja, gautama, vasiṣṭha, kaśyapa, agastya*	personal names (*nāma*) given at the naming ceremony (*nāmakaraṇa*)	guru's name
pravara—clan segments according to legendary descendants of the *ṛṣis*	father's name	*śākhā*—Vedic school
	mother's name	*pāṭha*—name of the recited text
	name of the *varṇa: śarmā* for *brāhmaṇa, varmā* for *kṣatriya, gupta* for *vaiśya, dāsa* for *śūdra*	
sāpiṇḍa—patrilineal and matrilineal male and female ancestors	name of the sub-caste (*jāti*)	

Saṃkalpa as a Speech Act and the Intentionality of Rituals

As can be seen from the material presented, a *saṃkalpa* is an *intentio solemnis* by which all action that is mentioned in it is recognized as sacred. This is what Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994, 88ff.) have called the ritual commitment. Indeed, only if such a formal decision has been made and expressed in words are the ritual acts religiously fully valid. Only then can an everyday action, such as the washing of a statue, be distinguished from pouring sacred water over it (*abhiṣeka*).

Moreover, with the five characteristics mentioned above, *saṃkalpas* share syntactic and pragmatic structures with vows (*vrata*), oaths (*vacana,*

praidhāna, praidhi), promises (*pratijñā*), curses (*śapatha*), charms (*mantra*), blessings (*āśīrvāda*), magic truth acts (*satyakriyā*), and other speech acts.[18] In most cases, a *saṃkalpa* is both a verbal and performative utterance that evokes something immediately—something that is articulated in a solemn way and refers to past or future actions, to which it expresses a commitment or promise, and that is often (but not always) accompanied by ritual gestures. In short, *saṃkalpas* can be characterized as performative utterances or as a variant of illocutionary acts. However, the analogy is dangerous. For John Searle, all speech acts involve intention, and language is basically communicative. But *saṃkalpas* need neither be communicative nor express intention.

Prima facie, all rituals performed with a *saṃkalpa* seem to be meaningful and intentional acts. I do not wish here to elaborate the discussion which was initiated by Frits Staal with his theory on the meaninglessness of rituals (see Chapter 8 herein) and which was continued, to a certain extent, by Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994). However, I must at least briefly discuss the question of whether *saṃkalpas* indicate the intentionality of ritual acts, given that they mention the intention (*artha, kāmya*) of the ritual to be performed. See, for example, the already quoted end of the *saṃkalpa* of the *Ṛgvedīyabrahmakarmasamuccaya*:

> I shall perform the morning bath in order to be released from all evil caused by *saṃsāra*—no matter whether it (evil) be done (by) bodily (actions), by words or mentally—and in order to receive the fruits that are mentioned by the highest god (Viṣṇu) in the Śāstras, Śrutis, Smṛtis and Purāṇas.

In this *saṃkalpa*, not only the aim of the morning bath has been mentioned, but also the desired fruits of the ritual. For Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994, 88f.), on the contrary, rituals must be "nonintentional" (as well as "stipulated," "elemental," or "archetypical" and "apprehensible"). It is especially the argument for the unintentionality of rituals that invites criticism.

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18. Until now, the discussion of these speech acts in Indian contexts (cf. Alper 1989; Benveniste 1973; Brown and Rocher 1978; Lüders 1951, 1959; Thompson 1998; Staal 1989; Tambiah 1990; Wheelock 1982) has been occupied with the semantic and pragmatic aspects of mantras. If I am not mistaken, neither the collection of articles edited by Harvey P. Alper (which, unfortunately, has no index) nor the important publications of Frits Staal or Stanley Tambiah even mention the institution of *saṃkalpa*—so essential for the study of Hindu (as well as Jain and Buddhist) rituals. All of this is regrettable since any *saṃkalpa* is indeed very similar to what was analyzed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) as speech acts, especially the promises discussed extensively by Searle (cf. Chapter 2.1 of this volume).

Indeed, if one were to follow Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory on this point, rituals with *saṃkalpas* would not, it seems, really be rituals.

However, a closer look at *saṃkalpa* makes it clear that the intentions mentioned in them are not motives. Humphrey and Laidlaw speak of rituals that are always nonintentional, but not necessarily unintentional. They can be performed with a variety of motives, but whatever they are, these wishes or motives do not change the ritual acts, and, even more important, they are not at all necessary for recognizing ritual acts as such. Whereas in the case of normal actions the intention is necessary to distinguish them from other actions or to perceive them as such, ritualized actions are not characterized by the intentions accompanying them. A *saṃkalpa* cannot be considered as a communicative or informative act because its purpose is neither to communicate nor to inform anybody about the ritual. It just signals that, from that point in time on, the sphere of existence has changed. It indicates, so to say, a change of program, a shift to the level of ritualization, so that all actions that follow and are framed by the *saṃkalpa* and *visarjana* may be considered as of a ritual or sacred nature, similar to plays in the theater. This is what Bell (1992) calls "ritualization" and Humphrey and Laidlaw call "ritual stance." Thus "in ritual you both are and are not the author of your acts" (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 99).

Only the *intentio solemnis* singles out certain segments of acts and evokes an awareness of the change. Whatever then happens is filtered through this cognitive act. Rituals do not just happen; they are caused by intentional acts. In order to mark this change of level, a change of the level of language usually takes place. In the ritual, water becomes ritual water, rice becomes ritual rice, and a simple stone becomes the seat of the gods. All this is usually distinguished in language. Thus, in Nepalese rituals, water is called by the Sanskrit word *jala*, instead of the everyday Nepali *pāni*; and *mīṭhai* ("sweets") becomes *naivedya*. *Phul* ("flowers") becomes *puṣpa, bati* ("light") becomes *dīpa*, and *camal* ("rice") becomes *akṣata* (see also Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 120).

Whatever the personal motive for performing a ritual may be, it does not affect the formulation of the *saṃkalpa*, which is itself already part of the ritual so that it sometimes can even be pronounced by somebody else (the priest, or the wife for the husband, and vice versa) in the name of the sacrificer. Imagine somebody changing the formula of an oath; this would make it irrelevant and invalid. Similarly, a *saṃkalpa* is not an informal promise (although it has much in common with that speech act). Neither the priest nor the performer can alter the phrasing or add personal motives. If this is done, it is to create amusement or scandal (as the sudden change of the formula "I do" in the Christian marriage ceremony).

A *saṃkalpa*, in the final analysis, is not a declaration of motives or wishes for performing a ritual, but the indication of a change in bearing or stance. This is different from forms of greeting, which in the following section serve as an example of ritualized but unframed behavior.

1.2 Greeting and Ritualized Greeting (namaskāra)

Gestures are an important part of many rituals. Falling to one's knees (the genoflux), a kiss, a handshake—these and other gestures can symbolically express subjection, love, or reconciliation and can be staged publically and elaborately. The gesture of greeting is perhaps the most frequent gesture. It is practiced daily. In the morning, one greets one's nearest and dearest with a kiss, or with a grumpy nod of the head; on the way to work, a neighbor with a word or two; then one's colleagues with a cheerful "good morning." And so it goes on, throughout the day, until one falls asleep after saying "good night."

In India, the behavior of greeting has been recorded in writing since ancient times, and has been standardized. This, at any rate, is the case for Brahmans. The Dharmaśāstra distinguishes five forms of ritualized greeting (cf. Kane 1968, vol. 2.1, 334–46):

1. Getting up in front of persons of respect (*pratyutthāna*).
2. Greeting without touching the feet (*abhivādana*), which should accompany *pratyutthāna*.
3. Touching the feet (*upasaṃgrahaṇa*).
4. The answering greeting (*pratyabhivāda*).
5. Bowing (*namaskāra*).

To this, at least four additional important formulae of greeting can be added:

6. Hand gestures (*mudrā*), of which the gesture of *añjali*, the hands laid flat together, palm to palm, is the most prominent (also called *praṇāma*).
7. Making a mark on the forehead (*tīkā, tilaka*).
8. The light side-to-side movement of the head.
9. And, the—by now—ubiquitous handshake, which is, however, regarded as Western.

Quite often, this mixture can lead to confusion, as shown in Manoj Kumar's 1975 film *Purab aur Pachim* ("East and West") (cf. Brosius and Yazgi 2007). In this, Bharat, a young man, takes leave of his teacher after absolving the traditional training and is sent to his uncle in London, who has lived there

for many years and is married to an Indian woman who has never been to India. The two have a son who provocatively challenges all conventions, having become a hippie. Bharat is given a copy of the *Bhagavadgītā* before he leaves for London. On arrival, a series of misunderstandings occur with regard to suitable gestures of greeting. The uncle is moved by being greeted in so deferent a way by his nephew; the son shakes Bharat's hand in an informal way; the wife does not understand why Bharat bends down to touch her feet. She does not understand because she does not recognize the message of this Indian gesture and because she is not used to people younger than she is showing her respect.

The most prominent gesture of *añjali*, also called *praṇāma*, the two hands laid flat against one another, leads to the heart of India. This gesture stands for India like curry, yoga, or gurus. Hardly ever does it not occur on visiting cards or menus, on the packaging of incense sticks as on that of high-tech products; one meets it everywhere, if nowhere else, then on the airplane to India, when smiling stewardesses try to instill a feeling of trust in Indian airlines in this way.

What does this gesture stand for? One can read quite a lot about this. I will give only two examples. The first is from the website, www.123.com:

> "Pranaam" is when you fold both the hands and it is a kind of union of your left and right hand, union of left and right brain hemisphere, union of yin and yang, masculine and feminine and also union of spirit. We are one that is the reason we say Namaste. More than the physical gesture the feeling is important.[19]

The second example is from an article in *Hinduism Today*, written by Siva siva Palani, who asked several Hindus about the meanings of this gesture. Here is a sample of answers:

> Namaste elevates one's consciousness, reminding one that all beings, all existence is holy, is God. It communicates, "I honor or worship the Divinity within you." Also, it draws the individual inward for a moment, inspires reflection on the deeper realities, softening the interface between people. It would be difficult to offend or feel animosity toward anyone that you greet as God.

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19. http://www.experts123.com/q/meaning-of-doing-pranaam.html (accessed June 28, 2015).

> Namaste is a gesture of friendship and kindness, also of thanks or special recognition. Mystically it is called namaskara mudra in the Agamic puja, and it centers one's energy within the spine.
>
> I've heard it means "I salute God within you." The true namaste gesture is accompanied by bowing the head and shoulders slightly. This is a gesture that lessens our sense of ego and self-centeredness, requiring some humility to do it well—whereas shaking hands can be quite an arrogant event. . . .
>
> The gesture has a subtle effect on the aura and nerve system. Bringing focused attention and a collection of one's forces, so to speak. It also protects against unnecessary psychic connections which are fostered by shaking hands. This might be called a form of purity also—protecting one's energies.
>
> This form of acknowledgement is so lovely, so graceful. Just look at two people in namaste and you will see so much human beauty and refinement.[20]

Such interpretations do not really apply to the ritual greeting, and, basically, they do not apply to the everyday greeting, either. They are overloaded with significances, because people, when they are asked about the meaning of something, feel they have to answer somehow. But who really wants somebody else to be greeted by God in saying "Grüss Gott!" ("(May) God greet (you)")? Who really wants to know "how are you"? Gestures of greeting have at most a polyvalent meaning—they are equivalent to rituals in this—but mostly they have no meaning whatsoever, just a social or communicative function. For this reason, Erving Goffman considered such "techniques of cultivating one's image" to be rituals of interaction, or everyday rituals. I would subsume them under the category of ritualized behavior, and I would speak of a scale of ritualization, on which they appear more at the lower end of the scale.

However, the gesture of greeting and its answer in Hindu ritual, but possibly in other contexts, too, seems to be more than just a symbolic act of communication or ritualized behavior. A closer look shows that it is based to some extent on forms of exchange and is thus to be seen as related to the ritualized exchange of gifts (cf. Michaels 1997a). As in sacrifice and other rituals, something is given and something is expected to be returned. Does this mean that

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20. Paramacharya Palaniswami (editor), "Namaste: Greeting the Divine," *West and East: The Hand Shake Versus the Anjali Mudra*, Oct. 2, 2005, http://www.hinduismtoday.com/modules/smartsection/item.php?itemid=1372 of 2005, accessed on July 14, 2009.

in the case of the *praṇāma* gesture the difference between ritual and ritualized behavior is not appropriate? This is a crucial question, and to answer it, we have at least three aspects of ritualized greeting in India.

First, there is the difference between a spoken greeting and a gestural greeting, and whether the greeting involves bodily contact. Spoken greetings rarely work without gestures, but a gesture of greeting may occur without anything being said; sometimes this is even required. Generally speaking, it is all about preserving hierarchical distance. Every rule serves to display this differentiation and marks the differences in rank, sex, and age.

The gesture or ritual of bowing is—within the context of the Dharmaśāstra—therefore almost never a symmetrical one. Quite the contrary is the refusal to show respect on the part of ascetics, for instance, who wish, occasionally, to show their equality with gods in their "self-idolization" (Weber 1968, 553). Thus, according to Nepalese chronicles, the ascetic priest Nityānanda refused to bow before two statues of gods (Kāmadeva and Dharmaśilā), although he was told to do so by King Śivasiṃhamalla (reigned approximately 1578–1619); but as he eventually did do so, the statues burst apart, upon which the king could just barely prevent him from bowing down before Paśupati, the protective deity of Nepal (cf. Michaels 1994a, 118).

The gesture of bowing, which can be carried out in many forms, varying from simple bowing of the upper body to prostration, almost always expresses subservience. The gesture of *añjali*, too, contains the respect shown to others. The respected person is no different from the gods, to start with (cf. Babb 1975, 51–53). The greater the respect, or the greater the hierarchical distance between the one greeting and the one being greeted, the more the gesture will be accompanied by bows or touching of the feet. In many texts, types of prostration are prescribed that require eight members to touch the ground (cf. Bühnemann 1988, 173).

Second, there is the bodily contact, as in the case of touching the feet. This gesture, too, expresses subservience to a high degree. It is used in cases of great difference in rank, for example, between pupil and teacher, son and father, wife and husband, or people and gods or saints, of whom sometimes only the feet or shoes are represented. Now, in India, the feet are regarded as the most impure part of the body. Whoever touches another's feet is polluted and unclean, as a rule, and must be subjected to ablutions or ritual cleansing. But when someone touches the feet of another, higher-ranking person intentionally, then this expresses "respect pollution" (Harper 1964, 181–83), a taking on of impurity born of respect. It is a similar matter with the *prasāda*, the gifts (of food) presented to the gods; the believer receives the "impure

leftovers," in a way, from the priest after the gift has been presented to the deity. In this manner, the believer subjects himself to the deity and recognizes the latter's higher rank.

Bodily contact thus almost always conceals the danger of impurity. It is therefore only possible when both of those involved accept their status within the hierarchy. This is true too—and most especially—of the application of a *tīkā*, or *tilaka*, as the forehead marking is also known. This gesture of blessing is a significant characteristic of purity and higher rank of the one giving the blessing, and who gives whom the *tīkā* is a matter of the most exact scrutiny (cf. Bennett 1983, 150–64). Here, too, *grosso modo* the purer gives the *tīkā* to the less pure, the unclean one, the higher-ranking person to the lower-ranking one, the older to the younger, the man to the woman. Thus, hitherto a small girl, who is honored in Kathmandu as the goddess Kumārī, was the one to give the king the *tīkā* at the annual Indrajātrā festival, confirming his power in this manner every year, while the king gave chosen members of the military, the civil service, and the people the marking on the forehead. With the takeover of power by the Maoists, this power structure has become somewhat muddled. In 2008, Kumārī did not give the *tīkā* to the king nor to the prime minister, nor even the president. But the president and the king did give it to the people, for which both were strongly criticized by the enlightened population.

Interestingly, some legal scholars (Dharmaśāstrins) regard a bow accompanied by words to be less suitable than the simple bow as such. This is valid in front of gods, Brahmans, and ascetics (cf. Kane 1968, vol. 2.1, 346). Thus, it is said in the *Viṣṇusmṛti* (according to the *Smṛticandrikā*, p. 468): "In assemblies, at sacrifice, and in palaces, one should bow to the Brahman, but one should not speak to him." Why is this so? I think it has to do with the materiality of the oral greeting. Just as in the case of bodily contact, with the gestural greeting in words, something comes to the one being greeted to which he has to answer.

Third, here, we have come to the question of the reply to a greeting, which shows interesting parallels to the exchange of gifts. A comparison of this sort may seem, at first, to be rather improbable, but in the Dharmaśāstra, these greeting rules and gestures are compared with rules for gift giving (see the following excursus). There, the rules for *dāna* are basically norms for proper behavior on the part of the newly initiated Twice-born. Thus Manu 4.179–80 first treats the question of how one should act upon being insulted, then come the rules for accepting gifts, and the next subject is impermissible vows etc. In parts, the Dharmaśāstra is simple etiquette, as Mauss in his seminal book *The Gift* likewise notes:

> The codes and the epic expiate upon the theme—as Hindu writers well knew how to do—that gifts, givers, and things given are terms to be considered relatively, after going into details and with scruples, so no error is committed in the way one gives and receives. It is all a matter of etiquette; it is not like in the market where, objectively, and for price, one takes something. (Mauss 2002, 77)

Parallels to the rules of greeting are themselves hinted at by Mauss: "The invitation must be returned, just as 'courtesies' must" (Mauss 2002, 84). Courtesies are, for Mauss, a part of the total number of transfers (*préstations totales*) that may occur, as services, in place of gifts in the system of total social phenomena (*phénomènes sociaux totaux*).

All of these aspects—the materiality of greeting gestures, their hierarchies, embodiment, and reciprocity—as well as the parallels between gift exchange and greeting do not, in my understanding, transform this ritualized behavior into rituals since the components of framing, *religio*, and transformation are generally missing. It is true that greeting gestures can themselves become complex rituals, but then they are accompanied by precisely these components. If, for instance, a greeting ceremony is formally arranged and beforehand announced, and if all this contributes to a social or religious transformation, the gesture of greeting becomes a ritual. But if not, it remains ritualized behavior or a subordinate ritual element of a complex ritual. We will see similar differentiations in Chapter 4.3.

Excursus: Greeting and Gift Exchange

The following comparison with the rules of greeting will serve to moderate the discussion of Hindu gift giving and its obsession with the purity of the gift—no doubt a consequence of Louis Dumont's great influence. Within the rules of greeting in the Dharmaśāstra (cf. Kane 1968, vol. 2.1, 334ff.), seven features stand out:

(1) The greeting must be directed to a worthy recipient. Of focal concern among the rules of greeting is the status of greeter and greeted. Status is measured according to the following criteria, in ascending order: "Wealth, kinship relation, age, deeds (Manu 12.1–11) and, fifthly, knowledge [of *śruti* and *smṛti*] are the basis for respect" (Manu 2.136; cf. *Yājñavalkyasmṛti* 1.116). The highest status is again—as in the case of *dāna*—enjoyed by the knower of the Veda, the *śrotriya*.

(2) The greeting should be performed in a respectful frame of mind, as an expression of esteem toward the higher-ranking person (ĀpDhS 1.4.14.10).

(3) Greeting, acknowledgement of greeting, return greeting, and greeting gestures are formalized. One is expected to stand during the greeting (*pratyutthāna*: Manu 2.126). The words of greeting vary according to status and repute, and the form of greeting likewise varies according to the relationship between greeter and greeted. Thus, according to the *Atrisaṃhitā* (*Smṛticandrikā*, pp. 38, 62), the student should touch with his hands the feet of his teacher (*upasaṃgrahaṇa*) after a period of teaching and after sunset; one should greet the student of the Vedas and others with the *añjali* gesture (*namaskāra*), and another Brahman with a raised right hand. According to ĀpDhS 1.2.5.16, a Brahman should greet a Kṣatriya with *añjali* at ear level, a Vaiśya at breast level, and a Śūdra at stomach level. The speech forms are similarly prescribed in detail. The customary words: *abhivadaye devadatta śarmāham bhoḥ*,[21] where Devadatta Śarman fills in the blank of one's own name, which is only inserted when the greeted person knows the formally correct return greeting: when the greeting of a member of one of the three upper classes is returned, the name must be lengthened at a fixed place (usually the last syllable) to three morae. The great age of this rule is shown by Pāṇini's *Aṣṭhādhyāyī* (ca. fourth century BCE): "If one returns the greeting of a non-Śūdra, then one uses *pluti*, namely for the final syllable of the sentence that represents the formulaic reply" (Pāṇini 8.2.82–3). This is normally the name of the person one has been greeted by. The Brahman who is unfamiliar with the correct form of reply thus displays his deficient education and should be treated like a Śūdra. For, as Patañjali makes clear in the *Mahābhāṣya*, one needs to have studied grammar in order to reply correctly.

> One should talk as one pleases to those uneducated persons who, in returning a greeting, do not know the lengthened form of the name—as to women[22] after one has come back from a trip [and says], "Here I am.". . . Grammar should be studied, [for] we do not wish, when greeting, to be like women [i.e., uneducated].

21. ĀpDhS 1.2.5.12, GautamaDhS 6.5, Manu 2.122 and 124.

22. For women, *svasti* is sufficient.

(4) A misdirected or improper greeting—strangers, enemies, murderers, menstruating women, runners, persons who are drunk, eating, yawning, and so forth (*Smṛticandrikā*, pp. 39, 67)—puts one at risk of being harmed and defiled. This applies also to misdirected or neglected greetings toward elders, for, according to Manu (2.120) and other sources, the life breaths (*prāṇa*) escape upward in younger persons when they meet older ones. The former gain back the life breaths by rising and properly greeting—and also blessings for a long life, knowledge, fame, and power. An impure person (such as one wearing shoes) should not greet, nor should one return with words the words of greeting of someone impure (ĀpDhS I.4.14.22). More comes out than mere words of greeting, in contrast to the mute gesture of the *namaskāra* greeting (see Kane 1968, vol. 2.1, 346).

(5) The proper greeting produces religious merit. Conversely, the threat of loss of religious merit (*puṇya*) hangs over one who fails to follow the strict form. A one-armed greeting carries the loss of *puṇya*, as stated in the *Viṣṇusmṛti* (*Smrticandrikā*, p. 62); whoever regularly greets elders, on the other hand, secures for himself a long life, religious merit, fame and power (Manu 2.121).

(6) The rules of greeting are hierarchically gradated according to social class. A Brahman is not bound by duty to greet Kṣatriyas and Vaiśyas before they greet him; on the contrary, even a ten-year-old Brahman is a father with respect to a 100-year-old Kṣatriya (Manu 2.135) and must be greeted first. The *Smṛticandrikā* (p. 38, resp. p. 65) clarifies this passage by remarking that only Brahmans should be greeted, and that under no circumstances should a Brahman (be the first) to greet Kṣatriyas and others, even if the latter possess knowledge and have performed good deeds. Ascetics who are not greeted (first) by the king may cause harm. And sometimes, ascetics do not bow to the gods in order to demonstrate their equal rank. Thus, according to Nepalese chronicles, the priest-ascetic Nityānanda refused to bow to statues of two gods (Kāmadeva and Dharmaśilā), even though he had been enjoined to do so by King Śivasiṃhamalla (reigned ca. 1578–1619); when in the end he did, the statues burst, whereupon the king was barely able to prevent him from bowing down to Paśupati, the tutelary deity of Nepal (Michaels 2004a, 118). Ritual rank thus takes precedence over seniority and power, but only in the case of oral greetings. The situation is different when it comes to standing up, which Brahmans are supposed to do upon meeting older persons, including Śūdras. Even if the priest, father-in-law, or uncle is younger, one should stand, but should not address them (GautamaDhS 6.9). The danger lies in the word, in the improper greeting formula. One could say that the danger lies in what is

given, the word, for in the end, we live in a world in which language, and more especially names, lay claim to an ethereal quality and influence. And if something is given, there is the duty to reciprocate, and this engenders dependency. But in spite of the ethereality of an oral greeting, there is no question, even in India, but that gift, present and exchange represent legal and commercial transactions that, though they are not necessarily constitutively binding, nevertheless involve the exchange of goods, whereas a greeting is an act that at most binds the second party morally, remaining outside the bounds of a commercial transaction.

(7) Special rules apply in special circumstances—similar to the times of emergency under *dānadharma*. Thus, even a Brahman should make way when older or frail persons, porters, and vehicles approach. Nonetheless, the rules for greeting evidently remain in force, even in times of emergency.

As one can see, there are clear parallels between the rules for greeting and the norms for giving and receiving gifts (see Table 1.4):

Table 1.4 Parallels in rules for gift exchange and greeting

Gift Exchange (*dānadharma*)	**Rules of Greeting (*abhivādana-"dharma"*)**
The gifts must be given to a worthy recipient.	The greeting must be directed to a worthy recipient.
The gift must be given in a liberal spirit.	The greeting should be given with a feeling of respect.
Giving and receiving is formalized.	Greeting, acknowledgement of greeting, and return greeting are formalized.
The gift harbors the risk of defilement.	An improper greeting harbors the risk of misfortune and defilement.
The gift produces religious merit for the giver.	A proper greeting produces religious merit for greeter and greeted.
The transactions are hierarchical.	The rules of greeting are hierarchically gradated according to class.
These norms are invalid in times of emergency (*āpad*).	Special regulations obtain in certain circumstances—comparable to times of emergency under *dānadharma*.

These parallels between greeting and gift are not surprising, given that greetings concern the bonds between giver and recipient that Mauss (2002) spoke of, or, conversely the maintenance of distance and the highlighting of status differences occasioned thereby. It is quite legitimate, in fact, to analyze greetings and gifts within the framework of a more global theory of behavior and communication, as Pierre Bourdieu (1966) has done, for example, since only then will the rules of the game and the entire palette of communicative challenges and responses be spelled out. Every communicative act directed to someone else is, indeed, an injury or questioning of their self-esteem and a virtual dishonoring. No matter what one gives the other—gifts, words (of greeting), invitations, gestures, or looks—one is exposing oneself to the receiver in that one is providing him the choice between a culturally and socially accepted or unacceptable response.

A response is the norm. It may be appropriate or inappropriate, and those involved can determine from it their hierarchical, personal, and emotional relationship. Whether remunerations to servants, tips, or presents self-made or bought, lavish or unassuming, it always depends on the circumstances and the people involved whether the gift is felt to be appropriate or inappropriate. To be sure, in hierarchical relationships, the gift need not necessarily be reciprocated; it is then an expression of the giver's superiority—parents' gifts to small children, gifts to the needy, and the like—but these are the exceptions.

Between grown-ups and equals, on the other hand, it is not normal for gifts not to be reciprocated or to be ignored or refused. When the giver exerts no pressure and, free of malice and envy, expects no gift in return, he gives with the often-declared intention of neither needing gifts himself nor exchanging them in any way. For most gifts (*dānāni*), a prior formal, orally expressed resolution (*saṃkalpa*) is necessary for their beneficial effect to be felt. This intent, in a religious context, is based on the giver's search for the abnormal, uncommon, or supernatural—it being the normal practice to reciprocate a communicative challenge. Being able to allow oneself not to respond, not to return a gift, not to issue a return invitation, and not to greet but to instead look away and say nothing may be taken as a sign of the extraordinary. God is sufficient unto Himself. "God, nature and sun give freely, without requiring a gift in return," writes Starobinski (1994, 74—borrowing from Seneca). And therefore, one must often refrain from addressing, greeting (as the first), inviting, or giving gifts to (in expectation of receiving others in return from) persons who claim or are treated as enjoying divine status—for example, saints, ascetics, or god-kings.

A gift for which a return gift is neither given nor, by either party, expected—where, in other words, something is given but nothing received—is usually given out of generosity. The moral or religious merit for which is the greater, the greater are the altruistic motives behind it. To the extent, therefore, that religious or moral goals are sought in the exercise of generosity, there must be no requirement to reciprocate. Mauss did not see this clearly enough—and not only with respect to Hindu law. Mauss and his critics, however, do not accept altruism as a motive for the giving of gifts,[23] though this is the very motive required in the giving of gifts.[24]

But what about the reciprocity of the greeting, that is, the return greeting? Here, there is a clear distinction vis-à-vis *dānadharma*, since the gestural return greeting (*pratyabhivāda*) is generally called for, whereas we were unable to find such reciprocity in the case of gift giving. If one is greeted, one must respond in turn or at least stand up, even as a Brahman. Otherwise, one will go to hell, it is stated in the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa* (according to *Smṛticandrikā*, pp. 37, 63). One who goes so far as not to return the greeting of a Brahman will be reborn as a tree at a cremation site on which vultures and crows congregate (ibid.). And further, it is stated that one shares the evil (*pāpa*) with the greeter if one does not return the greeting. The duty (*dharma*) to return greetings exists even toward a casteless Caṇḍāla, to whom one should come back with *piba surā* ("Drink schnapps!"). Given its function of showing peaceful intentions, ignoring a greeting amounts to an act of violence, an act of aggression, or an insult, even as, conversely, greetings and return greetings are pacifying gestures. Van Gennep interprets the returned greeting as a rite of affiliation.

If it were only a question of personal duty and hierarchy and too strong bonds and the fear of transferred defilement, similar reservations ought to have crystallized around the return of greetings. For, as we have seen, the greeting may also contain impureness and be dangerous. But, since this did not occur, the reasons must be of a material nature. "This is because the bond established between donor and recipient"—this Mauss correctly saw—"is too strong for both of them [i.e. the Brahmans]" (2002, 769). But this is so not because the recipient enters into a state of dependency, and even less because defilement, harm, or the like are always contained in the gift. Rather, it is because the gift, in contrast to the greeting, is a good of gross material nature, an equivalent return on which the Brahman can only be excused from when he himself is an ascetic or the motive for the gift is an ascetic one.

23. Trautmann (1981, 179): "[T]here is a show of altruism, but it is only show."

24. Cf. Michaels 1997a for a more elaborate version of this argument.

Significantly, the whole problematical complex does not exist in the case of offerings, for these gifts go to gods—not to men!

Conclusion

Parallel to the gift (*dāna*), are the greeting forms also often subject to a ritualized context. The giving and taking of, and responding to, greeting gestures are—as in other interaction rituals—formally regulated. If in greetings the formal requirements are fulfilled, the greeting is accepted as appropriate. Through such behavior, social values, hierarchies, status, and norms are conformed. However, "whereas there is no ritual without formality, all that is formal is not ritual" (Rappaport 1999, 37). The greetings normally remain within the limits of ordinary, everyday behavior. They are ritualized behavior but—in distinction to the *dāna* rituals—lack a number of components that I consider indispensable for the definition of ritual: they are neither framed nor transforming; they also generally lack the elevating component (*religio*). In other words, ritualized behavior might show highly formalized actions, but it is, nevertheless, different from complex rituals.

We have seen how in the *intentio solemnis* or *saṃkalpa*, especially in the aspects of localizing, timing, and personalizing, have become a means of identifying or authorizing the pilgrim (*yajamāna* or *vratin*). The person has to show a ritual license, as it were, by affirming that the ritual will be performed in a sacred space, at a sacred time, and by a genealogically admissible man or woman. By following these steps, a night vigil, for instance, will be ritually effective, in contradistinction to just staying awake at night. Similarly, the transactions of giving and taking gifts (or greetings) only become a ritual when these transcending aspects matter—for instance, if the exchange comes along with a *saṃkalpa*. The *intentio solemnis* or other markers of the frame of rituals thus make it possible to clearly differentiate between ritualized behavior and rituals.

It is the transcending aspect of the *saṃkalpa* that elevates the action, and this transcendence implies that the exact form of localizing, timing, and personalizing is, to a certain extent, the opposite of formulating a custom-made license for the ritual. In fact, it de-individualizes, de-chronologizes, and de-spatializes—in other words, transforms—reality. This is the theoretical point I wish to stress. Rituals cannot be conceptually reduced to the actual actions performed. In rituals, these are not just repeated, and they are thus not remembered, but re-membered and always newly created. Seen from the religious concept behind it, a ritual is a unique totality. Thus, the space mentioned in a *saṃkalpa* of a pilgrimage is conceptually not limited by geographical

criteria. It is the space beyond the visible borders that is realized—*in illo loco*. This space is not the space within space, but a singular, unique space, which is connected with the myth or a primordial divine act and thus identified with the transcendental world. The borders of this space are ideative, not empirical.

The exchange of goods or greetings may be ritualized, but only through such markers do they become ritual action. Likewise, in a ritual of circumambulation, it is not the circumambulatory walk that gives the pilgrimage its sacred character, but the *solemnis intentio* or *saṃkalpa*. Only then are "normal" ways solemnly declared to be sacred routes. This view seems to create a problem with localizing and timing rituals, for they always happen to occur in empirical space and time. However, for the *homo ritualis*, the religious feeling of space and time is absolute, not relative; it creates identities (or distinctions)—rather than similarities—between spaces: Uttarakāśī is not similar to Kaśī; it *is* Kāśī! Thus, any space is subjective or singular, but there is no space as such or *an sich*. A space *an sich*, or a transcendental space, does not exist, because such a space would not need any empirical space. The Absolute cannot manifest itself; it has no sphere of existence (*loka*). This is precisely the difference between religious and ordinary or "profane" concepts of space and time, and between rituals and ritualized behavior.

Localizing and timing rituals therefore means for the *homo ritualis* identifying himself or herself with religious forces that are regarded as absolute and singular. But only if a *saṃkalpa* is formulated and declared—and only if, by way of the formula the individual is ritually identified with this religious force—is the ritual potency valid and able to provide the desired results.

PART II

Formality

In definitions of rituals, formality—to which, strictly speaking, also framing belongs—ranks first. It includes stylized and repetitive gestures and words, liturgical order, as well as a certain invariance of fixed sequences or restricted codes. According to Catherine Bell, "[f]ormality is one of the most frequently cited characteristics of ritual, even though it is certainly not restricted to ritual per se. . . . In general, the more formal a series of movements and activities, the more ritual-like they are apt to seem to us" (1997, 139). This formality is sometimes seen as a kind of invariance:

> One of the most common characteristics of ritual like behaviour is the quality of invariance, usually seen in a disciplined set of actions marked by precise repetition and physical control. For some big theorists, this feature is the prime characteristics of ritual behaviour. (ibid., 150)

Likewise Roy Rappaport, in his book *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, takes "the term 'ritual' to denote the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" (1999, 24). For him, "[f]ormality, i.e. adherence to form, is an obvious aspect of all rituals. It is often, but not always, through the perception of their formal characteristics that we recognize events as rituals, or designate them to be such" (ibid., 33). According to my understanding, ritual action is also formalized, stereotypical, and repetitive (therefore imitable) as well as—in principle—public. It is therefore not primarily spontaneous, private, singular, or optional for everyone. Ritual acts are not deliberately rational or "given over to technological routine" (Turner 1967, 19), for they cannot easily be revised to achieve a better or more economical goal. Therefore, formalism (or standardization[1]) must be an indispensable criterion in definitions of

1. Goody (1961, 159) speaks of "standardized behaviour (custom)" and Kerzer (1988, 9) of "symbolic behavior that is socially standardized and repetitive"; cf. Platvoet (1995, 42–45) for more "classical" definitions.

ritual: "it is nonetheless quite true that ritual activities generally tend to resist change and often do so more effectively than other forms of social custom" (Bell 1997, 211). However, rituals are also variable, because every repeated ritual is not the same as the previous one. In a way, their formality necessitates their variability. The following deals with these aspects of ritual formality, that is, repetition, publicity (in the sense of impersonal intersubjectivity), and variation. In Chapter 2.1 and 2.2, I will discuss whether the formal structures of rituals allow for developing and modeling "grammars" of rituals. In a way, this part builds the core of my theory of ritual. A major part of ritual formalism is expressed in liturgical texts, especially in manuals and local handbooks, which have been widely neglected in Indological research. This literary genre also has to do with the publicity and notification of rituals that I will discuss in Chapter 2.3. In Chapter 3, the agency of formality is in the focus; as an example, I have chosen a specific part of the Hindu death ritual called *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*. My theoretical concern here is the question of how and to what extent ritual sequences can be transformed, left out, added, and transposed, and how, by this, the priest creates his own ritual referring to, or as agency for, a set of established formal ritual elements more or less known to his fellow priests and customers, thus using a kind of ritual language in both a stereotype and creative way. Although rule-governed action is sometimes meticulously fixed or preserved—for example, in scripts such as ritual handbooks—mistakes and mishaps do occur every once in a while. This often causes amusement. Both aspects—mishaps and jokes—will be treated in Chapters 3.2 and 3.3. In Chapter 4, I will treat performativity, the third aspect of ritual formality, that is, the variability and its playful and emotional sides. I shall try to work out the differences between music and ritual music (4.1), dance and ritual dance (4.2), as well as those between emotions (especially weeping) and ritualized emotions (4.3).

2

Repetitive Rules (vidhi)

MOST RITUAL ACTIVITY is based on rule-governed behavior and more or less rigid prescriptions, which can be repeated, transferred, or cited. In the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, *vidhi* is used as the term for both "the overall order of a ritual" (Clooney 1990, 175) and for injunctions (cf. Chapter 9). It seems that these basic rules and operational patterns can be taken as the basis for a "grammar" of rituals. However, although rituals often involve language, strictly speaking, they are not themselves a language. So basically, any talk of a grammar of rituals is meaningless, or only possible on a metaphorical level. And yet there are two reasons it makes sense to pursue this figure of speech: on the one hand, it has long been customary in linguistics to include nonverbal communication in grammars, and on the other, people are forever trying to analyze the rules of rituals in linguistic terms. Hans H. Penner has summarized this discussion as follows:

> Human beings are sometimes described or defined as a basically rational, economic, political, or playing species. They may, however, also be viewed as ritual beings, who exhibit a striking parallel between their ritual and verbal behaviour. Just as language is a system of symbols that is based upon arbitrary rules, ritual may be viewed as a system of symbolic acts that is based upon arbitrary rules. The intricate, yet complex, relation between ritual and language can be seen in the history of various attempts to explain ritual behaviour. (Penner 2014)

In the following, I bring together these approaches and come up with some preliminary thoughts on "grammars" of rituals, including considerations on the modeling of such "grammars" with computer linguistic methods.

2.1 The Grammar of Rituals

The first to observe the similarities between language and rituals as well as their grammar(s) was the grammarian Patañjali (ca. 150 BCE) in his commentary on the grammarian Pāṇini,[2] written expressedly for the purpose of reflecting on different aspects of the grammar.[3] In his *Mahābhāṣya*, especially in the introductory part, the Paspaśāhnika, he argues that a grammarian, like a ritualist (or a Dharmaśāstrin) is engaged in protecting (*rakṣā*) the established order by prescribing rules for it. Although the order is established through usage and tradition, yet rules have to be formulated to uphold it (*dharma-niyama*).[4] The criterion, whether an expression is standard or not, is its usage alone. Grammar provides only rules to uphold the standard. When this is the case, then what about expressions that are not in active use anymore or obsolete (*aprayukta-śabda*). Here, the criterion that they are established and correct on the basis of usage is lacking. Their explanation cannot and should not be comprehended through the rules of grammar.

The position of the *siddhāntin* is that there should be rules for such expressions as well. A number of arguments are presented to show primarily that obsolete expressions are still valid expressions, either because they are, in fact, less used or differently used, or used in some other regions:

> With regard to common matters (*loka*) it is said that one should not eat tame cock or tame pig. But what is food (*bhakṣya*) is taken to satisfy hunger and following this it could also be possible to satisfy hunger by eating the meat of dog etc. With regard to this, a restriction (*niyama*) is made, namely, this is eatable and this is not eatable. Similarly, desire for a woman is because of sexual urge. Satisfaction of sexual urge is possible equally with a woman suitable for intercourse or not. With regard to this, a restriction (*niyama*) is made, namely, this is suitable and this is not suitable.

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2. I am very grateful to Anand Mishra for helping me to understand Patañjali's position better.

3. It was Louis Renou (1941–1942) who first pointed to this passage and the similarities and parallels between ancient Indian grammarians and ritual: "La pensée indienne a pour substructure des raisonnements d'ordre grammatical" (1941–1942, 164; 1972, 468) and "La structure de l'Aṣṭādhyāyī est la même que celles des textes rituels" (1972, 439). Lately, Elisa Freschi and Tiziano Pontillo (2013) have thoroughly demonstrated the similarities between grammatical and ritual thinking.

4. See MBh, Paspaśāhnika, Vārttika 4. It seems that the word *dharma* here means "upholding" in accordance with the root *dhṛ,* rather than "religious merit" as suggested by Joshi and Roodbergen (1986, 117); see also Aklujkar (2004).

> In Vedic instructions as well, it is said that a brahmin observes the vow (*vrata*) of living on milk, a kṣatriya on gruel and a *vaiśya* on Indian cottage cheese (*āmikṣā*). A vow however is for the sake of taking food. It is possible to observe the vow by using rice and meat as well. With regard to this, a restriction (*niyama*) is made.
>
> Similarly, it is said that the post for tying the sacrificial animals should be either of the *bilva* wood or of the *khadira* wood. Such a post is for the sake of tying the sacrificial animals. It is possible to tie the animal with any wooden post, standing or lying. With regard to this, a restriction (*niyama*) is made.
>
> Similarly, when the potsherds have been put near the fire, the Vedic mantra: *bhṛgūṇām aṅgirasām gharmasya tapasā tapyadhvam iti* [be you heated with the heat of the sweat of the Bhṛgu's and the Aṅgirasas] is recited. Even without the formula, the fire, whose nature is to burn, heats the potsherds. And with regard to that, a restriction (*niyama*) is made, namely, when it is being done in this way, it leads to bliss in the form of heaven (*abhyudaya*).
>
> In the same way here also, when meaning can be understood equally from the standard expressions (*śabda*) and non standard expressions (*apaśabda*), a restriction (*niyama*) is made for *dharma*, namely, that meaning is to be conveyed by standard expressions only and not by non-standard expressions, as usage in this manner leads to bliss in the form of heaven (*abhyudaya*). (MBh, Paspaśāhnika, pp. 84–86)

Finally, the example of "long-sacrifices" (*dīrghasattra*) is mentioned. It is proposed that although in present time we do not see the performance of the long-rituals, yet we still find the rules for them in the ritual handbooks (*kalpasūtra*).

> In the case of unused [words], [it is] like long sacrifices. Though they are not used, they must necessarily be taught by the rules of the Śāstras like protracted sacrifices. (MBh, Paspaśāhnika, Vārttika 8; cf. MBh, Paspaśāhnika, p. 95)

Or, as paraphrased by Ramkrishna Gopal Bhandarkar (1972, 90):

> Sid. (Vārt. *aprayukte dīrghasattravat*). Even if these words are not used, they should be essentially taught by rules just as long sacrificial sessions are. It is in this way. Long sacrificial sessions are such as last for a hundred years and for a thousand years. In modern times none

> whatever holds them, but the writers on sacrifices teach them by rules, simply because [to learn] what has been handed down by tradition from the Rsis is religiously meritorious. And moreover (Vārt. *sarve deśāntare*) all these words are used in other places.

Thus, there is no reason why the rules of grammar continue comprehending expressions that are not in (active) use anymore. To sum up, the tenor of the argumentation is that although the basis of rule formulation is usage, it is not necessary that the product of the application of these rules is still in active use.[5]

Frits Staal interpreted this example of "long-sacrifice" as "sacrificial rites that are in fact never performed."[6] The reason for such an interpretation may be the unclarity surrounding the *dīrghasattras*, which allegedly should last for hundreds, thousands, or many years or days, depending upon the varying statements in the tradition.[7] If one would go by the current opinion, then one would understandably consider *dīrghasattra*s, along with Staal, to be sacrificial rites which were "in fact never performed." Now, neither Patañjali nor Frits Staal had seen the *dīrghasattra*s. Patañjali, however, on the basis of the rules comprehending them, seems to accord them the status of "not in use anymore," but Staal, on the other hand, on the basis that these rites are not performed, accords the rules to be "framed by the ritualists for the performance of sacrificial rites that are in fact never performed." Staal's interpretation puts the argument of Patañjali in a misplaced context.

An example of this misplacement is the way Naphtali Meshel, in his remarkable book, *The "Grammar" of Sacrifice—A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly Writings*, proceeds. Attempting to show the Chomskyan distinction between performance and competence, he suggests that Patañjali is talking about the "*mahāsattra*s, imaginary sacrificial rituals that can last up to a thousand years."[8] The conclusion he draws is that Patañjali, like Chomsky, considers that there is a similarity between rituals

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5. It must be noted that the examples of obsolete expressions: *ūśa, tera, cakra, peca* are chosen perhaps deliberately by the author to later show that, in fact, they *are* used in Vedic literature although not so much in the common speech. See MBh, Paspaśāhnika, p. 99.

6. "[He] compared grammatical rules for forms that are not in use with the rules framed by the ritualists for the performance of sacrificial rites that are in fact never performed" (Staal 1972, 432).

7. See Joshi and Roodbergen 1986 135 n.549.

8. See Meshel 2014, 2. Meshel incidentally uses the expression *mahāsattra* instead of *dīrghasattra*, a minor correction that would, however, not add to any improvement of his interpretation.

and language, in that both have "grammatical" expressions that remain as-yet unuttered or imaginary. He concludes that Patañjali is of the opinion that "competence in either [ritual and language] cannot be acquired by direct exposure." As a consequence, "rituals must have 'grammars,' in the sense of a finite inventory of building blocks and a finite set of rules that can be used, once internalized, to generate an unlimited array of combinations" (ibid.).

The conclusion of Meshel, that Patañjali has this idea of grammar, is questionable because the rules of grammar or rituals do not guide the utterance of an expression or performance of any sacrifice. They instead restrict (*niyama*) them in order to bring them in accord with the standard or established usage. It is usage that guides the performance, and it is usage that guides the formulation of the rules as well. Moreover, it is usage that guides changes in the corpus of rules. Competence, therefore, is acquired by direct exposure.

In a non-Indian context, the first move to conceive of ritual as a language came from Franz Boas, who remarked in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911) that in its unconscious elements, ritual resembled language. But Boas only hinted at these parallels and did not go into them any further. Susan K. Langer, on the other hand, picked up on his remarks in her major work *Philosophy in a New Key* (1942) and spoke of a basic need for symbolism that finds expression in, among other things, ritual, which to her mind is the "language of religion":

> Magic, then, is not a method but a language; it is part and parcel of that greater phenomenon, *ritual*, which is the language of religion. Ritual is a symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. (S. Langer 1996, 49)

Edmund Leach expanded the concept and described rituals as "cultural sets of behaviour [that] function as language" (Leach 1968–1972, 523) and as an "unknown language" of which scholars should "discover the rules of grammar and syntax" (ibid., 524). For him, "all customary behaviour [is] a form of speech, a mode of communicating information" (ibid., 523). In his book, *Culture and Communication* (1976), he adds:

> I . . . assume that *all* the various non-verbal dimensions of culture, such as styles in clothing, village lay-out, architecture, furniture, food, cooking, music, physical gestures, postural attitudes and so on are organized in patterned sets so as to incorporate coded information in a manner analogous to the sounds and words and sentences of a natural language. (Leach 1976, 10)

> Notice how the same elements of ritual behavior keep on recurring, but linked together in different combinations and different sequences. The elements are like letters of the alphabet; in different combinations they can be made to say different things. (ibid., 88)

For Leach, the communicative function of rituals arises from their expressiveness. At the same time, Leach (1976, 19) also sees clear differences between verbal and nonverbal communication. Thus, unlike verbal language, the possibilities of nonverbal communication generating new comprehensible forms are, in his view, limited by customs and conventions. He also surmises that the syntax of nonverbal "language" must have a much simpler structure than written and verbal language. As Werlen (1984, 35) has rightfully noted, the first point does not, however, hold, because less formalized or weakly liturgical rituals do in fact evince a wide range of variation. Similarly, the generative nature of languages also applies to their use in rituals, regardless of how strongly codified or standardized they may be.

A decisive impetus regarding the communicative function of rituals was given by John L. Austin and John R. Searle and their speech act theory. The theory enables actions to be understood as performative expressions and words as thus able to actually do something. From this point on, it was no longer simply a matter of grasping language as a reference system, by which meanings and ideas can be exchanged or conveyed, but also of charting the communicative aspect of situations revolving around speech, language, and writing. The relationship between the verbal and nonverbal aspects of acts could no longer be resolved through speech act theory, which led to the question of a "grammar" of rituals being posed anew, particularly because the demand for an analysis of the structural features of the nonverbal side of actions, the pragmatics, was emphasized.

All of these and other approaches were, however, more programmatic than proto-grammatical, which is to say, not even an attempt to glean the structural rules of rituals by comparative means and to develop them into a grammar of some ritual,[9] or even a "universal" grammar (cf. Meshel 2014, 205f.). The analogies made between language(s) and ritual(s) relied chiefly on ascertaining formalism and regularity, and many were only basically interested in the functional aspects. In fact, even the performative and communicative theories of ritual were essentially functionalistic theories (Lawson and

9. Until now, only Michaels 2012b and Meshel 2014 are attempts to write such "grammars."

McCauley 1990, 56). Other works on the relationship between ritual and language focused chiefly on the semiotics of rituals[10] and the aspect of language *in* rituals,[11] and less on the question of rituals *as* language. This will be the sole concern in the following, and not a metaphorical use of the term "grammar," in keeping with Iwar Werlen, who writes:

> The metaphorical talk of grammar and language leads . . . to ambiguities: if one wishes to regard the rite as a structured constant that is a language, one should view grammar more in its narrower, structural, linguistic or generative, transformational sense. Otherwise all talk of ritual as language is reduced simply to the semiotic nature of rituals. (Werlen 1984, 35)

So what was missing and by and large continues to be so is an exact dividing of the "morphology," "syntax," "semantics," and "pragmatics" of rituals, even though the use of these terms is, as we will see, inappropriate. Frits Staal (1979a, refined by Seaquist 2004), Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley (1990), Richard Payne (2004), Roy E. Gane (2004), and Meshel (2014) have taken preliminary steps in this direction, concentrating mostly on the syntax (or structure) of rituals. But this quasi-linguistic field in their investigations was mostly overlooked or never touched on again.

There have been other reasons why no agreement has been reached as yet on a "grammar" of rituals. One is that the complex of actions termed "ritual" is viewed too heterogeneously. Another is that the term "ritual," which is in any case recent, is seen as too woolly, at times as misleading, and even as useless. Further, difficulties in demarcation between Religious Studies and Linguistics may have led to mutual reservations about this matter.

Certainly, non-verbal communication obeys different criteria than does language, and it is hard if not impossible to pinpoint and delineate actions in the same clear way as "letters" (Leach), words, or sentences. This problem, which could only lead to a general theory of action by the inclusion of cognitive theories, will only be touched on here and not tackled any further. This would first require additional findings as to whether and how rituals genuinely constitute a unique form of action. But the answer to this question depends crucially on whether one can name, mark, or individuate (Seaquist 2004, 63) enough mutually distinguishable criteria. And these criteria for

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10. E.g., Wiedenmann 1991, 201ff.; Kreinath 2006.

11. See, for instance, Grainger 1974; Werlen 1984; Rappaport 1999, 139ff.; Yelle 2003.

their part are nothing other than the elements of a possible grammar of rituals. In other words, the "grammars" of rituals have always to be mediated through languages, that is, ritual texts or descriptions of rituals. Bell (1997) was right in saying (with reference to Staal) that rituals are like a language, but are not a language. So the following will be concerned with compiling a list of just such criteria, in analogy to linguistic models, that is, making a start at mapping out the morphology, syntax, and pragmatics (for semantics, see Chapter 8).[12] Whether this will lead us to developing a deep structure or a deep grammar of rituals is anything but certain.[13] But there is a reasonable suspicion, which has been expressed often enough and has now been confirmed by computer linguistic approaches by the Heidelberg Ritualdynamik School and by Naphtali Meshel's coherent *"Grammar" of Σ* (2014, Pt. 2, 1–26), that ritual action may well conform to a "grammatical" structure.

Morphology or the Building Blocks of Rituals

> Just as in language we distinguish, in one and the same string of (tenaciously meaningful) linguistic units, the distant organizational level of (a) phonemes, (b) morphemes, (c) words and (d) sentences, similarly in Vedic ritual we have to distinguish, in one and the same string of (tenaciously meaningful) ritual episodes, distinct organizational levels. (Houben 2011, 163).

Indeed, rituals are pieced together by repeatable sections and sequences of actions, episodes, sub-rituals, sub-parts or rites, and much more. So it is not

12. To these aspects of linguistics, Payne (2004, 219) even wants to add spatial structure and historical linguistics.

13. Despite the criticism of Meshel (2014, 18) and despite first successful attempts in developing "grammars" of rituals, I remain cautious because the example Meshel has given is based on a very limited and solely textual ritual, the sacrifice of Σ, that is, the ancient Israelite Priestly sacrificial system as presented in the Pentateuch. He thus does not have to deal much with the complexities, variations, and performativity of practiced rituals, nor with rituals (or sub-rituals) that are not prescribed in liturgical texts. Does the obligatory marriage cake in a Hindu wedding belong to the traditional ritual? What about Victor Turner's aspect of liminality, the unruled parts of ritual behavior? What about the considerably high agency that (Hindu) priests have in varying prescribed rules ad hoc? What about the hyper-applicability of mantras (Patton 2005). Meshel neglects or underestimates these aspects. To bring all of this in a coherent, "finite set of generative rules, in part internalized, that are amenable to concise, formulaic notation, such that illicit combinations are immediately discernible"—thus Meshel's definition of a "grammar" of ritual (Meshel 2014, 19)—is, to say the minimum, a major challenge, if not impossible.

a question of single actions, but of complexes of actions, that is, lots of actions with, at times, lots of actors, which may extend over a long period. Moreover, these actions entail special ritual utensils, times, places, decorum, and such like. It may be difficult at times to distinguish these elements, but the fact that rituals can be taught and have a design (cf. Gladigow 2004, 76; Grimes 2000a) shows that this is not a fundamental problem, also because instruction in rituals consists of nothing else than the composition of ritual elements.

Even if, in some cases, it is a difficult and often hotly debated question as to what constitutes the smallest or self-contained units, "the 'atoms', as it were" and the "smallest conveyors of meaning in ritual behaviour" (Lang 1998, 444f.), ritual manuals and instructions are often nothing more than lists of such brief ritual acts, ritual utensils, times, places, and decorum. As an example, I take the description of the Gandharva or love marriage ritual in a Nepalese ritual handbook. I have selected this example because it is very short, due to the fact that normally, a Brahman priest does not sanction such rituals.

> Now, (the rules for) the *gandharva* marriage. Arrange two oil lamps and two *kalaśa* flasks on either side of the place where the (Nev.) *hvaṃkegu* (joining) will take place. Complete the flask (*kalaśa*) worship according to the rules. Place (the *kalaśa*s) on either side of the threshold stone. After the bride has arrived, send a portion of food to the Kalādyaḥ.[14] The eldest person (of the clan) should perform the worship of the Brahmin. (Make) the ritual decision for food (*annasaṃkalpa*), (offer) *dakṣiṇā*, recitation.[15] Taking of the *bali* (cooked food etc.) away, (give) blessings. Both the bride and the groom should offer *dakṣiṇā* according to their capacity. Here ends the *gandharva* marriage. (*Gandharvavivāha* section in *Daśakarmavidhi*, ed. Gutschow and Michaels 2012, 292)[16]

In this ritual, the discreteness of the ritual steps is evident, since almost all actions have been named by technical terms: *brāhmaṇapūjā, annasaṃkalpa, dakṣiṇā*, and so forth.

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14. Non-iconic deity that receives the ritual waste.

15. It is unlikely, though in Nepal not impossible, that Vedic texts are recited in this context.

16. *atha gandharvavivāha. hoṃkeyā| javakhava dvālyākalasa taye, vidhi| theṃ kalasapūjā dhunake. pikhāla|khusa javakhava taye, bhaumacā thenakā kalaṃkhabo tayā uciṣṭa choye.| nāyathakālina brāhmaṇapūjā anna|saṃkalpa dakṣiṇā, vācanaṃ, baliha|raṇaṃ, āśīrvāda, dulāhā dulahī ne|mhasena dakṣiṇā biye phako, iti ga|ndharvavivāha samāptam.*

Such individual steps have also been termed the building bricks of rituals. Michael Oppitz, for instance, uses this metaphor of building and analyzes it along the lines of a "construction plan": rituals are pieced together—from individual units; the units of rituals are prefabricated structural elements; the prefabricated structural elements are mobile and transposable; the transposition of structural elements follow a design; and the prefabricated parts pieced together according to the design produce a recognizable product—the ritual in question.

> The prefabricated structural elements or units from which rituals are made are the building blocks with which they are composed. They come simultaneously from a number of levels: a material level in the form of certain objects required to conduct the ritual at a set time and at a designated place; a linguistic level of ready formulated utterances such as prayers, magical formulae or recited myths; an acoustic level in a broader sense, with musical and other sonic means of expression; and a kinetic level with special actions, movements and gestures. (Oppitz 1999, 73)

Here, Oppitz assigns to the material level such things as the individual objects that either are manufactured for the ritual in question, or receive a specific meaning from it. The acoustic level includes various rhythms and sequences of melodies produced by ritual instruments. The building blocks on the linguistic level include, according to Oppitz, "isolated words, phrases and turns of speech or whole text sequences from different genres, with vocabularies that may come from everyday speech or that even occur within the ritual framework (secret languages, ritual languages, special archaisms)" (Oppitz 1999, 73). The building blocks on the kinetic level may include gestures, postural attitudes, dance figures, or even whole sequences of actions.

It is clearly an important prerequisite for a ritual "morphology" that the individual ritual elements are delineated—just like building blocks. Only then can the ritual elements become distinguishable and recognizable and thus repeatable. The parts of a ritual must be discrete and easily perused so as to allow the possibility of notation or scripts, ritual manuals, and liturgical compendia. And this goes hand in hand with the possibility of abbreviations, citations, transpositions, or rearrangements—in short, an analysis of syntactical structure.

And yet, the question remains as to what are the smallest or the self-contained units of a ritual. Unfortunately, there is some confusion with the terminology of these building blocks. Burkhard Gladigow (2004, 59), among

others, has termed the elements that form the lexicon of ritual "ritemes." Van Gennep (1960, 191), Staal (1979a), Grimes (1990, 9–10), Rappaport (1999), and many others call them "rites"[17]; Snoek (2006, 9) also calls "the smallest building-block of a ceremony (e.g. exchanging rings at a wedding)" a "rite," and the "group of rites" a "ceremony." Leach (1976, 88), following Lèvi-Strauss, calls them "elementary units," and Meshel (2014, 141) calls them "atomacts" (compounded from *atom* + *act*). I shall refer to these smallest units of rituals as "ritual elements," but since these elements can also become expanded, it is necessary to denote the smallest ritual action units differently. For this, I prefer the term "riteme." Thus, the decision for giving of food (*annasaṃkalpa*), in the example of the *Daśakarmavidhi* above, can be a set of different action units (ritemes), such as arranging the food, placing it on a special plate, handing it over to the priest, and so on. Similarly, the *pūjā* can be an independent ritual consisting of various ritual elements, such as *āvahana* (invocation) (see Chapter 7.3). But it can also be itself a ritual element in a larger ritual. The smallest units in rituals have therefore always to be marked, named, or otherwise individualized.

The ability to demarcate the ritual elements and the ritual as a whole is achieved through the components of rituals, as shown in Table I.1, especially the modal aspect of extraordinariness or elevation (e.g., authority, age, or orthodoxy). The determination of or limitations placed on the meanings of the ritual elements arise through reference to precisely these constants. An everyday action can be sanctified and made into a special, extraordinary, canonical, traditional, or, in fact, ritual action by regarding it as the repetition of an action that has been authorized since time immemorial by (religious) specialists (e.g., priests), ancestors, or deities, or by reference to either these persons or to especially sanctified values. Since almost all ritual operations are actions that also appear in nonritual contexts, these criteria refer to the frame and mode of action. Thus, the action of "pouring water over a statue" becomes the ritual act of "blessing or consecrating a statue" by referring to the aforementioned constants. Were it not for such distinctions, the discussion about rituals would be meaningless.

For example, the ritual element—"Hand over the *pūjā* plate with *siddhir astu*" (cf. Gutschow and Michaels 2012, 294 passim)—has a number of implications. It does not mean just to give a plate to somebody beyond the ritual context. Instead, the giver is the Brahman priest, and the taker is the ritual

17. Recently, however, Grimes (2013, 232) also uses "element" as a term for the "smallest unit of ritual studies."

patron (*yajamāna*). It is also implicit that the plate must be given with the right hand and received with both hands, and that it cannot be just any plate—but must be a special one made out of silver, copper, or brass. All of this implicit knowledge has to be marked (or annotated explicitly as a "theme" in computer linguistic terms) in order to differentiate it, for instance, from an ordinary handing over of any plate during daily meals. This happens through the ritual framing and the reciting of the verse beginning with *siddhir astu*.

With such clarification, it is possible to develop a system of notation of rituals.[18] Staal, for instance, marked the ritemes with small letters (a, b, c . . .) and the ritual elements with capital letters (A, B, C . . .). Both can either be repeated (a-b-a) or varied (a1, a2, a3 . . .). These units can then be brought in linear or tree structures, for example, A (a + b + c . . .) → B (a + b + c . . .), and so on. The precise description of the combination of such explicit and implicit units characterizes the "syntax" of the ritual as a whole.

In keeping with the possible generativity of rituals and thus their "grammaticality," it is necessary to compile a finite quantity or corpus of ritual elements—the ritual inventory—in such a way that, together with an also finite number of formal rules, produces an infinite number of rituals and thus allows new rituals as well as deviations within the ritual. Only then will we have a formalism that does not rule out variants and dynamics, but that permits them in a circumscribed manner focused on the criteria of extraordiness we have named: authority, age, orthodoxy, and so forth. Essentially, these criteria correspond with those I have termed *religio*. In a Hindu context, these criteria could be mantra (authority), "Vedic" text (old age), Brahman (orthodoxy), and framing, for example, *saṃkalpa* (that is, determination of the point in time by astral sciences, marking out the sacred arena, and the like).

In the case of a phenomenological "morphology" of a certain ritual or a coherent group of rituals, among other things, one would now work out which are the smallest units or elements that can be repeated and transposed, but not the spontaneous or arbitrary components (although they also constitute part of the rituals in which they appear). So, in most cases, we would be dealing with ritemes and elements that are premeditated, prefabricated, archived, and recorded in scripts or ritual manuals.

More specifically, the ritual elements can refer to the action repertoire, as described in Table 2.1 (Ritual action repertoire):[19]

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18. For the notation of Staal, see Seaquist 2004, 71–98, and Meshel 2014, xxi–xxiii and Pt. 2.

19. For an attempt at writing a "grammar" of Newar life-cycle rituals, see Michaels 2012b.

Table 2.1 Ritual action repertoire (selection)

Action referring to . . .	Action repertoire (general)
Agency	Choice and appointment of the persons involved in the ritual, especially the ritual specialists and helpers
	Invitation of the ritual participants and guests
	Involvement of spectators, observers, etc.
Body	Festive or new garments, fancy costumes, masks, veils, changing or taking off shoes
	Putting on jewels and finery (necklaces, rings, feathers, makeup), headwear (hats, crowns, laurel wreaths)
	Changes in hair (tonsures, new hairdos, wigs)
	Ablutions (*snāna, samavārtana*), anointment (*abhiṣeka*) or injury to body (wounds, tattoos, circumcision)
	Out-of-the-ordinary movements (change of location, processions, circumambulations (*pradakṣiṇā*), practiced steps, parades, escorts)
Language and gestures	(Increased) literacy (minutes, documents, certificates, ritual texts, myths)
	Ceremonious speeches in restricted codes (addresses, singing, reciting texts, soliciting blessings, prayers, supplications; new names [*nāmakaraṇa*], use of mantras in ritual actions), or silence
Décor	Decorated, purified arena, temple, place of sacrifice, sacred sites (*yajña, maṇḍapa*), flowers, fire, incense, light, candles
	Acoustic means: music, drums, or bells
Framing	Setting special times (leisure time, working hours, evenings, determined according to horoscope or astral sciences)
	Formulaic resolution to perform a ritual (*saṃkalpa*)
Objects	Involvement of special offerings or utensils, e.g., gifts, paraphernalia, ritual objects, and instruments
	Food for shared meals, hospitality, or offerings.

The problem with any morphology of ritual is that if units of action are taken as the smallest building blocks, this does not correspond to the morphemes of a language, but at most to the sentences and thus more to a syntactic structure. This is a point not lost on Lawson and McCauley (1990, 84): "Returning, then, to the analogy with linguistics, it is the *action* that is the analogue of the *sentence* (which is the fundamental unit of linguistic analysis)." To be sure, it is difficult and time-consuming to determine the smallest units (ritemes) for every ritual unless specific computer linguistic methods are developed to "read" ritual descriptions almost automatically. What does seem more likely, though, is that we can work out a basic stock of delimitable ("citable," as it were) ritual elements within a more or less closed cultural framework, using rituals that are liturgically standardized, or that extend over a lengthy period of time that has to be determined. This would have to be performed at the beginning of a ritual analysis so that diachronic developments can be taken into consideration. Not every change in a ritual makes it necessary to develop a new "grammar," but at a certain stage, it might be appropriate to describe the system anew—"much like the grammars of Old, Middle, and Modern English differ significantly" (Meshel 2014, 22).

This was done, for instance, in exemplary fashion by Yasuhiro Tsuchiyama (2005, 51–94) when he demonstrated that the chief significance of the old Indian consecration ritual element (*abhiṣeka*) in the Vedic sources lies in the transfer of power and glory (*varcas*) to the offerer. The term also retained this significance when it was transferred to the consecration of statues. In more recent ritual texts, the Gṛhyasūtras (*abhiṣeka*) came, however, to be mingled with the ritual bath (*snāna*), and consequently was no longer distinguishable as a Vedic ritual element in its own right.

The Structure or Composition of Rituals

Only once the ritual elements are related to one another does the ritual emerge as a whole. Each ritual element and each detail must be understood as part of an entire ritual. But the entire ritual consists solely of the "syntactical" connection of the ritual elements. "Syntax" (Greek *σύνταξις*) means "putting in order, together," and in a ritual, the ritual elements are put together into larger units and sequences, partly, it may be presumed, according to universal patterns and rules. According to Oppitz (1999), the syntax of rituals is their "construction plan."[20] And Seaquist (2004, 5) takes syntax

20. Similarly Kohl 2006.

to be almost identical with "grammar." "First, rituals have a formal structure similar in important respects to the formal structure of natural language at the level of sentence; thus we may speak by analogy of a *syntax of ritual*."

Let us return to the above-mentioned Gandharvavivāha, or love marriage ritual. The linear structure of this ritual handbook (*Daśakarmavidhi*) is the following (with capital letters for ritual elements and small letters for the ritemes mentioned within the ritual elements): *kalaśapūjā* (A [a + b + c + d]) → *kalādyaḥpūjā* (B) → *brāhmaṇapūjā* (C) → *annasaṃkalpa* (D) → *dakṣiṇā* (E) → *vācana* (F) → *bali* (G) → *āśīrvāda* (H) → *dakṣiṇā* (E). However, the structure A(a + b + c + d)BCDEFGHE is only the surface structure. The actual ritual includes implicit actions, most important, the core element—the *hvaṃkegu* or joining of the couple (X). Taking this into consideration, we get the following structure, which also marks *annasaṃkalpa* (D) and *dakṣiṇā* (E) as one joint sub-element: A (a + b + c + d) → B → C → (D + E) → [X] → F → G → H → E. The reason I take D and E belonging closely together as a sub-element lies in the statistical evidence given by the "Modeling Ritual" Project described in the Appendix. In this database, we find *annasaṃkalpa* always followed by *dakṣiṇā*—independent of the ritual type (and meaning): in the rice-feeding ceremony (*annaprāśana*), the night vigil for the goddess Ṣaṣṭḥī (*chaithī*), the boy's initiation *mekhalabandhana*, or in the Gandharvavivāha. We find these instances also in parallel texts of the same ritual. We can therefore conclude that the deep structure of *annasaṃkalpa* implies *dakṣiṇā*. The database also shows density of this "frame" on a time scale from which we learn that *dakṣiṇā* does not always come at the end of rituals, although there is an accumulation towards the end.

The analysis of the Gandharvavivāha is just a very simple example of a "syntactical" structure. Although several scholars have spoken about "syntactical" rules of rituals, they have seldom specified such rules[21]—let alone a system or "grammar" of such rules, of which only a few attempts of structuring and formalizing rituals have been published.[22]

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21. This, for instance, holds true for Edmund Leach, whom Lawson and McCauley (1990, 56) criticize that he "nowhere suggests what such rules might look like."

22. Staal 1979a on the *darśapūrṇamāsa*, *paśubandha*, *agniṣṭoma* and *agnicayana*; Minkowski 1989 on *iṣṭi*; Payne 2004 on the *agnihotra*; Michaels 2012b on Newar life-cycle rituals; and Meshel 2014 on the ancient Israelite sacrifice.

The first more rigorous attempt to chart the syntax of rituals was undertaken by Frits Staal.[23] He refused the traditional theories of rituals that tried to explain them functionally through religious ideas and social structures. Instead, he went so far as to claim that ritual should be studied not as religion, but as syntax without semantics and semiotics, which is to say in purely formal terms. In actual fact, Staal simply arrives at an analysis of the various possibilities for sequencing ritual elements. Taking the old Indian fire ritual (*agnicayana*; cf. Staal 1987a), he demonstrates various recurring methods for arranging ritual elements. He divides the complex ritual into smaller units (A, B, C . . .) so as then to tease out a number of structures, for example, embedding or framing (B → ABA), modification (A^1 → A^2), inversion (ABA, BAB), insertion (BC → BAC), mirroring (ABA^1, $AABA^1A^2$), and serial sequences ($A^1A^2A^3$ . . .). Yet despite the limited range of patterns in these ritual sequences, Staal (1989, 91) considers the complex Vedic ritual to be unlimited in its ritual possibilities. His syntactical theory of rituals is based on his theory of meaninglessness and is influenced by generative transformational grammar.

With greater rigor even than Staal, E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley have developed a syntax of rituals that comes the closest to date to a "grammar" of rituals, particularly since they make precisely this claim while likewise drawing on Chomsky (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 78). To begin with, they note "striking similarities between speaker-listeners' knowledge of their languages and participants' knowledge of their religious ritual systems" (McCauley and Lawson 2002, 4). They also claim that "(b)oth languages and religious ritual systems are examples of what we call 'symbolic-cultural systems'" (ibid.), and "that a system of rules much like the grammar of a natural language can account for the patterned structure of religious ritual" (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 56). However, what they actually develop, as they freely admit (ibid., 77), is more a theory of ritual competence than of ritual behavior.

Their abstract and complex theory, which can only briefly be summarized here, is made up of four parts (see Lawson and McCauley 1990, 103):

(1) A system for representing actions ("Action Representation System, ARS"), containing the underlying syntactic components and the formative rules that allow symbolic categories to be realized by action elements;

23. Staal 1979a, 1979b, 1989; cf. also Seaquist 2004 and Chapter 8 for Staal's theory of the meaninglessness of rituals.

(2) Religious concepts ("Religious Conceptual Scheme") penetrate the ARS, charging the ARS, as it were, with semantic and cultural components;
(3) A set of "universal principles of religious ritual," such as a principle of "superhuman agency" or corresponding agents (culturally postulated superhuman agents, CPS-agents),[24] which underlies all religious rituals, or a principle according to which religious rituals always demand an object[25]; and
(4) A kind of self-control within the system ("Assessment of the Status of the Represented Religious Action"), in which the Object Agency Filter—a filter that makes rituals into universals but not innate actions—also plays a part.

With this scheme, in which I would see No. (1) as the action theory, No. (2) as the *religio*, and Nos. (3) and (4) as the generative aspect of rituals, Lawson and McCauley dissect rituals into their component parts and analyze them in structural "formation trees," which are openly based on linguistic sentence analyses. Apart from the possibility of empirically testing and formalizing rituals, this theory is particularly interesting due to the question it poses about the formative rules of a ritual.

A number of examples can be named of just such a formative, with some reservations "syntactical" rules, with which one may glean the dependence of the parts on the whole or on one another:[26]

- Repetition (*avāpa* in Pūrvamīmāṃsā)[27] or reduplication of ritual elements, partly interrupted by other ritual sequences, is a common structural element, for example, the repetition of mantras or the *darśapūrṇamāsa* ritual within the *agnicayana*.[28] Embedding, framing, and mirroring can be

24. In their more recent publications, Lawson and McCauley have altered their terminology. The CPS-agents are now called CI-agents, which is to say "agents possessing counterintuitive properties." The reason for this is given in McCauley and Lawson 2007, n.7: "We abandon that usage [of CPS], since cultures are not the sort of things that postulate anything, so far as we can tell."

25. Prayer, according to Lawson and McCauley (2002, 13), is a religious action but not a ritual.

26. See Chapter 2.2 and Chapter 3.1 for the application of some of these rules.

27. In brackets the proximate terminology of the Kalpasūtras and the Pūrvamīmāṃsā.

28. In the ŚBr (11.1.1), the difference between an element (*tantra*) that is performed just once but helps many and an element repeatedly performed is nicely expressed: "What, done once, helps many, is called *tantra*. For instance, a light made in the middle of Brahmans [which illuminates all—A.M.]. What helps through [its] repetition is *avāpa*. For instance, the anointing of these same Brahmins" (transl. Freschi and Pontillo 2013, 37).

variants of repetition. Whether symmetry is a ritual key structure (Seaquist 2004, 155f.) is debated.

- Mirroring ($A^1BCDCEA^2$): *prayāja* ("pre-offering") – *anuyāja* ("post-offering") in the same *ritual* (ibid.).
- Embedding (CDC): for example, *pradhāna – upāṃśuyāja – pradhāna*, that is, the oblation of ghee between the *pradhāna homas* in an *iṣṭi* (cf. Minkowski 1989, 418)
- Framing: the emphatic commencement and emphatic end of a ritual, for example, *saṃkalpa – dakṣiṇā* or *āvahana – visarjana*.

- Seriality (A^1, A^2, A^3 . . .): ritual elements recurring in sequences that can also spread to other rituals.
- Substitution (*ādeśa, pratinidhi*): the replacement of one ritual element by another viewed as equal in value (cf. also McCauley and Lawson n.d., 16). Thus, in the *annaprāśana*, normally a goose (*haṃsa*) is required, but in Nepal, it is every now and then substituted with a duck (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 46).
- Option (*vikalpa*): the optional or alternative employment of a number of ritual elements viewed as equal in value.[29]
- Fusion: the merging of two or more different ritual elements, for example, *abhiṣeka*, which is also *snāna*.
- Reduction and extension: abbreviations of the combinations of ritual elements, for example, *adyādi* ("today etc.") used as an as abbreviation of the particulars of the *intentio ritualis* (*deśakāla-saṃkalpa*), but also extended to a very elaborated form (see Chapter 1.1).
- Omission: the elision of stipulated ritual elements, more the rule than the exception, for example, *homa* in the marriage ritual, which is prescribed in almost all handbooks but more and more omitted in practice.
- Transfer (*atideśa*): transferring ritual elements to another ritual, such as a ritual quote, for example, the transfer of *homa* into Buddhist and other religions (see Chapter 7.2).
- Modification (*ūha, vikāra*): the necessary changes of ritual elements in processes of transfer and such.
- Intermission: staged interruptions in the succession of ritual sequences; sometimes rituals are interrupted "in order to carry out another 'disgressive' rite" (Minkowski 1989, 419). Whether nonliturgical parts of rituals are ritual elements or episodes depends on the formalization of these actions.
- Insertions (also called *avāpa*): rites that are "inserted within the basic procedure (*tantra*)" (Freschi and Pontillo 2013, 25–26).

29. Cf. for the technical the use of *vā*: Renou 1941–1942 and Mishra 2010, 95

These and other "syntactical" structures are internalized by the ritual participants like the syntax of a language. Even if individuals are unable perhaps to explain the rules of the rituals, they nevertheless know when something has gone astray or is wrong (cf. Huesken 2007 and Chapter 3.2). As is echoed by Lawson and McCauley,

> Although the performers of the ritual may not be able to explain the rules, they do *know* what is to be done when the rules are broken. The parallel between ritual and language at this point is quite striking. (McCauley and Lawson n.d., 11)

Just as it was the case with morphology, the metaphor of syntax for rituals soon reaches its limits. If ritual elements are already defined essentially as "sentences," the syntax in the rituals basically revolves round textual linguistics, which is to say the relationships between the sentences.

Pragmatics or Agency of Rituals

If rituals can be grasped under certain premises as a kind of special language, then they also require not only ritual competence but also communicative competence. This means that factors must be included such as their suitability for a situation, the relationship between the ritual participants and observers, and the cultural context. Moreover, for religious rituals it is significant that the addressee is mostly a supernatural being, so that the communicative situation occurs with answers and responses that are not directly perceivable, or are only so to the participants.

Of the greatest importance to a ritual are the performative utterances that go to make it up so that it is no longer simply a communiqué but also an action. "The crucial point is that religious rituals (despite their various unusual qualities) are actions too" (McCauley and Lawson 1990, 9). Pertinent here, for instance, are those (speech) acts in which everyday actions are turned into ritual actions by explicit explanations. When a formal declaration (*saṃkalpa*) is made to remain awake the whole night long, a vigil becomes a ritual action. But anyone who remains awake without this declaration does not usually benefit from the vigil, even though Hindu theologians have always claimed that the unconscious, unwilling and nonintended worship of deities gains the same merit.[30]

30. See Michaels 1996 and 2008, 183–92 for such a case in the Śivarātri myths.

With the formal structures shown in Chapter 1.1, the *saṃkalpa* reveals a pragmatical and syntactical congruence with speech acts, as formulated by John L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searle (1969). According to them, a speech act is a verbal and performative utterance that effects something in the moment it is carried out, even if it relates to future actions. As Searle (1969, 55–71) has explained with reference to promises, an illocutionary act of this kind has to fulfill certain nonlinguistic criteria apart from a certain linguistic form. For example, the promised action must not yet have been performed, the listener must value the action, and the action would not simply be done regardless. Promising one will give someone else a clip on the ear when one has already done so is not a particularly successful promise. By not merely asking whether sentences are true, but also whether they prove successful, Searle introduced a decisive turn in the analysis of language and with that of ritual.

Much the same is true of a promissory act, such as an oath, vow (*vrata*), pledge, troth, a solemn declaration or assurance, a curse, truth spells, professions, a confession of faith (*credo*), or indeed *saṃkalpas*. In most cases, promissory speech acts are connected with religious affirmations. With regard to rituals, I subsume promissory acts and signals together under the term *intentio solemnis* and refer by that to every act that makes an everyday action a ritual one. Put differently and more simply: spontaneous, chance, arbitrary actions are not rituals, while actions performed with an *intentio solemnis* can be.

The concept of agency, which will be dealt with in Chapter 3, is also special when it comes to the pragmatics of rituals, because many rituals also assume the involvement of supernatural agency (by deities or spirits), and groups or "corporative subjects (families, clans, brotherhoods, ritual circles, military units, etc.) can also appear in ritual contexts as 'agents'" (Krüger, Nijhawan, and Stavrianopoulou 2005, 6; my translation). Agency can, in that case, be described as a "transformative power to act" or "competence for action."

In the field of pragmatics, I would also include the gestural, decorative, and acoustic parts of rituals (cf. Chapter 4.1).

Meshel has introduced the term "praxemics" for the study of ritual form "from the point of view of physical acts" (2014, 130). In his *Grammar of Σ*, six components constitute a praxeme:

> (1) atomact (compounded from *atom+act*), an elementary physical act in a series of acts; (2) agent, the performer of an atomact; (3) object, the physical body that is manipulated during this atomact, almost

> invariable *materia sacra*; (4) target, to which the object is applied; (5) location, the spot where the agent is located when performing the atomact; and (6) time-frame, the point in time at which a atomact is performed. Every praxeme consists of an agent and exactly one atomact, and at times one or more of the other four components. (Meshel 2014, 130)

Meshel argues that "previous contributions to the topic of grammar of ritual have considered what is here called praxemics as the central aspect of ritual grammar" and criticizes this simplistic reduction to a "theoretical framework for the analysis of deeds" (ibid., 132f.). He believes that his introduction of "zoemics,[31] jugation[32] and hierarchies[33] should suffice that such unilateral logic is faulty" (ibid., 133). I would not go so far because zoemics and jugation actually concern the classificatory or cognitive system underlying the *material sacra* and "hierarchies" in Meshel's sense. They are just two "syntactical" rules of many. The supposed reduction of a "grammar" of rituals on acts is justified by the fact that simply thinking something is not a ritual, but utterances (cf. Meshel ibid, 133 n.11) are already a form of action. The other components in Meshel's list are the central part of any action, and it needs more to discern them as components of *ritual* action.

As seen, the problems of developing a "grammar" of rituals are not yet solved. The difficulties with regard to the "morphology" of rituals lie chiefly in determining the smallest units of a ritual, which are sometimes understood as actions, sometimes as objects. It is easier to demonstrate these in highly liturgical and thus formalized rituals than in expressively ritualized performances, but it will scarcely be possible to draw up a universal morphology. Similarly, the study of the "syntax" of rituals will result at most in possibilities of teasing out comparable structures, while a deep structure of some kind will not be revealed. The simultaneity of actions in rituals is, however, still unsolved. The "pragmatics" of rituals, on the other hand, constitutes an area of its own, in some ways a genuine field of ritual studies. It will be important to tie in here with semiotic theories, and in particular with theories of agency and performance. As we will see in Chapter 8, the "semantics" of rituals is the most controversial topic, not least because

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31. The "study of the classes of animals used in ritual sacrifice" (Meshel 2014, xxi).

32. The "joining of two or more animal or non-animal sacrificial materials"(ibid., xx).

33. The "study of the composition of sacrificial types wherein one or more sacrificial types constitute another type" (ibid., ixx).

religious convictions often play a part here. Independent of the question of whether rituals are meaningless or not, it can nevertheless be said that as a rule, rituals are polysemantic (and only in this sense are they "meaningless").

It will be decisive for the development of ritology or ritual studies in the narrower sense that common structures are elicited from as many rituals as possible. This will only be possible once conventions have been developed for the notation of rituals and ritual elements. On the road to this goal, the analogy between a "grammar" of rituals and a grammar of language is useful. But, for the moment, the main concern is to describe rituals as precisely as possible in their relevant context and to record them with the means provided by other media, that is, to segment them and present them in their all manifold pragmatic and semiotic, as well as culturally and socially significant connections. That is to say, we must devise a kind of grammar by which we can understand rituals and, if desired, conduct or perform them ourselves. This grammar would be nothing other than a set of rules for rituals, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's remark in his *Philosophical Investigations* (Nr. 199) needs no more than a slight modification in this context (as follows, inside the brackets):

> To obey a rule, to make a report, to given an order, to play a game of chess [or to do a ritual] are *customs* (uses, institutions). To understand a sentence [or a ritual element] means to understand a [ritual] language. To understand a [ritual] language means to be master of a technique. (Wittgenstein 1958, no. 199)

2.2 A Preliminary "Grammar" of Newar Life-Cycle Rituals

As demonstrated in the previous section, a one-to-one mapping of the morphology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics of rituals in a manner analogous to linguistic analysis is, to some extent, inadequate. However, there is sufficient evidence for the assumption that ritual behavior is structured and that many of these structures can be represented in such a way that general rules surface. The description and analysis of these structures and rules are nothing else than a grammar, the "grammar" of rituals. In this section, I wish to carve out some of the elements and rules of Newar life-cycle, especially marriage rituals, as they appear in Bhaktapur and other places of the Kathmandu Valley.

In Nepal, "[e]ach caste, and indeed each local clan, has its own traditional ways of performing these [life-cycle] rites" (Gellner 1992, 200). Some castes call a Hindu (Brahman) or Buddhist (Gubhāju) priest for their rites of passage; other castes perform it without any priest. Particularly high castes celebrate weddings with great outlay involving assistant priests and helpers and considerable amounts of catered food with sometimes hundreds of invited guests, whereas many other marriages, especially in the lower castes and in cases of elopement are performed with little or no ritual. And even among high castes, a considerable number of love marriages are carried out with very simplified rites especially when there is no consent of the family members. In these cases, it is sometimes enough when the groom parts in a temple the bride's hair with vermilion (Nepali 1965, 231).

The Smārta Wedding Tradition

If performed traditionally, high caste marriages among the Parbatiyās or Indo-Nepalese in Nepal are normally executed by following the course of events as presented in marriage manuals. Dadhirāma Marāsini's (1882–1963) popular *Vivāhapaddhati* (part of his *Karmakāṇḍabhāskara*), for example, lists the following rites (Table 2.2 lists marriage rituals). As most such Nepalese manuals, this text is based on the *Pāraskara-Gṛhyasūtra*, a domestic manual in the Mādhyandina school of the *Vājasaneyisaṃhitā*, although Marāsini sometimes refers to other Gṛhyasūtras.

Table 2.2 The marriage rituals according to Dadhirāma Marāsini's *Vivāhapaddhati*[1]

Rules for the engagement (*vāgdānavidhi*)
Asking for a girl (*kanyāyācana*)
Betrothal (*vāgdāna*)
Worship of the groom's father, etc. (*varapitrādipūjana*)
Rules for choosing the groom (*varaṇavidhi*)
Worship and choosing of the arriving groom at the threshold or door (*dvārāgatavarapūjanavaraṇe*), his solicitation (*varaprārthanā*) and worship (*varapūjana*)
Giving of *argha* (*arghadāna*) with mantra (*arghapradānamantra*)

(*continued*)

Table 2.2 (continued) The marriage rituals according to Dadhirāma Marāsini's *Vivāhapaddhati*[1]

Solicitation of the groom (*varaprārthanā*)
Worship with fragrant material, etc. (*gandhādibhirvaraṇa*)
Rules for the marriage (*vivāhavidhi*): worship of the groom (*varapūjana*)
Ceremonial address (*sambodhana*)
Offering a seat (*viṣṭaradāna*)
Gift of water for feet washing (*pādyadāna*)
Again gift of a seat (*punarviṣṭaradāna*)
Gift of *arghya*-water (*arghadāna*)
Gift of water for mouth cleaning (*ācamanīyadāna*)
Gift of *madhuparka* (*madhuparkadāna*)
Taking *madhuparka* (*madhuparkaprāśana*)
Touching of body parts (*aṅgālambhana*)
Cutting of *kuśa* grass (*kuśacchedana*)
Establishing the fire (*agnisthāpana*)
Clothing of groom and bride (*varakanyāyor vastraparidhāpana*)
Posing them opposite each other (*parasparasammukhīkaraṇa*)
Gift of the girl (*kanyādāna*)
Ritual intention (*saṃkalpa*)
Solicitation of the groom (*varaprārthanā*)
Establishing the gift (*dānapratiṣṭhā*)
Recitation of mantras by the groom (*varadvārāmantrapāṭha*)
Going out (*niṣkramaṇa*)
Mutual view of the couple (*parasparasamīkṣaṇa*)
Marriage *homa* (*vivāhahoma*)
Selecting the Brahman (*brāhmaṇavaraṇa*), the *Brahman* priest (*brahmavaraṇa*) and the *hotṛ* (*hotṛvaraṇa*), strewing *kuśa* grass around the fireplace (*paristaraṇa*), placing of vessels (*pātrāsādana*), and other ritual utensils
Preparing the ground for the *homa* (*homaprṣṭhabhūmisampādana*)

Table 2.2 (continued) The marriage rituals according to Dadhirāma Marāsini's *Vivāhapaddhati*[1]

Ritual intention for the *homa* (*homasaṃkalpa*)
Various *homas: āghārājyahoma, mahāvyāhṛtihoma, pañcavāruṇīhoma, rāṣṭrabhṛddhoma, jayahoma, abhyātānahoma, guptāhuti, lājāhoma*
(Other vivāha rites)
Seizing of the bride's hand by the groom (*pāṇigrahaṇa*)
Stepping on a stone (*aśmārohaṇa*)
Singing a song (*gāthāgāna*)
Circumambulation of the fire (*agnipradakṣiṇā*)
Offering the remaining roasted rice corns (*avaśiṣṭalājāhoma*)
Seven steps (*saptapadī*)
Sprinkling the bride (*abhiṣecana*)
Looking at the sun (*sūryodīkṣaṇa*)
Looking at the polar star (*dhruvodīkṣaṇa*)
Touching the heart (*hṛdayālambhana*)
Giving of vermilion (*sindurārpaṇa*)
Placing the bride left of the groom (*varasya vāmabhāge vadhvāḥ sthāpana*)
Concluding rites (*homa*, etc.)
Offering for Sviṣṭakṛt (*sviṣṭakṛdhoma*)
Gift of a filled vessel (*pūrṇapātradāna*)
Dismissal of the *praṇītā* (*praṇītāvimoka*)
Offering of sacrificial grass (*barhirhoma*)
Full ladle oblation (*pūrṇāhuti*)
"Making of the three lives" (*trāyuṣakaraṇa*), i.e., marking the forehead and other parts of the body with the ashes of the sacrificial fire
Sacrificial payment (*dakṣiṇā*)

[1]Adapted from Bechler 2007: 46–48.

Comparing major Gṛhyasūtras of the Smārta tradition (Āpastamba, Aśvalāyana, Gobhila, Hiraṇyakeśin, Pāraskara, and Śāṅkhyāyana Gṛhyasūtra), it becomes evident that the following sub-rites must be regarded as indispensable since they are mentioned by all of them (cf. Winternitz 1892, 18): Astrological fixing of the auspicious moment, choosing/receiving the groom (*kanyāvaraṇa*), clasping of hands of the couple or *dextarium iunctio* (*pāṇigrahaṇa*), seven steps (*saptapadī*), circumambulation of the fire (*agnipradakṣiṇā*), stepping on a stone (*aśmārohaṇa*), oblation into the fire with roasted rice (*lajāhoma*), viewing the polar star (*dhruvadarśana*), and cohabitation (after *caturthī*). These ritual elements can be considered as the backbone of the Smārta marriage ritual and added by some other common forms of Hindu weddings, such as the exchange of goods, food or vermilion; the giving of the bride as a *dāna*, "gift"; presenting of clothes, garlands, rings, and ornaments; Vedic sayings; walking around the fire; seating from the same plate; and going home (*vivāha*, lit. "taking away (the bride from her parental home)," the most popular expression for the whole wedding) most Parbatiyā marriage rituals indeed follow this same pattern, even if the number of variants is significant.

The Newar Wedding Tradition

Hindu Newars, too, basically follow a similar procedure. Table 2.3 is a list of the main sub-rites of a Hindu *Daśakarmavidhi* handbook from Bhaktapur, edited by Gutschow and Michaels (2012).[34] However, interspersed in this manuscript are elements that one more or less only finds among the Newar community (here marked with +).

Despite many congruencies between Hindu Parbatiyā and Hindu Newar marriage handbooks, it becomes evident that Newar marriage handbooks mention specific ritual elements that cannot be found in the Brahmanical-Sanskritic texts. They try to incorporate the Great Tradition but not at the price of neglecting local customs or ritual elements that might even come from a folk or tribal background. Newar Hindu marriage handbooks, thus, show a pattern that differs in several aspects from the Parbatiyā structure. Besides repeatedly prescribing Newar ritual elements, they list a number of rites that diverge from the Gṛhyasūtras and partly follow a different sequence.

34. Anonymous author, Nevārī, personal handbook of the priest Mahendra Raj Sharma, Bhaktapur, dated around 1920.

Table 2.3 Ritual elements in a Newar *Daśakarmavidhi*

I. At the house of the bride and the groom

1. Preliminary rites (*pūrvasevā*)

Ancestor worship (*yavodaka*)

Worship of the *pīṭha* deities

2. The day before (Nev. *dusala*)

+[1] Cutting of toenails of the priest and other persons

+ Worship of clay at the potter's place (for making the Alīdyaḥ[2])

Reception of the groom (in royal marriage) and ancestor worship (*yavodaka*)

Ritual welcoming (Nev. *lasakusa*) of the bride or groom, with offering *svastika* seat, worship with lamp, measuring vessel and key, offering of sandalwood and flowers, *pratiṣṭhā*, waving the lamp

Conclusion of the *dusala* worship with ritual payment of the priest (*dakṣiṇā*), worship in a nearby temple, grinding of lentils by the groom, leading of the groom in the upper floor, meal (*dusalajā*) for the marrying persons

3. Rituals of the main day

+ Arrangements for and worshipping of the sacrificial flasks (*kalaśa*)

Offering of oil and vermilion, purification of the barber, + grinding of lentils by the groom, and paring his toenails, bathing, and change of the dresses

At the auspicious moment (*sāit*), applying vermilion with presenting two golden rings and music

+ Offering of *phalina*[3] food

Concluding rites of the flask worship with *dakṣiṇā, pratiṣṭhā, visarjana*, etc.

II. At the house of the groom[4]

4. Ritual welcoming and purification of the groom

Reception of the bride with presenting dresses and ornaments

+ Grinding of lentils by the groom

+ Offering of *phalina* food

Ritual intention (*saṃkalpa*) for *kanyādāna* by the father-in-law

Worshipping and praising the groom as Viṣṇu

5. Gift of the girl (*kanyādāna*) I: Welcoming of the groom:

Preparing the seat (*viṣṭara*), joining of the hands of the couple (*pāṇigrahaṇa*), washing the feet (*pādya*), *arghya* water, water for mouth rinsing (*ācamanīya*), *madhuparka*, touching of the body parts, gift of the cow (*godāna*)

(*continued*)

Table 2.3 (continued) Ritual elements in a Newar *Daśakarmavidhi*

Giving of the dress and ornaments to the groom
Giving and consecration of a dress for the bride
Applying *tilaka* with sandalwood paste and vermilion
Reciting marriage verses and mantras
Kanyādāna saṃkalpa by the father-in-law with streaming of milk and water (Nev. *hvaṃkegu*)
Concluding rites: Giving of the fruits, flowers, etc. in the *maṇḍala* to the groom
Gift of the girl (*kanyādāna*) II
Similar to *kanyādāna* I, but also changing of the dresses and presenting of gold and ornaments to the bride
6. Fire sacrifices (*vivāhahoma*)
+ Worship of various deities in flasks and *praṇīta* vessel, etc.
Rāṣṭrabhṛddhoma, Jayāhoma, Abhyatānahoma, Guptāhutihoma, Tilāhuti, Saṃkhyāhuti, Lājāhoma
7. Other marriage rites
Joining the hands of the couple (*pāṇigrahaṇa*)
Stepping on a stone (*aśmārohaṇa*)
Circumambulation of the fire (*agniparikrama*)
Seven steps (*saptapadī*)
Looking at the sun (*sūryadarśana*)
Applying of vermilion (*sindūra*) by the groom and + handing over of the vermilion container to the bride
Touching of the bride's heart by the groom
Ascending the cow cart
Looking at the polar star
8. Concluding rites
+ Dismissal of the Brahmā (flask)
+ Sending of offerings to the absorbing stone
abhiṣeka, blessings with (Nev.) *sagā*[5] etc.
Bride is taken upstairs by the (Nev.) *nakhī*[6]

Table 2.3 (continued) Ritual elements in a Newar *Daśakarmavidhi*

Joint meal
At night the couple should lie down in one bed
9. The day after
Grooming of the bride
Welcoming rites blessing for the bride
and taking her upstairs
+ Grinding of the lentils by the bride
Joint meal of the couple and + sending of the impure food to the Kalādyaḥ[7]
+ Dismissal of the Brahmā flask (if in wife-giver's house; if in wife-taker's house: on *caturthī*)
Ritual outing of the couple (*bhramaṇayātrā*) and welcoming and blessing after returning
10. Ritual of the fourth day (*caturthīkarma*)
+ Worship (*pañcopacāra*) of the clan deity (Nev. *digudyaḥ*[8])
+ Taking inside the Alīdyaḥ
Joint meal of the couple
Ancestor worship (*yavodaka*)
Ritual intention (*saṃkalpa*) for the fire oblations, joint worship of Brahmā and other deities by the couple with ghee and sesame oblations, sending of the *bali* to different places
Purifying the bride by the groom: applying vermilion and offering of dresses to the bride by the groom, marking of the bride's hair with a porcupine quill, Sprinkling water to the bride
+ ?Tying knots in the bride's hair
Bridegroom offers (again?) vermilion to the bride
Bridegroom takes the bride to the ground floor
Bride makes 54 oblations to the fire and *pūrṇāhuti*
Touching the heart of the bride
Dismissal of the fire and the Brahmā flask

(*continued*)

Table 2.3 (continued) Ritual elements in a Newar *Daśakarmavidhi*

III. At the house of the bride
11. Concluding rites of the fourth day
Special meal for the bride
Looking in the mirror by the bride
+ Husband binds bel-fruit into a shawl (?)
Husband takes her back into the groom's house with welcoming and purification
+ Taking the couple to the upper floor or the shrine of Taleju with offering of betel nuts and joint meal
+ Burning wicks are sent to different deities in the vicinity

[1] + = Newar element

[2] A lump of clay worshipped as Śiva or Agni.

[3] Also called *cakraphaṇi* (Skt./Nev.), "round crown: a representation of a god (*phalīdyaḥ*) in a round cup made of paper painted by the Citrakāras (Painters), mostly used in initiation Kaytāpujā and Ihi (Gutschow and Michaels 2008). For Buddhists, the deity is mostly considered as Tārā. (Nev.) *phalinī* (var. *phalina*) *chāye* also means offering fruits and vegetarian saltless food. It is often offered together with the mantra VS 20.50. Cf. Rospatt 2010, 241–42.

[4] Sometimes, some of these elements are celebrated in the bride's house.

[5] *Sagā* (Nep. *sagūn*, Skt. *saguṇa*, lit. "with good qualities, with virtue") is a presentation of certain items, such as new dresses and rice, dried fish, red powder, flowers, eggs, lentil cake (*vaḥ*), coins, alcohol (*aila*), and so on for giving the auspicious *tikā*. In the Parbatiyā tradition, *sagūn* is sometimes a *tikā* with yoghurt. It is often given from (Nev.) *dhaupati*, "flat (bowls of) yoghurt," a pair of small cups or saucers with yoghurt used for a representation, especially in a Buddhist context, of the Four Brahmāvihāras or Eight Immortal Beings (*aṣṭacirañjīvi*), and for a *dhau svagā*, that is, a kind of *tikā* with yoghurt on the right (men) or left (women) temple.

[6] The wife of the eldest male of a household or lineage.

[7] Kalādyaḥ is a non-iconic deity that receives the ritual waste (Nev. (*kalaḥ*)); the rite is similar to the *kuladevatāpūjā* among the Parvatiyā.

[8] Ancestral deity.

With regard to the actual practice of Newar marriage rituals, even more differences have to be noted (Table 2.4). Basically, the wedding is divided into three phases: (1) preparatory rituals that mostly entail premarriage rituals in the bride's and, to a lesser extent, in the groom's household; (2) the wedding rituals that predominantly take place in the bride's house; and (3) rituals that follow after the wedding. Table 2.4 is an

Table 2.4 The Newar marriage pattern

o = in the bride's house

• = in the groom's house

1. Pre-marriage rituals

o Arranging of the marriage through a mediator or matchmaker (*lami*), including the matching of horoscopes

o Approval of the marriage, betrothal: negotiation and visiting relatives and betrothal with acceptance of betel nuts and a silver coin (sent by the groom's parents) by the bride's *parents* (*gvẽ biyegu*)

o Applying a mark of yoghurt on the temple (*dhau svagã*) to the bride and later to the groom as another confirmation of the marriage

o Visit of the girl's household by the boy's family and bringing sweetmeats (*lākhāmahrī chvayegu*)

o To put on bracelets (*kalyā nhyākegu/chvayegu*)

o Four days before marriage: sending of trays with seasonal fruits, vegetables, yoghurt, gifts, *pūjā* plate, and other items to the bride's house (*gvẽ yẽkegu*)

o "Farewell" rice meal (*pyana-jā bhvẽ*)

• Ancestor worship (*śrāddha*)

o Wedding feast of the bride's family (*bhyaḥ bhvay* in Bhaktapur or *pyana bhvay* in Patan)

2. Wedding

• Farewell of the groom: worship of/with *sukūdā* or Gaṇeśa resp. Sūrya lamp

• → o Procession of the groom's party to the bride's parental home (*janta vanegu*)

o Reception of the groom's party with spices, snacks, and drinks

o Choosing the groom (*svayaṃvara*)

o Giving of the daughter as gift (*kanyādāna*)[9] with circumambulation of the groom, touching his feet, parting her hair by the groom, mutual offering of ornaments

(*continued*)

Table 2.4 (continued) The Newar marriage pattern

- o Worship of *sukũdā* (Gaṇeśa or Sūrya) and the bride's lineage deity
- o Recitation of *maṅgalasūtra* (*svastivākya*) by the bride's father and *phukī* members of the groom (only Buddhist)
- o Offering of various food items and drinks to the bride (only Buddhist)
- o Offering and distributing areca nuts (Nev. *gvẽ biyegu/sāyagu*)
- o Joint meal (*thāybhū nakegu*)
- o Tying the bangles (*tutibaki nyakegu*)
- o Handing over of the bride (*bhamcā lalhāna biyegu*)
- o Formal chat of fathers at a Gaṇeśa shrine (*bhamcā khā lhāyegu*).
- o → • Marriage procession (*janta vanegu*) to the groom's house
- • Welcoming of the bride (*bhamcā dukāyegu*)
- • Distribution of areca nuts to the bride's in-laws (*bhamcā yagu gvẽ sālegu*)
- • (or o) Joining together the heads (*hvākegu*)
- • Joint meal (*thyābhu nakegu*)
- • Oiling, combing, or wetting the hair (*sā pyākegu*)
- • Visit of the goddess shrine (*vanjala vanegu*)

3. Post-wedding rituals

Worship at the shrine of the goddess (*pīṭhapūjā*) with animal sacrife (only Hindu)

Distribution of the sacrificial animal's head (*syūkabhvay*, only Hindu)

- • Gaṇeśapūjā (*caturthī*)
- • Looking at the bride's face (*khvā sva vaneyegu*) by the bride's party
- o Accepting the son-in-law (*jilancā dukāyegu*) by the bride's family
- • Admission of the bride to the groom's lineage association (*digudyaḥ guthī dukāyegu*)
- • The groom's party (*bhoj*)

[9] Only for *thars* that do not practice the Ihi ritual.

overview of the major sub-rituals and ritual elements during Newar Hindu (and Buddhist) marriages (cf. Pradhan 1986, 154; *Daśakarmavidhi*, pp. 123–35). These rituals tend to be more elaborate in proportion to the eminence of the lineages.

The Morphology and Structure

What then is "Newar" in Newar Hindu life-cycle rituals? In *Growing up*,[35] Niels Gutschow and I have started to identify some ritual elements that we regard as specifically Newar since they do not or only very differently appear in rituals of other social groups or castes in South Asia. These elements are not variants of Hinduism but characteristics of a religion *sui generis*, even if they sometimes look similar to the Gṛhya tradition or have the same term. The Newar *pratiṣṭhā* (scattering popped rice, Nev. *cvaki hvalegu*) or *svagā* (applying yoghurt at the temple of a person) are, for instance, different from Smārta *pratiṣṭhā* or *tīkā/tilaka*.

The question is how to bring these elements into a kind of grammar of Newar (life-cycle) rituals, that is, into rules that can be followed, varied, and extended by those who know them and who have internalized a great deal of them—similar to rules of a game that one has to learn in order to play it correctly. The "grammatical" structures shown in Table 2.5 can be regarded as the most common rules to be followed by the Newar priests, the priest's clients (*yajamāna*), or the clan's oldest men (*nāyaḥ*) or women (*nakhī*) who are mostly ritually responsible for the ritual, and the individual(s) for whom the life-cycle ritual is performed. Not all of these rules are obligatory, and some are not exclusively Newar, but the general system can be presented in this manner. The acts performed by the priest are usually accompanied with a mantra.

These ritual elements, together with some acts of the Smārta tradition, build an inventory of mostly high-caste Newar life-cycle ritual acts, out of which these and other Newar rituals are composed. It is evident that not all elements can be performed at any time of a given ritual. The invocation of deities naturally will be at the beginning and their release at the end of a ritual. But a great number of ritual elements are isolated units that can be easily transferred to different contexts across the rituals and even across the

35. Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 38–39, and more detailed in Gutschow and Michaels 2012, App. 2.

Table 2.5 Elements in Newar life-cycle rituals[10]

Preparatory rites	Priest	Clan eldest(*nāyaḥ*)	Individual
		Fix the auspicious moment (Nep./Nev. *sāit*) with the help of an astrologer (Josi).	
		Invite relatives, neighbors, and friends.	
Preliminary rites	Purify (*nisi yāyegu*) yourself, the specialists and family members with sprinkling of water (*abhiṣeka*), mouth rinsing (*nasalā, ācamana*).	On the morning of the main day(s), feed curd and flattened rice to Individual (*dhaubaji nākegu*).	On the morning of the main day(s), get a *tīkā* from Nāyaḥ or apply it yourself.
	Prepare the ritual arena, for instance by drawing diagrams on the ground and arranging the sacred place with sacred vases and pots.		
	Make a ritual commitment (*saṃkalpa, nyāsa*) or let the priest make it for Individual or Nāyaḥ (and other ritual specialists).		
	Worship the ancestors (*nāndī-* or *vṛddhiśrāddha*).		
	Make a mental concentration on the deities (*nyāsa*).		
	Make a ritual invocation (*āvāhana, namaḥ*) of the deity or deities by sprinkling (*abhiṣeka*) water from a certain pot (*arghyapātra*) on their seats (*āsana*) and/or vessels (*kalaśa*).		

Preliminary rites	Offer an oil-cake (*khau kāyegu*) mixed with sesame paste and water used for purification.	
	(with Individual and Nāyaḥ): Worship the deities in the sacred vases, on the sacred plates (*kāyabhaḥpūjā*) and in ritual instruments.	
	Make a fire sacrifice (*homa, yajña*).	
	Get the nails paired and colored (*lusi dhenegu* or *pācake; ala taygu*).	
Main rites[11]	Nāyaḥ to Priest: Hand over the *pūjā* plate or "flower basket" (*puṣpabhājana*) to the priest together with the *puṣpabhājanamantra*.	
	Send a share of the *pūjā* to the local Gaṇeśa shrine.	
	Make *balipūjā*, i.e., worship mother goddesses, Kṣetrapālas, spirits, and supplementary gods.	
		Welcome the main participants (*lasakusa*).
	Wave the smoke of mustard seeds on charcoal over the sacred place and participants in order to ward off any evil influence.	
	Light the *sukũdā* lamp or an oil lamp (*dīpa*) in a clay saucer as witnesses of the ritual.	
	Send a clay cup with fire, together with other things to the protective and absorbing stones (*pikhālākhu, chvāsaḥ*).	

(*continued*)

Table 2.5 (continued) Elements in Newar life-cycle rituals

Preparatory rites	Priest	Clan eldest(*nāyaḥ*)	Individual
	Worship with a lamp, a wooden measuring vessel, and iron key(s) mostly over the head of Individual.		
		Offer well-wishing food (*svagā*) to Individual.	
	Recite the *ratnoṣadhi* hymn.		
	Wave fragrant materials (*dhūpa*)		
	Apply a *tīkā* made of sandalwood (*candana*) paste or vermilion and rice.		
	Worship with husked, uncooked, and unbroken rice (*akṣata*).		
		Present and worship new dresses.	
Core rites	The main parts of the ritual, such as the initiation or the marriage rites, are evidently specific, i.e., not common to all Newar life-cycle rituals.		
Concluding rites	Send leftovers to the Kalādyaḥ, or absorbing stone.		
	Wave the wooden measuring vessel and the lamp.		
	Let popped rice be scattered to the deities in the sacrificial arena (*pratiṣṭhā*).		

	Let the Indiviual or Nāyaḥ make a "the decision for food" (*annasaṃkalpa*), i.e., hand over rice or other grains to the priest	
	Let the Individual give money (*dakṣiṇā*) for the ritual to the priest	
Concluding rites	Bless (*āśīrvāda*) the participants.	
	Release the sacred vases and other holy items are removed (*visarjana*).	
	Give a *tīkā* and a wristband to the participants.	
	Show a mirror to everybody (*nhāykā kenegu*).	
	Recite the *pūrṇacandra* verses.	
	Release the witness deities such as the Sun or Viṣṇu.	
	Send a share of the *pūjā* material to Kumārī or any other Mother Goddess shrine.	
		Offer well-wishing food (*khẽ svagā, prasāda*) to all participants.
		Invite for a festive joint meal (*bhvay*, Skt. *bhojana*) on the same day or some days later.

[10] *Gurumaṇḍalapūjā, homa*, and *kalaśapūjā* can be elaborate separate rituals.
[11] The sequence in this group varies considerably according to the individual life-cycle ritual.

religious "borders" of Hinduism and Buddhism. The Newar marriage pattern as outlined in Table 2.4 holds true, *grosso modo*, for both Hindu and Buddhist marriages. Even if Newar Buddhist life-cycle rituals include the salutation to the Three Jewels and Vajradhara or the *gurumaṇḍalapūjā* and recite different mantras, the basic pattern of *sūryārgha, saṃkalpa, kalaśārcana*, core ritual elements, *upacāras* to the deities (in the *maṇḍalapūjā*), *visarjana*, and so forth remain the same. Moreover, many rules can be changed, and ritual elements can be added or reduced without losing the characteristics of a Newar ritual.

Examples of the transformation of Gṛhya into Newar ritual elements include: the old ritual of putting on new dresses by bride and groom which is replaced by festively clothing before the ritual or the offering of cloths to each other during the ritual; the *pūrṇapātra* that might have been transformed or substituted by the measuring vessel; the three so-called Tobias nights of celibacy after marriage that have been transformed into the *caturthī* ritual after the wedding; and the triple Vedic circumambulation of the fire that has become the circumambulation of the husband by the bride.

It now becomes evident that a limited number of ritual elements and rules can produce an almost infinite number of combinations and that this dynamic also allows to introduce new sub-rituals (e.g., *svayaṃvara*) or the marriage cake, or rituals as well as deviations within the rituals. In other words, with this generative capacity of ritual elements and thus the potential grammaticality of rituals, it is possible to describe "syntactical" structures of a ritual. As such, one can note the following:

Framing: Many rituals are framed by the elements *samkalpa—dakṣiṇā, āvahana—visarjana*.

Repetition: Some acts, especially the recitation of mantras, are repeated three times, most prominently the circumambulation of the groom by the bride.

Reduplication: Sometimes ritual elements are repeated, partly interrupted by other ritual sequences. Thus, we find *annasaṃkalpa*, "the decision for food," in the beginning of a ritual, but also in the end.

Seriality: Ritual elements recur in sequences, for example, *matā-phātācā-pūjā*, the worship with lamp, measuring vessel, and iron key(s): the worship with the lamp (*sukūda*) appears independently but also very often together with the measuring vessel and the iron keys. Likewise taking place on an *āsana* is very often linked with the act of pulling the concerned person by hands to that seat (*lāsālāva yane*), or

the entering of the house by a special welcome ritual (*lasa kusa*). Similarly, ritual elements in the beginning often follow a common pattern.

Substitution: The replacement of one ritual element by another viewed as equal in value: In the *annaprāśana* normally a goose (Skt., Nep. *haṃsa*) is required, but it is every now and then substituted by a duck (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 46).

Option: The optional or alternative employment of a number of ritual elements viewed as equal in value. This holds especially true for the recitation of many mantras that are often listed after a prescribed act.

Fusion or the merging of two or more different ritual elements, for example, *abhiṣeka* that also is *snāna*.

Reduction or abbreviations of the combinations of ritual elements. Thus, often the texts have *candanādi*, which means that a sandalwood paste for *tīkā* is offered together with a scattering of rice, a sacred thread, a piece of cloth, flowers, and other *upacāras*. What is abbreviated in the text is mostly also abbreviated in the ritual practice. Likewise, *adyādi* ("today etc.") appears as abbreviation of the *deśa-kāla-saṃkalpa*.

Extension: Similarly, rituals such as *śrāddhas* can be extended and performed in a very elaborate form.

Omission or the elision of stipulated ritual elements, more the rule than the exception. The most prominent example is *homa* in the marriage ritual, which is prescribed in almost all handbooks but is more and more omitted in practice.

Transfer of ritual elements to another ritual: As mentioned above, many Vedic elements have been transferred into a Buddhist context, the *homa* again being the most complex and prominent example.

As far as the meaning of ritual elements is concerned, I refrain from determining just one such function because rituals and ritual elements mostly have several meanings, and in this sense not (just one) meaning (cf. Chapter 9.1). It cannot easily be said whether music or ornaments are regarded as auspicious (*maṅgala, śubha*) because they might also be seen as prestigious elements or fashion, or that the *bel* fruit in the Ihi marriage (Chapter 5.2) is meant for the progeny because there are several other interpretations as well. Likewise, it seems impossible to reduce the stepping on stones (*aśmārohaṇa*) to the warding off of evil. The most striking example for this argument is the use of the mantras. Even these verbal ritual elements cannot be reduced to a certain meaning, as will be demonstrated in Chapter 7.3.

2.3 Rituals in Handbooks (paddhati)

In the previous sections, we have seen how rituals are composed by more or less explicit repetitive rules and structures. These rules have been laid down as scripts, in a written form in ritual handbooks, and in tacit knowledge of the performers. They form the backbone of rule-governed behavior in liturgically fixed rituals. Even if not all rules are notificated in such handbooks, they could be so—in principle. It is in this sense that rituals are potentially (but not necessarily in practice) public events that can be repeated, copied, imitated, or transferred. This does not hold true for singular and private actions.

In Hinduism, the number of ritual handbooks is impressive. The old and modern handbooks for Vedic and Hindu rituals belong to the most comprehensive, yet neglected, genre of Sanskrit literature. Their manuscripts number in the thousands. At nearly all times, Brahmans, priests, and other ritual specialists have made note of the procedures they were doing. This was due to the complexity of many rituals or due to the need to avoid any mistake in rituals, as we will see in Chapter 3.2. In order to make everything correct, every step was written down, including the mantras that go along with many actions. Before coming to the functions and literary consequences of such handbooks, we have to be a bit more specific.

Very few ritual handbooks have been edited or translated, and there are only a few studies on the textual and contextual peculiarities of such texts.[36] Even Alfred Hillebrandt (1897) and Jan Gonda (1977, 653–59), who have contributed most to the study of this genre, elaborate only randomly on the more recent handbooks, even though none of these authors would deny the value of handbooks.

In Sanskrit, ritual handbooks are normally called *paddhati* ("compendium"), *vidhi* ("rules, norms"), *prayoga* ("manual"), *prakaraṇa* ("dissertation"), *vidhāna* (see Patton 2005, 27–31), or, in the case of metric texts, *kārikā*, which means texts that are manuals for the practice, as well as for the liturgy. Such texts have been composed to enable the steps in a ritual to be performed in correct order and form, and also to list the mantras that accompany many actions. There can be great differences in the style and size of ritual handbooks. There are also collections of ritual handbooks.[37] These ritual handbooks can be classified into the following categories:

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36. Parpola 1986; Deshpande 1996; Karttunnen 1998; Colas 2005; Michaels 2010a.

37. E.g., Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa's *Prayogaratna*, Veṅkaṭeśa's *Prayogamālā*, Cathurthī Lāl's *Nityakarmayogamālā*, A. Rangasvami Aiyangar's *Jaiminīyaprayogavivaraṇa* (Parpola 1986, 86f.), or several Nibandhas and Smṛtis, such as *Nirṇayasindhu, Saṃskārakaustubha, Smṛtikaustubha*, and so on, which are mostly compendia of Dharmaśāstra und Gṛhyasūtra texts.

- handbooks in Sanskrit (*sūtra, smṛti, nibandha, vidhi, paddhati, prayoga*, etc.) from the great tradition with a pan-Indian distribution that are mostly printed;
- personal handbooks of the priests, normally not printed; such texts are generally written in a mixture of Sanskrit and vernacular languages;
- printed manuals in Sanskrit, often published with a commentary or translation in vernacular languages; such texts are also sometimes used by priests in the rituals;
- documents and lists for ritual material from private persons, temples, or religious organizations, related to the rituals performed;
- grey literature (pamphlets, etc.) from ritual organizations explaining the ritual procedure and meanings.

One can equally well classify these handbooks according to other criteria, for instance, according to the type of ritual (*śrauta/gṛhya; vaidika/laukika*; Vedic/non-Vedic, related to domestic/temple rituals, etc.).

It matters whether the texts have been composed just for private use or printed for a broader readership. Private handbooks are texts that follow common standards in orthography and grammar much less. They have been written just for performing the rituals. This implies editorial problems to which I will return later.

Even the Sūtra texts and, to a lesser extent, the Brāhmaṇa texts are ritual handbooks, but they often have lost their practical context and have turned into compendia of ritual norms or even exegetic texts. It is true that one can study the ritual procedure using them, too, but the texts contain variants and explanations that are beyond the practical purpose of how to get the ritual right. Similarly, the commentaries of the Sūtras and Brāhmaṇas discuss grammatical, semantic, and theoretical questions that do not interest the practitioners so much.

The modern ritual handbooks are simple texts. They are often just private notebooks that have been written and produced for private and practical use only. They are aide-mémoires for the priests, and therefore provisionally designed: full of transcriptions and superscriptions, additions, corrections, marginal remarks, and sketchy drawings, for example for the placements of ritual objects, *maṇḍala*s and *yantra*s, or the Navagrahas. They are not meant for an audience or for publication. In the Newar context of Nepal, the scribes are not always Brahmans; sometimes they are astrologers or other specialists. The "mistakes" are not always a sign of language incompetence, but of personal ways of making notes and memos. After all, these priests are more concerned with getting the ritual than the text right. Such personal handbooks are much more personal than the subject they are dealing with.

The reasons Indological research has mostly neglected such modern ritual handbooks are manifold: the texts are too recent, the authors and readers of such texts are mostly not educated, the language is corrupt, and often one does not see any practical relevance. More important, one rarely recognizes that such texts have to be studied with a different methodology, that is, a combination of fieldwork and philology. I have called this method "Ethno-Indology" (see Introduction), but only the term is new, not the method, as Parpola noted already in 1989:

> Although a good deal of this later literature is undoubtedly of more recent origin, this example [Aiyangar's *Jaiminīyaprayogavivaraṇa*] clearly demonstrates how difficult it is for an outsider to understand the Vedic ritual merely by reading about it. It is therefore necessary to secure now as complete and accurate descriptions of the present-day performances as possible. As already indicated above, such a rescue study is highly urgent, because comprehensive mastery of the old traditions is becoming rarer all the time. (Parpola 1989, 91)

Let us look at these points more closely. First is the allegation that the texts are "mostly comparatively modern and unimportant" (Gonda 1977, 659) since they do not add anything relevant to the Sūtras or commentaries. Indeed, most of these ritual handbooks are from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and are certainly post-Vedic (Gonda 1977, 653). This, however, does not imply that they are "unimportant," because the information they contain is mostly far older than was acknowledged by George Thibaut, who rightly remarked that there are no old *prayogas*, but that the ritual knowledge of these texts must have been produced along with the rituals and transmitted orally:

> We cannot indeed confidently maintain that [in the time immediately following on the composition of the chief Brāhmaṇa's] already books of the nature of the Kalpasūtra's or Prayoga's existed, but at any rate there must have existed from the outset a full and circumstantial oral tradition referring to the proper performance of the sacrifices. (George Thibaut, quoted in Hillebrandt 1897, 38)

A second reason ritual handbooks have been ignored so much is their poor language and dubious appearance. After all, it is "grey" Sanskrit literature, cheaply produced and printed poorly, if at all. The texts are often grammatically incorrect, written in a hybrid style with many orthographical mistakes. Often

the instructions are in vernacular languages, and even the mantras or authoritative verses are quoted incorrectly. If, for instance, in a Newar handbook, the mantra *dadhikrāvṇa* (ṚV 4.39.6, VS 32.32) is recited along with giving Nev. *svagā* (*saguṇa*), which implies diluted curd (*dadhi*), although this mantra is related in the Rigveda to the horse Dadhikrāvan (cf. Deshpande 1996, 416), it becomes obvious that the users of these handbooks are not educated.

Other linguistic peculiarities in these handbooks are the following:[38] the use of vernacular languages together with Sanskrit and sanskritization of vernacular words; word separations without following the euphonic (*sandhi*) rules; vernacularization of verb forms for the ritual instructions: a preference for Sanskrit nouns and vernacular verbs; absent or corrupt case suffixes; arbitrary or vernacular case suffixes in Sanskrit words; inconsistency or spelling "mistakes."

Given these and many other features, is this Sanskrit "a jargon born of ignorance of 'good' Sanskrit" (Salomon 1989, 285)? Or is it an independent Sanskrit, which can be compared with Buddhist, or Jaina Sanskrit? Should it be called vernacular or colloquial Sanskrit? It is certainly not the Sanskrit of a closed community, school, or sect; it is also not to be regarded as vernacular Sanskrit or dialect. It is not a Sanskrit that develops to a kind of middle-Indian language. It is, I would argue, a language that could and should be called "Pseudo-Sanskrit" or, better, "Hybrid Sanskrit" because the text consists of calques from standard Sanskrit texts and *mantras*.

As was shown by Sheldon Pollock (2006), the claim on grammatical and linguistic correctness has much to do with (royal) power and prestige, as well as claims of exclusivity and elite. The Brahmanic administrators of the Sanskrit language easily disregarded grammatically corrupt texts. Indologists, too, tend to devaluate hybrid forms of Sanskrit. Thus, Bernhard Kölver and Hemrāj Śākya (1985, 27), editing and analyzing Nevārī documents, speak of "much distorted" Sanskrit texts with "morphological malformations," "syntactical clumsiness," or "clumsy expansions of the standard text."

However, such texts, as simple as they may be, reveal valuable information on rituals—German *Überbleibsel* ("survivals") as Hillebrandt (1897, 3) called them—or a local practice and terminology, which is missing in other texts. Thus, many ritual elements or regional specialities can only be found in the personal handbooks of the priests, or by observation of the rituals in the field. One looks in vain, for example, for a myth that explains the Ihi marriage of girls to the *bel* fruit, sometimes called Suvarṇakumāra, whom

38. For examples, cf. Michaels 2010a.

Hindus regard as Viṣṇu or Śiva, Buddhists, however, as Buddha (cf. Chapter 5.2). It is only in a text called *Pāṇigrahaṇavidhi*, "The Rules for Taking the Hands (i.e., wedding)" (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 258–63), that we found a passage which declared this "marriage" to be an initiation (*upanayam, sic*, read: *upanayanam*) of the girls, thus giving it the scope of another interpretation than that usually assumed.

Moreover, the notion of the purity of Sanskrit mostly overlooks sociolinguistic aspects und linguistic developments.[39] "We find in it (i.e. classical Sanskrit, AM)," says Emenau, "no dialects, no chronological developments, except loss and at times invasions from the vernaculars of the users, and no divergences" (quoted in Deshpande 1996, 401). However, influenced by Pāṇinian ideas of Sanskrit as an ideal, eternal language, quite a few scholars remain skeptical towards nonstandardized texts. This attitude "turned us blind to changes and development of a living language and trained us to dismiss all of them as mistakes resulting from ignorance or half knowledge." (Ramesh 1984, 44)

Deviations from Pāṇinian Sanskrit do not make for an ungrammatical text. It has been demonstrated by Richard Salomon (1989, 284) and others that from early times on, Sanskrit has been a living language that adapted to local situations and conditions, without giving up the claim that it is a sacred language, by maintaining the formal and technical terms, as well as the recitations, in a more or less unchanged form and expressing the operational and pragmatic aspects in vernaculars. In this sense, the language of modern ritual handbooks is more what Ramesh called "functional Sanskrit" than wrong Sanskrit.

Salomon further remarks that Sanskrit, even if it is the language of the elites, must maintain a certain degree of flexibility when it is used for practical, ritual, and learned purposes. For these aims, it sometimes is necessary to exclude the problem of correct or wrong Sanskrit:

> Given this approach, it is undeniable that the degree of variability in Sanskrit as the language was actually used through history was much greater than it is usually realized, and that the search for linguistic perfection was more an ideal than a reality. While Sanskrit is indeed notably resistant to dialectical variation, it was nonetheless inevitably

39. Studies that take this aspect into consideration are Brough 1954; Ramesh 1984; Salomon 1989; Deshpande 1993.

> subject to various forces for linguistic change, which the traditional models could only retard and minimize but never wholly suppress. (Salomon 1989, 291)

Inter-textually, ritual handbooks must be regarded as a corpus with various windows—to the Vedic context, the ritual practice, forms of recitations, the participants and audiences, as well the participant observers. Without these contexts, the text of a ritual handbook is almost incomprehensible. Ritual objects, paraphernalia and items, ingredients, objects, or specialists that often are not even mentioned in the text must be considered—to the extent that some rituals can only be understood when they are observed.

It then becomes obvious that the ritual handbook also has an ostentatious function that makes the Brahman a special ritual specialist. The book is his status sign—in distinction to the drum of the shaman (see Oppitz 1986). Frequently, the Brahman arrives at the ritual place only with his book wrapped in a newspaper or plastic bag. He brings it and shows it even when he does not use it.

Given this, ritual handbooks appear not as a separate, but as an essential part of rituals. Their domain lies in the representational and procedural structures. They form only one side of a narrative, to which many ritual specialists and participants contribute. This perspective includes the often orally transmitted practical knowledge as an inevitable part of rituals.

Thus, in rituals, Brahmans and their texts might have a higher authority than other specialists, but only when it concerns their domain, that is, the Veda and the (Sanskrit) book, but not because of the logocentric dominance of certain material. If such sources are not privileged, one indeed encounters the often-claimed "confluence of Indology and sociology" (Dumont and Pocock 1957). Then, the real ritual text in its inter-textual dimensions reveals itself.

3

Agency in Ritual

HOWEVER PRESCRIBED THEY are, in rituals is scope for variation. A major part of this lies in the agency of the main actors including superhuman actors, that is, gods and ghosts. The question of agency in rituals has been profoundly debated (Ahearn 2001; Sax 2006; Chaniotis 2010) and, following Bruno Latour, it has aptly been suggested, for instance, by William S. Sax (2013, 27) that agency and actor are not identical because agency is located in networks of actors and actants (Latour 2005, 71), or by Ronald L. Grimes (2013, 249) that "(r)itualists not only perform their actions (as subjects); they are also constituted by these actions (as objects)." Moreover, the field of ritual agency must include the scale of different ritual roles—from being a leading ritual participant to a mere observer or spectator (see Grimes 2013, List 12). Yet "agency" also refers to the individual competency (*adhikāra*) to vary rituals ad hoc. It is mainly this aspect that I will discuss in the following with an example of the priest's competence in a Hindu death ritual.

3.1 Ritual Competency (adhikāra)

In this section, I will deal with the rules of the Hindu ancestor ritual called (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*), or *latyā* ("forty-five") in Nevārī, as performed by a Newar Jyāpu (farmer) family from Bhaktapur and a Newar Rājopādhyāya Brahman priest originally from Patan. I shall analyze the ritual in which the departed person is basically transformed from a yet unpacified and helpless deceased person (*preta*) to an ancestor (*pitṛ*), on the basis of two ethno-indological categories: the observance of the ritual performance at a certain date and place, and two types of manuals or ritual handbooks (cf. also Chapter 3), the one used in situ by the performing priest, that is, the *personal Handbook (HB) of the domestic priest Mahendra Raj Sharma* and three local *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* texts of the so-called Great Tradition (the *Antyakarmapaddhati (AKP) by Dadhi Rāma Marāsini with a commentary by Ṛṣi Rāma Śarmā Ghimire*, the

Antyeṣṭipaddhati or Uttaranārāyaṇabhaṭṭī of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, and the *Garuḍapurāṇa-Pretakalpa*). To be sure, these Sanskrit *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* texts were neither explicitly nor ostensively used in the actual ritual, nor were they necessarily consulted in written form by the priest. It must also be taken into consideration that this text is more rooted in the Indo-Parbatiyā or Smārta culture, whereas the material of the field observation and the HB is basically Newar. However, both sources (HB and AKP) deal with the same ritual, and both sides are Brahmanic- Sanskritic.

The questions now are: to what extent is formality based on such texts really practiced? Or how much agency and competency (*adhikāra*)[1] is prescribed and left for the performers?

Methodologically, I focus on the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* or *latyā* ritual, as performed in Bhaktapur on August 22, 2002, for a deceased person who was the father of the deceased[2]—a point to which I will return below. My approach is therefore inductive rather than deductive, my starting point being the actual and singular ritual practice, which I do not consider deviant but authentic. What happens in situ is, for me, not a more or less apt realization or enactment of what is textually prescribed, but a ritual performance in its own right. Given the variety of textual sources and of ritual practice, I try to understand both the agency in rituals and the function of the texts in contexts. I hold that the agency is not only with the priest (*pūjāri*) but also with the ritual patron (*yajamāna*) and its family, the spectators of the ritual, and even transhuman agents. From this point of view, rituals, as well as ritual texts, are much less stereotypical than they appear to be.

Basically, Hindu death rituals include rites concerning the dying person and the corpse, including cremation and disposal of the bones and ashes, as well as offerings to the deceased and worshipping him, which includes his ritual union with ancestors and commemorative rites for the ancestors.[3] These are lengthy and complex rituals (cf. Chapter 5.4), on which I will concentrate here only in part, namely, the offering of a third series of sixteen small balls (*piṇḍa*) generally made of wheat flour; this sub-ritual is mostly called *pañcadaśapiṇḍadāna* (var. *māsikaśrāddha*, or *ṣoḍaśaśrāddha*). It is

1. F. Smith 1987, 59–62, 121–223; Lubin 2010b.

2. See Gutschow and Michaels (2005) and Michaels (in collaboration with Buss) (2010d) for an extensive description of this ritual.

3. See Evison 1989, 448–69 and Michaels 2004a, 133–35 (Table 11) for more detailed lists of the ritual events at death and ancestor rituals.

performed after five deities in vessels (*kumbhakeśvara*) have been worshipped (*kumbhapūjā*), and before the actual death ritual, the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, has started.

If one compares the main steps of the Kumbhapūjā and the Pañcadaśapiṇḍadāna rituals, as performed in situ and represented in the relevant texts (see Michaels [in collaboration with Buss] 2010d, 103–07), one sometimes has the impression that each source concerns a different ritual evidence. This surprising complexity and variability of ritual action is mainly reached through the following ritual methods and techniques applied by the priest(s):[4]

(1) *Substitution* (*pratyāmna*, cf. Müller 1992, 23): Within the *pañcadaśapiṇḍadāna*, three fruits (*triphala*) have to be offered to five deities represented by *kumbhas*. Since the prescribed fruits were not available during the actual ritual, other fruits had to be substituted. Interestingly, the three fruits are not textually prescribed, but by a norm the priest is aware of. Thus, he asks the *yajamāna* during the ritual: "Do you have *triphala*?. . . If you have *triphala*, keep it (there). If not, use three (other) fruits: *harro, barro* and *amalā*."[5] Similarly, the priest asks during the ritual several times for ingredients and substitutes them ad hoc. Thus, when preparing the paste for the *ṭīkās* he asks: "Do you have (some) rice flour? If not (use) wheat flour (Nev. *chuchuṃ*), add some water to it, mix it and use for pasting the *ṭīkā* on the *kalaśa*." It is quite common to substitute leaves for flowers, (rice) *akṣata* for feeding *brāhmaṇas*, pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrās*) for *prāyaścitta*, coins for sacrificial gifts (*dakṣiṇā*) etc. Thus, the priest asks for gold and silver pieces: "Have you brought a piece of gold and silver? If not, use *dakṣiṇā* (i.e., money) for this (purpose). Place one coin down."

(2) *Alteration*: In texts as well as in practice, often alternatives or options are often explicitly mentioned, which leave it to the priest to modify the ritual according to the situation. Thus, according to the Handbook of the priest the number of necessary vessels (*kumbha*) is given with 5, 7, 9, 11, or 21. Since the early Brāhmaṇa texts we find such alternatives mentioned, for instance, referring to other schools or different regional practice.

4. For further such techniques or methods for alterations and variations in other contexts, see Section 3.1 and Michaels 2012b.

5. *Barro* (Skt. *vibhītaka*) is *Belleric myrobalan, harro* (Skt. *haritakī*) is *Chebulic myrobalan*, and *amalā* (Skt. *āmalakī*) is *Emblica myrobalan*.

(3) *Shifting, postponement, or interpolation*: In Nārāyaṇabhaṭṭa's *Antyeṣṭipaddhati* (Müller 1992, 154), the *māsikapiṇḍas* have to be removed immediately. In the ritual, however, the *māsikapiṇḍas* are kept aside and thrown into the river after *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* (i.e., together with *tripiṇḍa*) and after the "giving of the bed" (*śayyadāna*). This is instructed by the priest himself:

> Throw this *piṇḍa* (out later). . . . It can be kept here (for a moment). Draw a circle (*maṇḍala*) by hand. . . . Collect these all (left overs of the *śrāddha*) from the flour and put them on the pot (*piṇḍapātra*). . . . Go there and wash your hand. . . . Now, one person shall come in front to go to worship (to the outside shrine). . . . A daughter or a son-in-law may (do this). This (Sūrya *kumbha*) is for the Sun God (Sūrya). . . . This (Nārāyaṇa *kumbha*) is for the God Nārāyaṇa. . . . Where is the (shrine of) God Nārāyaṇa?. . . This is to (offer to) a well (Nev. *tūṃ*) (or) a water fountain (*hiṭī*). Is there a well outside (for Varuṇa *kumbha*)?. . . It (i.e., the Nārāyaṇa *kumbha*) is allowed to offer it to Nārāyaṇa after offering (this Sūrya *kumbha*) to Sūrya. Take both of them (together).

(4) *Omission*: At several levels, certain prescribed ritual actions are neither mentioned in the texts nor performed. Thus, the feeding of the *brāhmaṇas* is neither performed in the ritual of August, 22, 2002, nor mentioned in the HB; it might have been substituted by throwing rice (*akṣata*). The same is true for the *yajñopavīta*, which is not at all mentioned in the *Antyakarmapaddhati* though being an essential part both of *upacāra* and *dāna* elements.[6] Generally speaking, not only the texts neglect to mention what happens in the ritual, but also the ritualists leave out elements, which, even according to their personal handbooks, should have been ritually carried out. Thus, a Siddhikeśvarapūjā should have been performed according to the HB, but was not so during the ritual of August 22, 2002. Another example is the position of the *yajñopavīta*. according to the AKP, at several stages, the *yajamāna* has to shift the thread from his left to right shoulder and vice versa. This practice is completely abandoned in the performance of the *latyā* and also not mentioned in the handbook.

(5) *Fusion*: Through the introduction of *kumbha* deities, *śrāddha* and *pūjā* are combined. Thus, the *kumbhapūjā* has become a kind of *pañcāyatanapūjā*,

6. The offering of *sūtra* as prescribed in the AKP is given as cloth strips, not as *yajñopavīta* as indicated in the formula: *pretaitat te vāsaḥ*.

although traditionally, there should not be any *devapūjā* in the house of the deceased as long as *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* has not been performed. This is particularly noticeable during the *kumbhapūjā*, which, in the *Antyeṣṭipaddhati*, is declared as water purified by three gods (i.e., *trimūrti*) and presented to the deceased person (*preta*) for his way to Dharmarāja or Yama. However, in the ritual of August 22, 2002, the *kumbhas* are worshipped as seats of five deities who should protect the ritual and the *preta*. Thus, a *dāna* for the *preta* is merged with an *upacāra* for deities. As Klaus-Werner Müller (1992, 88f.) aptly remarked, any Hindu death ritual is a constant mixture of *śrāddha, pūjā, dāna, and homa*. The ritual specialists skillfully play with such ritual "bricks." A *viṣṇuśrāddha*, for example, is basically a *viṣṇupūjā*. However, it is mostly, but not even always denoted *śrāddha* simply by being incorporated in an ancestor ritual. Similarly, a *homa*—basically a rite for gods—can easily become a rite for ancestors.

(6) *Reduction* (*tantreṇa*) or *abbreviation*: On (Nev.) *du byẽkegu*, the tenth day after death, ten *piṇḍas* are prepared three times in order to constitute the new body of the deceased person. This is a combination or reduction of what—according to most texts—should happen on the ten consecutive days after death. However, as the priest says, the chief mourner is so impure that he cannot go to the river without meeting others and thereby polluting them. Therefore, this ritual should now be performed on a singular day. Similarly, the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* and the *ābdikaśrāddha*, which, according to textual traditions, should be performed one year after the death, are nowadays mostly performed much earlier, on the forty-fifth day or even on the twelfth or thirteenth day. Thus, "(r)itual abbreviation and simplification are ubiquitous procedures that are allowed by the texts themselves" (Fuller 1992 68).

(7) *Re-duplication*: A common technique is to repeat ritual elements, for example, *ācamana* in the beginning of the *kumbhapūjā*.

(8) *Invention*: Sometimes, the priests more or less invent new ritual parts or interpret them in their own way. Thus, in the actual ritual, a *piṇḍa* is offered for unknown *pretas*. Moreover, during the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, the priest introduced a kind of shadow *piṇḍas* saying to the *yajamāna*:

> Continue to make (also) three lumps (of dough) of this (smaller) size. . . . According to my father, they are also a kind of *pitṛ*. (But) they are not offered after spelling their name. They are (for) the older ancestors than these ones (he points to the *tripiṇḍa*).

A fourth *piṇḍa* in this context is also known to other texts. According to *Āpastamba Gṛhyasūtra* and *Hiraṇyakeśin Gṛhyasūtra*, this should be given to the ancestor in the fourth generation, that is, preceding the deceased great-grandfather, without saying anything (Caland 1896, 7). The *Matsyapurāṇa* (18.29) also mentions that "ancestors from the fourth (i.e. the father, grandfather and great-grandfather of the great-grandfather of (the) performer) are entitled only to the wipings of the articles of food (sticking to the hand of the performer of *śrāddha*)." Similarly, Manu (3.216) calls the three paternal ancestors after the paternal great-grandfather who benefit from the wipings *lepabhāgin*, that is, those who "share the *lepa*, remnants wiped from hands after offering to the three paternal ancestors" (see Kane 1968ff., vol. 5.1., 482f.).

All of these forms of variance are means to adapt ritual liturgy to the actual situation depending on the macro-, meso-, or micro-level of comparison. Adaptation of rituals and thus their variability, rather than their strict formality, has been accepted by the Dharmaśāstrins, priests, and theologians, since rituals often had to be reduced and modified in times of distress (*āpad*) or adapted to the specific circumstances of region and time (*deśakālānucāra*). The authority or competency (*adhikāra*) for such variations lies mostly in the agency of the priests.

However, the variability of rituals has limits, since there are always some core elements, which hardly can be exchanged or substituted. They constitute the particular type of the ritual. Thus, in all four sources of the *pañcadaśapiṇḍadāna*, especially *saṃkalpa, piṇḍa, pūjā, dāna*, or *homa* appear. Among these, only the *piṇḍas* are specific to death rituals, whereas the other ritual elements are also to be found in other rituals. But even the *piṇḍas* and other core elements are neither prepared nor used in a fixed and homogeneous way.

Thus, *piṇḍas* are offered several times during Hindu death rituals. They are offered not only to the deceased and the ancestors but also to gods and the helpers of Yama. Similarly, the number of *piṇḍas* varies. Generally, and according to the highly influential *Garuḍapurāṇasāroddhāra*, three sets of sixteen *piṇḍas* have to be offered (GPS 12.66ff.) The first six *piṇḍas* of the first set are given on the way to and at the cremation ground, the other ten of the first set are given during the first ten days. They are meant to create a transcendental body for the deceased. Fifteen *piṇḍas* of the second set are offered to the gods and one only is offered to the *preta*. The name refers to the monthly offerings for the deceased during the first year after his death, before the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*. Apparently the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* was previously to be held eleven, twelve, or thirteen days after the death. However, when the *māsikaśrāddhas*

were included in the death rituals, the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* was performed after a year, but this period came again to be shortened to twelve days or so, which made it necessary to ritually reduce the *māsikaśrāddhas* as well.[7] According to the tradition, the sixteen monthly *piṇḍas* are meant to feed the deceased during his year-long journey to Yama's world, passing sixteen different cities, where he eats the *piṇḍas* and receives the gifts given along the way (GPS 1.58). The number sixteen includes the twelve months and four additional points of time. The third set of sixteen *piṇḍas* is often offered at the eleventh or twelfth day in advance for the following year. In the special case of the *latyā*, the timings are different: the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* is performed on the forty-fifth day after death, which is, according to the handbooks, another possible point of time for the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*.[8]

The different handbooks neither agree about the exact classification of the *piṇḍas* and *śrāddhas*, nor do they all mention these three sets, but there is certainly a consciousness on the part of the priests of the importance of these three sets. Thus, the author of the Nepalese *Antyakarmapaddhati* gives the complete set of rules for the death ritual, including the first set of sixteen *piṇḍas* and the third set, but omits the middle set, which usually seems not to be offered in the Nepalese ritual. The author of the AKP discusses this matter in the appendix and cites the GPS and then gives the rules for offering the middle set in the appendix. In Gillian Evison's table (1989, 448–69), the *māsikapiṇḍas* are not specially named; she generally mentions the offering of *piṇḍas* during the first twelve days.

Thus, texts and the practice again differ considerably. In the ritual of August, 22, 2002, the first *piṇḍa* is not prepared in the ritual, but mentally taken from the second set of *piṇḍas* prepared on the eleventh day after death. Moreover, a *piṇḍa* for an unknown *preta* or for three previous generations is added without giving it a number. This is not a spontaneous invention of the priest, but instead is a common practice in Newar ancestor rituals. Also, the sixteenth *piṇḍa* is offered separately before the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* in the ritual, and this ball, also called *vikalapiṇḍa*, the "imperfect *piṇḍa*," is sometimes dedicated to all unpacified family members.

We see here that even in a core element of death rituals, that is, the *piṇḍas*, ritual formality is limited. How, then, does formality come to be seen as such a central category of rituals?

7. See Abegg 1921, 174 n.1.

8. See Müller 1992, 173 (AKP 4.45), GPS 13.28.

The variability and complexity of Hindu death rituals are, of course, to a great extent related to the liminal status of the deceased being somewhere between *preta* and *pitṛ*, between unpacified being, ghost, and ancestor. The *piṇḍas* are food—for the deceased, for deities, for the messengers of Yama, or for the crows—but they are also identified with the ancestors and the deceased. This is especially evident when the priest instructs the *yajamāna* to knead the *piṇḍas* with great attention. He asks him several times to be careful and not to hurt the deceased or ancestors: "Do not hit the *piṇḍa* while offering them the coins. It is something like hurting him."

Thus, the *piṇḍas* are food, but they also represent the *preta*, *pitṛ*, or the All-Gods (*viśve devāḥ*). Taking rituals, texts, and the commentary of the priests together, there is no formal ritual preparation and dedication of the *piṇḍas*, but only the awareness that a number (mostly sixteen) of *piṇḍas* has to be offered during the ritual preceding the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*. This is the "plot" that makes the ritual a *latyā* ritual. All other action is also to be found in other rituals.

The example also shows that the agency of the priest in rituals seems to be much greater than generally assumed. This becomes clear in the surprising substitution during the ritual of August, 22, 2002: the substitution of the father of the *preta* for his son. For it is the father of the deceased who performs the death ritual, although the dead son had himself a son. During the ritual, when the father kneads the *piṇḍas*, the priest says:

> It is (still) not allowed to uplift the *piṇḍa* from the ground. . . . Is there a son (born from the dead person)? [The father agrees]. . . . However, if he has a son, it is not necessary to make (mix) all (*piṇḍas*) one. If he did not have a son, (in such a case) all (the *piṇḍas*) shall be made one. . . . Don't worry that it (the *piṇḍa*) will be broken. . . . Now this way, move it round. . . . Make (it) little thinner upside. Now fold it like this. Now, again move it round. Keep pressing in this way (demonstration). (Be careful) it is going to be broken. It is not allowed to break the *piṇḍa*.

The son mentioned by the *yajamāna* was born shortly before his father died. He was therefore too young to perform the death rituals. In most, if not all texts,[9] it is explicitly forbidden for a father to perform the *antyeṣṭi* and *śrāddha* rituals for his son, since that would imply that the succession of the ancestors had broken down. But the agency of the priest in the ritual is indeed

9. See Kane 1973, vol. 4, 257; GPS 11.19.

remarkable. He can alter the presumptive rules according to the situation, although, since Vedic times, the ritual succession of father and son has been well established. However, the agency of the priest is not unconditional, and the term *adhikāra* is not identical with "agency," because in ritual contexts, it denotes not only "a capacity or power with normative value" (Lubin 2010a, 149) but also an obligation and responsibility (Lariviere 1988). In the *Kātyāyanaśrautasūtra* (1.1.1ff.), the right to perform Vedic rituals is clearly limited:

> Now about the right (to perform the Vedic ritual). The rites have results. This is (valid) for all (beings) because of no difference (between them). (Or) for humans (only) because of (their) ability to perform. Except for individuals lacking limbs, not having studied the Veda, eunuchs and *śūdras*. (Definitely it is valid) for Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas because of the *śruti* (that they are entitled to study). And for women because there is no other specification. And because (their participation in the sacrifice) is obvious. The chariot maker (has the right) to establish (the fires). And (this extends) to the obligatory rites. No, because of (his) absence (in the rites), such (says) Vātsa. A Niṣāda chieftain has the right to offer *gavedhuka* ([Coix barbata] grains). The (optional) ass-sacrifice may be offered by a Vedic student who has broken his vow of chastity. Both are to be performed in the ordinary (and not the ritually established) fire. (*KātyāyanaŚrS* 1.1.1–14)

To sum up, the great formal variety within both ritual practice and ritual texts has to do with the fact that ritual action has to be understood as a kind of grammar which serves for a creative use of its basic elements and structures. Ritual agency is a key notion in this context. Neither symbolism nor the meaning of rituals can explain this variability. True, there is a relation between a core action or plot of the ritual and sub-rituals—*pradhāna* and *aṅga* in Mīmāṃsā terminology—but the formality is not fixed by a limited and restricted procedure and protocol or liturgy. It is fixed instead by using more or less deliberately a known set of ritual elements and decorum from various sources. This holds true at least for the life-cycle rituals that I have taken into consideration and observed. It might be different with complex (temple) rituals, which involve a great number of priests and other ritual specialists who monitor each other. It might be different in purely brahmanic or spiritual traditions. In other words, ritual formality refers to a kind of floating inventory of ritual action and decorum which has to be bound and mixed by several agents to a structure or "grammar" of more or less meaningful action. Thus,

it is both the formality and the variability in the use of forms that explains the dynamics of rituals, which the *homo ritualis* readily acknowledges.

3.2 Atonements for Ritual Mishaps (prāyaścitta)

Despite the variations given through the agency of the ritual actors, Brahmanic ritualists claim Vedic ritual to be perfect and invariable. The sacrifice was regarded as an achievement of perfection, something that is without any harm. One of the many Sanskrit terms for "sacrifice" is *ma-kha*, which the *Gopathabrāhmaṇa* (2.2.5) explains to be a compound of *mā* and *kha*, that is, "without any hole." After all, gods make the ritual. Everything within the ritual is consecrated, thus nonhuman. Whatever gets into the sacrifice has to be sacrosanct; otherwise it pollutes and destroys the ritual. Nothing is natural; everything is ritual—even the elements are not pure in themselves and even they have to be consecrated. For the air could be polluted by insects and water by excrement. The holy fire could mix with the profane, and so on (cf. Negelein 1915, xxii).

Thus, it is men who make mistakes, not the ritual. The question for ritualists, thus, is this: How can the "perfect" ritual be protected against the imperfections of human beings? How can there be perfection in an imperfect world?

Looking at Vedic and Hindu material from various sources, I propose the following answer. Vedic ritual must be protected,[10] and it is finally protected by two rather nonritualistic notions: knowledge and faith, *vidyā* and *śraddhā*. I will first present several examples of mishaps in *śrauta* rituals; I will then elaborate on ancient methods of rectifying the mistakes, and I will finally try to show how the rather technical methods of healing and means of rectifying mishaps in ritual lead to a certain notion of internalization and autonomy of the ritual that is, I propose, more or less typical for the ritual thinking of the *homo ritualis*. Rituals, I argue, are to be seen as dynamic events in their own right that cannot really fail.

Vedic rituals aim at a certain result. If mishaps or obstacles arise,[11] the consequences could be serious: they could, for instance, severely harm the sacrificer and his family. The fear of ritual failure was therefore great.[12]

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10. *yajñasya aghātāya* (TaittBr 3.8.9.4).

11. See Thite 1975, 161ff., from which most of the following examples are taken; cf. also Seaquist 2004, 210.

12. See Lévi 1898, 123 and Huesken 2007 for more examples of ritual failure.

Thus, we read in the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (11.5.3.8ff., see infra), that the householder (*gṛhapati*) would die, if the *gārhapatya*, that is, the domestic sacrificial fire, went out; or that the cattle would die, if the *anvāhārvyapacana* fire were to go out; or that the family would be without heirs, if all sacrificial fires were to go out; or that the sacrificer would see unpleasant things in this and the next world, if the fires were to go out even if there were no wind.

Almost any mishap could lead to far-reaching results, even the destruction of the whole country. The loss of the horse in the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*), for example, would cause a war. The range of mishaps is even greater than the impressive list of ritual failures compiled by Ronald Grimes (1988) and Peter von Moos (2001), for example, misfire, abuse, ineffectuality, violation, contagion, opacity, defeat, omission, misframing, and so forth.[13] The Vedic ritualists were fully aware of what could fail. *Āśvalāyanaprāyaścittāni* 1b, for example, lists what could eventually be subject to error: the sacrificial material, the place and time of the ritual, the sacrificial fees, the priest and his wife. To mention only a few examples of mishaps in ritual:[14]

- Problems with the fire: the sacrificial fires are contaminated by each other or by the village fires or the forest fires (AitBr 7.6–8); there is the sudden extinction of the sacrificial fires (ŚBr 11.5.3.8ff).
- Misbehavior: the Brāhmaṇa might break his silence (ŚBr 1.7.4.20) or wrongly recite a hymn or verse. A famous example is *Ṛgveda* 1.32.6, which has long been used to demonstrate the importance of correct accentuation, for if *indraśatruḥ* is recited with the wrong accent, it means the opposite of "Indra's defeater," and thus destroys the ritual effect.
- Spoiled meals and food: the sacrificer could lose his offspring, cattle, or even his house if milk is spilled during the ritual, if it is touched by worms, or if it is not poured on a mold (TaittBr 3.7.2.1–5); the sacrificer could suffer from leprosy or hemorrhoids (*arśas*) if rain dropped on milk that is offered in the sacrifice (ibid.); the sacrificial meals could become sour, fermented, or burnt; the sacrificer might eat the food of a woman with child (AitBr 7.9).
- Polluting animals: a dog, which goes through the fire, interrupts and destroys the sacrifice (TaittBr 1.4.3.6). The horse of the *aśvamedha* might couple with a mare (ŚBr 13.6.8.1), a donkey could make unpleasant noises

13. See, for example, ŚBr 12.4.1.1ff. for a list of possible mistakes during the *agnihotra* ritual.

14. For further references, see Negelein's index to the *Atharvaprāyaścittāni* and Kane 1968ff., vol. 4, 58.

nearby; a crow, considered a messenger of death, could fly down on the sacrificial arena; the sacrificial animals could run away, collapse, become sick, roar, and so on. Animals of the night, such as mice or ants, could appear; vultures, which are also, regarded as birds of death, may appear and thus pollute the sacrifice.

- Destruction of sacrificial items: charcoal could fall from the fire; the sacrificial post (*yūpa*) to which the animals are bound could fall, break, or start to bud.

In general, Vedic sacrifice is seen as a body that embodies truth and salvation. Often, the sacrificial altar has the form of a human or animal body. Thus, mishaps can hurt it and can literally wound it or break it (ŚBr 12.6.1.2), break it up, or make holes (*chidra*) in it (AitBr 3.11). The sacrifice can even be killed or might run away. Thus, the utmost care and diligence is required in avoiding mistakes. If mistakes occur, the sacrifice would have to be restored. To this end, several methods were used.

In Chapter 3.1, I have tried to show the methods for alterations and variations in a (Newar) death ritual (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*), which allows for a considerable reduction in the strictness and formality claimed by most definitions of ritual. Basically, I have worked out the following methods: substitution, alteration, omission, fusion, reduction, repetition, and invention. Some of these serve a *restitutio in integrum*, that is, they help to heal the ritual and rectify any mishap that might occur.

The most widespread Sanskrit term used for this process—the ritual atonement—is *prāyaścitti* or *prāyaścit(ta)*,[15] which is defined by a commentator of the *Āpastambaśrautasūtra* (9.1.1) as follows: "*prāyaścitti* is a (ritual) act which has the purpose of removing (any) mistake."[16] The Vedic ritualists have composed extensive texts in which the casuistry, as well as rules and remedies to rectify mistakes in ritual, are listed.[17]

Thus, the method of substitution (*pratyāmna, ādeśa*) is very common in Vedic rituals. If, for instance,[18] the sacrificial spoon (*juhu*) splits during the

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15. For the etymology of *prāyaścitti* or *prāyaścitta*, as well as a general discussion of the term(s), see Stenzler 1876; Bonnerjea 1931; Gampert 1939, 23–29; Kane 1973, vol. 4, 59; Thite 1975, 163f.; Michaels 2005d, 3–60; Aktor 2012; Brick 2012.

16. *doṣanirharaṇārthaṃ karma prāyaścittam*, quoted in Negelein 1915, xii. See also ŚBr 13.1.6.3 and KātyŚrS 25.1.1: *karmopapātaḥ prāyaścittam* ("For mishaps in rituals [there is] the (ritual) atonement.").

17. See also the ŚBr 12.4, AitBr 32.2–11, *MānavaGS* 1.3, *HiraṇyakeśiGS* 1.5.1–16, *ĀśvŚrS* 3.10.

18. For more examples, see Thite 1975, 166; Negelein 1915, xi–xx.

sacrifice, it can be placed on the *āhavanīya* fire and replaced by another spoon (AitBr 7.5). If, in the *aśvamedha*, the horse is lost, another horse can replace it. If the *soma* plant is not available, it can be substituted by the *pūtikā* plant;[19] if this plant is not available, the leaves of the *arjuna* tree (*Terminalia Arjuna*) can be taken, and so on (*Tāṇḍyamahābrāhmaṇa* 9.5.3.ff.). If sacrificial material is spoiled, it can be exchanged with pure material (ŚBr 12.4.1.2). If a priest becomes sick, if the wife of the sacrificer becomes impure, or if the householder dies, substitutes can be made in all of these instances.[20] Similar materials, ghee and butter for instance, could substitute for each other, and long lists declare what had to be regarded as equal or similar. Basically, the material means of expiation—such as water, fire, *kuśa* grass, gold, the *brāhmaṇa*—are identical and exchangeable.

The method of alteration is a variant of the substitution, for it anticipates the alternatives performed during the rituals. From the early Brāhmaṇa texts onward, we find such alternatives mentioned, for instance, through the references to other schools or regional practices (*deśadharma*; see Wezler 1985).

Similarly, the method of omission is a necessity for coping with unforeseen infelicities, shortages, or negligence on the part of the ritual participants in the supply of sacrificial material. The method of (gradual) reduction (*tantreṇa*) has been applied in several cases. Thus, if the sacrificer was about to die within the next twenty-four hours, the elaborate *soma* sacrifice could also be performed within one day (*ekāha*; see *Atharvaprāyaścittāni* 3.9). Moreover, mishaps or mistakes can often be rectified by repetition or repair. If, for example, the fire-pan (*ukhā*) is broken, another is prepared, and this ritual act of making another fire-pan is again called *prāyaścitti* (ŚBr 6.6.4.7f.).[21]

Besides these and other methods, further ways of rectifying mishaps can be found in the Vedic material. Thus, often mishaps can be cured by recitations of hymns or verses from the Vedic *saṃhitās*; when the cart by which the *soma* is brought into the sacrificial arena makes noises of creaking, a verse[22] is to be recited; this is itself the *prāyaścitti* (ŚBr 3.5.3.17f.); or, if the *agnihotra*-cow makes a noise while being united with the calf and being milked, one should recite *Ṛgveda* 1.164.10 (*sūyavasād bhagavatī . . .*) (AitBr 5.27).

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19. A species of plant (Guilandina Bonduc ?) serving as a substitute for the *soma* plant.

20. For references and further examples, see Negelein 1915, xxxviii.

21. For additional examples, see Negelein 1915, xv and n.257.

22. *svaṃ goṣṭham avadātam* (*Vājasaneyisaṃhitā* 5.17).

A seemingly simple but effective way of repairing a broken sacrifice is the use of three utterances (*vyāhṛti*) *bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ,* and *svaḥ,* which are also regarded as "all-*prāyaścittis.*"[23] As proposed by Negelein (1915, vli), this rite originally was a means of substituting the complicated and complex ritual atonements with just one rite: ghee or another offering had to be given to that fire which was related to a *saṃhitā* which had been recited falsely. Later, the *vyāhṛti* formula was combined with a simple offering of ghee in the *āhavanīya* fire with the words: "Whatsoever ritual mistake has been made, for this is this alone (i.e. the rite) the total accomplishment (*kḷpti*), the all-*prāyaścitti.*"[24] It became a universal means of curing mishaps in the ritual recitation of the Veda. These holy syllables are also often preventatively used for unknown mishaps. According to a myth from the *Jaiminīyabrāhmaṇa* (1.357f.), the three *vyāhṛtis* were created by Prajāpati as an essence or condensation of the three Vedas, since the gods had asked him for remedies to rectify mistakes in the sacrifice. Thus, the *vyāhṛtis* are explicitly understood as a means to repair the broken sacrifice:

> These *vyāhṛtis* are internal fastenings of the Vedas; just as one may unite one thing with another or joint with a joint or with a cord unite an object of leather or something which has come apart, so with this one unites whatever in the sacrifice has come apart (broken). (AitBr 5.32; transl. Thite 1975, 167)[25]

One of the most common means to overcome any violation of ritual rules is making donations, especially gifts to gods or priests. Both, then, act as healers of the spoiled ritual: "for whatever joint of the sacrifice fails, that breaks; and whichever then is the deity in that (part of the sacrifice), through that deity he heals the sacrifice, through that one makes the sacrifice complete again" (ŚBr 13.6.1.2; transl. Eggeling). Thus, if the horse of the *aśvamedha* falls sick, a pap (*caru*) is given to Pūṣan, since this deity rules over the beasts (ŚBr 13.3.8.2), and if any eye disease befalls the horse, a *caru* is donated to Sūrya, since the body moves (*car,* "to move") through eyes (ŚBr 13.3.6.4).

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23. *sarva-prāyaścitti* or *-prāyaścitta,* AitBr 5.27; cf. Thite 1975, 167 with further references.

24. *yat kim cāvidhivihitaṃ karma kriyate tasyaiṣaiva sarvasya kḷptiḥ sarvāsya prāyaścittiś ceti hi śrutir bhavati* (*Atharvaprāyaścittāni* 3.8).

25. Cf. also *Jaiminīyopaniṣadbrāhmaṇa* 3.4.4.4.

Seen from the point of view of ritual practice, smaller mishaps had to be overlooked and disregarded. If, for example, a crow came into the sacrificial arena but immediately flew away, no ritual atonement had to be performed:

> His *gārhapatya* is this (terrestrial) world, his *anvāhāryapacana* (or southern fire) the air world, and his *āhavanīya* yonder (heavenly) world; and freely, indeed, birds, both combined (*yukta*) and single, pass to and fro in these worlds; and even if a whole crowd were to pass through between his fires, let him know that no harm and no hurt will come to him. (ŚBr 12.4.1.3; transl. Eggeling)

The Brāhmaṇas do not yet refer to personal guilt, but only to ritual failure. However, the cover term for the treatment of ritual failure and personal guilt, *prāyaścitta*, later becomes common to both cases. In Hindu classical law, it became necessary to differentiate between actions undertaken with and without intent in order to know which of the two results—those which are caused by intentional (*kāmata* or *jñāna*) sins or those caused by unintentional (*akāmata, ajñāna*) sins—are destroyed by penances.[26]

> Wise men know that a restoration is for an evil committed unintentionally; some say, on the evidence of the revealed canon that it is also for one done intentionally. An evil committed unintentionally is cleansed by reciting the Veda, but one committed intentionally, in confusion, (is cleansed) by different sorts of particular restorations. A Twice-born man who has incurred the need for restoration, through fate or by an act committed in a former (life), should not associate with good people until restoration has been completed. (Manu 11.45–47)[27]

The logic behind it is that only intentional acts count ritually. The distinction between intentionally and unintentionally committed offenses has to do with the nature of ritual actions, as I have tried to show in Chapter 1.1.

Any mishap "breaks" the ritual, and the methods mentioned help to join or put it together again. This all looks very technical, as if everything in Vedic rituals were very strict, as if rules had to be strictly observed to avoid ritual failure. However, two points must be made which help to understand why Vedic and Hindu rituals seldom actually fail.

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26. Kane 1968ff., vol. 1., 63ff., 75, 80; Rocher 1980, 61–89; Day 1982, 215.

27. See, for instance, Manu 11.45–46; *Yājñ* 3.226; and GautDhS 19.3ff.

First, the agency of the Brahman priest should not be underestimated, as we have seen in the previous section. It was he who had to supervise the ritual, to intervene if mishaps happened, to recite the correct mantras, and to guide the other priests. He had to separate the important from the unimportant and thus guarantee the success of the ritual. As mentioned before, he is often compared with a healer and doctor.

Second, even though mishaps in the rituals were considered to harm the people involved, and even though all possible methods to rectify ritual mistakes had to be applied, the Brāhmaṇa texts sometimes mention that one should not be too afraid of mishaps. The *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* even declares mistakes and incompleteness to be helpful:

> Then, as to the successful issue of the sacrifice. Now, whatever part of the sacrifice is incomplete (*nyūna*), that part of it is productive for him; and what is redundant in it, that is favorable to cattle; and what is uncertain (*saṃkasuka*) in it, that makes for prosperity; and what is perfect in it, that is conducive to heaven. . . . This then is the successful issue of the sacrifice; and, verily, whosoever thus knows this to be the successful issue of the sacrifice, by him offering is made by a wholly successful sacrifice. (ŚBr 9.4.4.8, 12; my translation partly following Eggeling)

According to this passage, one had not necessarily to be afraid of the mishaps, and rituals are not only governed by the rigidity of ritual rules. What also counts is both the rule and the spirit or knowledge of the ritual agents. *Prāyaścitti* and *vidyā* ("knowledge") go together, are sometimes even used as synonyms.[28] If there is no knowledge, there would also not be efficacy with regard to ritual. This also means that knowledge alone can sometimes rectify the mishaps in rituals and that in the end, knowledge alone can substitute ritual. All of this, of course, leads to the widespread notion of the inner (*mānasa*) ritual and ritual criticism of the Upaniṣads and other texts.

This argument seems to be in contradiction to the fact that rituals can be efficacious even if they are performed ignorantly, out of confusion (*bhrantyā*), or absentmindedly (*vismaraṇāt*), for it is generally accepted that the ritual works independent of the sacrificer's or priest's mind if the prescribed rules are followed. This is why ritual atonement is necessary independent of the guilt of the ritual agents.

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28. See, for instance, ŚBr 11.5.3.8ff. or *Gopathabrāhmaṇa* 1.3.13; cf. Thite 1975, 171.

The Vedic ritualists apparently were aware of a general problem mentioned in the beginning. How can imperfect men perform perfect rituals? If it were only the action per se (*ex opera operato*), then animals could also sacrifice and get the reward (*puṇya*) of ritual action, and this was again and again stressed by opponents of rituals. Fish, which always take a bath in the holy water, someone who innocently stepped on cow dung, and birds flying around a temple and thus doing a *pradakṣiṇā* or a ritual circumambulation around the holy place are all standard examples of such satirical ritual criticism (cf. the following section).

The Vedic ritualists therefore stressed the importance of knowledge and faith. Thus, it was regarded as a bad omen if rain dropped on the sacrificial spoon and thereby increased the *agnihotra*-milk, for the rain had not been consecrated and could therefore not be integrated into the sacrificial arena. Such mishaps and other similar ones apparently could be counteracted not by actions, but by bona fides, that is, by thoughts alone:

> They also say "If it were to rain upon (*upariṣṭāt*) any one's Agnihotra-milk when it has been ladled into the offering-spoon, what rite and what expiation would there be in that case?" Let him know "Light (or sap) has come to me from above (*upariṣṭāt*); the gods have helped me: I shall become more glorious;" and let him by all means make offerings therewith. This, then, is the rite performed in that case. (ŚBr 12.4.2.10; transl. Eggeling)

Another example from the Brāhmaṇa texts for the stress on the right knowledge is the initiation of Śauceya Prācīnayogya. When, in this process, the priest Uddālaka Āruṇi asks his student about the details of the *agnihotra* ritual, he also says:

> If thou hast offered the Agnihotra knowing this, then it has indeed been offered by thee; but if (thou hast offered it) not knowing this, then it has not been offered by thee. (ŚBr 11.5.3.4; transl. Eggeling)

Then, the teacher instructs him in the esoteric meanings of the *agnihotra*, and afterwards the student asks his guru about the knowledge of how to counteract various mishaps with regard to the sacrificial fires, for example:

> Sauceya, thus instructed, said: "I would yet ask thee a question, reverend sir."—"Ask then, Prācīnayogya!" he replied. He said, "If, at that very time, the Gārhapatya fire were to go out, dost thou know what

> danger there is in that case for him who offers?"—"I know it," he replied; "before long the master of the house [i.e. the sacrificer himself] would die in the case of him who would not know this; but by dint of knowledge I myself have prevailed"—"What is that knowledge, and what the atonement?" he asked.—"The upward breathing has entered the breath of the mouth—this (is the knowledge); and I would make the offering on the Āhavanīya—this would be the atonement, and I should not be committing that sin."—"This much, then reverend sir, we two (know) in common," said (Sauceya). (ŚBr 11.5.3.9; transl. Eggeling)

Interestingly, the term used for knowledge here is *prāyaścitti*. The ritual action alone cannot prevail over mishaps, but with the right esoteric knowledge, mistakes cannot really endanger the ritual.

In passing, I should mention that the problem of ritual perfection was discussed in a much more sophisticated terms by the Mīmāṃsakas or specialists in the interpretation of Vedic rituals (cf. Chapter 9). Jaimini, for example, was fully aware of the basic problem that imperfect men cannot create perfect rituals. He discussed all relevant aspects: the relationship between the first archetypical performance and its ritual repetition, prototype and realization, main (*prakṛti, pradhāna*) and subsidiary (*śeṣa, aṅga*) actions, divine and human agency (*adhikāra*), material and action, as well as the methods of substitution and the problem of efficacy (*apūrva*). However, for him, the way out of the paradoxical situation was not the "protestant" interiorization of the ritual, but its conversion into an absolute entity. It is the ritual itself that has its own agency, independent of those who perform it.

What does all of this mean for ritual theory? Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994, 128) rightly remarked that: "Ritual is prescribed action, you have to get it right, and yet sometimes it seems that so long as you try, so long as you accept the ritual commitment, it is almost impossible to get it wrong." Indeed, as was already observed by Julius Negelein, the seemingly stereotyped and fixed (Vedic) ritual was always and quickly adapted to the practical needs of the priests and sacrificers: "It was cared for all cases. In a wonderful malleability, the seemingly rigid ritual adapted itself to the practical needs" (Negelein 1915, xxxix; my transl.). Thus, rituals, despite being formal, repetitive, and stereotyped, are full of dynamics, and this is basically due to the methods aiming at a *restitutio in integrum*, especially substitution, alteration, iteration, omission, reduction, repetition, invention, as well as recitation and donation. It is by these methods that a failed or even messy performance does

not inevitably invalidate the ritual as a whole (cf. Grimes 1988, 103–22). Consequently, ritual facilitates change, rather than obstructing it. Ritual—one could perhaps say—is the imperfect realization of the idea of perfection. However, "if you abandon the assumption of perfect order and perfect repetition, imperfection and variation become illuminating, rather than being noise that a well-honed interpretation dampens down and edits out" (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 130).

3.3 The Comic Side of Ritual Formality

Every ritual is formal, even to the point where only the form remains. For this reason, jokes, satire, and irony easily take effect in rituals, especially when mishaps are occurring and the agency somehow goes out of order. Rituals, in fact, are often comic, paradoxical, stiff, pompous, silly, or ridiculous. That is because rituals have divested themselves of function and are, in this sense, empty. They always carry the seeds of their own destruction within them, even when there is no visibly stamped "use by" date. They often hit the ritual with great accuracy where it hurts, with intentional nastiness: the emptiness and the lack of any sense to it, and so they can dethrone whole traditions. But the dynamics of ritual is fed precisely by this ritual criticism, for the anti-ritual generally petrifies rapidly into a ritual itself.

To the three classical roads to salvation, that of knowledge (*jñānamārga*), of sacrifice or deed (*karmamārga*), and of devotion (*bhaktimārga*), one ought to add a path of heroism (*vīryamārga*, cf. Michaels 2004a, 272–80) and, perhaps then, a path of liberating laughter (*hāsyamārga*) that also leads to ritual.

I shall begin with an example of the comical side of ritual actions. This is the widespread ritual ablution (*snāna, mārjanā, tarpaṇa, abhiṣeka*). As contamination or defilement are often conceived of as filth, washing is a popular method to free oneself of impurities or pollution. In India, sleep is already seen as a contaminant, from which one must free oneself daily. According to the Dharmaśāstra (cf. Kane 1968ff., vol. 2.1, 656–68), a daily bath, then, is obligatory for all ranks of society; for the Twice-born, it must be accompanied by Vedic mantras (BaudhDhS 2.4.4, Manu 2.176). Someone who does not bathe daily is not permitted to maintain the hearth fire, to call on the gods, or to carry out other rituals.

According to the *Smṛticandrikā* (1, 110ff.), a comparatively recent Hindu compendium of ritual, which, however, is a compilation of older material from the Dharmaśāstra, the system of ritual bathing is set forth in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1 The system of ritual ablution in Hinduism

Washing one's own body (*snāna*)			Washing for somebody else = libation
Primary (*mūla*): bath in water with forms like *malākarṣaṇa*: to wash off dirt, e.g., after anointing with oil, etc.		Secondary (*gauṇa*)	*tarpaṇa*: giving water to the ancestors
nityа: fixed, e.g., part of the morning ritual after cleaning teeth and mouth (*ācamana*)	*kriyāṅga*: as part (*aṅga*) of a larger ritual, often on the occasion of libations for gods or ancestors	*mānasa*: spiritual, carried out spiritually or meditatively	
naimittika: by reason of some temporary cause, e.g., after touching a *caṇḍālā* or a corpse	*kriyāsnāna*: ritual bath in holy places, when the bath itself is the ritual	*āgneya*: with holy ashes (= *substitutio*)	
kāmya: optional or for a particular wish, e.g., the event of an eclipse of the sun, or a festival, often in connection with astrological criteria			

The motives and aims of a ritual ablution are established according to this multiplicity. In the *Smṛticandrikā*, the following are named, among others: washing oneself free of guilt (expiation), strength, beauty, success, religious merit, long life, fortune, resolution, and health.

But the ritual ablution only promises to be successful if the form is adhered to, that is, when time, place, and method are according to specified norms and rules. Thus, the daily bath should be taken before midday; even better is the time before sunrise or at the break of day. Hot or warm water is

not permitted. Natural water is prescribed (Manu 4.203, Viṣṇu 64.1–2, 15–16), preferably that of rivers, but also that of temple pools, lakes, or springs. In the *Snānasūtra*, "The Instruction of Bathing," by Kātyāyana, the prescription for taking a ritual bath is as follows:

> Now the instruction for the obligatory (daily) bath in rivers etc. (The Twice-born) shall fetch clay, cow dung, *kuśa* grass, sesame seeds, and flowers, step to the bank, (there) place these things at a purified location, wash his hands and feet, hold *kuśa* blades in his hand, bind up his lock (*śikhā*), wear the holy thread (*yajñopavīta)*, carry out the ritual rinsing of his mouth (*ācamana*), call to the water with the words *urum hi* (ṚV 1.24.8), and mix it (with his thumb) with the words *ye te śatam* (cf. PG 1.2). He shall fill his folded hands with water and the words *sumitriyā* (VS 6.22) and pour (the water) onto the ground in the direction of his enemy, saying *durmitriyā* (VS 6.22). He shall rub loose earth three times onto all parts of his body, (first) the belly, the buttocks, the heels, the feet and the hands, then carry out the ritual rinsing of the mouth (*ācamana*), honor the water, and rub his (whole) body with loose earth. In the direction of the sun he shall immerse himself in the water with the words *idam viṣṇur* (ṚV 1.22.17 = VS 5.15) and he shall bathe with the words *āpo asmān* (ṚV 10.17.10 = VS 4.2), then he shall straighten his body with the words *ud-id-ābhyaḥ* (VS 4.2), immerse himself again in the water, again carry out the ritual of rinsing the mouth with his head out of the water, and rub his body with cow dung, saying the words *mā nastoke* (ṚV 1.114.1 = VS 16.16). Then he shall bath, saying the words *imam me Varuṇa* (VS 21.1–4) and the four sayings *mā apo, uduttamam* (VS 12.12), *muñcatu* (ṚV 10.97.16 = VS 12.90), and *avabhṛtha* (VS 3.48). At the end of this mantra, he shall immerse himself in the water, straighten up again, rinse his mouth again, and drip water upon his body with the *darbha* blades of grass, reciting nine verses. . . . Then, immersing himself in the water each time, he shall repeat the *aghamarṣaṇa* hymn (ṚV 10.190.1–3) three times, and before and after this he shall recite the words *cit patir-mā* (VS 4.4), the holy syllable *oṃ*, the *vyāhṛti*, and the Gāyatrī hymn (ṚV 3.62.10). . . . After coming out of the water he shall put on two freshly washed cloths, wash his hands and thighs with loose earth, rinse his mouth, and continue with the ritual of regulating the breath (*prāṇāyāma*). (*Snānasūtra* of Kātyayana, after Kane 1968ff., vol. 2.1, n. 1571)

The ritual bath must be seen separately to the mere hygienic exercise. The difference is marked by the formal resolution (*saṃkalpa*), the recitation of

the mantra, the use of certain ritual objects (spoon, *kuśa* grass, jug of water), as well as formal ritual actions such as those in the example given above; all of it makes for the extraordinariness of the action. Every detail is precisely regulated, and the text only reports a part of all of that. Thus, for the sub-ritual of rinsing the mouth (*ācamana*), the right hand is generally divided into four holy sections (*tīrtha*), which are applied varyingly according to different criteria. A widespread chain is *brāhma, kaya, daiva*, and *pitrya*:

> (The place) where the fingers are rooted in the palm is called the *tīrtha* of Brahmā, at the root of the (small) finger it is called (the *tīrtha*) of Ka (= Prajāpati), at the tip it is called divine, and (the place) below both is called (the *tīrtha*) for the ancestors. (Manu 2.59)

According to this, the tips of the fingers (without the thumb) are assigned to the gods (*daiva*), the right side and the middle of the hand to the ancestors (*pitrya*), the heel of the hand opposite to the middle fingers is assigned to the chief god Brahmā (*brāhma*), and the left edge of the hand to Prajāpati (*kāya, prajāpatya*); the middle of the hand is sometimes regarded as the highest position (*pārameṣṭhya*). Accordingly, the *brahmatīrtha* is often used in honoring the gods and the *pitryatīrtha* is often used in ancestor cults; water intended for the gods is poured toward the front, over the fingers, while water for the ancestors is poured over the heel of the hand. Although ritual and profane ablutions may be carried out at one and the same time, in this way, it is always clear which action is ritual and which is not.

This distinctive rituality of the morning toilet is particularly strong in India, but can be found in other cultures, too. Thus, the Nacirema tribe has a strongly stylized complex of actions as a morning ritual. This comprises norms of bodily hygiene, washing, combing, and making up the face, whereby numerous salves and perfumes are applied. The body rites are accepted and practiced by nearly everyone, especially women. Whoever does not carry out these rites is at the edges of society. The ritual is carried out at a particular place in the house, resembling an altar, at which there is also a mirror. For Nacirema men, this place is often taboo.

If anyone now asks where the Nacirema tribe lives, he or she only needs to read the name backward. Horace Minder's article "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (1956) illustrates more than the exotic perspective on the bodily behavior of cultures, however; it makes clear the difference between ritual and routine. For while the Naciremas or—to be fair—the Snamreg can always vary the morning toilet, and in fact must do so (i.e., depending on the success

of the cosmetics industry's advertising), because the sense of the actions is subject to the purpose (freedom from wrinkles, adaptation to the ideal of beauty, etc.), this is not the case in ritual ablutions. There is little choice of the means, as the means themselves are the ritual.

An ablution of this kind is something that is, to a great extent, stereotyped, standardized, and a formalized complex of actions, to wit: a ritual. Depending upon the point of view or system of beliefs, the whole thing appears either to be a heartfelt or ridiculous sequence of actions. Again, mere cleaning of the body or the mouth is not what is understood in India by ritual ablution, as neither a toothbrush, which would better fulfill any hygienic purpose, is permitted, nor can a shower in a hotel fulfill the holy purpose of the ritual self-cleansing. We see a person who is standing up to the navel in a river and contorting himself to pour water in his mouth and over his head, so as to become not clean, but pure.

No wonder, then, that this behavior provoked derision from "heretics" such as the Buddhists. The nun Puṇṇā, who had been a slave but became a free woman when she won over the Brahman Sotthiya to Buddhism, mocked:

> All frogs, turtles, water snakes, crocodiles and whatever else lives in the water would have to go directly to heaven. Everyone who commits evil deeds, for example those who slaughter pigs and sheep, hunters, fishermen, thieves, murderers, would be freed of bad *karma* when they sprinkled water over themselves. If these rivers really washed away all the evil that you have committed, then they would also wash away your religious merit and leave you there, empty and hollow. (*Therīgāthā* 240–43)

Again and again, the Buddha taught his disciples that external bathing did not purify, but inner purification was necessary. The following is typical of this kind of pronouncement:

> Man is not purified by water, however often he may bathe in it; whoever lives in truth and virtue, he is pure. (*Udāna* 1.9)
>
> Whoever has sinned, remains impure, whether he touches moist cow dung or not, whether he walks around the fire or not, whether he prays to the Sun with folded hands, or not. (*Aṅguttara-Nikāya* V, p. 266)

The criticism of the merely external nature of the washing ritual was expressed already, of course, by the Brahmins themselves; this became proverbial in India:

> A fish lives only to bathe, a snake nourishes itself from the wind, a bellwether lives on leaves, a mouse lives in a cave, a lion in the wood, an egret seeks the deep, the oilseed miller's ox wanders about, the carrier of idols goes from place to place and constantly has to do with the gods. What payment do they receive, then, for these mortifications? Let purity of heart be close. (Böhtlingk no. 4873)

The image of the fish always swimming in water, yet never acquiring the merit of a ritual bath, was probably popular early on. In mythological texts (Purāṇas and Māhātmyas), we find it repeated. A simple person, these texts tell us, can bathe at a *tīrtha* one hundred times and yet remain as impure as a wine jug (Kkh 6.38; cf. Tss 69, 183).

Similar mockery of senseless ritual can be found in remarks on birds, who ought to attain freedom, since they fly around the temple daily, thus practicing the prescribed ritual circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*), or in the image of the croaking of frogs, which is the same as the recitations of Brahmin priests, or on the useless ritual of sacrifice (cf. Freiberger 1998).

Custom is the enemy of all sense—that is the meaning behind these sayings. For this reason, the absurdity of many rituals, quite abstracted from sense, actually provokes such satires or parodies. In modern times, caricaturists have had an easy time in deriding precisely such petrified rituals.

A digression: Sometimes even the brahmanic ritualists and their commentators laugh at the rituals. A fine parodistic example for the humor of Indian scholars is the Maṇḍūka or "Frog" Upaniṣad by the Brahman Ganapath Sastri, translated by Lee Siegel. Pandit Ganapath Sastri mocks the recitation of mantras in initiation:

> The initiate must ceaselessly mutter repetition after repetition of the supreme mantra: *Oṃ haha huṃ hahaha phaṭ haha heehee hoho huṃ*. . . .
>
> All is sorrow, decay, and death. Thus the brahmin must chant, the tantric must whisper, the *bhakta* must weep, the yogi must keep silent; meanwhile the man of true holiness laughs. (*Maṇḍūka Upaniṣad* 7.1, 7.8)

Lee Siegel himself is a great mocker, so that we cannot be certain that this text actually exists. With a fine sense of "academic" rituals, he has published a novel, *Love in a Dead Language*. In this amusing and yet scholarly book,

Leopold Roth, a professor of Indology, attempts to fathom the love rituals of the *Kāmasūtra* by trying them out. The *Kāmasūtra*, however, is primarily ritual literature and is not really suited as an erotic compendium. When love cooing is dealt with in this work, that is, noises created by blows which the hetaera is supposed to emit in order to increase the excitement of her lover, then the whole business, combined with the instructions for carrying it out as given by the commentator Yaśodhara, sounds like this:

> Making *phūt* is imitating the sound made when a jujube falls into the water.
>
> Commentary: ". . . when making the blows with the outstretched, cupped hand, "cooing and *phūt* take place" on the part of the female lover'. In what way? (The author) answers: "By means of the inside of the mouth": cooing takes place in the inside of the mouth, with the throat closed off. The designation "cooing" indicates an unclear sound. When it is produced with the throat open and using the root of the tongue, then *phūt* happens." (Yaśodhara on the *Kāmasūtra*, p. 149)

Leopold Roth, in Lee Siegel's novel, is—to finish telling the story—not only an ivory tower philologist; he wants to know exactly what is what, and proceeds to put the *Kāmasūtra* into practice. His victim is the beautiful student Lalita (a hardly veiled reference to Vladimir Nabokov's Lolita), whom he seduces—quite scientifically—according to the Vātsyāyana during a study trip to India. This burlesque novel is presented to us simultaneously as a scientific translation and commentary of the *Kāmasūtra*, which, in addition, is edited by Anang Saighal, one of Leopold Roth's students, who refers to a further (fictitious) commentary by one Pandit Pralayananga Lilaraja. But the difference between the professor and Lalita lies in the significance that each attaches to the love ritual. What, for the professor, is a practical study of Indian love life, a kind of field research,[29] becomes serious for the student—and she is disappointed. The rest happens as it has had to ever since Heinrich Mann's *Professor Unrat* ("Small Town Tyrant") or Elias Canetti's *Die Blendung* ("The

29. "I am a tenured full professor of Indian studies, a Sanskrit scholar, and yet never, never in my life, have I made love to an Indian woman. While I have had the oral pleasure of eating Indian food and endured the gastrointestinal torment of Indian dysentery, my pscho-sexo-Indological development has been arrested; I yearn to move on to the phallic and then genital stages of Indology. Some sort of union, an erotic spanning of East and West, had, before I met Lalita, already become a hope. And now aspiration becomes obsession: I must possess Lalita Gupta for the sake of Sanskrit and South Asian studies." (Siegel 1999, 16)

Blinding"): the student lays charges of sexual harassment against the professor, who loses his reputation and his marriage, and, in the end, he is even found dead in his office, killed with Sir Monier Monier-Williams' Sanskrit-English dictionary—as yet another of the numerous intellectual references in the novel, for Monier-Williams quite shamelessly used the knowledge gathered by Leopold Roth's namesake, Rudolf, together with Otto Böhtlingk, into their monumental seven-volume Petersburg Dictionary. The whole novel is an amusing and scholarly potpourri of science and fiction, which cannot be untangled, and presents and parodies the rituals of scientific publication. In contrast to the English genre of university novels in the vein of David Lodge or Malcolm Bradbury, Lee Siegel's book was published by a noted scientific publishing house, the respectable Chicago University Press.

Back to the serious side of things, to the ritual of ablution. Remarkable, and typical, is the fact that the ritual ablution at a holy bathing place (*tīrtha*) itself came into being as a criticism of a ritual. For it is represented as being—for example, in the *Mahābhārata* epic—a simplified, indeed liberating, ritual action in contrast to the elaborate Vedic ritual of sacrifice:

> These sacrifices cannot be (*yajña*) attained by a poor man, [for] sacrifices [require] much equipment [and] a great deal of various materials. These can [if at all] be acquired by Kings or sometimes by rich men, [but] not by penniless aides, individuals [or] those with no ties. But recognise which ritual may [however] be attained (i.e. carried out) by the poor, with religious merit equal to that of the success of the sacrifice! [For] this is the greatest secret of the seer: using *tīrthas* is (such) a religious merit, worth more even than the sacrifice. (Mbh 3.80.35–38; vgl. Tss 38)

Here, we see that criticism of ritual does not mean an absence of ritual, for sooner or later, it becomes a ritual itself. But we should examine at which point the a priori meaninglessness becomes so powerful that it can be expressed as criticism, something that has not yet been adequately investigated. It is equally unclear why the criticism of rituals or the protest against them petrifies so quickly to a ritual itself.

The form of the deviation and the context of the ritual determine the comical side of a situation. The rituals are not actually intended to be comical, but their emphasis on being serious lets them appear often as comical. Even if the function of rituals is the creation of comedy, as in a carnival, for example, it is serious for the actors involved: the comedian himself does not laugh; he causes others to laugh. Indeed, the ceremonial often expressly forbids

laughter during rituals (cf. also Tschanerl 1992). Prohibitions on laughter for the (Brahman) pupils (*snātaka*), thus those who have already undergone the ritual bath, are numerous.

> He should not smile. If he smiles, he should cover his mouth. (ĀpDhS 1.2.7.6–7).
>
> He should avoid touching the guru (with his fingers), whispering (in his ear), laughing (to his face), calling him, saying his (personal) name, or giving him commands, etc. (ĀpDhS 1.2.8.15).
>
> He should imitate (his teacher) in getting up, sitting, walking, and smiling. He should not excrete, fart, speak loudly, laugh loudly, spit loudly, clean his teeth, pick his nose, furrow his brow, clap with his hands, snip with his fingers in the presence (of his teacher). (ĀpDhS 2.2.5.8–9).
>
> He should avoid spitting, laughing, yawning, cracking his knuckles,. . . .(GautDhS 2.15).
>
> A *snātaka* is not to observe people laughing or dancing (KāṭhakaGS 3.17, PG 2.7.3).
>
> The ceremony of cleaning the mouth (*ācamana*) is also to be carried out without laughing and talking (BaudhDhS 1.8.18).

The invariability of rituals provokes situative comedy and then often needs only a minor triggering factor. When, in November 1967, the German revolutionary Fritz Teufel was told to rise from his seat in court, under threat of a fine for disobeying, he commented on this ritual with the famous words: "If it helps to get at the truth"—and all at once the ritual of the trial was exposed. When German students in the spring of 1968 held up a placard to their professors in their academic robes which said, "Unter den Talaren: der Muff von 1000 Jahren" ("Under the gowns the musty smell of 1,000 years"), a whole series of academic rituals collapsed; painful efforts are now being made to revive them. Each time, the methods of ironic culmination and parody were used. This can be done by the conscious inversion of the ritual, for instance, the *devistur,* while maintaining a serious air—thus irony. But it can also be a small, surprising, often involuntary nonconformity with the norm, an error in the course of things: a dog running across the ritual location, a mistake in recitation, sacrificial milk being spilled or rained into, an ass braying in the middle of it all (all of these are examples taken from ancient Indian ritual practice). Because everything in a ritual is exactly prescribed, mistakes in its course are not provided for. A ritual of atonement is usually required to correct or to compensate; in the Hindu context, this is the *prāyaścitta* ritual, as

we have seen in the previous chapter. The small intended or unintended mistakes lead to a relief of the tension that rituals so carefully build up. Who does not know the feeling of having to laugh just at the instant when things are most serious, when laughing is not permitted under any circumstances? Who does not know the feeling of liberation when all participants then join in the laughter, because they, too, know or feel that it was all not so serious after all!

Of course, only when what is expected is clear can its inversion or exaggeration be comical. In rituals, it is pretty clear what is to happen, for every ritual is a repetition and imitation. But imitation and aping are close to each other.

4

Playful Rituals (līlā)

BRUCE KAPFERER WAS right to stress that the performance of ritual cannot be reduced to a preexisting cultural "text," but that "important properties of the meaning of the 'text' may only be realized in performance" (1983, 328) and "that the full nature of the text is only revealed in performance" (ibid., 351). Kapferer also saw that "the transformative capacity of ritual is effected above all through various media of performance: music, song dance, comic drama" (Houseman and Severi 1998, 193), which have "the tendency to deny reflective distance, . . . to enter directly into the experiencing subject and to form an unity with the subject" (Kapferer 1983, 260, 327).

In contrast to the more rigid, formal, and linguistically coded structures of ritual handbooks, the performance of rituals opens the space for their variability. We have already seen in Chapter 3.1 how agency and formality necessitate variation as each performance is different and thus requires alternations and renewals. In this chapter, I want to focus on another aspect of performative variability, which was called "liminality" by Victor Turner. He means the nonordinary, ludative, paradoxical, and sometimes hilarious and playful parts of rituals that are often accompanied by music and dance, as well as intensive emotions. One of his examples is *līlā*,[1] of which Stanley Tambiah notes:

> The *līlā* in North India means play and as such labels games and dramas. But *līlā* is also used to describe one of the greatest cycles of religious festivals, the Rām Līlā, at which the Rāmāyaṇa is enacted. In this context, *līlā* means no "ordinary" play, no "ordinary" theatre, but communicates the fact of the gods and the divine becoming *activated and manifest in this* world, and thus stands for an intensive experience of the divine, characterized by a heightened use of many media of communication and a charged and expectant mass participation. (Tambiah 1979, 117)

1. Cf. Sax 1995; Schweig 2010.

The differences between play, play-acting, and rule-governed games have been clearly described by Johannes Bronkhorst (2012). If a play is spontaneous, it cannot be a ritual in our terms since it is not stipulated; play-acting is closer to ritual, but it is more often a part of a ritual complex; in rule-governed games, finally, it is the competitive and, in the end, open result that matters. In contrast, in rituals, the results are fixed and, thus, winner and loser of the performers: "there can be no unforeseen outcomes of ritual, and if there are, the ritual is no longer ritual" (ibid., 166).[2] Bronkhorst sees "that ritual activity is holistic in the sense that ritual actions are divorced from their usual goals . . ." (ibid., 165), but he underestimates the fact that rituals often contain playful elements with open ends. This is the ludistic and liminal part that Victor Turner stressed.

In the following sections, I deal with these aspects of rituals, for instance, with the question of how music, dance, and emotions are different from ritual music, ritual dance, and ritual emotions, but I will not yet deal with festivals—this will follow in Chapter 6. The reason these matters are subsumed under formality (rather than modality) in the present book is that their formal aspects are decisive for the question of whether they should count as rituals or not. This means that I will not predominantly deal with music, dance, or emotions as more or less accidental parts of rituals, but as independent rituals that require the components that were mentioned in Table I.1 (p. 39).

4.1 Music and Ritual Music

Ritual spaces of sound have a particular kind of acoustics, a special soundscape that transports any listener to another world. Here are a few examples from the extremely sonic culture of South Asia:[3] a recitation of the Veda transports one immediately to the world of Brahmanic ritual and spirituality; the sing-song sentence *Rāma nāma satya hai* ("the name of Rama is the truth"), to be heard especially in the streets and lanes of Varanasi, often accompanied by drumming, ensures that everyone makes room for an approaching funerary procession; singing, or rather chanting, divine names accompanied by a drum takes the listener to the colorful world of the Hindu *pūjā*.

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2. Bronkhorst (2012) demonstrates these differences by referring to the ritualized chariot race in the Vājapeya and Rājasūya rituals, the Vedic dicing game, and the verbal contests (*brahmodaya*). He rightly refutes the position of Heesterman (1993) that the Vedic sacrifice is nothing but play.

3. See Beck 1993; Wilke and Moebus 2011; Wilke 2013.

Such rituals are separations in space and time from daily life, and music enables this sequestration without simply being a background. Music, in this context, is neither just ornamental, nor is it program music; rather, music itself becomes a ritual (at least in religious rituals[4]) in that it creates singular, elevating spaces of sound that can be bodily sensed. In this section, I will attempt to show, on the one hand, how music in rituals creates its own space of sound in which some daily event briefly becomes an extraordinary, often ceremonial or festive, ritual event and, on the other hand, how ritual spaces of sound distinguish themselves from other spaces of sound.

Ritual actions can be sensibly delimited from daily, routine actions using the components outlined in Table I.1 at the end of the Introduction of this book. It seems to me to be particularly important to distinguish them from routine daily actions, which are often also designated as rituals. These routine actions do have formal, repetitive, performative patterns of action, but certain regimes of cultural symbols are lacking, which make up the elevation—the *religio*—of the actions and their normativity. Among such elevating regimes of cultural symbols are metaphors, insignia, media of transmission (scripts and the like), and also music. With these regimes of symbols, reference is made to ideals or metapersonal ideas of values. In the case of rituals, a greater individual or collective potential of obligation and recognition, compared with routine daily actions, exists for those actively participating in the ritual. The concept of "daily" or "the everyday" is itself a construction and culturally informed, yet the criterion of separating distinct actions still seems to me to be essential.

Precisely this separation from everyday life—thus my argument—does not occur purely by the agency of music, but certainly to a major extent. Music, of course, becomes by this a ritual itself, and not simply a means to an end. For ritual music differs from other music by the same criteria as for the definition of ritual.

First, there is embodiment: ritual music has to be not only heard but also embedded in a space of action. The occasion and the space (temple, procession, etc.) are certain or are made by other ritual actions (cf. Grimes 2013, 256). Often, it matters by whom the music is played, because it is not only a matter of music. Instead, certain persons must play particular pieces of music on certain instruments in certain places. In Nepal, the rulers, together with a piece of land, which yielded the earnings to pay the musicians, occasionally

4. In this section, I concentrate on overtly religious rituals and not so much on other musical events, such as the performance of a European symphony concert which, of course, can also be seen analyzed as a ritual. See Small 1998 and Grimes 2013, 217–23.

provided these instruments. Traditions of long duration have been able to establish themselves in this way, even despite a change of locale. Even today, for example, at the Deśoddhāra festival at the Paśupatinātha temple in Deopatan, which is a series of rituals at the shrine of the Goddess Pīgāmāī (cf. Michaels 2008, 55–68), two trumpeters of the Jyāpu or peasant caste must come from Patan, around ten kilometers away, just to play a few notes on the long trumpets (Nev. *pvaḥ*). Furthermore, they are paid according to traditional tariff and thus not at market prices, which causes corresponding dissatisfaction.

Second, there is performance. It has already been said that repetition belongs to ritual, which exists by imitation and mimesis. The rhythm, particularly that of percussion instruments, pulls the (body of the) ritual participant into the rhythm of the ritual. But the rhythm of a ritual is not only to be understood acoustically; it is also a timing, like a bar of music that is determined by the number, type, sequence, and repetition of ritual sequences. In this way, a certain feeling for the "beat" of a ritual, its meter, comes into being.

Third, there is the framing. As already stated, ritual or ritual sequences are often marked with bells, gongs, drums, or cymbals, or simply by hitting a champagne glass with a knife. By this means, one knows not only when a ritual is beginning but also when it ceases, or when there is some major change. Thus, for example, in the Nepalese festival of the goddess Vatsalā (cf. Michaels 2008, 79–106), the head of a sacrificed water buffalo must be chopped into eight pieces precisely at the instant when a festival procession ends. The butchers present, who are at a place where they cannot see the procession, can only hear when the right point in time has arrived by the change in rhythm on the part of the accompanying musicians. Often, it is only the type of instrument that reveals what ritual is about to start.

Ritual music frames rituals—not all of them, but certainly many of them. A wedding, an initiation, or a procession is nearly unthinkable in South Asia without a music group. This makes itself heard in the streets and lanes and thus announces what will be seen a little later. In this way, the participants in the ritual obtain the space they need. At the same time, this permits the ritual participants to be separated and delimited from the other people on the streets and squares. The music of ritual is often used only when the gods move, that is, when they leave their temples or chosen places, which are rooted in the respective earth or territory, to be carried in procession in the form of statues. One might almost say that ritual music only needs to sound when the gods arise. This music creates the frame and the space within which the gods can move.

Fourth, there are transformation and the elevating effect. Music in rituals does not just sound, it has an effect, too—and this not only aesthetically but

in a performative sense, as well. Sonance becomes resonance. In ritual music, the listener is drawn into it, especially by means of rhythmic body movements. This music is addressed to the community, which communicates through common action. The repertoire and the instruments are often regarded as blessed or as having been given by the gods themselves (Tingey 1992). They promise good fortune, success, or the favor of the gods and thus the effect of the ritual actions. The ritual effect of music is, of course, particularly noticeable in the case of the drums of the shamans, used to bring on the trance.[5]

Ritual music is sacred or mythical music, and so what is true for mythical spaces and times is also true for it.[6] Ritual music and ritual are thus not complementary, but rather form a unit. Music, then, exists not only in space and time but also outside of both. It is not in the ritual, or during the ritual, but forms itself the whole strength of the ritual. Ritual music is therefore a sacred potency which different things may possess at the same time: the sacred arena or the sacred space (e.g., the *maṇḍala*), the priest, the statue, or, precisely, a piece of music. As the color red is only visible when it is a characteristic of various objects, without itself changing, thus, ritual music is to be understood as a kind of elevating coloring or atmosphere that may be a characteristic of visual or acoustic objects, but which remains, per se, absolute.

Ritual music is, in this sense, unique, for the religious *homo ritualis* does not know of similarities in the content of spaces, only of identities or differences therein. Every perceivable equivalence is identity, the expression of the same sacred potency. Equally, it is no coincidence for the religious *homo ritualis*, or only an external feature, where and when something exists; rather, for this person, a binding relationship exists between the object and its expression—in this case, between ritual and music. Objectivity is only possible in the radical subjectivity or singularity, which is often designated as the certainty of faith. The identity of the part and the whole belongs to this. In religious understanding, the singular is simultaneously the whole. As soon as something has been recognized as a part of the absolute, for instance part of a god, it must be everything, for the absolute or god is not divisible. Only in this manner can the individual participate in the whole, that is, be identified with it. In other words, ritual music does not stand for something external, but for itself. Internal and external, in this case, are identical.

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5. This is most impressively documented in the voluminous book, *Morphologie der Schamanentrommel* (Morphology of the Shaman´s Drum) by Michael Oppitz (2013).

6. For this theory, see especially Hübner 1985 and Michaels 2004a, 314–46.

As is classical Indian music, ritual music is basically a syntax of aesthetic forms of expression, culturally bound on the one hand, untranslatable on the other. These are idiosyncratic spaces of sound, expressed with their own idiosyncratic language, that is, the music (S. Langer 1996: chap. 8). Music is also the expression and reproduction of feelings, moods, and psychological tensions and their resolutions, but at the same time, it is not just the representation of these feelings. The close connection between ritual music and ritual can be dissolved, to be sure, in that ritual music sounds on nonritual occasions, for example; but ritual music is then no longer the music of a ritual, for one then leaves the space of ritual sound.

The peculiarity of the ritual space of sound, we can now establish, is to be seen in the fact that it cannot be functionalized, nor can it be reduced because it also includes the other world: religious events take place *in illo loco, in illo tempore*, and, too, *in illo sonore*. A ritual sound image can never be only in this space, because it is simultaneously the complete Otherworld, because man, place, and god(s) are identical, or can be identified with each other *ritualiter*. This is why it matters to the *homo ritualis* where and when ritual music sounds. Put briefly: without space, there is no ritual music, but ritual music is, at the same time, without dimension. Thus, ritual music and ritual are not complementaries, but a whole, such that music is in not only time and space but also beyond. It is not something in the ritual or during the ritual, but part of the overall power of the ritual.

4.2 Dance and Ritual Dance

What is appropriate for gods? Immobility or movement? *Stabilitas* or *mobilitas*? If it is normal to move and to stand, then it can be—following a maxim by Edmund Leach (1976)—suitable for gods to do only the one or the other. God moves, without himself moving. Similarly, Don Handelman and David Shulman ask:

> Does god move, or, for that matter, rest? What does it mean for us to accelerate an intra-divine movement? More generally, is god restless? Empty? Full? Can he be exorcised—and if so, of whom? By whom? *For* whom? (Handelman and Shulman 2004, 4)

"Alle Beweglichkeit ist Sterben (All movement is dying)," says Meister Eckhart,[7] and in the Indian context, stillness, being static, or cosmic equilibrium

7. Quoted in Haas 1996, 141.

are regarded as particularly supportive of healing. The Syrian Stylites are also famous, those odd men who, between the fourth and sixth centuries of our era, remained on column-like platforms in the air. They wanted to express standing before God in this way or, by praying with outstretched arms for forty days before Easter, to recreate the Resurrection motif. In Jainism, the statue of Gommateśvara has attained great fame. It represents Bāhubali, the legendary son of the first Tīrthaṅkara, called Ādinātha, who became an ascetic and spent a whole year standing, naked in meditation and thought; he stood for so long that vines and creepers grew around his body, and ants built their nests at his feet. In the South Indian place of pilgrimage, Shravana Belgola, a statue of this holy man some twenty-five meters high has been hewn out of a cliff face.

On the other hand, if gods are only at one place and they are immobile, then they can hardly be omnipresent. This tension between *stabilitas* and *mobilitas* can be seen in many religions and on many levels. Ascetics, these demigods in black or orange, live this tension. They remain in monasteries or in meditative zazen or in yoga positions (*āsana*), or they go on a permanent, wandering pilgrimage (Latin *peregrinatio perennis*). Gods, however, can do both at one and the same time: being immobile, yet mobile. Normal mortals, on the contrary, must make a decision: one can come nearer to the gods on the inside, or one can live one's life trying to come nearer to them. When these actions have to do with gods, we generally speak of rituals. A particularly spacious ritual action, for instance, is the procession; another is ritual dance.

The questions that pose themselves to me within this relation of tension are the following. What is the special characteristic of ritual dance within a complex ritual event? Can ritual and dance be separated at all? Is not every form of choreographed movement a kind of dance? Would it not make sense to attribute an independent anthropology to dance? How do those cultures see this, in which the gods (still) dance—religions then, in which Friedrich Nietzsche wished to find himself?

Paul Spencer remarked in 1985 with great perspicacity, in the "Introduction" to his influential volume, *Society and the Dance: The Social Anthropology of Process and Performance*, to what great extent an anthropology of dance must distance itself from traditional concepts of dance if it is to open up cultural contexts. He could, of course, only do this because Victor Turner and Richard Schechner had, to coin a phrase, already "polished the floor" for him. Yet, right at the beginning, he did point out a remarkable parallel between dance and ritual: he criticized the traditional idea of dance as a "patterned movement as an end in itself that transcends utility. Such definitions assume

that dance is self-contained, to be justified essentially on aesthetic grounds; one is lulled into looking no further" (Spencer 1985, 1).

Spencer negates the self-significance of dance and is of the opinion that dance is to be understood as a ritual action and therefore must be socio-culturally embedded:

> Dance is not an entity in itself, but belongs rightfully to the wider analysis of ritual action, and it is in this context that one can approach it analytically and grant it the attention it demands. In a very important sense, society creates the dance, and it is to society that we must turn to understand it. (Spencer 1985, 38)

The socio-cultural embedding of dance avoids essentialist questions and correspondingly senseless answers. I myself intend, in what follows, to examine the dance of the Navadurgā goddesses in its socio-cultural environment in Nepal. But—and I must say this now—the leveling of dance and ritual seems to me to be as much of a problem as their strict separation.

When dance and ritual are essentially characterized by the criterion of purposelessness, despite their socio-cultural embedding, then one should ask about further specifics of dance. In this regard, Richard Schechner most certainly did much by fusing the differences between ritual and theatrical actions into the performance concept. Of course, he polarized at first, in that he contrasted the effectivity of the ritual with the entertainment character of the theater, among other things (Schechner 2004, 240). But he added:

> The entire binary "efficacy/ritual—entertainment/theatre" is performance: performance includes the impulse to be serious and to entertain, to collect meanings and to pass the time; to display symbolic behaviour that actualizes "there and then" and to exist only "here and now;" to be oneself and to play at being others; to be in trance and to be conscious; to get results and to fool around; to focus the action on and for a select group sharing a hermetic language and to broadcast to the largest possible audiences of strangers who buy tickets. (ibid., 256)

Theater studies scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2008), too, sees more commonalities than differences between ritual and dance. In her view, artistic and ritual performances share script, improvization, the constitution of a reality, entertainment, the involvement and exchange of roles of actors and audience, and a weak framework. But she characterizes ritual by the

transformations evoked by threshold experiences and the collaboration of art and reality.

For both Schechner and Fischer-Lichte, the question, then, is to what extent a performance affects a transformation in the active or the passive participant, the borderline between ritual and artistic concepts of action. I do not wish to contradict these theories in any basic way, but I would like to test them by turning to an event in which not only individual people and not only gods, but also the entire population of a city gets on the (ritualized) move. It appears to me that the categories in use hitherto are not adequate to do this event justice. I shall therefore attempt to introduce additional categories, but before doing so, I must try to describe the event, that is the Navadurgā festival, in as concise a fashion as possible.

In all three royal cities (Bhaktapur, Kathmandu, Patan), but in numerous other places, too, in the Kathmandu Valley, many dances have been preserved. Usually, these are a matter of costume and masked dances with several actors, and they fit in well into the spectrum of Indian or South Asian dance. Many of these dances are now mere folklore, presented for the entertainment of the population and the tourists. In Bhaktapur, however, it is the gods who still dance, now as ever. One reason for this is preserved in local legends and chronicles:[8]

> During the reign of King Guṇakāmadeva (12th–13th centuries), but possibly not until the time of King Suvarṇa Malla, a group of nine Durgā goddesses is supposed to have lived in a wood not far from Bhaktapur, where they repeatedly caught inhabitants of the city and drank their blood. One day, a tantric priest of the peasant caste entered the wood, and, as the Durgās wanted to kill him, he was able to use his magical powers to make them immobile. The goddesses thereupon asked forgiveness and promised not to kill him. Sunanda Ācajyu, thus the name of the priest, then shrank them in size, placed them in a basket, and took them to his prayer room in Bhaktapur, where he honored and worshipped them with regularity. Soon, a neighbouring brahmanic Tantra priest, Somarā Rājopādhyāya, who was Sunanda's guru, heard of the matter. He found that Sunandra was not capable of carrying out the ritual properly, took the goddesses with him, and taught them to dance by showing them how with his hands.

8. Wright [1877] 1972, 162–63; cf. Gutschow and Bāsukala 1987. What follows here reproduces Levy 1990, 503 ff.

> One day, Somarā Rājopādhyāya had to go to Varanasi. He strictly forbade his wife to enter the pūjā room where the Navadurgās were kept. But the woman was so curious that she looked into the room despite her husband's words. The Durgās thereupon killed the woman and fled. Hardly had they attained their freedom when they killed a pig and drank its blood, so that the Brahman could not take them into his house any more, owing to their being sullied. The goddesses could only be subdued by receiving a house of their own and the right to embody themselves every year in the caste of the Gāthās. Ever since, the Navadurgās dance in Bhaktapur and neighbouring places for nine months of each year, always requiring blood sacrifices.

Beginning with the so-called Dasain festival in the autumn, in Bhaktapur, men (!) are actually chosen to play the part of these goddesses. These men are members of that Gāthā caste, or of the landless flower dealer and casual labor caste. To be exact, the goddesses come to life. They get up from their assigned divine places and go through a phase of nine months in which they also subject themselves to different rites of passage in the life-cycle.

The Navadurgās are a specialty of Bhaktapur. They protect and accompany the city. The Navadurgā dancers are presented with gifts and placated by a deep solicitousness on the part of the population. These are wild goddesses, and the men who represent them are wild, too, demanding, unpredictable, inebriated with huge amounts of alcohol, possessed. Fatigued from the night-long revelries and dances, they sometimes simply fall over and remain lying, nearly motionless, until, after a couple of hours, they can continue in their revelry. Often, they are held up by two men, as they might stumble and fall. They are called upon for rituals of the home and the life-cycle, and they are given endless gifts: rice, fruits, yogurt, money, and especially blood and alcohol. It is of great merit to sacrifice five animals to the Navadurgās at once: buffalo, sheep, goat, pig, and chicken. For this, one receives their blessing, a sign on the forehead, threads that are bound about the throat, some cinnabar, flowers, or oleander leaves.

The Navadurgās also represent the Mātṛkās, the eight goddesses called "Mothers," whose places (*pīṭha*) surround and protect the old town of Bhaktapur. A ninth goddess exists, too, Tripurasundarī, in the center of town. Robert Levy (1990) calls this group of goddesses the maṇḍalic goddesses, referring to the arrangement of the places, which forms a field of power (*maṇḍala*), in other words, the town itself, thus forming its limits as well. Indeed, the Eight Mothers (Aṣṭamātṛkās) and the Nine Durgās are basically identical—with the constraint that the names and also the number vary to

some extent. But it is always a group of equal, unmarried goddesses. But while the Aṣṭamātṛkās are for the most part immobile, the Navadurgās can visit different places and thus cover a wider territory. Thus, they dance in the twenty-one quarters of the city, and at around twelve different places in the former kingdom of Bhaktapur.[9]

Here we again have the polarity between static and dynamic, which was spoken of at the beginning. The Eight Mothers, with their seats, embody the static aspect, the Nine Durgās, with their movements, the dynamic. But what are these movements, when the Navadurgās visit various places together, mostly accompanied by a band of drummers and flute players? For example, on approximately the ninth day of the Dasāin festival, a large buffalo is sacrificed, and certain dancers drink the blood of the buffalo. Then nearly every inhabitant of Bhaktapur goes to the shrine of the goddess Brahmāyāṇī outside Bhaktapur in order to tear off a piece of flesh from the buffalo until, at the end, only the bare bones remain. Following this, the "goddesses" and their representatives or embodiments return to the town. Long white paths of material, a little like a white carpet, are spread before them constantly. It is not seemly for gods to tread on the ground.

In such choreographed movements, the gods do not dance, according to their own understanding. According to a shallow impression, sometimes they most certainly do. The Navadurgās do make certain prescribed movements, which are clearly different from everyday movements. They stride, hopping sometimes, twirl about, and often they shake themselves as if they were possessed. They are also accompanied by an orchestra. But for the representatives of the Navadurgās and the people these are no dances. This is clearly differentiated in the terminology. Processions are called *yātrā*, while dances are called (in Nevārī) *phyākhã*. Procession and dance are, however, also distinguished in the music, primarily in the drumming style used. The rhythm alters, and one can hear, in this manner, whether the Navadurgās are dancing or not. The places where they explicitly dance are known, too.

Further criteria come into it. The Navadurgās wear masks when ritually dancing, but not generally in processions and other ritual actions. The masks are then often pushed to the top of the head so that the human face is again recognizable, although the men continue to be honored as goddesses and gods. This can be recognized in that they still distribute divine favor (*prasāda*) in the form of all kinds of gifts, especially threads that are twisted around the wrist, even when the masks are off. For the dances, too, certain costumes and

9. These places have been mapped by Gutschow and Bāsukala 1987.

chains, as well as bells or jingles, are used. Touching a big ritual drum (which itself actually represents a divinity) or a drummer with both hands, or touching the earth before dancing are further clear characteristics distinguishing the dances in the complex ritual events. Often the Navadurgās begin to shiver just before, or even during, the dance, as if they were possessed. Indeed, actually the gods are dancing, not the men. Finally, the ritual dances require years of extensive training, which is brushed up on every year prior to the start of the Navadurgā cycle. Not only the exact steps and sequences of movement are learned, but also the myths and stories belonging to the dances. For example, the Seto ("white") Bhairava attempts to "fish" members of the audience, that is, to capture them, in a "fisherman's dance" (Nev. *nyā lākegu*), in order to placate the goddess Mahālakṣmī, who stole a scarf from him (cf. Levy 1990, 568–71).

All of this taken together makes up the special quality of the Navadurgā dances. Only when these factors are also taken into consideration has one managed to encompass the ritual complex "in its own right" (Handelman 2004) and as a "special mode of social intercourse" (Platvoet 1995, 36). The rituals have an autonomy and follow an inner "logic." The Navadurgā dances cannot, then, be separated from the Navadurgā rituals, although they are formally differentiated. Indeed, at the Navadurgā festival, the entire population of the city is moving around. At Dasāin, kites are flown, and gods and man get up from their seats: the gods from their ancestral seats, rooted in the earth (*pīṭha*), to be carried about in processions or to dance; the people from their houses, to visit relatives and friends. Dasāin is the reinvigoration of an entire city, in which the social and collective aspects have primacy and the individual is put last. The Navadurgā dances form only an element of the ritual choreography in a space intensified by movement. These movements are ritual or ritualized movements, but they mean not only, as Richard Schechner would have it, a "transformation from one status, identity, situation to another," but also simple entertainment. The Navadurgā dances are not danced only to obtain results; they are danced for the joy of dancing.

If one were to comprehend all ritual movements in the Navadurgā ritual complex as dances, one would overlook the very important difference that only the gods dance. Then one would indeed have disregarded something decisive. This does not mean relativism, that is, the assumption that a ritual cannot be detached from its specific local bonds. But it does mean that the fact must be recognized that in ritual, a distinct world, distant from the everyday, is created, that follows its own rules. Ritual and ritual dance have, despite all the liturgical and formal regulations, an autonomy that favors imagination, creativity, and dynamic action. Everything is related to everything

else in this world; nothing is there of and for itself. It is a virtual world with its own movements, tempi, directions, sequences of action, and rules.

But what characterizes this other world of the rituals? Parallel, what has been said to ritual music in the previous section, the following four characteristic components can be singled out:

First, there is embodiment. Dance rituals must be embedded as actions in a ritual space of action. In this context, the occasion and the space are clear-cut. It is then, for example, not a matter of indifference as to who dances, because it is not about dance, but also about interaction and communication, not infrequently with higher beings. Instead, certain (hallowed, sanctified) persons must play in a certain (sacred) way in certain (mythical) places.

Second, there is formality. Here again, the rhythm, particularly of percussion instruments, but also of the body movements, draws in the (bodies of the) ritual participants, the dancers and the audience, into the repetitive rhythm of the ritual. In a certain sense, everyone becomes a dancer through this. The rhythm of a ritual is to be understood as a certain underlying beat, characterized by the number, type, sequence, and repetition of the ritual sequences.

Third, there is the framing. Bells, gongs, or cymbals often mark rituals and ritual sequences. This tells one not only when the ritual is about to begin but also when it ends or when a major transition takes place. The cymbals of the intimidating Navadurgā dance troupe in Bhaktapur jangle so loudly that many people who hear them cringe. When the ritual death of the Navadurgās takes place, when their masks are burnt (or cremated?), the sound of special cymbals fills the town with a singularly pervasive sense of sadness. Ritual music frames the rituals externally and internally. The ritual dances within the ritual complex, too, are thus distinguished from the rest of the ritual event. Music also creates the frame and the space within which the gods can move. Up to this point, there is little difference to be observed between ritual dance and other types of dance performance. Embodiment, formality, and framing constitute any dance performance. But it is a different matter with the two following categories.

Fourth, there are transformation and the elevating effect. Both music and dance in rituals have an effect—and this not only aesthetically, but in a performative sense, as well. Ritual dance transports the audience to another time and another world, while still existing as an expression of this world. In addition to the religious or transcendental principles *in illo loco, in illo tempore*, and *in illo* sonore, one might also say *in illo corpore*. Ritual dance is a sacred, or mythical, movement, and so the same is true of it that is true of mythical space and time. Ritual dance and ritual are thus not complementary, but

rather form a unit. A ritual dance is not only in space and time, but apart from these, too. It is not in the ritual or during the ritual; it is in itself the entire power of the ritual. The Navadurgās goddesses are themselves masks, images, statues, dances, and dancers, all at the same time. For the person bound to ritual, the *homo ritualis*, it is not simply an external feature, where and when something exists; rather, for this person, a binding relationship exists between the object and its expression, between divinity and dance, for instance, or between place and dance. For the *homo ritualis* in ritual dances it is the Gods who dance, not man.

4.3 Emotions and Ritual Emotions

Emotions mostly play a subordinate role in ritual theories. Although they are of central importance for the efficacy of rituals, they are often not picked out as a central theme and are thus also not the specific object of research. However, where emotions become the topic of ritual research (cf. Michaels and Wulf 2012, 2013), it becomes clear that this opens up a broad and important research field.

The ritual generation of emotions ranges between a rigidity that results from the fact that the emotions relate to traditions and precursors, and a performative openness and flexibility that necessitate transformative power and creativity of emotions in the context of the event. Rituals bring past emotions into the present and make them relevant for the future. In this way, they secure emotional continuity and permanence for the community. Many rituals range between play and earnestness and exert a portion of their emotional effects by having a playful element that allows them to take over traditional ritual actions without having to limit their staging to traditional forms, structures, and emotions. The ludic character of ritual arrangements creates possibilities for an innovative treatment of emotions that increases the topicality and ability to express and represent the ritual occurrence in emotional terms. It also makes it possible to carry out the ritual arrangement and to simultaneously distance oneself from the emotions that arise in the process.

In rituals, emotions are closely associated with the performativity and dynamic of the ritual arrangements, that is, they are closely linked with the staging, performance, and dynamic of the rituals. Depending on the ritual, different collective and individual emotions arise. These are in part common to many rituals and characteristic for certain ritual types, such as sacred rituals or ceremonies. Many rituals generate intensive ecstatic feelings, but others tend to produce boredom. In some cases, precise expectations in

regard to the performative expression and representation of certain emotions accompany the ritual arrangements. For example, in a wedding ritual, it is—as I will show below—expected that, at a certain point in time in the ritual, the mother and daughter show sadness and shed tears, but at a different point in time, they express their hopes and expectations of happiness in regard to the new situation after the wedding. In other rituals, ecstatic emotions, for example, are expected from the participants. If these fail to materialize, this leads to a disturbance of the ritual that requires a correction. These ritualized emotions must be differentiated from those that appear as a consequence of the performativity of ritual actions with individually differing intensity in the course of the ritual arrangements, for which there is admittedly an expectation horizon shared by all, but within which individual room to maneuver exists.

Many rituals create emotions of commonality and belonging (togetherness) among their participants and audience. These collective feelings arise due to mimetic processes, in the course of which an emotional contagion spreads among the ritual participants (Gebauer and Wulf 1995). A flowing of the emotions occurs, which strengthens their intensity, and the similarity of the emotions unites the ritual participants. This example makes the social and communicative side of the emotions clear, something that is underestimated by large parts of the psychologically oriented emotions research. Ritual research focusing on the meaning of emotions can make an important contribution to research on the social side of emotions.

In order to illustrate the above, I will take two cases from my fieldwork and material that Niels Gutschow and I have collected in Bhaktapur. I have chosen the emotion of crying, weeping, or wailing, because it is a very strong emotion and easy to observe (Nelson 2005).[10] This emotion has a long debate[11] that centers around questions whether only human beings, but not animals can weep, or whether ritualized tears are real tears. If only spontaneous tears are accepted as real tears, scripted tears are "by definition mere formalities, not real tears" (Ebersole 2004, 188). However, a lamenting or weeping person does not necessarily disclose his or her feelings and emotions. How do we differentiate between "real" and "pretended" or ritual emotions? I will take two examples: one from the context of death, and the other from the context of marriage.

10. Similar arguments could be made for emotions of joy in festivals, for example, Holi, playfulness and happiness, sensing community, and so forth.

11. See Ebersole (2004) [2000] for an overview of the relevant literature.

Tears in Mourning

When death occurs in a family, grief and sadness are, of course, frequent emotions. They affect close relatives more than others, but almost always such emotions are expressed in tears. Death and mourning rituals often trigger them. Without grief, man would not be man, or, as Jan Assmann (2000, 13) puts it: "Culture arises from the knowledge of death and mortality" (my translation).

The traditional transfer of grief in continued, ritualized mourning ritual processes contrasts with the modern instantaneity of death, called by the medical term, *exitus*. In traditional cultures, however, death is not seen as just an abrupt event, with the border between life and death drawn sharply and firmly. Of course, in Europe and North America, too, death is not the definitive end, for grief is the continued dealing with the dead. Only this has become, in those places, an internal matter, a psychological process, which changes nothing about the irrevocable nature of death and the irrecoverable deceased. Mourning is, for the most part, regarded as a private matter (Ariès 1991). The death ritual is often restricted to the narrowest of family circles; visits of condolence are rare; cemeteries become deserted; one wears black only for a short time; a year of mourning visible for all is no longer practiced; the Month's Mind has become ever rarer. Death and mourning are no longer public events. Society no longer takes a break with regard to death; the disappearance of one individual no longer interrupts its continual course. Life in the big city gives one the impression that nobody dies anymore.

At the same time, the attempt to master the loss is visible. But this is regarded as work, the work of mourning, and, at first, it is often understood in a technical way: how to deal (suitably) with a corpse. With death, the corpse immediately becomes an object, as, among others, Michel Foucault (1973) has shown, in his *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. It is no longer alive; it must be got rid of as fast as possible.

In coming to terms with death, mourning rituals are required again, and there is hardly any limit to invention. People paint the coffins themselves; let loose balloons at the grave, to symbolize letting go; they play the favorite music of the deceased; and much else besides. All of this occurs so that death will go and life will come (again). Calls for a re-ritualization of mourning continue. What is then created anew is usually nothing more than a mixture of old, widespread prohibitions and abstinences, among others: changed habits of eating (taboo foods, fasting), reducing activities (sexual abstinence), the prohibition of sleep (wakes, etc.), silence and stillness, but also crying and

wailing, a change of clothing, bodily harm, directly or symbolically (tearing one's hair, ashes and dust).

But it all changes hardly anything about the fact that in many parts of Europe and North America, internal grief cannot find any suitable means of expression in external ritual. It was Sigmund Freud who made the coming to terms with inner grief a therapeutic program. The grieving should, in three stages, remember the traumatic event, repeat it, and process it. If the bereaved do not manage this, grief becomes pathological; it becomes melancholy. "In grief, the world has become poor and empty; in melancholy, it is the Ego itself" (Freud 1917, 246). In this case, the past is not dealt with. The border between death and life has not been set.

Indeed, the dead are only dead when the bereaved survivors let them "die." This essentially happens in two ways—by forgetting and by means of ritual. The dead first die by way of the *damnatio memoriae* of the living, and the grief for the dead is only resolved when the dead are forgotten. Grief, says Thomas Macho, following Hertz's *Représentation collective de la mort* (1905–06), is the psychosocial correlation to decay:

> What decays during the period of mourning, and, in the end, coagulates into a few rigid, immutable symbols, is the image of the dead person himself—the memory of his life, his appearance, his deeds. While, at first, the mind is troubled by all sorts of associations, ambivalent feelings, confused feelings of guilt, daydreams, and sudden hallucinations, a process of petrification slowly takes place, a kind of crystallization of memory, which has its corresponding expression in the stones placed in memory of the dead. From such a perspective, it may be permitted to characterize this whole work of cultural memory as a higher form of dissection. The accidental, the formable, what is soft, but also the flesh of living experience and social communication give way in the course of the mourning period to the needful, literally established, that which is hard, the ossuary, the skeleton, the skull, on which a symbol or a name may be written. Only the second, the last burial, seals the grave. (Macho 1997, 947)

Successful mourning in the "West," then, takes place almost at the cost of the dead per se. The living cannot let go, cannot leave the dead their own lives after life, cannot see them as others instead of as a part of themselves, the living, that has not been overcome. The living will not grant the dead a special status in which individuality and singularity disappear into the collective ancestors. One could say that modern mourning is, above all, the

commemoration of singularity, shown in monuments, headstones, portraits, grave inscriptions, death masks, virtual cemeteries, commemorative speeches, obituaries, and epitaphs. In this way, one tells one's tales of the dead and refers to them. The dead must live; they may not die. There may be no putting the past behind one, at least not in public or as a ritual; only in secret, in privacy. Tears have to be wiped away. Importantly, even in mourning, death is denied in this so very worldly culture that has lost both this and the other world, that believes that death can be frozen in time in plasticized bodies, but only manages to freeze life.

The differences in mourning between modern and pre-modern cultures are thus obvious. They consist in individualization, privatization, internalization, and deritualization, and perhaps also in professionalization and mechanization. Grief and mourning in Europe and North America are lonely, internal, psychological, private, and quite without form. Are both, then, more difficult, more despairing, more endless, and more traumatic as one hears and reads again and again? It is said that this whole matter is completely different in other cultures, so that we ought to learn from them, especially with regard to the form of ritual. Thomas Macho, too, answers the question of how the conditions for possible mourning are to be conceived of in modern times by calling for new rituals: "The answer to this question lies probably not in any new theory, but above all in developing new rituals" (Macho 1997, 953) But does that not imply what is "new" in the same old things? The supposed modern inability to mourn is nothing more and nothing less than the same old eternal unease about death, quite apart from any epoch or culture. Only the idea that death could be overcome with successful mourning is modern, a result of the hypermodern, total denial or suppression of human mortality. But the inability to come to terms with death is anything but modern. Uncertainty, ambivalence, stigmatization, and speechlessness—this has existed, and still exists, in other cultures, too, with their particular rites of mourning, among which weeping rituals are one example. It is precisely this tension that creates the dynamics of ritual, leading ever again and everywhere to new rituals, changes, and peregrinations. The collectively and often spontaneously organized ritual, such as could be observed on the part of the survivors and relatives of victims of the tsunami catastrophe in Southeast and South Asia, is an expression of the helplessness engendered by death. Rituals of mourning permit this helplessness to be studied, the helplessness in finding a hold in a ritual space that can offer neither a secure hold nor any certainty, but only the appearance of them.

In Nepal, it is the custom not to weep at the cremation ground. It is said that the deceased will find it more difficult to reach the next world if people

cry during the burning of the corpse. Usually, then, women do not accompany the corpse in a funeral procession; they remain in the house, where expressing their emotions is less restricted. In the *Mulukī Ain*, a Nepalese law text of 1854, Newar women are even fined when they cry at the wrong places:

> The Newar women shall not cry on the way while visiting the place where a Newar dies; cry only when you reach the place of death. If the women cry on the way while walking in the lanes, a fine of 8 *ānā* shall be imposed on each of them. If the rupees are not paid, imprison [them] according to the Ain. (*Mulukī Ain*, chap. 95, § 7)

In Newar mortuary rituals, there is, however, a ritual (called *lakṣa* in Nevārī)[12] in which overt mourning and wailing is not only allowed, but even required. It is the late afternoon of the fourth day after death that is reserved for mourning. Then relatives who belong to the extended lineage and share the same ancestor deity (Nev. *dugudyaḥ*) gather at the house of the deceased person. Mourning in front of and inside the house starts after the female relatives, daughters, and aunts have arrived with an offering of beaten rice to the mourners. Men arrive at the house quietly and join a group of 50 to 100 persons who squat on long mats, spread out on both sides of the road by neighbors. Small fires are lit on both sides, adding to the serene atmosphere of the scene. There is no overt expression of sorrow, but a sense of sincerity in remembering the deceased, who, in the form of a ghost (*preta*), is believed to be around the house. People and vehicles pass along the road or lane without taking notice of those who mourn and without disturbing them. The simultaneity of everyday life and ritual mourning is striking: urban space is indeed ambiguous, both public and intimate. After some time, all women except the wife or mother and daughters of the deceased (or all of these) leave the house, walking a few paces down the road. All of a sudden, as if answering a signal, wailing as an expression of mourning almost erupts. The group moves slowly toward the house, clinging to and leaning on each other in groups of two or three. One woman in each group acts more or less as a guide, while another turns her head back and covers her face with a shawl. All of them enter the house and join the women there in wailing. After a short period of a few minutes, they leave the house again, still crying. At a nearby step-well or public tap, they wash their faces, stop crying, and return to the house. After less than an hour, one of the groups of men in front of the house rises; slowly

12. See Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 97f.) for a more detailed description of this ritual.

others follow, form groups, whisper, and thus return to daily life. The loosely connected *communitas* of mourners quietly ends. The observation of four days of mourning is called Nev. *penhu dukha cvanegu*. This is the only context in which the Sanskrit term *duḥkha,* "sorrow, grief," appears.

What becomes evident from this ritual is that we have to differentiate between crying during ritual and ritual crying. The first emotion is perhaps evoked by rituals or given space within them, as weeping very often is emotionally contagious (cf. Röttger-Rössler 2012), but remains subject to the individual's choice or psychic disposition as to whether it happens or not. The ritual crying, on the other hand, as in the case described above, follows my five criteria of rituals: it is dependent on a causal change (the death); it is stipulated (*intentio solemnis*), performed, or staged in a prescribed form, publicly performed, and staged, irrevocably marking the loss of the deceased. All of this happens in modes of acts characterized by subjective emotions (the crying) that can but need not coincide with authentic feelings. It is also a communal event with a clear reference to the superhuman world (transcendence, i.e., the world of the ancestors), since the deceased is helped to find his or her way to the other world and thus changes his (or her) identity and status, from the deceased person (*preta*) to the forefather (*pitṛ*), but also the status of the mourner changes from impure to gradually becoming pure again. In other words, the weeping is not a spontaneous reaction to the death and subject to individual feelings. It is a "must" and part of a symbolic performance in which solidarity is expressed.

However, in such situations, it is hardly possible to discern whether the tears shed are "real" or not, because what perhaps happens as ritualized weeping may end in "real" weeping due to the triggering effect of the situation. Is the distinction between performative and real tears in the end useless? I do not think so. First, ritualized tears are as "real" as tears shed as an emotional response to the event. Assuming that they are not "real" presupposes a "Western" individualism and emotionalism that places individual and spontaneous emotions higher than formalized and ritualized emotions. Even crocodile tears as a metaphor for hypocritical tears are "real" tears. Second, a ritual is framed by the *intentio solemnis* and other formal criteria. Tears within this frame are performative tears since their "intention" or cause (motive) is laid down or prearranged. They can be formally stipulated and prescribed, or more or less allowed or "allowed" by the ritual community. Nobody will then ask why a participant starts crying if tears are stipulated or are a "normal reaction" in this part of the ritual.

Such ritualized weeping, especially communal weeping, is prescribed by many cultures. Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1922) was among the first

to note this during his fieldwork on the Andaman Islanders. He noticed—as Judith Kay Nelson writes—that

> [p]eople who remain dry eyed when ritual weeping is expected may be considered ill mannered or, worse, suspected of harboring evil motives or secrets. The Andaman Islanders' ritual weeping took place at rites of passage (like menstruation or puberty), weddings, reunions after long separations, or funerals. The parties would face each other, one sitting on the other's lap (man on the woman's lap when mixed couples were involved) and weep. . . . Even though the weeping is ceremonial and people are able to cry at will, Radcliffe-Brown (1922) wrote, and modern observers have concurred, that the feelings are genuinely experienced, not faked or merely acted. (The Andaman Islanders, male and female, could also weep on demand on non-ceremonial occasions.) The man or woman sits down and wails or howls, and then tears stream down his or her face. (Nelson 2005, 201f.; the last sentence is from Radcliffe-Brown 1922, 117)

Thus, to shed tears on command can culturally be prescribed. This does not mean that everybody has to follow these norms, but it becomes clear that tears have their cultural history (Ebersole 2004, 196) and depend on gender, class, age, and event or situation.

Tears in Marriages

Another case of ritualized weeping and weeping in rituals is the Hindu marriage. In this ritual, it is prescribed, or at least expected, that the bride and the bride's mother shed tears and cry at certain moments in the presence of the groom's relatives. Let me elaborate on this by describing a sub-ritual of a marriage that I observed in Bhaktapur (Nepal) in February 2009.[13]

It is a case of simple love marriage in the Khvaju farmer caste, although arranged with the help of a matchmaker (Nev. *lhami*). The couple has once or twice met before the marriage on the street. The groom is the son of the elder sister of the helper of the bride. On the day of the approval of the marriage, a kind of engagement, both the helper of the bride and the helper of the groom come to the house of the bride with yoghurt, fruits, and a cake in order to hand over the obligatory *gvẽ* (Nep. *supāri*) nuts. The ritual is regarded as a

13. Cf. Gutschow and Michaels 2012, 153–58.

kind of advance for the marriage. Afterward, it is not possible to marry somebody else. The couple should not see each other until the marriage. During a series of exchanges of presents between the wife-giver and wife-taker parties, the mother of the bride gives a *tilaka* to her daughter and then suddenly starts crying, but is slapped by a woman. Nobody takes care of her or consoles her. The bride receives a sari and a blouse as well as some money. The mother then applies a red *sindūra* mark to the hair of her daughter and gives another piece of cloth to the helper of the bride (Nev. *misā lhami*). Shortly afterward, the mother withdraws, still weeping, and everybody, especially the bride, looks depressed; the bride constantly looks down at the ground. At the end she is left alone, but starts smiling again. On the next day, in the evening, the bride receives guests in a separate room on the first floor. She gets presents, mostly kitchen utensils and cloths on a brass plate in which a one-rupee coin is placed. She hands over one or two *supāri* nuts in return—a very emotional moment, since it marks the separation from her natal family. Later, after ten o'clock, she moves to the second floor, where she joins the family in talking, gossiping, and watching television. All wait for the groom's party that arrives around midnight. All guests are led into the house and up to the second floor, where they take their places behind the burning lamps together with the bride's maternal uncle (Nep. *māmā*). All guests sit on the floor and are left alone for about half an hour. There is a quiet atmosphere, the guests do not talk, nor do they make any jokes. The groom is shy and constantly looks at the ground. His father sits in a corner without talking to him at all. After one hour, the bride is brought into the room by her friend. She is veiled and cries all the time. She takes her place on the floor together with the *misā lamī* to her left and her friend to her right, who both assist her. Early in the morning, the bride's father carries his daughter on his back to the groom's car in order for the latter to take her to his father's house; she again cries loudly while entering the car, demonstrating that she does not want to leave her parental home.

Why do the bride and the mother cry during the engagement ceremonies and the marriage? Because they have to and because they are sad! By means of this behavior, the daughter demonstrates that she will be a good wife in the future. If she did not cry, people might assume that she does not love her parents, and this could be seen as a lack of emotional steadfastness. The mother, in turn, demonstrates by her tears how much she loves her daughter. Again, ritualized tears mix with spontaneous tears that, however, are framed and "permitted" by the ritual context. In the Khvaju case summarized above, the couple knew each other, and the groom even had chosen the bride himself—quite unusual in a traditional Hindu context—but they had to

behave as if they had had no contact before. It became obvious to me that the crying was staged when the bride went up to the second floor, where the popular *Indian Idol* show was running all the time. At this moment, all the "grief" left her face immediately and she looked normal again, smiling and laughing. It is somewhat more difficult with the mother. During the engagement, the crying was apparently staged, but on the next day, she seemed to be really sad that her daughter was leaving the house.

Thus, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between staged and "real" weeping. Occasionally, it looks as if both, bride and mother, are "really" moved, but sometimes, one gets the impression that the tears are not "really" expressing sadness. Tears are often called the "windows into the soul" that show true feelings. But even tears can be masked, pretended, or simulated. Most important, they cannot be taken as a clear signal of the emotions. How ambiguous such situations can become occurred to me in another Newar marriage when Niels Gutschow, Christian Bau, and I looked later at the filmed material. It was, again, an emotional situation when the bride was taken to the car, leaving her parental home, and when the brass band played auspicious music (Nep. *maṅgal dhūn*). In this case, too, the bride cried and wept. Women threw flowers on her from the roof. While her father carried her on his back and they circumambulated the Mercedes marriage car three times, the brother of the eldest member of the clan clapped the bride on her shoulder. What we understood as a sign of consolation at that moment looked very different after we had examined the filmed material. Then we could hear him saying to the bride: "You must weep more, weep more!" Apparently, she was not weeping enough, and her scripted tears were not convincing. Thus, it is not the personal feeling that matters in such situations, but the ritualized emotions.

A similar case is the weeping that was prescribed and scripted in early modern Spain during the Holy Week processions and other occasions,[14] when tears were a sign of penitence or an expression of compassion for the suffering of Jesus, and "emotions were serious business; provoked, collective, weeping could be effective. One is tempted to say it was rational to weep. A science for provoking public tears and compassion existed, with specialized artists, sculptors, choreographers, and actors" (Christian 2004, 46). Weeping was "considered something that people could learn how to do, in the course of exciting their emotions" (ibid., 34). This collective weeping can be observed even today, for instance, in Andalusia, when the statue of Mary meets an

14. Huizinga 1963, 1ff.; Christian 2004; Nagy 2004; Althoff 2010.

image of Christ and mostly elderly women start crying. This publicly staged wailing and weeping does not say anything about the inner or "real" feelings of the participants and observers, but it deeply moves them so that many indeed shed tears. Again it is the ritual frame that allows for this amalgamation of scripted and spontaneous, individual and collective tears that shape the emotional mode of the ritual.

The examples from Nepal and Spain suggest that we not only have to differentiate between individual and collective expressions of emotions, but also between emotions in rituals and ritualized emotions. Whitehouse (2004; cf. below, pp. 173–5) does not make such distinctions. For him, it is basically the frequency of rituals that makes certain rituals more emotional than others. In his categories, the Newar marriage ritual would show high levels of sensory pageantry and emotional involvement, and thus belong to the imaginistic mode that calls upon the episodic memory—despite the fact that all other components of the marriage rituals would belong to the doctrinal mode. For Whitehouse, the scripted or staged tears would be doctrinal, and the real or spontaneous tears imaginistic. But rituals do not always make these distinctions, for it is sometimes difficult to separate the formal from the informal, the prescribed action from the normatively expected action.

To be sure, the term "emotion" is as polyvalent as "ritual." It can denote feelings, moods, affects, sentiments, and much more. It mostly goes together with a cognitive side in contradistinction to feeling (German "Gefühl"), where the cognitive side might be absent. All of these distinctions are important, as is also the question of whether emotions are accompanied by bodily expressions or not. Furthermore, it matters in what way emotions are regarded, that is, from a psychological, neurobiological, biological, sociological, or cognitive standpoint. Also important are the categories of emotions: short–long, individual–collective, cognitive–noncognitive, emotional episodes and emotional dispositions, pleasant or unpleasant emotions, and so forth.

However, even with these differentiations, there is a sharp line between ritualized emotions and emotions in ritual. In other words, I argue that within rituals it is clear whether emotions are ritualized or not. This has to do with my definition of ritual that I presented at the end of the Introduction, especially with the framing and the *intentio solemnis*. These criteria help to clearly distinguish between more or less formalized emotions that are stipulated and normatively regulated, for example, scripted tears, and emotions in rituals that are accidental or spontaneous, but in a strict sense not essential to the ritual, for example, "real tears." Even in highly emotional rituals, we mostly encounter hybrid contexts where stipulated and spontaneous acts

come together and mutually support each other. This is why, in rituals, emotions are never rendered free from the suspicion of being closer to theater than inner feelings or camouflage, open to re-interpretation, questioned by its authenticity. But only if the distinction between ritualized emotions and emotions in rituals is made, can ritual itself be upheld as a special mode of action. This does not mean that spontaneous emotions within the ritual frame do not belong to the ritual, but it marks such emotions as conceptually different from emotions that are not appropriate, expected, or stipulated, and therefore not regarded as an important or essential part of the ritual. It is the kind, potential, and intensity of such prescribed or expected emotions that make for the emotional mode of a ritual.

Conclusion

Formality, as we have seen, is an indispensable component of rituals. It is action based on repetitive rules, which are laid down in quasi-grammatical structures and often codified in scripted ritual handbooks. Repetitivity, which lives from imitation and mimesis, is an essential part of any ritual. Ritual formality even encompasses emotions and other forms of bodily expressions, such as dancing or music. In such cases, "ritual is not a free expression of emotions, but a disciplined rehearsal of right attitudes" (Tambiah 1979, 126). Johan Platvoet supports this view:

> As such, it (i.e. ritual) tends towards formality, stereotypy, and rigidity and has distancing effects upon the participants: it prevents spontaneous expressions (because they can be disordered) and private emotions when they do not express the public ones required by the ritual. They also distance the participants from their spontaneous selves, and from their private motives for, or interpretations of, the ritual. For the duration of the ritual, the participants are reduced to the roles which it prescribes for them, and to the purpose and theory embedded in it. If a ritual allows spontaneity and chaos, it does so 'in prescribed times and places,' and manners and styles. (Platvoet 1995, 28f.)

The forms of formality vary, but they include repetitivity, a quasi-grammatical structure, publicity—and, an astonishingly dynamic variability. The last feature is especially induced through the agency of the ritual specialists and participants, the vagueness of the ritual performance, the conflicts of interests of the performers and participants, different interpretations of the ritual elements, variant exegesis of texts, or the malleability of memory of the rules.

The possibility of repeating rituals or ritual elements can also relate to the language used in the ritual, and with that, as Lévi-Strauss has correctly remarked, be excessive and boundless:

> [A]t the cost of considerable verbal expenditure, it goes in for a riot of repetition: the same formula, or formulae similar in syntax or assonance, are repeated at short intervals, and are only operative, as it were, by the dozen; the same formula must be repeated a great many times running, or alternatively, a sentence containing a very slight meaning is sandwiched, and almost concealed, between accumulations of identical and meaningless formulae. (Lévi-Strauss 1990, 673)

Thus, rituals, despite being formalized, are full of dynamics, and it is basically owing to the methods of substitution, alteration, iteration, omission, reduction, repetition, and invention that performances of a ritual are never the same. Even failed or disordered performances, which often cause amusement and jokes among the participants, do not inevitably invalidate the ritual as a whole. Vedic ritual literature, especially the Brāhmaṇa and *prāyaścitta* texts, is fully aware that mishaps in rituals happen. It differentiates between various types of ritual failure, considers various causes, and offers various means to resolve the problems, depending on the type of mishap or mistake.

PART III

Modality

Ritual has often been defined as a special mode of action: "Rituals is a specific mode of interaction between humans which does certain things for and in them" (Platvoet 1995, 26), or "Ritual is a specific, observable mode of behavior exhibited by all known societies" (Penner 2014). This is the topic of the present part that focuses on the modal criteria of rituals. I will concentrate here on the question of what rituals do with their performers and the society they live in. I will not yet concentrate on questions of meaning and efficacy in general—that will come in Part IV—but on the fact that rituals affect both the individual and the social group in different and complementary ways. This means that the modality of rituals is based on individual or collective intentions and symbolically condensed meanings (plural) depending on the ritual type and the perspective of the participants.

There is a debate on the number of modes in rituals. Ronald Grimes in his *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (1982, 50; cf. 2013, 204, Table 7.1) speaks of six modes of ritual sensibility: ritualization, decorum, ceremony, liturgy, magic, and celebration, and regards these "not so much as types of rituals, (but) as sensibilities, or embedded attitudes, that may arise in the course of a ritual" (ibid., 35). Harvey Whitehouse, however, in his book *Modes of Religiosity* (2004) and preceding publications (1995, 2000) distinguishes between only two modes of rituals in particular, the imagistic and the doctrinal mode:

> At the root of all such dichotomous models, is a recognition that some religious practices are very intense emotionally; they may be rarely performed and highly stimulating (e.g. involving altered states of consciousness or terrible ordeals and tortures); they tend to trigger a lasting sense of revelation, and to produce powerful bonds between small groups of ritual participants. Whereas, by contrast, certain other forms of religious activity tend to be much less stimulating: they may be highly repetitive or "routinized," conducted in a relatively calm and

> sober atmosphere; such practices are often accompanied by the transmission of complex theology and doctrine; and these practices tend to mark out large religious communities—composed of people who cannot possibly all know each other (certainly not in any intimate way). (Whitehouse 2004, 63)

Whitehouse's theory is based on the distinction between two different types of forms of memory according to the psychologist Endel Tulving: the semantic and the episodic memory. According to his theory, the doctrinal mode of religiosity corresponds to the semantic memory, and the imagistic mode to the imagistic memory. Both forms belong to the explicit memory, which Whitehouse divides into short-term and long-term memory.

> Semantic memory consists of 'general knowledge' about the world (e.g. how to behave in restaurants, or what is the capital city of France, etc.). We can seldom recall how or when we acquired this sort of knowledge. By contrast, episodic memory consists of specific events in our life experience (e.g. our first kiss, the death of a beloved relative, the day war broke out, etc.). These types of memory are activated very differently in doctrinal and imagistic modes of religiosity. (ibid., 65)

The two modes of religiosity as described by Whitehouse are definable by way of thirteen binary oppositional pairs. Both modes are separated and clearly distinguished as ideal types as demonstrated by Table P.1 (modified after McCauley and Lawson 2002, 105).

The doctrinal mode in this scheme is described as verbally coded; the imagistic mode as nonverbal. The doctrinal mode is lasting, a form of routine and rigid, whereas the imagistic mode is correspondingly sporadic, chaotic-emotional, and innovative (Whitehouse 1995, 197). Thus, the doctrinal mode of religiosity involves inter alia memorization of a script of automatic procedures, whereas the imagistic mode of religiosity involves single episodes, which have made their mark due to their stark sensual and emotional impact.

Since I regard the ritual itself as a special mode of stipulated action, that can be scaled from low to very high emotionality, I do not need to differentiate between the two basic types of rituals (or even religiosity) or the basic dichotomy of religious activity that Harvey Whitehouse developed. In the following, I shall instead discuss different modes of rituals. I will first deal with rituals in which the individual is in the center (Chapter 5). As such I will discuss some major life-cycle rituals: initiation, marriage, and death or ancestor rituals and what they do with individuals—an aspect that I call

Table P.1 Harvey Whitehouse's imaginistic und doctrinal modes of rituals

Variable	Doctrinal mode	Imagistic mode
Style of codification	Verbalized doctrine and exegesis	Iconic imagery
Frequency of transmission	Repetitive (routinized)	Periodic (at most every few years)
Cognitive processing	Generalized schemata (semantic memory)	Unique schemata (episodic memory)
Political ethos	Universalistic (imagined community)	Particularistic (face-to-face community)
Solidarity/cohesion	Diffuse	Intense
Revelatory potential	Intellectual persuasion	Emotional and sensual stimulation
Ideological coherence	Ideas linked by implicational logic	Ideas linked by loose connotations
Moral character	Strict discipline	Indulgence, license
Spread by	Proselytization	Group action only
Scale and structure	Large scale, centralized	Small scale, localized
Leadership type	Enduring, dynamic	Passive figureheads
Distribution of institutions	Uniform beliefs and practices	Variable beliefs and practices
Diachronic features	Rigidity (permanent "breaking away")	Flexibility (incremental change (radical innovation)

individualitas. These rituals have always been regarded as the prototypes of rituals—especially since Arnold van Gennep's seminal study *Les rites de passage* (1909) and Victor Turner's revision of it in his equally influential essay, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1967). Due to their importance, both scholars will be briefly introduced. In these rites of passage, the aspect of transformation of the individual is evident because

> rituals of passage are traditional rituals organized by society, whereby the individual is moved from one status to another. They often include rites of separation, whereby the individual is separated and estranged

> from his erstwhile status. His previous role is "de-actualized," and his old ego is put to death. They also include rites of transition, which prepare for a transition to a new status. (Honko 1979, 374)

Such rituals are primarily individual-oriented, and thus, in this case, the highly emotional aspect of *individualitas* becomes as important as Whitehouse's doctrinal mode. They are nonrecurrent, anticipated, and fixed to the personal horoscope of the individual, and not as festivals according to the annual calendar. They mostly take place in private houses, and family members together with the house priest organize them.

Different from these individual-oriented rituals are cyclical festivals (Chapter 6)—so vital in South Asia. These are mostly calendrical, collective, and communal rituals in which the social group, the community, and the notion of *societas* are in the foreground. These rituals are also recurrent and anticipated, but generally, a social group or temple priests, rather than the family, organizes them, and they take place in public spheres rather than in private houses. To be sure, it will not always be possible and necessary to separate *individualitas* and *societas* since rites of passage are organized by, and also concern, social groups, and festivals matter to individuals too. Vows (*vrata*), for instance, which I will discuss in Chapter 6.2, are performed by an individual, but they are often recurrent and not as transformative as rites of passage. Pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*) are often part of such vows or are based on them. Although they might look like large festivals, it is often just an addition of individual rituals by individual pilgrims. But in some cases, *tīrthayātrās* may become communal or group events, as some festivals are simply an accumulation of individual forms of worship. However, the focus of the rituals is different, and this has to be taken into account. Rituals such as some forms of *śrāddha* (worship of ancestors) or *rakṣabandhana* (strengthening the sister-brother relationship) are individual-oriented but may well be called festivals.[1]

In Chapter 7, I shall approach the crucial question of transcendence, or *religio*, as I prefer to call the elevating aspects of rituals. That this is also an essential part of the modality of rituals, I will try to show by focusing on a scale from very intensive forms of sacrifices to rather "secular" cyber pujas. As already mentioned in the Introduction, I hold that formalized action only becomes ritual when there is a portion of *religio*. This is not an equivalent for religion, but denotes awareness that the action is somehow heightened,

1. On the problems of classification of festivals, see also Freed and Freed 1998, 26–35.

extraordinary, and frequently transcendental in the sense that a superhuman agent is involved. In other words, rituals show a more or less strong religious modality or at least reference to some elevating principle or order.

I must again emphasize that, to my understanding, rituals are characterized by all three modalities—*individualitas, societas, and religio*—even though the intensity of them may vary (cf. Table I.1 and Figure I.1 in the Introduction). This, however, does not exclude further modes of ritual action.

5

Individualized and Domestic Rituals (saṃskāra)

BIRTH, BAPTISM, SCHOOL enrollment, initiation, engagement, wedding, death—we always make a ritual of these. Birthdays, exams, anniversaries—rituals, it appears, accompany us throughout life from start to finish. They mark the frontiers, designate the festivals of life, the highlights, when one dresses differently, places flowers, lights candles—and takes pictures. I suppose that, apart from holiday photos, it is pictures of such celebrations that fill most family albums. Why is this so? And why are rituals like these carried out in all cultures of the world, as far as we can judge? Animals do not know this pausing for a moment in the middle of life. They do not hold birthday celebrations, weddings, or funerals. They do know feelings similar to grief, but no rituals of grief. But man has this urge to divide life into parts, to stage highlights, and to place them apart from the everyday. It is not enough for man to be born, to reproduce, and to die. Man wants to re-enact birth, to ritually set apart the ties of matrimony from other couplings, and make deceased persons into ancestors. Man always wants to inflate and master his biological side; he always wants to cook the rawness within. Why is this so important to us?

I believe that this has to do with the awareness and denial of mortality and the desire for identification with immortality. But I will begin by referring to two academic ancestors who both dealt intensively with this topic: Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner—the first focusing on the individualizing aspects, the latter on the communal or collective aspects of life-cycle rituals. Then I will analyze the most common Hindu life-cycle rituals, especially initiation, marriage, and death rituals. I will not describe these rituals at length,[2] but will focus on more general and theoretical implications. At the end, I will

2. For this, see Michaels 2004a, 71–158; and Gutschow and Michaels 2005, 2008, 2012.

check, supplement, and contrast the findings of van Gennep and Turner using a traditional Indian theory of rituals of life-cycles and using research findings from India and Nepal. This theory will bring me to the conclusion that van Gennep and Turner only said the right things because what they said involves nearly all rituals, and not just rites of passage in the cycle of life. But something is lacking in their views, something the Indian theory has that I would like to call the requirement of perfection in rites of passage. This requirement, of course, collides considerably with the performative aspects of the rituals. For rituals, including rites of passage, are, despite any formality, which they may—and indeed must—have, open to adaptation, variation, and new creation. This ability to integrate what is actually new without giving up what is old is their strength.

Few expressions have become better known in the research on rituals than Arnold van Gennep's concept of the "rite of passage," published in 1909 under the title *Les rites de passage*—three years before Durkheim's *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. It is doubtless right when Ron Grimes says: "Had not van Gennep coined the idea, we would not be considering births, initiations, weddings, and funerals as the same kind of ritual, because these types are not always classified together by their practitioners" (Grimes 2000, 103). Indeed, in the Catholic teaching of the sacraments, along with baptism, confirmation, and marriage, there appear the Eucharist and the basic sacrament, which are anything but rites of passage in the life-cycle, and in one Indian system, which I will elaborate below, fire sacrifice and other rituals appear in one category together with classical rites of passage. Birth and death rituals are tied to one part of a life, but this is only true in a limited sense for initiation and marriage rituals. It is possible to marry at an advanced age, or to change one's religious confession. Yet the scheme developed by van Gennep is used by everyone, and, by now, it is being used gladly by ritual designers, for example by an American "Rites of Passage Institute," founded by the social worker Paul Hill Jr., with exact instructions on how to build your own rite of passage. "However, it is precisely the persuasiveness of the rite of passage structure that undermines its analytical usefulness" (Houseman and Severi 1998, 169).

Van Gennep regarded his *Rites de passage* as "a part of my flesh." For him, every society consists of social groups: family and other groups of blood relations, professional groups, age groups, religious communities. The dynamics of social life—thus van Gennep—require, however, constant overstepping of borders, as the individual moves in other groups and classes, indeed must move in them.

Crises were caused by this, and rituals allegedly had the task of mastering and dissolving these crises, by accompanying a change of place, condition,

position, or age group. According to van Gennep, these rituals always have the same goal: to lead the individual from a precisely defined situation over to a different one, equally precisely defined. For him, certain rituals thus have an unvarying function: that of controlling social life and its passages. This is as true of the rituals of the life-cycle as it is of cosmic rituals dealing with temporal and spatial changes, the change of years, for instance, or the laying of foundation stones. But for van Gennep, these rituals of passage not only have an unvarying function, but also an unvarying form. They are differentiated into rites of separation (French: *rites de séparation*), rites of threshold or change (*rites de marge*), and rites of incorporation or affiliation (*rites d'agrégation*). Rites of passage, then, occur (theoretically at least) in three (sometimes five) steps. Rites of separation characterize the phase of displacement and dissolution, rites of threshold or change characterize the interim phase, and rites of affiliation characterize the phase of integration. Whether birth, initiation, marriage, or death, van Gennep sees the individual as leaving his or her group and attaining a new identity: from the newborn to a socially accepted small child with a name, from a boy to a youth, from a bachelor to a bridegroom, or from a girl to a bride, from a living person to an ancestor. The decisive matters happen in the threshold phase, a kind of social no man's land.

Van Gennep's thoughts were exciting at the time. After all, the influence of historicizing and evolutionistic ideas was still strong, for example, those of a James Frazer and his *Golden Bough*, published in 1890, according to which there is a development from a "primitive" state to one of higher civilization. Van Gennep, on the other hand, used a comparative method and emphasized the process and structural character of rituals. Proudly, and not unjustifiably, he notes in his foreword that "no one has shown why such rites are performed in a specific order" (Van Gennep 1960, xxv). Yet his achievement was not appreciated. On the contrary, no less a scholar than Marcel Mauss, a nephew of Émile Durkheim, who dominated the sociological discussion in France of the time, could write a withering criticism in the very year of publication of *Rites de Passage*. It appeared in 1910 in the journal *L'Année Sociologique*, which belonged to the Durkheim school of thought. There, Mauss writes: "Porté à la degré de généralité, la thèse devient un truism." Mauss accused van Gennep of assuming a downright universal scheme and applying this everywhere. But it was just this that van Gennep had explicitly denied:

> What I have said holds in general, but the same acts does not have the same consequences among all peoples, and I want to reiterate that I do not claim an absolute universality or an absolute necessity for the pattern of rites of passage. (Van Gennep 1909, 148)

Van Gennep ordered and classified what he read, and he reports that after ten years of effort in the dark, the recognition of the structural and functional context of rites of passage hit him like a kind of inner enlightenment (Belmont 1979, 58). But this recognition, this knowledge, would have been forgotten if Victor Witter Turner (1920–1983) had not rediscovered it.

Toward the end of 1963, still shocked by the murder of John F. Kennedy, in the midst of a difficult time for him personally, Turner discovered van Gennep's *Rites de passage* for himself. A year later, he published what is probably his most influential essay, "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage" (1967). In this, he developed a theory that concentrated entirely on van Gennep's middle phase, but that adds a certain independence. He characterizes this phase as an oddly unstructured, ambivalent, sometimes paradoxical and ludic phase, and coined for it the concepts of "liminality" (Latin *limen* "threshold, border") and "communitas," community. In this ritual phase of "betwixt and between," the neophytes, according to Turner, are dead socially, isolated, in condition of exclusion, asexual or ambisexual, marked by masks, costumes, or by shaving the hair of the head. They are, in this liminal phase, on the way to a transformation, the crossing of a biological or social frontier, but first of all, they are neither the one nor the other. This, then, is where the sacral, the encounter with God or the gods takes place. Turner's definition of ritual, right from the start, cannot be thought of without this transcendental, antisecular reference, something that is often overlooked.

The experience with liminality, for Turner, goes hand in hand with that of communitas. For the dominant feeling that emerges in that threshold condition and, where hierarchy is virtually nonexistent, is one of equality, comradeship, and community. Turner understands this community in an idealistic sense as an almost anarchic anti-structure, the antipode to the structure of society, but also as an experience of humanity, a powerful source of strength for the renewal of society. The anti-structure shows itself in the figures of the artist, the trickster, the clown, the shaman, the prophet, or the holy man—in other words, those permanent dwellers on and beyond the social frontier, which is what the neophytes temporarily become in rites of passage.

Turner, active as always, extended these thoughts in later works, first in his much-admired book *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), and then in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure* (1969). This latter book burst into the middle of the hippie movement—which Turner also investigated—and had a lasting influence with regard to the experiential character of rituals. Finally, there were works such as *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974) or *From Ritual to Theatre:*

The Human Seriousness of Play (1982), in which he applied his theory to modern, post-industrial societies, expanding it into a theory of social drama. His influence, on disciplines apart from ethnology as much as ethnology itself, was enormous. The so-called "performative turn" in the humanities, that is, turning to the actors, the actions, and the staging, the processual and the corporality of social proceedings, in short, the "social drama," as Turner called it, is unthinkable without him.

A major point in the criticism of both van Gennep and Turner is their high degree of generality and the eclectic method they both used, well known in the area of the phenomenology of religion. The same holds true for similar traditional theories of life-cycle rituals that have them mostly understood as hierophantic events (Eliade) or as events that help to overcome life crisis (e.g., Malinowski or Freud), or to strengthen the solidarity or hierarchy of a social group (e.g., Durkheim). Such functionalistic and reductionist theories do not adequately grasp the polyvalent, polythetic, and dynamic aspects and components of rituals. Much of their work seems also imprecise, not very reliable in the empirical sense, and too coarsely filtered.

In the terminology of the Indian legal scholars, the transition between two stages or phases of life is seen as a *saṃskāra*, that is, a rite dealing with the life-cycle, by means of which an individual is placed in (lit. "made into": *saṃ-kṛ*) a condition of wholeness and perfection. *Saṃskāra*, "purificatory rite, rite in general," is the Sanskrit term mostly used for Brahmanic-Sanskritic life-cycle rituals that are widespread between Hindu and other (Buddhist, Jaina) communities.[3] The *saṃskāras* present a linear idea of life and are rarely linked in the relevant texts to the cyclical notion of reincarnation (*saṃsāra*).

Saṃskāras have been brought into a system in the period starting from around 500 BCE, when the higher classes of the Āryans began to separate from other population groups in South Asia, especially in the Gangetic plains. In the early Vedic time, the initiation ritual took the form of a consecration (*dīkṣā*) into secret priestly knowledge and was a privilege for those who wanted to learn the Veda, mostly for the sons of priests, but also for sons of other classes and even women. Later, however, the consecration turned into a life-cycle rite that demarcated the social and ritual borders between different social groups. Those not initiated were equated with outsiders, marginal groups, and enemies (e.g., the Vrātyas). Therefore, through birth, everyone was a Śūdra, and only by celebrating *upanayana*, that is, birth in the

3. For indological studies see, for instance, Hillebrandt 1897; Gonda 1965, 1980; Kane 1968ff., vol. 2.2; Pandey 1969; Kapani 1992; Olivelle 1993; McGee 2004.

Veda, did one become a Twice-born. Any region without initiated classes was regarded as the land of the barbarians (*mlecchadeśa*). The noninitiated from these regions were not allowed to take part in the Brahmanic rituals, could not maintain the important domestic fire, could not share food with the initiated, and were allowed only limited participation in social life. Most important, however, they were made unavailable as marriage partners. To the leading circles that employed Brahmanic priests, the uninitiated was a social outcast.

Various factors may have been responsible for this development: acculturation problems vis-à-vis the indigenous population due to the transition from a semi-nomadic to a settled life; the emergence of states and kingdoms; the defense of sinecures, prerogatives, and privileges; and the rise of superior technologies. Times of harsh distress (famine, epidemics), when the social order was shaken, must also be taken into account. Many legal texts mention such instances of collective and individual distress (*āpad*). Mingling with the resident population and their doctrines and religions also had to be regulated. Who was admitted for the rituals, mainly the fire sacrifice? Who could marry whom? As acculturation between the Indo-Aryans and the other population groups progressed, the more clearly did specific classes need an externally visible demarcation. The Sacred Thread that any Twice-born received during initiation was to be their symbol of this boundary.

By linking consecration with marriage, the Hindu caste society was almost established. Through initiation, a youth becomes a member of a caste, an apprentice, entitled to perform sacrifice, and a candidate for marriage all at once. What was originally a consecration rite became a life-cycle rite of passage and a socio-ritualistic transformation into the system of norms of the specific extended families. Thus, this rite takes priority over all other rites of passage. For the formation of Hindu identity, initiation is perhaps even more significant than the wedding, for no Twice-born son can be married without being initiated. All male Hindus who employ Brahman priests are initiated, but not all get married. Initiation is also indispensable for the right to perform death and ancestor rites. However, it must be noted that reform movements, such as the Arya Samaj, have criticized or simplified the traditional *saṃskāras*, and Twice-born make up only about fifteen percent of the Indian population.

In the textual tradition, up to forty *saṃskāras* are known, of which, in modern practice (and probably in older practice as well), not all are regarded as being of the same importance. However, Hindu life-cycle rituals are practiced in many forms with a great number of variations (cf. Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 13). The most common enumeration of the traditional Hindu

life-cycle rituals is a list of sixteen bodily (*śarīra*) *saṃskāras* that are generally grouped according to the life stage into prenatal, birth, childhood, adolescence, marriage, death, and ancestor rituals (described in Table 5.1). Among these are prenatal and birth rites, such as procreation and insemination (*garbhādāna*), the transformation of the embryo into a male fetus (*puṃsavana*), the parting of the hair of the pregnant woman (*sīmantonnayana*) by her sister-in-law, and the birth (*jātakarma*) with numerous rites of strengthening. The rituals of childhood include naming (*nāmakaraṇa*), the first excursion to the outside world (*niṣkramaṇa*) within the first four months after birth, the taking of the first solid food (*annaprāśana*), piercing the ear of the boy child (*karṇavedha*), and the tonsure (*cūḍakaraṇa* or *caula*). The rituals of puberty and adolescence comprise the beginning of learning (*vidyārambha*), the initiation (*upanayana*), the start of studying (*vedārambha*), the rite of marriage (*vivāha*). The death rituals (*antyeṣṭi*) conclude the *saṃskāras*. The rituals dealing with ancestors (*śrāddha*) form a special category.

The prenatal life-cycle rituals are mainly concerned with the promotion of the fertility of the woman and health of the fetus and mother. Hindu theologians discuss it, sometimes concentrating their discussions more on the fetus or semen (*garbha*), or on the mother and the womb (*kṣetra*). The majority of life-cycle rituals are directed to the childhood, and adolescence is considered in premodern societies to be the most harmful time. Birth is considered to be impure and thus requires a number of purification rituals. Most childhood rituals are performed for both male and female children. The initiation rituals, however, are only for boys, and marriage is regarded as the initiation for girls. The *saṃskāras* of adolescence are often declared as educational rituals. In fact, they focus on introducing the boy into the adult world and prepare him to take his social and ritual responsibility. For the Gṛhyasūtras, marriage is the main ritual in life because a man becomes only complete and fit to sacrifice when he has married. Other rituals are left out. Thus, only the death ritual (*antyeṣṭi*) is mentioned in the list, but not the rituals for the ancestors (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa, śrāddha*); these belong to another form of life. Moreover, the sequences of sub-rites in the life-cycle vary greatly in the Gṛhyasūtras.

5.1 The Boy's Initiation

This ramified ritual, known as *upanayana* (lit. "bringing near, fetching, gaining, procuring") and *vratabandha* ("the vow of binding (the Sacred Thread)") in Sanskrit, consists, if one is to look for ritual elements, essentially of preparations for a new life stage: the tonsure, the initiation in the narrower sense,

Table 5.1 Hindu life-cycle rites

Phases of Life	Ritual	Date/Time	Description
Prenatal Rituals	1. Procreation, insemination (*garbhadāna, niṣeka*)	Between the 4th and 16th day after the beginning of the menstruation	Insemination with prayers and purifications
	2. Transformation of the fruit of love to a male fetus (*puṃsavana*)	3rd and 4th month of pregnancy	Feeding of certain food items to the woman
	3. Parting of the hair of the pregnant woman (*sīmantonnayana*)	Between the 4th and 8th month of pregnancy	A ritual to protect mother and fetus from evil influences; parting of the hair of the wife by her husband with *garbha* grass or porcupine spines
Birth and Childhood	4. Birth ritual (*jātakarma*)	At birth	A ritual to strengthen the child and to bless the mother by cutting of the umbilical cord, feeding of honey, or the touching of the shoulders of the child
Adolescence (Initiation)	5. Name giving (*nāmakaraṇa*)	11th day	The father or priest whispers the names into the left ear of the child
	6. First outing (*niṣkramaṇa*)	On an auspicious day within the first three months	The child is to be taken out of the house and shown to the sun (*ādityadarśana*)
	7. First solid food (*annapraśana*)	Around 6th month	Food (usually a sweet rice preparation) is fed as a kind of sanctified leftover to the child, normally by the father
	8. Tonsure or first cutting of the hair (*cūḍākaraṇa, caula*)	Between the first and third year of the child	Shaving of the hair except for a little tuft (*śikhā*) that is regarded as the seat of the patrilineal lineage
	9. Ear piercing (*karṇavedha*)	On an auspicious day in the 7th or 8th month	Piercing of both ears with a needle by the priest or father

	10. Beginning of learning (*vidyārambha*)	Together with *upanayana*	The ritual authorization of the boy to learn the Veda
	11. Initiation or Sacred Thread ceremony (*upanayana, vratabandhana*)	Between 8 and 12 years	Handing over of the sacrificial thread (*yajñopavīta*) to the boy, teaching of Gāyatrī mantra (*Ṛgveda* 3.62.10), the condensation of the Veda; from this moment onwards the boy becomes a Twice-born (*dvija*)
	12. Beginning of learning (*vedārambha*)	Together with *upanayana*	
	13. The first shave (*keśānta*)	Dto.	
	14. The end of study and returning to the house (*samāvartana*)	Dto.	Basically a ritual bath that concludes the period of learning the Veda
Marriage	15. Wedding (*vivāha, pāṇigrahaṇa*)	After initation	Core elements involve engagement (*vāgdāna*), the marriage procession (*vadhūgṛhagamana*), a bestowal of the bride by her father to the groom (*kanyādāna*), taking of the bride's hand (*pāṇigrahaṇa*), an exchange of garlands between the bride and groom, the lighting and circumambulation of the sacred fire (*agnipradakṣiṇā, parikramaṇa, pariṇayana*), seven steps (*saptapadī*), and a joint meal
Death and Afterlife	16. Death ritual (*antyeṣṭi*)	After death	Burning of the corpse
	Joining the ancestors (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*)	11th or 12th day after death	Unification of the deceased with the forefathers by mixing flower balls (*piṇḍa*)
	Ancestor worship (*śrāddha*)	At many occasions	Worship of all ancestors with water, etc.

the studies, and the concluding rituals. These various stages appear as described below.[4]

First, the age of initiation is established; according to Dharmaśāstra texts, it varies according to status and class between the age of eight and twelve, but in practice boys can be considerably younger or older. The initiation time is determined astronomically and astrologically. The ritual specialists (priests, cooks, musicians, barbers, etc.) must be spoken to early on and must be involved in the planning. Relatives and friends are informed and invited.

The actual preliminary rituals begin on the day before the initiation, in that the important ritual participants (parents, priests, son) and the family house are ritually cleansed with cow dung and other things. The gods and ancestors are honored, and evil spirits are warded off. Not the least of the preliminaries is the preparation of the ritual location for the next day. On this previous day, a further sub-rite commences, which, according to the traditional writings, should be taken at a rather young age, but in fact is generally carried out directly before initiation: the tonsure. On the evening prior to the initiation day, in the *cūḍākaraṇa* ritual, the son's hair is bound up with the bristles of a porcupine (which show a triple pattern representing, among other things, the Hindu triad of gods, Brahmā, Śiva, and Viṣṇu) and with never-wilting *darbha* grass. After this, the son practices a vow of fasting and silence for the whole night. The next morning, on the main day, the son eats together with his mother for the last time, sitting on her lap to do so. Later, he will not really be permitted to eat together with his mother anymore. Following this, the hair of his head is shaven, except for a small strand (the *śikhā*). Various rituals of strengthening are then carried out. Thus, the son is bathed, and his sisters rub him with turmeric. The tonsure is concluded with gifts to the priest.

After this, the actual initiation (*upanayana*) takes place. It is considered a second birth and is divided into the dedication as an ascetic, the dedication as a pupil, and the dedication as a man. The primary act in the dedication as an ascetic is the laying-on of the holy cord. During this dedication, the son is given, among other things, an antelope skin and a stick, the few possessions of an ascetic. In the subsequent dedication as a pupil, instruction in the holy writings, the Veda, is given. These texts may, according to traditional understanding, only be learned, that is, heard and recited, by the initiated, the Twice-born (*dvija*). The priest teaches the son a Vedic hymn while both are under a blanket; the hymn is the so-called Gāyatrī hymn (*Ṛgveda* 3.62.10), which is

4. Snoek 1987 presents a fairly reliable overview of the vast literature on initiation in general. For the Hindu initiation, see also Michaels 2004a, 71–98, and Gutschow and Michaels 2008.

considered to be a condensed form of the entire Veda. In return, the son honors the priest as his teacher and, according to ancient tradition, brings him brushwood to keep up his fire. He goes on a begging tour around the invited guests, too. Not until he has been initiated, or is a Twice-born, is a Hindu permitted to keep the house fire in the Vedic-Brahmanical tradition; not until the holy cord has been laid upon him is he a member of his family group, with full ritual rights. Then he may keep the fire himself, he may marry, and he may carry out the rituals for the dead. In the initiation, the son lights the main fire for the first time, pours ghee and grain onto it and walks around it three times.

After this, there again comes the symbolic and ritual celebration of the study of the holy texts. The son again goes on a round of begging, lights a special fire, and takes a special bath, which makes him into a pupil of Vedic (*snātaka*). In a more playful episode (*deśāntara*), the pupil starts off to Varanasi for twelve years of studies, until, a short time after he has set off, his uncle on his mother's side and the priest hold him back at the garden gate, promising to find him a beautiful woman to marry.

The end of these "studies," too, is arranged as a ritual. First, the *samāvartana* fire is lit and honored, and then the son receives yogurt and other foods from the priest, as well as a white loincloth and the holy cord. Finally, the initiate dresses in new, worldly (generally Western) clothing and regards himself in the mirror. The initiation ends with a ritual farewell to the gods and the closing of the sacrificial place (*visarjana*).

Van Gennep knew of this ritual from the literature and analyzed it on two pages of his book (Van Gennep 1960, 104–05). He correctly recognized that the whole ritual dealt with separation from a previous world, expressed, for example, in the meal together with the mother, but most especially in the symbolism of death: the initiate dies and is reborn into a new world—a thought that was later taken up by Mircea Eliade in his book *Rites and Symbols of Initiation* (1958). The priest even takes the initiate into his womb, so to speak, from which he releases the pupil into the Veda, and thus into the holy order. As a novice, the initiate is subjected to all kinds of threshold and change rites. He receives the characteristics of an ascetic—stick, skin, alms bowl—and dedicates himself to study. At the end, he gives the utensils back, puts on new clothes, and is integrated again by means of incorporation rituals. Turner, too, could see himself confirmed: the ritual is full of liminality and communitas. I will desist from describing all of this in detail.

However, van Gennep and Turner could both only find themselves confirmed because they ignored much else that happens, for instance the fire, the strand of hair remaining unshaven, the texts or mantras that are recited. Van Gennep especially reduced many phases to three (in some places in his

book, to five). In addition, despite all of his recognition for the ambivalence of the sacred, he reduces a complex event involving many people to one individual, and, in so doing, overemphasizes the social and subjective aspects of the ritual. Van Gennep assumed a spatial model of ritual, basically a house of thought, with rooms, doors, and thresholds; this proves fatal. The triple-stage model envisaged by van Gennep thus consists only of a "before," "during," and "after." In this degree of generalization, it is valid for very many types of ritual. Indeed this model is no more than a truism, because it is so general.

But outside in the field, there are no such clear borders. There, the edges are unfocused, frayed, fuzzy. From the Hindu point of view, rather more occurs during the ritual, too. Not the community (in both senses) of belief is confirmed and strengthened, not the acceptance into a religious community, but, first, the Brahmanic right of the son to study the Veda; second, maturity, becoming adult, becoming a man, and thus enabling the son to marry, for without initiation, there is no marriage; and third, the cohesion of the family and the status of a family group. The Hindu initiation is thus the celebration of becoming a man, coming of age, becoming an ascetic, and becoming a pupil—all rolled up into one.

The Hindu initiation is a ritual of adolescence within the cycle of life, celebrating the change to a new phase of life, but only in a limited sense. Basically, in fact, the process of aging is brought to a stop once and for all, ritually seen. This has little to do with coming of age and maturity, and even less with discovering identity or mastering a crisis of adolescence. The designation of life-cycle rituals preferred by Turner, "life-crisis rituals," is, then, highly problematic in this context. In any case, the usual concepts of age, childhood, youth, adulthood, are very inadequate to describe the subtle processes of people maturing and aging. Childhood is not only a biological phase but above all also a cultural concept. Not until after the Renaissance did people in Europe see children not as small adults, but as beings with their own thoughts and feelings. Youth, puberty, or adolescence have only come into focus since the late nineteenth century anyhow. In ancient India, these parts of life were hardly delimited one against the other. It is only in more recent years that children's birthdays are celebrated in India, and toy stores have opened—and this only in the well-to-do middle classes.

More important than all of this, however, from the point of view of the Brahmin priests and theologians, is that the Hindu initiation is full of equivalences. The son is identified in the initiation ritual with the Veda, the sacrifice, the father, and the father's line. He receives a new self, and he is born as one identical with *Brahman* and therefore immortal. Above all, natural parenthood is replaced by ritual parenthood: the *guru* is now the father, who is,

at the same time, the Veda, the absolute *Brahman*, and so on. These equivalences are the basis for all Hindu sacrificial practices and theology, so much so, I think, that they have become of themselves an identificatory habitus, without the sense of sacrifice always being clear to those participating. In a certain way, then, the Hindu initiation is focusing on both individualization and de-individualization, with the goal of binding the individual to immortality, to make the individual equivalent to immortality.

Thus, the Hindu initiation is full of identifications with the immortal world expressed for instance in the fire, the *mantras*, or the evergreen couch (*kuśa*) grass, the gold, or the virgin cult. *Kuśa* grass is an attribute of Brahmā, the creator god and the personification of the eternal *brahman* principle with which the Brahman priest sees himself identified by virtue of his knowledge of the Veda. In the boy's initiation, especially the Vratabandha, a "ring of the Kuśa grass" (Nep. *kuśāuṃti*) is bound into the son's hair on the evening of the day before, which keeps apart the tuft (*śikhā*) of hair that will not be cut off later because it represents the paternal line and thus the link to the ancestors. The initiates are thus ritually identified with immortality. As Marc Bloch (1992, 4) aptly remarks, in initiations, individuals are made "part of something permanent, therefore life-transcending." They are made "perfect" (*saṃskāra* from *sam-kṛ*).

As a consequence, the new birth also signifies a ritual substitution of the parents: ritual parentage almost excludes biological parents. By maintaining a distance to natural parentage, it is intended that ritual parentage will acquire a greater legitimacy in the religious training of the children. Natural biological parentage is linked with deadly forces. According to Brahmanic-Sanskritic belief, birth is an impure process, which poses an obstacle to the realization of immortality. Birth actually implies death. Only human beings need birth, whereas gods never die and therefore are not born. As a result, the natural parents—as well as the couple in the marriage ritual—have either to be identified with immortal substances, such as the "ring of Kuśa grass," or they have to be substituted by ritual parents such as the Brahman priest who in ritual terms is to be regarded as immortal on account of his identification with the *brahman*. It is therefore the Brahman priest who teaches and instructs the boy during the initiation, even though the boys are not initiated into learning the Veda, and it is the Brahman priest who speaks the decisive mantras during the wedding.

5.2 The Girl's Initiation

The question of how to conceptualize and denote an event such as "initiation" is crucial. If, for instance, the aspect of education and learning of the Veda as

well as the importance of the son for the patrilineage are highlighted, it appears that Hindu girls are not initiated. If, however, the aspect of identification with immortality or the integration of a child in the lineage is stressed, the situation looks different. To illustrate this, we again have to enter the Kathmandu Valley, where so many rare rituals have been preserved. Among these is the mysterious Ihi ritual, the marriage of a Newar maiden to a god.[5] The brides in such cases are very young, between three and ten years of age. In the decisive instant of the ritual, the girl holds a fruit of the wood apple or *bel* tree in her hands, resting her hands at the same time in the hands of her father, while the mother affixes a small leaf of gold to the child's forehead and places a small leaf of silver on the fruit. For foreign observers, the matter of which god her father is marrying the child to remains a secret. Is she now married to the god Śiva, to whom the *bel* fruit is dedicated? Or is it the god Viṣṇu, as one occasionally may read, or Buddha, as assumed by the Buddhist Newars?

The parents of the "bride" among the Newars, as well as their daughters, often also do not exactly know which god their children are being entrusted to. In comparison to monotheistic religions, this shows a fundamentally different attitude toward the gods. For in Hinduism, the god is not to be reduced to an aspect or only one identity. It would be downright presumptuous to want to know precisely who or what the god is. In Hinduism, gods are especially powerful when they have several different identities, names, and appearances. It would be, on the other hand, "weak" to reduce the manifold to the level of the one.

Although the divine "spouse" remains inscrutable, for many Newars, this ritual, which is celebrated in public places over a period of two days, is regarded as a "real" wedding. It is said that the girls thus avoid the dire fate of the widow in Hinduism, for the god will never die, and the girl will never become a widow—even though the later human spouse will not be immortal.

In fact, some of the scenes of this ritual do correspond to a proper wedding. The father gives the girl as a "virgin gift" (*kanyādāna*) to her "spouse"; she receives a marriage sari, walks around the sacred fire, and takes seven ritual steps (*saptapadī*) into her new life. But an exact analysis shows that in the Ihi ritual, the arrival of the woman-to-be in society and her domicile, the town, is being celebrated. It is thus more an initiation, the acceptance of the maiden in the world of the adults and ancestors, rather than a wedding, that will avoid future widowhood. Correspondingly, remarriage among better-off Newars is about as strongly frowned upon as in other Hindu groups in Nepal.

5. For a detailed description of this ritual, see Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 93–172.

Up to 200 magnificently dressed girls, nearly overloaded with jewelry, give the towns where this ritual is celebrated an unexpected glamour for such moments, especially since many other rituals, such as weddings and boys' initiations, take place at the same time. In the days prior to the actual ritual, relatives fetch the four- to nine-year-old girls. After a walk through town, the girl is given symbolic food. In the future, she will have a ritual relation to these people, the members of the clans and the maternal and paternal relatives; this ritual relationship will attain a new quality through the later "actual" wedding. At the conclusion of the Ihi ritual, at the threshold of her family home, the women of all households at which she has been a guest bless the girl with a gift of rice. The seal is set on the transition to a ritually full-fledged being, finally, by the girl receiving ritual food and alcohol from the oldest married woman of the clan, and setting aside a share for the gods. A few months after this, the divine bride dedicates the fruit that she had held in her hands during the ceremony to the ancestral god of the clan. She has now matured from child to marriageable young woman, accepted by means of the Ihi ritual as a full-fledged member of the family and the clan.

Western society often regards rituals of transition within the life-cycle as a means of mastering such transition, or even of mastering crises of life. This is not true of the initiations and other life-cycle rituals in South Asia. Rather, the rituals indicate arrangements that are generally not thought about much, and that do not have to be thought about. In the rituals, individuals mark their allocation to caste, age and gender groups, professional associations, and religious communities. However much the rituals depend on biological changes, yet these are treated themselves ritually. They are subsumed into a commonly accepted event and thus removed from the state of the individual. Natural events—death, birth, or menarche—are ritually carried out for a second time or are accompanied by ritual and thus are removed from the compass of the mortal and transitory world. In this fashion—at least in the imaginations of most participants—the traditional and the well tried are constantly staged anew. This alone gives the people security and satisfaction.

5.3 The Marriage

Marriage may be the most important life-cycle ritual in the life of both a man and a woman. But more than simply bringing two individuals together, it also brings together two families and two clans; it is not only a private but also a communal event that concerns the relationship between groups or clans, the question of descent and kinship, social and caste status, the power, prestige, and hierarchy of individuals and families within the society and their social

and religious identities. No wonder the organization and effort involved outstrips that of all other life-cycle rituals, sometimes with an overwhelming impact as a result of the costs of the wedding and the dowry.

Since, viewed traditionally, only a married Hindu can set up his own household, light the sacred fire, and produce legitimate children, only marriage makes a person "complete" in a ritual sense: a young man becomes a husband and householder (*gṛhastha*) and a young woman a wife (*strī*). Although love marriage has become an issue in South Asia, it is through a traditional marriage ritual that a love relationship between two people is fully accepted and recognized by society.

Such a ritual is full of symbolic connotations and meanings, which act out and demonstrate the new roles of the bride and groom. The focus is on rites of separation as well as aggregation: the girl is given to another household where she is then integrated. However, even though the marriage culminates in the wedding ceremony, it is a process of integration with a number of rituals in both households stretching over a long period of time and connected with an extensive exchange of gifts and visits.

Despite much congruence between Hindu Smārta and Hindu (and Buddhist) Newar marriage handbooks (see Chapter 2.2), it becomes evident that the practice of the Newar high-caste marriage incorporates the Great Tradition but does not neglect local customs or ritual elements[6] that might even come from a folk or tribal background. One does not necessarily find, for instance, the sacrificial fire (*homa*), the seven-step-ritem (*saptapadī*), or—most notably—the gift of the girl (*kanyādāna*), although they appear as elements in the Daśakarmavidhis. This relates to the fact that the marriage to a man is the third marriage in the life of a Newar girl. Before that, she had been married in the Ihi ritual to the bel-fruit (briefly described above) considered to be Viṣṇu, Buddha, or some other god (Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 93–172), and, in the Girl's Seclusion (ibid., 173–87) to the Sun god. As we have seen in the previous section, the above-mentioned sub-rituals have already been performed during these rituals.

The lists of ritual elements (Tables 2.3 and 2.4) demonstrate that many ritual elements in the Newar high-caste marriage are neither listed in the Gṛhyasūtras nor in the Newar ritual handbooks. To this, we have to add modern ritual elements such as the obligatory marriage cake, the video filming of the ceremonies, and the "official" photo of the couple. As in the Hindu initiation, we then see that life-cycle rituals are rich, diverse, and dense

6. Cf. Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 38f. and 2012, App. 2.

events, full of fuzzy ritual elements in different orders, dynamic processes, and socio-religious relations. Newar marriage rituals consist of a mixture of Vedic, Smārta, and folk elements. They can be pompous celebrations with exchanges of a great many goods and large parties, full of ritual and festive elements, but also rather simple ceremonies in which the groom's family accepts the bride into its household. They can be performed in a very traditional way with learned Brahman or Buddhist Bajrācārya priests or without any priest at all. There is also a conspicuous absence of the Veda in the ritual practice of Newar Hindu weddings. Though evident in the texts, many essential elements such as the fire, seven steps, *kanyādāna*, and even until recently *svayaṃvara*, are missing from the ritual performances. Given the lack of these elements, there are even doubts whether the Newar Hindu marriage can be counted as a traditional *saṃskāra* or life-cycle ritual. However, "if we insist that only *kanyadan* can be a sacrament, then by definition Newar (human) marriage is not a sacrament and only *ihi* is. Those Newars who perform the elaborate marriage ritual do however regard it as one of the set of 'ten sacraments' (*dasakarma*)" (Gellner 1991, 116).

From this, it follows that Newar marriage has to be seen as a process rather than as an event: it is in continuation of Ihi and confinement (Bāhrā tayegu) and only lasts perhaps until the day the first child is born. Only then has the daughter-in-law effectively arrived in her new environment. Some of these traditional elements are performed before the wedding and are not repeated afterward; other elements, such as *svayaṃvara*, seem to be recent introductions from the past few decades. Only if they have not been performed, as in the case of Brahman Newars, will they be carried out during the wedding. This characteristic also contributes to a certain "Newarness" of the ritual.

However, given the many variations, it is difficult to speak even of *the* Newar marriage without specifying caste, religion, and place. These variations are not minor differences, but sometimes affect central elements. They show a kind of performative richness, which implies that one can only arrive at broad generalizations by neglecting the specificity of the event. Given this, what then remain as core elements in Hindu marriage rituals?

This question is difficult if not impossible to answer, but, as is often true, it helps to ask the jurists, for at some point, they must decide, rather than continue to problematize. In fact, I was once asked by an attorney to help in a case of alleged bigamy. A young man from Gujarat who was married to a German woman was accused of having also married an Indian girl during a holiday trip to his place of origin. In the process of the rituals that took place at this occasion, a video film was made, and this film somehow was sent to the

German court accusing the man of bigamy. On the film, called "Ring Ceremony," the following scenes could be observed: in the house of the bride, *maṅgalam* (opening ceremony with a statue of Gaṇeśa and an oil lamp), packing of gifts, drive to the groom's house, reception there, worship of the groom with shawl, gold bracelet sweets, clothes coconut, money, *tīkā*, and a thread that is twisted around the wrist. After the offering of a meal to the family of the groom, the party moves to the house of the bride's father. Then follows a ring ceremony in which the groom hands over a ring to the bride, who also receives a sari, a bangle, and a *tīkā*. Then the bride's family receives money and her parents bless the couple. After photos had been made of the participants, bride and groom take together a meal. Finally, the couple is filmed in an orange plantation.

The question to me was whether this could be regarded as a wedding or not. I was hesitant since some crucial elements of a Hindu marriage (*saptapadī, kanyādāna* or circumambulation of the fire) were missing. I could therefore not definitely say whether the rituals performed had been an engagement or a proper marriage. The Hindu Marriage Act of 1955 could also not help in this regard, because this law leaves refrains from defining Hindu marriage, but refers to the local and regional practices: "A Hindu Marriage may be solemnized in accordance with the customary rites and ceremonies of either party thereto" (Section 7(1)).

Despite these problems that the variations in the Hindu marriage pose for us, I hold that, at least for high-caste Hindus, one central element is the fact that the bride is considered to be a free gift (*kanyādāna*, lit. "gift of a virgin or daughter") to her future husband. However, this part has to be seen in a process of exchanges between the bride's and the groom's families and again by considering the regional differences.

Thus, in the north Indian Brahmanic marriage system, the bride's side generally has to provide a bigger share than the groom's side, and demands for gifts can also continue after the wedding. Moreover, in the north Indian Brahmanic marriage system, only the bride's side gives gifts. Sometimes, it is even explicitly forbidden for the groom's party to give anything in return. And the father of the bride or other relatives occasionally may not even eat cooked food in the groom's house, because that evokes the suspicion of an exchange or payment (see Dumont 1980, 138).

The Newars differ from this system in two ways: the ornaments, household goods, and money given to the bride remain her personal property; the wife-taker also bestows considerable gifts, for instance gold ornaments, on

the bride. We therefore see in Newar marriages both a dowry and a kind of bride-price, and we see a symmetrical form of exchange that corresponds to the isogamic structure of the alliances that Robert Levy has described: "In the Newar case the general emphasis on equality of prestations corresponds to an emphasis on isogamy" (Levy 1990, 130).

Unlike reciprocal gifts among equals or in the act of economic exchange, the religious gift (*dāna*), including the gift of the daughter (*kanyādāna*), does not oblige a material gift to be made in return. A gift produces religious merit for the giver only if it is given without expectation of a gift in return. What he then obtains is an invisible merit, unlike the profit or gain in secular gifts. To avoid the appearance of a secular purchase, Manu (3.51–54) stipulates that no bride-price may be accepted; otherwise, it would be prostitution. Thus, the hierarchy of the gift is established from the outset. The giver has a lower status than the receiver.

In a ritual sense, the father "sacrifices" his daughter for religious merit (cf. Trautmann 1981, 26), for in return he obtains the "blessing" of the higher clan. Representing his extended family, he also obtains standing and prestige. If the father does not give the daughter away as a virgin, disaster threatens: the daughter is considered impure or as casteless (*śūdrā, vṛṣalī*). The institution of child marriage arose out of anxiety about not marrying off the daughter before her first menses, and the fear of impurity and loss of standing for the whole family. The early promise of marriage given long before the wedding, and in terms of ritual almost as solid as marriage, probably occurred for the same reason.

We have already seen in the Ihi rituals that rituals do not center on the girls alone, but are meant as an initiation ritual for the acceptance of the girl into the clan and society. At a wedding, the perspective of the West tends even more to focus on the bridal couple. But in a traditional Hindu and Buddhist marriage, man and wife do not come together simply to establish a family. Descent groups also come together, who try to preserve or improve their purity and status. Economic exchanges of considerable size take place between two groups. And not only does the couple undergo a rite of passage, but also new kinship ties are made between former "strangers" by becoming an in-law-relatives with new bonds of solidarity and mutual aid.

Thus, marriage also has to do with the distribution of goods, labor rights, and duties or privileges. The other purposes of a marriage bond, such as legalizing sexuality and producing progeny or setting up a new household, are to be seen within this network of relations.

5.4 Death Rituals and Redemption

While it is probable that animals also know the experience of grief and show rudimentary funerary practices, only man has let this processing of the loss of one of his kind become a culture—probably since the Middle Paleolithic age. In the sense of cultural economics, mourning is one of the "costs" of social binding. In the history of human development, then, it was not the socially rather nonbonding hunter type who prevailed. This paleolithic hunter probably knew only a few rituals of ancestors and death. But when the Neolithic came along, in particular with early settlements of early human groups, property and the acquisition of land came into being, with rules of relation and inheritance—and ancestors. The death ritual first enables the integration of people belonging to the same society. In Ancient Egypt, in ancient and modern India, and in most other traditional cultures, one lived and lives with death and the dead. Dealings with both are institutionalized and ritualized. The dead receive their places by means of rituals, and the memory of them reaches its closure.

In traditional cultures, this is seen generally as a ritual process, a transition to different forms of vitality. For such cultures, death is seen as a passage for which rites are needed, quite in the threefold sense of the *rite de passage* as set forth by van Gennep: rites of separation, of threshold or change, and of incorporation or affiliation. These passages are often seen as voyages, paths, and steps that require intercession, accompaniment, votive, and grave goods—for instance, in Hinduism, boats or a cow, in order to cross a river of the dead. The process of the deceased's travels corresponds to the time of mourning. Weeks, months, one or more years go by, before the dead have arrived and the living have found peace.

When we speak of death, we therefore usually do not mean the instant at which life ceases, that short moment in which the last breath is taken. We mean dying and mortality. We speak of what death does, how people deal with it, how people can delay it, and how they can comfort themselves. It may sound paradoxical, but when we speak of death, we mean life. Only by suppressing the thought of death are we able to live. But looked at in the Indian way, we die already at birth; birth, aging, and death form an interlaced unit. "If it were not for three things in this world, then the perfect one, the holy one, the completely awakened one would not appear in the world. . . . What are these three things? Birth, aging, death," the Buddha allegedly said (*Aṅguttara-Nikāya* V.144). In the *Garuḍapurāṇa*, an important text on Hindu death ritual, it is said: "As a consequence of being conceived, man is doomed to die, but without a mortal body, he cannot find salvation."[7]

7. GarPur-UKh 14.1–3 (Abegg 1921, 16).

The individual does not like to imagine himself dead. How could he, in any case? The dead have no consciousness of self, therefore no subject. Consequently, death can only be "experienced" in others and by others, not for oneself. For the dead experience nothing, or at least they cannot explain death. Experiences of the "afterworld" or the "other world" are experiences in this world, experiences in life. A dead person would have to be living to tell us about the other side of life. What wouldn't we give for that knowledge?

That is precisely what is so painful: that we know nothing—absolutely nothing—about the "other world." We are surrounded only by forebodings, threats, fantasmagoria—and sometimes faith. That, at least. The Wild West opposition of "life or death" is thus just as harsh as it is simple. It does not encompass the processual vagueness of dying: lifelong decay, not to mention slow demise—on a crucifix, on the battlefield, by cancer, in illness. It does not encompass dying a second death, life in life after death, in heaven or in hell, in eternal light or the darkest of darknesses, alone or with others who have died, who we sometimes call ancestors.

In the following, I will discuss just these passages. Death through birth, death before death, that is, a special death in life, life before and after death, the world other than this world. I will talk of the dead who live and the living who are "dead"—about ancestors, Manes, and forefathers, and those redeemed during life. The questions that interest me are: Where are the ancestors? And what is to be done with the ancestors? I will start by dealing not only with the Indian material but also with the simple observation that, in the modernity of the West, or at least in my world, the ancestors have almost no place (left) in the scheme of things. Certainly, the dead are remembered, there is the cult of the grave, commemorative events, and All Saints Day. But one does not remember the ancestors as such, but rather as individuals: the nearest or dearest, those who died by an unlucky stroke of fate, victims or martyrs. But ancestors in the usual sense have no individual character; according to ancient custom, they are to be ritually honored, no matter how they actually led their lives, for better or for worse.[8] The word "ancestor" has indeed almost become obsolete in the West. The genealogical singular is accepted, but the plural sounds somewhat odd.

One might think that perplexity in dealing with ancestors, and their silent disappearance, is a modern phenomenon. But if one examines the Indian material, principally with an eye to the death and ancestor rituals still practiced today in Hinduism and Buddhism, then it becomes clear that ancestors

8. Cf. Newell 1976, 22.

are still omnipresent in India (no home ritual is carried out without them receiving their share), but it is equally clear that they have no particular location and not even a properly defined living space.

Two things are agreed on as being fundamental in the Indian religions as teachings or models of life and death:

(a) The idea of life without "death," a cyclical model: in Hinduism and, in a certain sense, in Buddhism, life and death form a nearly eternally recurring and dynamic cycle (*saṃsāra*), although envisaged as suffering, in which life is mostly transformed, but not destroyed or frozen in otherworldly eternity. Cremation in the death ritual expresses this cycle, based on the teaching of natural philosophy on fire and water. In this conception, the dead arrive at an in-between realm through the cremation, whence they are reborn, either immediately (in some forms of Buddhism) or with some delay.
(b) The idea of "death" before death, or the living "dead" (*jīvanmukti*): liberation from the cycle of suffering and birth and reincarnation is possible, in Hinduism and Buddhism, by means of a premature and ascetic death as an ascetic, thus by means of a ritual identification with deathlessness or immortality. Differences exist on this point between Hinduism and Buddhism. While Hinduism is directed toward a one-to-one identification (the dead person is equated with deathlessness), early Buddhism wanted meditative zero realization (basically, the subject does not exist and therefore cannot become anything; or whoever does not exist, cannot die). This idea of "death" before death is also a way to flee from the ancestors.

Both ideas have been reflected in numerous texts, particularly philosophical and epic-purāṇic texts on *karma* teachings or revenging deeds, and so it has become usual to reconstruct the concepts of after-death especially from these texts.[9] In the practice of death and ancestor rituals, which has hitherto been little noticed by researchers and on which I wish to concentrate here, one may however observe that the localization of ancestors is by no means so retributionally causal as it might appear according to philosophical teachings or mythological instruction. Instead, as I will attempt to show, mutable ideas are added of conducting the dead, heaven and hell, atonement, driving away or satisfying the dead, new creation of what has gone before, and its sacrifice, and all sorts of murky, turbid things.

9. Cf., for instance, O'Flaherty 1980.

As with all rituals, it is impossible to explain death rituals in a one-dimensional and monothetic way. As we have already seen in the previous chapters, ritual is surrounded by too much ambivalence and polyvalence. This makes them so enduring. Even when the significance has changed, many actions still remain the same. This is true of Hindu death rituals, too. In the ancient Indian Vedic death rituals, the route to the ancestors, the second death in the afterlife, and attaining heaven or immortality were in the foreground, before the idea of repeated reincarnation and the fear of a return of the dead and the fear of hells were added, sometime around the birth of Christ. In the following, I will concentrate on the main features of the extremely complex Hindu death rituals, as they are practiced today in North India and Nepal by Brahman priests of the dead.

Life without Death (*saṃsāra*)

In the Hindu death ritual,[10] the deceased in India is first a *preta*, literally a "departed one." But where he has departed *to* remains rather diffuse. He is regarded as a restless soul, without any place (*loka*) to stay at first, and it may seem that the departed needs to be ritually cared for, in order to reach the other world. A large part of the rituals consists, then, of a kind of escort for the dead. Thus the dying person is laid upon the ground, which is covered with cow dung, even before death, because in the space between the heavens, the realm of the gods, and the earth, where man and animals live, spirits threaten. Also, one should place or pour water of the Ganges, *kuśa* grass, *tulasi* leaves, and gold pieces on all bodily openings, and weigh the body down with a black stone or with ammonites (*śālagrāma*) so that the soul will not fly away before it has been ritually prepared for its journey. In Hindu rituals, *kuśa* grass, a sort of perennial grass that represents the ever-green, and gold pieces (today coins or banknotes may be used) often represent the everlasting and immortal. These gifts are to benefit the departed on his way to the forefathers, it is said.

The corpse is carried out a back door feet first, wrapped in new white cloths that have been dipped in holy water. It is placed upon a bamboo bier and brought to the place of cremation, over special paths for the dead, through special town gates (lichgates), generally the south gate. Women are not permitted to participate in the funeral cortege. Nobody is supposed to cry, for then the deceased would have to take on tears and mucus, against his will.

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10. On the following, cf. Michaels 2004a, 131–58, with further bibliographical references; and Gutschow and Michaels 2005.

Feelings are to be expressed only at home. At the place of cremation, the corpse is laid with the feet in the water of a river, which is considered Ganges water and therefore liberating.

The cremation fire is lit with the domestic fire, which has been brought in a dish. The corpse is cremated the same day, on a funeral pyre or (more rarely) in a crematorium. From the Brahmanic and ritual point of view, the fire is creation and immortality. The gods, say the Brāhmaṇa texts, attained immortality first through the sacrificial fire. For this reason, it is the duty of every Twice-born, that is, one who has been initiated in the Vedic and Brahmanic ways, to light the fire every day with the Agnihotra ritual. This is why fire is at the center of almost every Hindu ritual. The initiation is the right to light the fire, marriage is solemnized by striding around the fire, and in death, the corpse is cremated. The departed, it is said, should gain heaven with the fire. "The purpose of the entire funeral is to allow the deceased to attain to the other world, the world of the pious, the kingdom of Yama, heaven," felt Willem Caland (1896, 174). He thus regarded the cremation, too, as primarily a sacrifice. But does the departed then need an escort? And where does he really go? To the "pious" (= the ancestors, or perhaps Viśve Devāḥ?), to heaven (= the gods), or to Yama? To which heaven? The heaven of the forefathers (*pitṛloka*), Brahma's heaven (*brahmaloka*), or to the heavens of Śiva (Kailāsa), of Viṣṇu (Vaikuṇṭha), or of Kṛṣṇa (Goloka)?

The funeral pyre is cooled with offerings of water to relieve the torment of the deceased. The deceased is still one departed, but as soon as the skull has burst or been smashed open on the pyre, a gossamer individual soul (*puruṣa*) is released—thus some Hindus imagine; others maintain that this happens as soon as breathing ceases.[11] The place on the skull that is opened to let the "soul" out is that of the strand of hair (*śikhā*) on the fontanel, which is called, significantly, *brahmarandhra*, the "*brahman* hole." It also has a central importance in the initiation, when the youth is inducted into the way to keep the sacrificial fire, as a sign of patrilineage. Immediately thereafter the still material individual soul must be attended to, for example by providing jars filled with food or water. Clay jars or jugs are a constant ritual element; sometimes they are smashed, like (or even instead of) the skull, although they are regarded as the seat of the deceased, and sometimes they are placed somewhere or hung up, to provide for the dead.

The bursting or smashing of the skull constitutes the ritually decisive point of death. After this, the living begin a period of being impure (*aśauca, mṛtakasūtaka, sūtaka*), which can last for up to thirteen days, depending on

11. Cf. S. Firth 1997, 37.

the degree of relation; this requires various purity measures and expiation rituals for the deceased and is "infectious." During this time, relations and strangers are very particular to keep a commensual distance. The periods of impurity are also characterized by a significant absence of the Veda and Vedic ritual for the one performing sacrifices, that is, the main mourner, generally the son. For this reason, those affected by impurity are prohibited from entering the temple or reciting the Veda for at least ten days.

As Robert Hertz (1960) already recognized, and Maurice Bloch (1988, 19) repeated, the question with death is, what actually dies, and what does not? Physically, the dead person must be got rid of; but the soul must be kept alive.[12] For this reason, in many cultures, the corpse is divided into perishable, often matrilinear parts (e.g., all the soft parts) and imperishable, often patrilinear parts (e.g., the bones). The soul, however, is rarely imagined as completely immaterial and purely spiritual.

In the Hindu ideas of death, the soul is regarded as corporeal. However, the body is at first hardly capable of survival. The unsatisfied dead (*preta*) have a gossamer body without a mouth, or only a mouth as big as a pinhole, as long as their ritual admission to the world of ancestors has not been carried out, in any case for no more than a year. They are conscious and can sense, but have no bodily organs to match. They are, as are the living, in a borderline state, full of ambivalence, impurity, weakness, and low vitality. They are hungry and thirsty; they wander somewhere about the house of the survivors; they are neither here nor there, neither on Earth nor in heaven or hell. They envy the survivors their life and wish to befall them with illnesses. This is why the departed also become beings that one wishes to get rid of and of which one must rid oneself. *Preta* also means simply "(tormenting) ghost," and in cases of so-called "bad" death (premature death, death by accident), the departed often remain forever in this unsatisfied condition, at least in the imaginations of the living.

It is the business of the survivors to give the departed a new body, and thus to put an end to their undesirable floating about. In this way, the aspect of new creation is added to those of accompanying the dead, impurity, expiation, banishing of the dead. Various ideas of the body supersede one another: in the beginning, the departed has only a body consisting of wind (*vāyuśarīra*), or of subtle substance (*sūkṣmadeha*), then a thumb-sized, so-called "body of features" (*liṅgaśarīra*), and finally a so-called "body of suffering" (*yātanāśarīra*), as big as an arm. These bodies are, as a rule, constituted by three series of sixteen balls or dumplings (*piṇḍa*) made of rice flour and milk—prepared by

12. Cf. Fortes 1976, 14.

the chief mourners. The aim is to enable the deceased to reach the forefathers and ancestors. Ten *piṇḍas* of the first series, for example, stand for the following body parts: (1) the head, (2) the eyes, nose, and ears, (3) the neck, the arms, and the breast, (4) the navel, the sexual organs, and the arms, (5) the hips, the legs, and the feet, (6) the inner organs, (7) the veins, (8) the nails, the teeth, and the bodily hair, (9) the semen, and (10) hunger and thirst.[13] This composition corresponds to Ayurvedic ideas of the development of the embryo and formation of the fetus in the womb.

The dumpling body is a social body, but not an individual one. For "bound by the sacrificial ball" (*sapiṇḍa*) is a designation for relations, which is also taken into consideration at births, in the determination of endo- and exogamy, and in the Bengali laws of inheritance (*dāyabhāga*): anyone who has the right to carry out the ancestor ritual (*śrāddha*) has the right to inherit. *Sapiṇḍa* relatives form a common body because they are conjoined by the forefathers (seven generations on the father's side, five on the mother's) (Parry 1985, 622).

The admission of the departed to the society of the ancestors (*sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*) is attained by means of performing several rituals over a period of up to one year, but this can be shortened to twelve days (each day representing a month). For example, it is usual to carry out the ritual of giving a cow (*godāna*) to the deceased. According to what is set out in the influential *Garuḍapurāṇa*, on his dangerous and extremely painful journey to the ancestors, the deceased reaches a kind of hellish river of blood and excrement, which flows between the earth and the kingdom of Yama. A cow will help him cross this river. The ritual of giving a cow is generally practiced in such a way that the funerary priest recites Vedic sayings while holding a cow's tail and a leaf of basil; the son takes hold of the priest's hand during this. The son is acting as a representative of the deceased. Normally the departed take a year to reach the semi-divine status of the *pitaraḥ*. This word, in the plural as it is here, means "forefathers, ancestors," but also "original ancestors"; the seven seers (*ṛṣis*) of the distant past are sometimes considered to be the "original ancestors." In the singular (*pitṛ*), it characteristically means (and is etymologically related to) "father." Father and forefathers, then, are on the same level, ritually regarded, as the son.

With the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, the arrival of the deceased at the place of the ancestors is celebrated. The main mourner divides up a somewhat larger *piṇḍa*, which now is the deceased, using a (sacrificial) cord or his fingers, into three parts; into these parts he mixes gold, *kuśa* grass, and often a piece of meat or

13. After the *Pretamañjari*, cf. for a different division: GPS (Naunidhirāma's *Sāroddhāra*) 1.50–54.

other things, and rubs it with black sesame seeds and mixes this whole matter in turn with three *piṇḍas*, which, in this case, represent the father, the grandfather, and the great-grandfather. This is the decisive moment, when the deceased, giving up his personal name, joins the multitude of forefathers (*pitaraḥ*), forming a community of eating, and is no longer a *preta*, a helpless vagabond on his own.[14] He has found his group, if not his home. United with the other dead, he can now live through his own strength and has a divine body (*divyadeha*). At the same time, the father of the great-grandfather (in other words: the great-great-grandfather) joins the multitude of the generalized, semi-divine forefathers (*viśve devāḥ*, literally "all gods"). With each new death, the deceased moves closer to heaven. "A man wins worlds by means of his son, immortality by means of a grandson, and the sun by means of the grandson of his son," is how Manu (9.137) puts it.[15] The three generations of deceased form a ladder with increasing status, but constantly decreasing closeness to the survivors. This is why sons are important for one's own salvation, as only they can carry out the rituals. Consequently, the son (*putra*) in Sanskrit is someone who saves his father from hell. Conversely, every living person owes something to the seers, the ancestors, and the gods.

Whether one deceased reaches the world of the ancestors or of heaven thus does not depend only on his own *karma* and his own deeds, on debt or service, still less on gods, but also—and especially—on whether and how his children carry out the death and ancestor rituals, and sometimes, too, on the mercy of the preferred divinity. But, despite all the promises of the epic-purāṇic texts, and despite all the clarity of the philosophical *karma* texts, it remains an open question, in ritual too, as to where the deceased goes, and when, and whether he goes at all. The world of spirits? That of the ancestors? The world of the forefathers? Hell (Yama's world)? Heaven? Reincarnation? Obvious inconsistencies remain in the concept of life after death: the wish to achieve reincarnation conflicts with the desire to be free of it; the idea of an immediate re-incorporation after death "contradicts" the sequence of generations of the ancestors; the latter are sometimes temporary, sometimes permanent divinities; admission to heaven partially sets aside the causality of requital for deeds.

The only certainty—and in this, the Vedic-Brahmanic ritual of dying and death is equivalent to death ceremonies in other cultures—is that the deceased goes thence and requires the care and nourishment provided by the

14. Abegg 1921, 17, and Parry 1985, 622.

15. Cf. *Yājñ* 1.78 and *Viṣṇusmṛti* 15.56.

survivors. As in the Roman Catholic ritual of the dead, there are provisions for the journey, an escort by means of prayers of pleading and blessing, the laying out and a kind of wake, a salving or embalming of the body, a funeral cortege, special clothing for the deceased and the survivors, the gathering at the corpse, sprinkling it with water, a sort of death knell (for instance, the saying *Rāma nāma satya hai* "The name of Rāma is the truth"), and a period of mourning lasting about one year.

But the differences between the Brahmanic-Sanskrit death ritual and Christian blessings are very clear, too. There is no confession, no written death notices (this has only recently come into vogue among the urban middle classes), no charitable actions (donations to the needy), no funeral banquet immediately after the funeral, no singing by the mourners, and no celebration of the dead, such as the eucharist with its sermon. As a rule, there are no graves, no rituals of remembering the soul, hardly any votive gifts. The dead have disappeared as individuals from general view; no image, no gravestone commemorates them. Meyer Fortes' succinct geneonymic definition "An ancestor is a named, dead forebear"[16] is valid for India in only a very limited way.

There are other distinctive features, too. The Vedic-Brahmanic ritual of dying and death is, to a great extent, the elimination of impurity and mortality. This is partly achieved by creating a new body for the deceased in the other world. In addition to the vital force engendered by his own *karma*, further vital strength is attributed to the deceased person, for which he needs a place and a new body in his new world. (The momentous converse—"if he had no vital force, he would not have to be born again and thus would not have to die again"—is something I will deal with below.)

This vital strength, which, in the final analysis, brings death, is left or transferred by him to the survivors, at least in part. Consequently, the survivors must protect themselves and the deceased, primarily by means of the cleansing strength of water, fire, and cremation.

As manifold, fluid, and variable the ritual constructions and their meanings may be, equally vague are the ideas of the afterworld. To take but one detail, one can only state in a limited way that the deceased is transformed by the dumplings and enters a cycle by means of the fire that will finally lead to reincarnation. For the significance of the dumplings alone is constantly changing: they form the new body parts of the deceased; or they are provisions for the deceased, taken or eaten by the funeral priest, or the crows, or the dogs, as representatives of the deceased; or again they represent the

16. Cited after Newell 1976, 20.

deceased or the forefathers; or they are divine food (S. Firth 1997, 75); or they are signs—*piṇḍa* also means "embryo"—of reincarnation. In the end, only the *damnatio memoriae*, the elimination of memory, helps, through which, finally, all ancestors "die." Only the killing of the ancestors still remains, after all this. But more of that below.

"Death" before Death (*jīvanmukti*)

What has been described thus far fits perfectly into current theories about death and dying. The deceased have an afterlife. They must be accompanied and pacified until they fall victim at some point to *damnatio memoriae* and disappear. But one problem remains: the ancestors do not find any place of peace and quiet in the Indian religions. In dealing with them, ambivalence, perplexity, and fear remain paramount. The dead are not really dead, and so the dependency on them survives, as does the guilt toward them, which is to be atoned for. Physical death is a break, but not yet the dissolution of bonds between the bereaved and the deceased. Real disengagement continues, for the ancestors as well as the living. For when the ancestors are reborn, they are threatened with renewed suffering and renewed death.

The formula, life equals suffering (*sarvaṃ dukkham*), is valid both in Vedic-Brahmanic Hinduism and in Buddhism. Rebirth is thus not necessarily to be seen as a reward, no second chance or end of suffering, but a punishment. How, then, can true liberation from suffering be attained? In this, Hinduism and Buddhism go separate ways, but for both religions, immortality is often only achievable by escaping the cycle of life and death to which people and ancestors are subject. For both, there is an afterworld that occupies a place other than this world and the afterworld, sometimes called *mokṣa* or *mukti*, sometimes called *nirvāṇa*. These mean complete liberation, total disengagement. But they also mean a desired "death" before death as provided by fate.

In Vedic-Brahmanic Hinduism, people could derive these ideas directly from the construction of the sacrifice. The Vedic sacrifice guaranteed the gods immortality (*amṛta*), according to ancient Indian belief; it was the creation and source of life par excellence. Man and animal are distinguished by the sacrifice. Only man is not sacrificed, but carries out the sacrifice himself (ŚBr 7.5.2.23).

Not the soul, but the sacrifice makes the difference between man and beast. As the Indologist Jan Heesterman (1995, 28) has shown, the soul (*ātman, puruṣa*, etc.), in particular and especially the post-mortem soul, is to be understood in the Vedic context as a process. It is understood to be a mixture of several constantly changing components—the forces of breathing (*prāṇa*), bodily forms (*tanu*), and the forces of the senses (*indriya*).

> The principle is movement and impermanence of the vital phenomena. . . . The archaic conceptions of the soul do not indicate any particular identity, but rather a cyclical process of change and mutual interpenetration of the vital forces. Put briefly: the soul as a process. (Heesterman 1995, 30)

Naturally, as Heesterman says, in this world, metempsychosis, metamorphosis, being possessed, exorcism, and shamanism are a matter of course, and man is subject to a "continuous change. . . in which he threatens to lose himself. Looked at this way, it is understandable that continuous change for Buddha is precisely Non-Self, *anattā*" (ibid., 31).

Against this, there is the sacrifice, which expresses this continuous change and, at the same time, is identified with the soul. But, in that man constructs the sacrifice, he also creates his own soul, his self. The sacrifice becomes the self.

> In the end, man achieves his self by sacrificing himself. Sacrificer and sacrificed, life and death coincide with one another in the Self, which is thus no longer subjected to the continuous change of the world. In self-sacrifice, the Self finds its final and constant state. (ibid, 32)

Of course, what is sacrificed became itself, in a way, mortal through its identification with the self or with the individual soul. People did not only become like gods, but gods were also dependent upon people. If they did not make the sacrifice, the gods faced their own downfall. The paradox that resulted from now on, namely that the sacrificial victim's "immortality" was mortal, led to various attempts on the part of the Brahmans to resolve it. One possibility was that the "mortality" of man, that is primarily his biological descendance, was ritually completely removed. Thus, the man reproduced himself in the woman, he was reborn in her. In Hindu initiation, in which the sacrificial knowledge and therefore actually the sacrifice itself is symbolically passed on, the son does not follow the father; rather, he substitutes for the father. In this way, a woman loses her line of descendance upon marriage and ritually receives that of her husband. Immortality could not be subject to becoming and disappearing and could not be mortal like man himself.

Around the eighth century BC, however, people began to ask themselves why man and woman are necessary for the immortality of the sacrifice, indeed, why progeny? This thought was connected to the criticism of the elaborate, expensive, esoteric sacrificial ritual.

> The ancient sages, it is said, did not desire children (thinking), "What shall we achieve through children, we who have attained this Self, this world (result)." They, it is said, renounced their desire for sons, for wealth and for the worlds, and lived a mendicant life,

it says in the *Bṛhdāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* (4.4.22). In place of ritual practice, there was a gnostic realization of the ritual in itself. In that the ascetics united sacrifice and victim in themselves, their self became "ageless" and "deathless," as the *ātman* is often called in the Upaniṣads.

The tension between the finite nature of all human activity, including the sacrifice, and the aim of the ritual sacrifice, immortality, had become intolerable for people who were seriously seeking salvation. Every newborn meant, for them, a new death. Man, in their view, owed a debt (*ṛṇa*) to gods, other men, and ancestors, through mere birth, without personal behavior playing any role. Rebirth and heaven are for Twice-born, and immortality and salvation are for us, the ascetics told themselves. Life in the house, with the hearth, wife, children, and ancestors could no longer be their kind of life; they wanted to go forth into the wilderness and light their own inner fires.

Ascetics are radical people. Their consequentiality shows in their rituals: ascetics die a social and ritual death, prematurely, as it were (Olivelle 1992, 89 ff.). As a token of this, some members of the Daśanāmī sect lay themselves upon the pyre at their ordination, or they make a figure of grass and burn it. They even sacrifice *piṇḍas* to themselves. But most especially, they are freed of the debt toward the ancestors. In a way, they are treated as *pretas* for the rest of their lives, the liminal deceased whose souls have not yet found their places (Olivelle 1992, 93). From a social standpoint, they lose all rights of ownership and have no marital duties, but they cannot inherit, either.

They regard the body as no more than an external envelope, filled with blood and excrement, a sign of frailty, age, and death. To demarcate and distinguish themselves from these signs of mortality, they do everything differently than normal people do. They cut their hair off entirely, or they never cut it; they are dressed in rags, a few earth-colored cloths, or they are naked (*nāga, vātaraśana, digambara*, literally "clothed with air"). They eat like animals (cows, doves, egrets are named), or what they are given. They fast or starve themselves to death, since "dead" people do not need to eat any more. They do not work; they beg instead. They do not live anywhere, as their "home" is permanent wandering, interrupted only by the rainy season—ancient rules even forbid the ascetic to beg in his home village.

The ascetic is in basic opposition to the house and sacrificial fires. The ascetic must give up everything that has to do with the sacrifice: fire utensils;

cooking vessels; Vedic mantras, primarily the Gāyatrī (cf. *Āruṇi Upaniṣad* 6); the strand of hair (*śikhā*), the sign of patrilineal descent; and the holy cord. An old name for the ascetic is "the fireless one" (*anagnin*). The ascetic is himself the fire; *agni* becomes *tapas* (literally "heat"); the ascetic becomes the *tapasvin*.[17]

For ascetics, what is valid in death for normal mortals is not valid for them. Ascetics are not cremated, but rather buried. They do not need any sacrificial balls, any funeral escort, any sacrificial fire, because they themselves are the fire, because they have already "died" at their ordination seeking liberation at life time (*jīvanmukti*). Their souls have already escaped during their lifetimes. The soul does not need to escape through the *brahmarandra* in the case of ascetics; the ascetic has already permitted its escape by means of spiritual or meditative force, which is why only his bodily envelope continues to live, not he himself. The ascetic and his relatives are not affected by any impurity in death. A mediaeval ascetic text states that, when a dying person recites the *praiṣa* formula "I have renounced" (*saṃnyāstaṃ mayā*) at the moment of death, he will, like the ascetic, not become an unsatisfied spirit of the dead (*preta*), but will go immediately to the forefather (*pitṛ*), and the corresponding *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa* ritual is not needed for him.[18]

"Death reinforces 'the desire for life,'" as Bronisław Malinowski (1974, 51) formulated a basic axiom of numerous death rituals. Indeed, in the Indian context too, not death is the problem with death, but rather further life. In death rituals, particularly, this reveals itself in the localization of the ancestors and their liminal position. To be liberated from death means, in the Indian religions, to set life and death oneself. Death as willed by oneself prevents natural death, including death after death, from occurring. Displacing death, (spi)-ritual suicide, prevents dying. From this point of view, from the Indian perspective, the very inversion of life and death results. The ancestors only die when we kill them—and we die only when we want to. Thus, in life-cycle rituals often the unchangeable or the immortal is being staged—a point to which I will came back in the conclusion of Chapter 7 (pp. 262ff.).

17. Cf. Heesterman 1995; Kaelber 1989; Olivelle 1992, 86–89.

18. *Yatidharmaprakāśa* 71.12–20, 52–53; Olivelle 1992, 74.

6

Collective and Public Rituals

"SOCIETY IS REFLECTED in a ritual by the very (f)act of its members taking part in it" (Platvoet 1995, 30). This holds true for rites of passage where individuals and their ritual transformations are in the center, but also for collective rituals, such as cyclical festivals where many people from different social groups and castes gather. It is this collective and communal aspect (*societas*) that matters in festivals, whereas in rites of passage, the individual(s) together with their families and clans are in the focus.

The aspect of *societas* should not be underestimated. Collective rituals (Liénard and Boyer 2006), including domestic life-cycle rituals, produce group coordination and solidarity. People often feel compelled or morally obliged to participate and to publicly show affiliation to the group, and they fear social exclusion if they do not join the events. The ostentative character of most collective rituals is therefore especially appropriate to demonstrate overtly commitment to social order and hierarchies.

South Asia is known for its many festivals called *utsava* (see below) or *melā* ("fair"; from *mil-*, "to meet"). Both terms commonly denote communal festivals, which are related to mythological events of deities or localities, the harvest cycle, or ancestors. And both terms indicate what is important in such collective rituals: the arising of attention and getting together of people. However, every festival must be understood in terms of its historical, mythological, socio-ritual, and performative aspects. Only then does the "meaning" of the event appear, which cannot be separated from its mythical references and from those who perform, celebrate, organize, or pay for the festival. Neither myth alone nor its history or social function can fully explain the festival.

The category of "festival" actually is a cover term for a variety of performances and events: regular collective celebrations, public enactments of plays and dramas, theater performances, pilgrimages, temple processions, gatherings of ascetics, games, sportive competitions, vows, pilgrimages, and much

more. The English terms "feast" and "festival" are derived from the Latin word *festus*, referring to times when cultic actions were performed. The term "festival" carries a number of connotations such as liminal, exceptional, paradoxic, eccentric, ludic, obscene, rebellion, joy, and solemn. As Sigmund Freud said:

> A festival is a permitted, or rather an obligatory, excess, a solemn breach of a prohibition. It is not that men commit the excesses because they are feeling happy as a result of some injunction they have received. It is rather that excess is of the essence of a festival; the festive feeling is produced by the liberty to do what is as a rule prohibited. (Freud 1989, 499)

Humphrey and Laidlaw distinguish between performance-centered and liturgy-centered rituals. In performance-centered rituals, such as initiations or shamanistic seances, it is important to influence the participants, whereas in liturgy-centered performances it is important to follow the stipulated script of the actions. In the first, one asks "Has it worked?"; in the latter, "Have we got it right?" (Humphey and Laidlaw 1994, 11). Often, however, it is impossible to differentiate between the gravity of liturgy and the playfulness of festivals (cf. Grimes 2013, 185).

Ronald L. Grimes sees "celebration" as one of six modes of ritual sensibility (i.e., embodied attitudes):

> Celebration is excessive play. Celebration takes a variety of forms: carnivals, birthdays, feasting, pretending, gamboling, gaming, dancing, singing, music-making. Whenever we begin to detach ourselves from ordinary matters requiring pragmatic modes of participation so we may toy with forms themselves, we are beginning to play. Since ritual is itself a mode of formalization it is inescapably connected to the ludic impulse. Play is at once a root of ritual and a fruit of the same. (Grimes 1982, 48)

Grimes acknowledges the multigenre character of festivals and emphasizes that different "ritual sensibilities" are present at the same time (see also Grimes 2013, 185f.), but it is mainly the *societas* mode that differentiates festivals from other rituals, and I agree with Ronald Grimes that it is not necessary to regard performance-centered rituals compared to liturgy-centered rituals as "a weaker or less pure form of ritual" (ibid., 200).

Festivals are typically cyclical rituals that follow a calendar and depend on the seasons and certain days of the year. They celebrate certain calendrical transitions, for example, the solar transition (*saṃkrānti*) when the sun shifts from one sign of the zodiac to the next, and they mark out these dates by ordering time:

> [A]mong the various functions which the holding of festivals may fulfill, one very important function is the ordering of time. The interval between two successive festivals of the same type is a "period," usually a named period, e.g. "week," "year." Without the festivals, such periods would not exist, and all order would go out of social life. (Edmund Leach, quoted in Honko 1979, 376)

Many festivals (identified in Table 6.1) thus have to do with the harvest cycle, with the monsoon, and with sowing and rice cultivation. These are often rituals of renewal. Others are designed to reinforce the borders and identity of a city or a neighborhood, or to prevent damage and ensure the solidarity of a social group. On certain days, gods have to be worshipped, for instance on their birthdays. On other days, gods, ghosts, the dead, or ancestors must be pacified, or family ties have to be reinforced.

Quite often, processions are part of the festivals, either temple processions (see Chapter 6.1) or processions that have been used or created for political demonstrations, be it the mass conventions of militant Sadhus during the *kumbhamelās* or the chariot procession created by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to the claimed birthplace of Rāma in Ayodhya. Another processional type consists of circumambulations (*parikrama*) around holy places (Varanasi, Mount Kailash, etc.), where pilgrims visit a certain number of temples or shrines.

Other festive rituals are vows (*vrata*, see Chapter 6.2), which belong to the most celebrated rituals in South India, and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*, Chapter 6.3). These are also performed by individuals, but in contradistinction to life-cycle rituals, they are often recurrent and not as transformative as rites of passage. Moreover, a *tīrthayātrā* may be part of or based on vows. Although these rituals sometimes look like large festivals, they are often just the sum of individual rituals by individual pilgrims. In some cases, however, *tīrthayātrās* may become communal or group events. Similarly, the Gaṇapati festival was once a private event before it became a public event. The same holds true for Durgāpūjā and Śivarātri (see below Chapter 6.2), which have now become popular festivals.

Table 6.1 Major Hindu Festivals

January/February	*Makara-Saṃkrānti*: Winter solstice, ritual bath
	Vasantapañcamī ("Spring's Fifth"): Worship of Śiva and/or Sarasvatī
February/March	*Mahāśivarātrī* ("Śiva's Great Night"): Worship of Śiva with fasting, vigil, and bath
	Holī, Holikā: New Year's festival, worship of Viṣṇu, Kṛṣṇa, and Rādhā, throwing bags of colored powder, visit of relatives and friends, burning of Holikā figures
	Rāmanavamī ("Rāma's Ninth"): Rāma's birthday
March/April	*Kumbha Melā*: every three or twelve years: pilgrimage and ritual bath in Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain, and Nasik
June/July	*Rathayātrā*: Temple festival to honor Jagannātha in Orissa
	Gurupūrṇimā ("Teacher's full moon"): Worship of teachers
July/August	*Rakṣabandhana* ("Binding of Demons"): Sisters bind a thread around their brother's wrists to protect them against evil spirits
	Nāgpañcamī ("Snake's Fifth"): Worship of snake
August/September	*Gaṇeśacaturthī* ("Gaṇeśa's Fourth"): Worship of Gaṇeśa
	Kṛṣṇājanmāṣṭamī: Kṛṣṇa's birthday
September/October	*Navarātrī, Durgāpūjā, Daśaharā*: Worship of Durgās, Gaurīs; on the 10th day (*vijayadaśamī*): celebration of the victory of Durgā over the demon Mahiṣa
	Rāmalīlā ("Rāma's Play"): Performance of the Rāmāyaṇa epos, especially in Varanasi (Varanasi)
October/November	*Divālī* (*Dīpāvalī*): Light festival to honor Lakṣmī

6.1 Temple Festivals (utsava)

In South Asian languages, there is not a single term that encompasses all festive occasions. Terms that are often translated as "festival" or "feast" are *utsava* (Hindī *utsav*, lit. "arising"), *melā* ("gathering"), *līlā* ("play"), *tīrthayātra* ("procession to a holy place"), Singhalese *perahära* ("procession"), *jāgaraṇa* (Konkani *jagor*, "vigil"), (Kannarese) *teyyam* ("dance of the gods"), (Tamil) *kūṭiyāṭṭam* ("combined acting"), but also *pūjā* ("worship"), *yajña/yāga* ("sacrifice"), or *homa* ("fire sacrifice," see Chapter 7.2).

The Sanskrit word *utsava* is perhaps the most widespread term that refers to occasions close to what is covered by "festival"; it is—at least in North India—not restricted to temple festivals (Gonda 1985; Anderson 1993), whereas in Āgama texts, the term is "employed more specifically to denote a set of temple ceremonies" (Davis 2010, 25). The main point of *utsava* (from *ud-sū*, "to rise") is that deities ascend from the place in the temple, become physically present in movable forms, and are shown to the public, including those who normally do not enter the temple. This presence of the deity is the focus of *utsavas*. According to one Śaiva Āgama, the *Karaṇāgama* (*pūrva* 141.1–2), Śiva's creative activity, is manifested (*ud-bhūta*) and made visible in *utsavas* (ibid.). And another text, the *Vijayottarāgama*, defines *utsava* as follows:

> The *utsava* is that which extricates the creatures who have fallen into the slain of ignorance from their bondage, and thereby it brings about the manifestation of their power of knowledge. (Davis 2010, 25, quoting T. Ganesan's translation)

Utsava festivals are often chariot processions, generally in a circumambulatory form around the locality or temple demarcating inside and outside of a locality or linear ways to the center. Such festivals are essentially interwoven with space and locality. It is perhaps no wonder that two major books on rituals signal this in their titles: Victor Turner's *Centre Out There* (1973b) and Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987).

The *Mahotsavavidhi* of Aghoraśiva classifies *utsavas* according to various categories, for instance according to the frequency of celebration: daily (*nityotsava*), monthly (*māsotsava*), fortnightly (*pakṣotsava*)—for example, the new moon or full moon festivals—, and so forth. Thus, with the notion of the arising of the deities, a festive place and time is set apart. During this time, which may last several days or weeks, priests and other participants have to behave differently. They must fast or keep a diet, sleep on the ground, live in a separate house or in the temple, and have no sexual intercourse. In a way, it is a vulnerable time, and only when the deity is back in his or her temple is order re-established.

As an example of the *utsava* or uprising character of Hindu festivals, a short description of the Nepalese Vatsalājātra may suffice.[1] This most important Newar festival of Deopatan takes place in the month of Caitra

1. See Michaels 2004a, 191–220, and 2008, 79–107, for a more comprehensive description of the festival.

(March/April). The festivities encompass processions, sacrifices, and *pūjās*. A large number of participants and ritual specialists of the city are involved. The rituals begin with the Dūdūcyācyājātrā a few days before the main festival, when a small copper replica of the main *liṅga* of the Paśupatinātha Temple is carried in a small processional litter to the Naradevī Temple in Kathmandu. One of the Bhaṭṭa priests of the Paśupatinātha Temple heads the procession, which is also to invite all sister goddesses to participate in the Vatsalājātrā.

The main events start with the Deśoddhārapūjā on the 12th of Caitra. During daytime, four tantric Karmācārya priests responsible for the goddess Vatsalā join with the leaders of socio-religious associations (Nep. *guthi*) of the "upper" and "lower" part of Deopatan to sacrifice a goat and smear the seat of Vatsalā with a mixture of cooked rice, lentils, eggs, fish, and black soya beans. These two *guthis* are also responsible for the statues of Śiva and Śakti (or Vatsalā) carried around during the Vatsalājātrā. In the evening, four individuals from different castes, each representing one of the four *varṇas*—the *vaiśya* representative must even be a Buddhist Śākya—gather at the Vajreśvarī or Pīgāmāī shrine, where they participate in an animal sacrifice conducted by four local tantric Karmācārya priests. At the end, invited caste members each bring a piece of white cotton, which they bind together to make enormous turbans for the representatives. In this part of the festivities, the city expresses, for the welfare of the area or country (*deśoddhāra*), solidarity and *societas* beyond caste differences.

In the evening of the following day, nine virgins and two boys are worshipped at the Vajreśvarī shrine as the nine *kumārīs* (representing the Navadurgā group) and Gaṇeśa and Kumāra respectively. Navadurgā masks are also worshipped at the shrine. During the next day, called Goblin's Fourteenth (*piśācacaturdaśī*), an icon of Vajreśvarī is carried around in the Pīgāmāījātrā, usually by members of the low Poḍe caste.

On the same day, the Bhaṭṭa temple priests, along with many individuals from the Newar community of Deopatan and others, have animals sacrificed at the Vatsalā Temple. In the evening, Karmācāryas and the *guthi* leaders again cover the seat (*pīṭha*) of Vatsalā with cooked rice. Shortly afterward, the movable statues of Vatsalā and Śiva are brought and placed on separate seats west of the Vatsalā Temple, and a pyre is laid so as to resemble the human sacrifices Vatsalā is said to have demanded. Around midnight, again the twenty-two children representing two groups of nine *kumārīs*, Gaṇeśa and Kumāra, take their seats in an arcade, the Poḍepāṭī, west of the Vatsalā Temple; these children constitute the Śakti group, and the other children the Śiva group. All children are fed and worshipped by the priests and others.

In the early morning, the *pīṭha* of Vatsalā is filled up with more than 200 liters of rice beer, and when the so-called Dhvājuju, the leader of the Śakti Guthi who is responsible for the Jackal God (Nev. Dhvādyaḥ), howls like a jackal, three pipes leading into the nearby Bāgmatī River are opened, and there some devotees bathe in the flow of alcohol. In the evening of the same day, the chief Bhaṭṭa priest comes to worship Vatsalā and gives official permission to start the actual procession of the Vatsalājātrā. For this purpose, the icon of Vatsalā, together with a small *liṅga*, is placed on the processional litter. During the night, Vatsalā is carried to her "house" in the middle of Deopatan, where the icon is kept throughout the year. It is said that she is angry at Śiva's refusal to accept her because of her consumption of alcohol and blood.

All during the next day, Vatsalā is carried through Deopatan and even beyond the western gate; she goes so far as to threaten to leave Śiva/Paśupati. In the evening, the forty to fifty young men who carry the processional litter during the whole *jātrā* run in an excited mood down the street to the western gate of the Paśupatinātha Temple. The porters ram the threshold of the portal with the timbers sticking out from the processional litter. But Śiva still refuses Vatsalā, so that she is once more carried through Deopatan. On the last day, Śiva/Paśupati has grown worried and, full of sorrow for his consort, he calls her back. Again she goes to the western portal gate of the Paśupatinātha Temple in a procession that lasts the whole day, with almost every Newar household stopping the porters to worship her. In the evening, the porters ram the steps of the portal three times until the chief Bhaṭṭa comes out and presents Vatsalā with a small red cloth, representing a sari, meant as a gift and gesture of reconciliation.

Although unknown in Vedic times, festivals like the Vatsalājātrā have become increasingly accepted. In many processions, the deities are taken out from the sanctuaries and shown to the public. Often, they are then carried around a certain locality (village, temple) or area. Mostly young men pull them in wooden chariots through the cities or villages, for example, in the Jagannātha procession (*rathayātrā*) in Puri (Orissa), in the Matsyendranātha procession in Patan (Nepal), and in many temple processions in South India. The deities are also carried on special seats or processional litters on the shoulders of participants. The chariots are decorated with ornaments, flags, flowers, and silk clothes. In the procession there is often a hierarchy of those who march together. Mostly these processions are accompanied by music and dance groups and followed by a great number of devotees and spectators. The priests often sit on the chariot, cooling the deity with a yak fan and taking gifts from the people inside the movable temple and distributing *prasāda*.

Although these festivals often attract the attention of masses of devotees, they are sometimes basically just gatherings of people who come for individual worship of the deities. They nevertheless create the experience of brotherhood and group solidarity, in other words *societas*, or *communitas* in Victor Turner's sense. Festivals are also gatherings of social groups and markets, so that one also has to consider notions of play, leisure, and commodification (cf. Korom 1999).

The *societas* of festivals is further present in joint meals and especially in the fact that it only occurs when different groups (priests, rulers, members of the municipality, patrons, musicians, artisans, astrologers, cleaners, or helpers) work together. The collective display of cooperation reinforces the solidarity. Festivals are therefore very complex events that take place at the same time, but at different locations. This density of events clearly contributes to the fact that a festival is not just the sum of the activities of individuals, but much more. The participants in most cases have strictly prescribed and predefined roles, but for some of them, the line between spectator and performer cannot consistently be drawn. At some points, they are very actively involved, and at other points, they are simply observers. For those actively involved, the relation of creativity vis-à-vis stability in festivals is a contingent matter since they are parts of complex networks of agency while also being active as individual agents in shaping every realization of a festival. All participating agents constantly have to test and experiment how far change can go before the performance is not considered "the same" any more, when change matters, and to whom, and who in the end has the competence and authority to decide what is essential, and what is subject to negotiations. Festivals, therefore, seem to be measures of traditions themselves, ensuring that flexibility is retained and regained.

This is why festivals often are occasions for negotiating and managing conflicts, making power claims, forming strategies to affirm or oppose social hierarchies and status, and marking the inside and outside of social groups. They build a framework for a set of relationships that cannot be reduced to individual agencies. They are settings to socialize and learn about traditions. They are also platforms for demonstrating cultural heritage, and they are stages of political and economic interests. Sometimes festivals and processions are also semi-sportive events, for instance, when participants run around Kāśī in the Pañcakrośīyātrā or around Kathmandu in the Dīpaṅkarayātrā (cf. Michaels 2013). More and more festivals have also become podiums to demonstrate world peace and harmony. Above all, however, festivals are times to meet friends and relatives, enjoy the scenes and events and (theater) plays or games, partake of meals, snacks, and picnics, visit other places—and return to one's home somehow different.

Festivals often include other rituals such as worship (*pūjā*), sacrifices (*yajña, homa*, etc.), dances, music, donations (*dāna*), religious vows (*vrata*), for instance, fasting or night vigil, processions (*yātrā*), and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*)—all of which bring religious merit for the individual and his extended family through performing the meritorious *darśana*, the beneficial view of a deity at a pilgrimage site.

In contradistinction to life-cycle rituals with which festivals share the extranormal time and space, they are often further characterized by their periodicity. They are generally events that are repeated. Most important, however, they address the community and public sphere rather than the individual and family or clan. Festivals are thus vital for creating and confirming group identity. Despite many transformations and innovations[2] festivals still stand for tradition and heritage.

6.2 Vows (vrata)

As mentioned before, it is not always possible to strictly distinguish individual-oriented rituals from calendrically fixed festivals. Rituals such as the *rakṣabandhana* (strengthening the sister-brother relationship) are both an individual-oriented ritual and a festival celebrated throughout Hindu South Asia. Similarly, the dead, particularly relatives who have died during the preceding year, are commemorated near the Paśupatinātha Temple on Bālācaturdāśī, the dark 14th of Mārga (November/December). On this day, many small family groups gather for the whole night and light lamps, which in the morning are set afloat on the Bāgmatī river on small earthen plates. The ritual also involves strewing a mixture of various grains (Nep. *satbīj* or *-biu*) all over the place, including the Paśupatinātha Temple. The ritual, woven about with many legends of a cannibalistic demon, ends as a rule with an act of worship of Paśupati and not seldom with a (symbolic) procession to the sixty-four *liṅgas* within the Paśupatinātha Temple.

Vows (*vrata*) are another example. They can be independent rituals or festivals, such as Śivarātri, Ekādaśī or Kṛṣṇa's Birthday, but they can also be a part of major festivals; they are, for instance, often part of the *pūjā* worship of deities. Vratas generally include a number of observances, such as fasting, singing, or night vigil. They are performed either for oneself (*ātmārtha*) or for somebody else (*parārtha*), especially often by women for their husbands.

2. Cf. Huesken and Michaels 2013.

Sometimes individual *vratas* accumulate to a major festival. This is true of the Śivarātri festival. In the Great Tradition, it is based on a myth, which has been handed down to us principally in its purāṇic sources, especially in the *Śiva-*, *Padma-*, and *Skandapurāṇa*,[3] or texts sometimes called *Śivarātrivratakathā*. In nearly all of its versions, it is a hunter (*vyādha, lubdaka, kirāta*, etc.) who gets lost in the jungle and—frightened at nightfall by wild animals—then climbs a *bilva* tree. There he stays awake the whole night, dropping from time to time some water and some *bilva* leaves, which both fall upon a hidden *liṅga* on the ground. Unconsciously and unwillingly, he thus worships Śiva through fasting (*upavāsa*), a night vigil (*jāgara*), *bilva* leaves—much favored by Śiva—and water (*sparśana*). Śiva therefore grants the hunter (who in the social sphere stands at the bottom rung of the Brahmanic hierarchy because his profession involves the killing of animals) salvation (*mukti*) or a place near to Śiva (*Śivaloka, -purī, -gaṇa, -tulyatā, -sārupya*, etc.). He also exculpates the hunter from his sinful way of life (by granting *pāpahīna*).

However, the extensive celebration of Śivarātri in Nepal, and especially at Deopatan, probably the largest festival in Nepal based on the number of pilgrims, is surprisingly not mirrored by this mythological written material, since the purāṇic Śivarātri myth is scarcely known in Nepal. When I interviewed about 350 pilgrims in a survey during Śivarātri in 1987 and asked them about the origin of this festival, there was not a single devotee who knew about the story of the hunter. Instead, the majority of the pilgrims said that the Śivarātri is the anniversary of the wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī or Śiva's birthday. To the best of my knowledge, the latter is not known to the Purāṇas, but we find similar statements in the ethnographical literature dealing with India.

In addition to the purāṇic texts, there is another group of sources related to the Śivarātri vow, namely the Dharmaśāstras, Nibandhas, and manuals for the proper celebration of this festival.[4] Their main feature is the prescriptions they contain for the Śivarātri *vrata*, that is, for the rituals to be performed on this day, as well as for the behavior of the devotee. In accordance with the hunter of the purāṇic myth, this vow is basically threefold since it focuses on vigil, fasting, and *pūjā*. However, it is fascinating to note how the apparent social openness of the myth, which seems primarily to be designed to legitimate the worship of Śiva by the low castes and noninitiated as well, is altered

3. See *Śivapurāṇa* 4.40.1–102 (more references in Michaels 1996).

4. See especially the Śivarātri sections in *Kālanirṇaya, Kṛtyatattva, Caturvargacintāmaṇi* (Vratakhaṇḍa and Kālakhaṇḍa), *Tithitattva, Dharmasindhu, Nirṇayasindhu, Puruṣārthacintāmaṇi*, and *Smṛtikaustubhā*.

by the Smārta conception of Śivarātri as a *vrata*. For in the myth, it is the accidental, unconscious, and even unwilling worship of Śiva that is important. A *vrata*, on the other hand, is invalid without *saṃkalpa*, that is, a previous, formal, and conscious declaration of what the devotee intends to keep as his vow.

The celebration of the Śivarātri at Deopatan also differs considerably in this respect from the Great Tradition and from most Indian little traditions. Only very few pilgrims, for instance, keep a vow of fasting. Moreover, most ritual activities do not take place—as described in the Dharmaśāstra—at nighttime, but during the day. The ritual activities of the night—when the Paśupati Temple remains open and its *jyotirliṅga*, or the main sanctum, is worshipped in accordance with the classical Śivarātripūjāvidhi every three hours (*prahara*)[5]—are somehow limited to the Bhaṭṭa temple priests and their assistants, while most pilgrims, including the ascetics, simply sleep. In contrast, the Indian celebration of Śivarātri is frequently a joyful event, where many devotees remain awake, singing and dancing all night around fires on the roads.

It is remarkable that the Śivarātri at Deopatan is not celebrated in its classical form. To a certain extent, only the calendrical date coincides with the Śivarātri of the Great Tradition, but here too, we observe significant differences. In the Dharmaśāstra and Nibandhas, each 14th of the dark half of any month is called Śivarātri. However, the *kṛṣṇacaturdaśī* of Phālguna or Māgha (depending on the *amānta*- or *pūrṇimānta*-system) is Mahāśivarātri, the festival. In any case, it is the *tithi*, the lunar day, which is decisive for fixing the exact time of the festival. Nonetheless, due to the vows of night vigil and fasting (which involves the daytime hours), natural time has to be taken into consideration for determining the proper ritual time. These essentials of the Śivarātri *vrata* have led to an astronomical and chronological problem with implications for the ritual practice, both of which are extensively discussed by the Dharmaśāstrins. But more important, an "individual" ritual (*vrata*) has turned into a festival (Śivarātri) with many participants.

6.3 Pilgrimages and Processions (yātrā)

In Hindu festivals, not only gods arise and move around, but also individuals or groups go on long pilgrimages to the deities. Such pilgrimages[6] are

5. For a description of Śivarātri temple worship in South India, see Long 1982, 203–07.

6. Cf. Michaels 2003b, Gutschow and Michaels 1993.

extremely popular in the Hindu context challenging other rituals, for instance, the sacrifice. Large numbers of pilgrimage sites, visited by large numbers of devotees, reflect the many gods and holy men of India:

> The traditions of sacred geography and the rituals of pilgrimage together constitute such a central dimension of Hinduism that it is perhaps not an overstatement to say that, for a large majority of Hindus, their religious practice is more oriented around sacred space than around sacred books and that the ritual of pilgrimage and visits to temples is of more relevance in their religious life than rituals involving books. (Jacobson 2013, 5)

Pilgrimages[7] belong to a mixed category between cyclical festivals and individualistic rituals. The visit of or pilgrimage (*yātrā*) to one or several holy places (*tīrtha*) can be part of a major calendrically fixed festival or an individual journey motivated by personal goals and arranged according to the horoscope of the pilgrim. These optional (*kāmya*) *tīrthayātrās* often take the devotee to various shrines, primarily *liṅgas* and watering places (*kuṇḍas*) where he or she worships the deities. Jacobson even believes that "the tradition of pilgrimage and sacred places marks a change in religion from a fire-centric to a water-centric religion and transfer from ritual sacrifice to the ritual of the sacred bath."[8] I would not go as far as that, because at the pilgrimage place, many fire rituals are performed, and for sacrifices, a ritual bath has always been obligatory—both are means of purification and protection. Such processions are a favored means to set off the sacred world from the profane, unordered, unprotected world, in order to give expression to a divine principle by means of underlying linear or circular patterns.

A *tīrtha* (literally "ford") means "pilgrimage site," but also "(holy) man" (e.g., Rāmatīrtha or the *tīrtha* section of the Daśamāmī ascetics), a certain religious "line in the palm" or "(holy) text." *Tīrthas* can be spatially arranged in a number of forms: *maṇḍala, cakra, yantra*, axis, *svastikā*, the syllable *oṃ*. This means that the arrangement of *tīrthas* in processions also expresses certain religious concepts and not just historical, social, or topographical relations.[9] Such religious concepts serve to demonstrate the omnipresence of the

7. Cf. Bhardwaj 1973; Morinis 1984; van der Veer 1988; Gold 1989; Fuller 1992, 204–23; Jacobson 2013.

8. Jacobson 2009, 391; for the ritual bath, cf. above Chapter 3.3.

9. See Michaels 2003b for a more detailed study on the concept of *tīrtha*.

deities—an omnipresence that is not limited to earthly (*bhauma*) sites only, but can encompass intellectual and spiritual (*mānasa*) *tīrthas* as well.[10]

Tīrthas are places for rituals. Most commonly *pūjās* are celebrated, involving giving and taking. Many pilgrimages have to do with ancestor rituals (*śrāddha, piṇḍadāna*). Especially in places such as Varanasi, Prayag, or Gaya, thousands of special priests are responsible for these rituals and help the pilgrims to organize them. Sometimes, pilgrimages require a restrictive lifestyle, fasting, walking barefoot, abstinence from meat and alcohol, sleeping on the ground, head shaving, or celibacy.

In several texts, we encounter long eulogizing lists of such holy places.[11] In the sacred geography of the Great Tradition, some of these places are grouped, such as the Seven Cities (*saptapurī*), the Four Cardinal Tīrthas (Badrināth, Purī, Rāmeśvaram and Dvārakā), the Twelve Jyotirliṅgas, and the *śāktapīṭhas*. Several eulogizing texts (*māhātmya*) relate regionally important sacred places to the supraregional level by declaring that the sanctum belongs to one of these groups. Regional kingdoms often bound surrounding vassals to the center by this means, not only politically but also ritually, namely, through establishing ritual pilgrimage centers and building prominent temples.

However, the knowledge of eulogies of *tīrthas* among the pilgrims is rather limited. What is important for them in the veneration of the sacred sanctuary is the ritual, the procession or circumambulation (*parikrama, kṣetrapradakṣiṇā*) of the places and the worship of the deities. This mostly means a form of *pūjā* through which the divine order is given concrete embodiment. It is this ritual experience of the place(s) that accounts for a portion of the popularity of pilgrimages. However, to these experiences belong not only the employment of local priests—who tell them the stories (*kathā*) of the places, guide the pilgrims around them, or offer special services, sometimes on the basis of recorded long-standing connections to their customers—but also the enjoyment of religious souvenir shops and stands there too, stocked with an abundance of religious paraphernalia, restaurants and snack stalls, as well as the gatherings in hotels or ashrams.

Given these associations, *tīrtha* is, then, the holy substance "transition, junction" between worlds that touch and do not touch each other. In other words, *tīrtha* is the expression of a certain sacred spatial concept that helps to

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10. *Tristhalīsetu* 68; cf. also Bhardwaj 1973, 2, and Hazra 1975, 113

11. See, for example, Mbh 2.80–156 and the selective compendium in Bhardwaj 1973, 45–56; *Śabdakalpadruma, s.v. tīrtha*; Kane 1968, vol. 5, 723–825; Salomon 1985, App. A; Jacobson 2009, 395–99.

identify the pilgrim with the "other world." For *tīrthas*, as other sacred places, are otherworldly, spiritual spaces to a certain extent. As Ernst Cassirer put it with regard to mythical thinking:

> The whole spatial world, and with it the cosmos, appears to be built according to a definite model, which may manifest itself to us on an enlarged or a reduced scale but which, large or small, remains the same. All the relations of mythical space rest ultimately on this original *identity*; they go back not to a similarity of efficacy, not to a dynamic law, but to an original identity of essence. (Cassirer 1973, vol. 2, 89; transl. Barbara Harshaw)

The same is true of pilgrimages. They can take place on various levels and in various, basically equal, spaces. Thus, one goes on a pilgrimage to Varanasi (cf. Gutschow and Michaels 1993, 14f., 102–43), but also within Varanasi, in that one walks around holy places. With every tour (*pradakṣiṇā*), the pilgrim receives the sacred power possessed by the enclosed space. This can be a brief circumambulation around the gods in a temple, but also a five-day procession like the Pañcakrośīyātrā, the walk around Varanasi in a radius of five *krośas* (17.5 km), in which 108 *tīrthas* are visited. Every sanctuary encloses other holy sites through its mythology, so that at the end of the procession, the universe is celebrated. But what can be expanded because it is infinite can also be contracted into the one: identifications can be dilated or compressed. Thus, in Varanasi, there is the Pañcakrośī Temple with 108 reliefs, which represent the shrines of the Pañcakrośīyātrā (Gutschow 2006); there, walking around Kāśī—an ancient name of Varanasi—can be performed in one place, with a walk around the temple, which brings as much religious merit as the five-day procession. In addition, there is the temple of Kāśīdevī ("goddess Kāśī"), where the sacred power "Kāśī" can be obtained. Because of the identity of the part and the whole, the universe can be in Kāśī, and Kāśī can be in one specific temple or in another place: several places in southern Asia call themselves a true or secret "Varanasi."

Thus, the power "Varanasi" is bound not only to the geographical place of Varanasi, and a *tīrtha* is not only a site within geocentric space coordinates. For then it would not be holy. In the extreme case, neither a statue nor external rituals are necessary: "Varanasi" is then visited in the mind, and in the heart. The pilgrim texts and city eulogies themselves elevate Varanasi to this transcendent level. Kāśī appears there in bright light, as a field of cosmic forces, as a sacred *maṇḍala* enclosing the whole universe as a place of perfect purity, liberation, and redemption. Kāśī is built of pure gold there and floats

in the ether, where the city is supported by Śiva's trident, whose extension forms the Viśvanātha, the temple of the city's main deity. Kāśī has the form of a *maṇḍala* or a Yogic or cosmic body there. Kāśī changes and yet remains the same because the sacred power "Kāśī" is singular.

Yet, a pilgrimage site is not only a vague religious feeling. On the contrary, its sacred power can be measured precisely, as illustrated by a category of texts studied by Richard Salomon (1979). The texts are called *tīthapratyāmnāyāḥ* ("pilgrimage sites as [equivalent] substitute [for penance]"). In them, visiting holy sites is balanced against atonement and redemption (*kṛcchra, prāyaścitta*), which is stipulated in specific ritual procedures. Thus, pilgrimage sites have a certain atonement value that depends on distance and other factors. An early example for these identifications comes from the *Paraśārasmṛti*: according to this, a pilgrimage of two *yojanas* (about 3.2 km) is considered equal to a *kṛcchra* act of penance (*Parāśarasmṛti* 12.64; Salomon 1979, 102–03). In later texts, the holy places themselves are named and listed. For example, a bath in the Ganges corresponds to six years of *kṛcchra* acts of penance, when one has covered sixty *yojanas* in order to visit the river; since one *kṛcchra* act of penance needs twelve days and can be carried out only once a month, the bath in the Ganges along with some thirty miles of pilgrimage corresponds to 180 *kṛcchras* altogether. It is also obvious in these equations that the equivalent can be determined only through an abstraction, the sacred value. Spaces and sites can have this value, but it is not connected to them and it can be miscalculated because of its materiality. The religious value of the recitation of a text can also be given precisely: to get a husband, the *Rāmarakṣastotra* should be repeated 220 times; for the birth of a child, 64 times; in illnesses 12 times, and so on (Bühnemann 1988, 86). This can be compared to calculating and paying for indulgences in the Roman Catholic church.

As theoretical concepts, the *tīrthayātrās* are less associated with the sphere of the temple and thus with a fixed and permanent place for a deity; rather, they are more bound up with the sacred *arena* of the house and the family or clan. The Vedic culture had its particular difficulties when it came to the recognition of the *stabilitas loci* of the gods. The gods like to travel, says the *Ṛgveda*. Thus, in each instance, they had to be summoned and invited to the sacrificial site by the semi-nomadic agents of this culture. It was possible to locate that site almost anywhere and in ad hoc fashion. For this reason, it was not only unnecessary to recognize permanent holy sites—but it was indeed quite impossible to do so. Agni is a god and an altar; thus, the variable site of sacrifice was also the god himself. The *tīrthayātrās* appear to stand within this tradition, though naturally, only in a distant and removed sense. They

likewise do not confine the existence of the gods to a single locus. The ancient Brahmanic skepticism vis-à-vis temples and their priests has been preserved in the relative arbitrariness of their patterns.

This is one aspect the *tīrthayātrās* suggest, and one feels to some extent confirmed in this regard by stories like the following recent tale in which the mobility of a specific deity—in contrast to other gods—is clearly expressed. When a broad thoroughfare, the Ring Road, was being constructed through Deopatan with Chinese aid during the 1970s, the sites of two goddesses stood in the way. While it was unproblematic to move the benevolent goddess Maṅgalāgaurī a few meters to the north—and a temple inscription dated 1976 CE attests this—it proved impossible to relocate the tantric goddess Vajreśvarī. The local inhabitants still recall the reason quite clearly; I will summarize the oral report of a Jyāpu peasant (see Michaels 1993):

> A few years ago, when they were building this road, they wanted to relocate the Pīgāmāī (a Nevārī name for Vajreśvarī) to the south. Everyone here was against that. But no one listened to us, especially not the construction workers. One of them rammed the large tree at the site of Pīgāmāī with a Caterpillar. At the same moment, two snakes came out of the tree and bared their fangs. Well, three days later the poor man was dead. He died in terrible pain. So a difficult situation had arisen. It was only possible to resolve it because King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah and Mao Dze-dong got together and conferred with each other. They decided that the goddess should remain there and that the Ring Road should pass on over her.

In actual fact, the shrine of Pīgāmāī is located today at a tunnel below this bypass road. As mentioned, this story—which approaches myth in its classic form (because there was, of course, no such meeting between the two leaders)—demonstrates very clearly the various attitudes toward the *stabilitas loci* of deities. However, what is true for the sanctuaries of the gods also holds true as far as their processions are concerned. The processions of the firmly rooted goddesses are organized by the local Newars for the benefit of the cosmological order of the town as a whole, as well as to protect the inhabitants of the town against demons, sickness, or crop failures; in these processions, the goddesses arise from their permanent seats (*pīṭha*) for just a few days during the year and are carried around as icons, which are otherwise kept in a special house (Nev. *dyaḥchẽ*). In contradistinction to this, the *tīrthayātrās* are generally organized by individuals who reside outside of the town, principally by the Bāhun/Chetri (Brahmin/Kṣatriya) stratum, for their own benefit and

religious merit. In the Smārta *tīrthayātrās*, the pilgrims travel to the gods; in the Newar town festivals, on the other hand, the participants move in procession with the gods in or around the town. The *tīrthayātrās* are optional and take place on days auspicious for the organizer; the Newar town festivals, in contrast, are held on calendrically fixed days, which are closely associated with the harvest cycle. Thus processions and pilgrimages can be individual-oriented or group-oriented, and only a close look at the ritual event and its participants can distinguish these two basically different types of processions.

7

Transcendence in Rituals

UNTIL HERE, I have suggested two modes of rituals, *individualitas* and *societas*, that help to explain the type or focus of certain rituals, for example, individual-focused life-cycle rituals and group-oriented festivals. We have also seen that these modalities are not given separately but intermingle. This holds true also for the third modality of rituals: *religio*, that is, the belief in higher, extraordinary values or some kind of elevation.

According to Emile Durkheim "ritual can be defined only after defining the belief" (1912, 50). He linked religion with ritual. Following their theory of ritual competence (Lawson and McCauley 1990), Robert McCauley and E. Thomas Lawson (2002) developed a similar alliance between ritual and "religion," postulating that the difference between religious and non-religious actions is introduced by the appearance of a culturally formed and superhuman performer or addressee of the action, which the daily psychological act-theory does not differentiate.[1] The problem with these theses is that the first does not allow differentiating between religious and nonreligious ritual, and the second presupposes what it wants to demonstrate: the belief in a superhuman being as agents along or behind the rituals. This approach excludes rituals in which no superhuman being is involved—examination rituals for instance—and limits "religion" to a theological belief.

In order to avoid such a close link between ritual and belief, I hold that the majority of rituals cannot be appropriately understood without a notion of *religio*, which does not presuppose a belief in superhuman beings or religion since there are many rituals in which people do not believe in superhuman beings while performing the ritual. To be sure, *religio* denotes an awareness that ritual action is extraordinary and frequently also transcendening—in the sense that a superhuman agent is involved. *Religio* thus refers to the religious

1. Cf. Whitehouse's (2004, chap. 8) critique of this theory and Koch 2006, 263.

modality, or at least to some elevating principle or order in rituals. It also refers to something new that is created through the ritual for the performer of rituals.[2] With this approach, I am close to Raymond Firth's early definition of ritual: "Patterned activities oriented toward control of human affairs primarily symbolic in character with a non-empirical referent, and as a rule sanctioned" (1951, 222).

The important and perhaps even decisive aspect of *religio* as I understand it is also highlighted by Ronald Grimes. In his list of twelve "family characteristics of ritual," nine refer to the extraordinary and elevating aspect of ritual:

Actions become ritualized by:

- traditionalizing them, for instance, by claiming that they originated a long time ago or with the ancestors
- elevating them by associating them with sacredly held values . . .
- singularizing them, that is, offering them as rare or even one-time events . . .
- stylizing them, so they are carried out with flare
- entering them with a nonordinary attitude or in a special state of mind, for example, contemplatively or in trance
- invoking powers to whom respect or reverence is due—gods, royalty, and spirits, for example
- attributing to them special power or influence
- situating them in special places and/or times
- being performed by specially qualified persons. (Grimes 2013, 194, List 4)

It is this *religio* that makes rituals attractive enough to invest time, work, and resources in them as Jan E. M. Houben rightly observed:

> The fact that the ritual actor is taken out of his daily routine and is linked up with transcendental orders, with divine beings or distant forefathers etc., is crucial for the ritual process. Objects from daily life, a grass-seat or a bread etc., do play a role, but are used with reference to a transcendental order, for instance when a seat is prepared for the gods or when the bread is prepared in order to be offered to a deity. The impressiveness of the transcendental orders has the capacity to

2. This aspect is similar to what in Pūrvamīmāṃsā is called *apūrva*, the unseen result or efficacy of sacrifice (cf. Chapter 9).

> inspire potential performers to invest their time and wealth, and to invest these more and more in a ritual or in a ritual system. (Houben 2011, 157)

Based on the Indian material, especially the Brahmanic-Sanskritic material on sacrifice, I also propose that many rituals in South Asia follow a model developed from the sacrifice ideology to overcome or transcend mortality. Maurice Bloch called this the "irreducible core of the ritual process":

> [This] minimum irreducible structure which is common to many rituals and other religious phenomena . . . derives from the fact that the vast majority of societies represent human life as occurring within a permanent framework which transcends the natural transformative process of birth, growth, reproduction, ageing and death. (Bloch 1992, 3)

We have already seen in Chapter 5 how the construction of Hindu life-cycle rituals followed such a model of overcoming the biological and thus mortal aspects of life through a process of identifying the main persons of the rituals with notions of immortality such as the Veda or the sacrifice. The term to denote these rituals was *saṃskāra*, "to make (somebody or something) perfect" or equal to the gods so that they can accept it. Bloch describes the ritual process similarly: "Initiation frequently begins with a symbolic 'killing' of the initiates, a 'killing' which negates their birth and nurturing" (ibid., 4). Then follows in the ritual the transforming part in which the individuals are made "part of something permanent, therefore life-transcending" (ibid.). (I leave out here Bloch's theory of rebounding violence since it does not concern my argument.)

In the following, I will extend these aspects by dealing with their roots in the Vedic sacrifice (*yajña, homa*) from which—I suggest—an identificatory habitus evolved, which helped to shape the Hindu *homo ritualis*. I will argue that, due to soteriological reasons, the Vedic sacrifice forms a model for other Hindu rituals inasmuch as it establishes three ritual characteristics of subsequent rituals: the identificatory pattern based on the identification of the sacrificer with the sacrifice, the use of mantras authenticating ritual action, and the importance of the fire in Hindu rituals. I will begin with a short introduction in the structures of the Vedic sacrifice. Afterwards, I will try to show how the Vedic fire ritual (*homa*) has been transformed when it is practiced as part of other rituals and in modern contexts, for example, the public sacrifices (*mahāyāga*) with large crowds and organized by religious institutions.

7.1 The Vedic Sacrifice (yajña)

In Vedic cosmology, sacrifice (*yajña, yāga*; from *yaj-*, "to sacrifice") is the link between a separate order of reality and the worlds of the gods and beings. As in ancient Iranian religion, the fire (*agni*)[3] forms the center. Sacrificial objects are thrown or poured—the sacrifice is also called *homa* (from *hu*, "to pour, to sacrifice")—into the fire in order to send them to the gods. The essential parts of (Vedic) sacrifice are food and liquid offerings that are physically destroyed or transferred and transported to the gods. These gods live on the food and especially the *soma* drink that humans offer to them so that in return, they can support and strengthen the humans: "Therefore for thee are these abundant cups with Indra's drink, stone-pressed juices (i.e., *soma*) held in ladles. Drink them and satisfy therewith thy longing; then fix your mind upon bestowing treasure" (ṚV 1.54.9).

Occasions and motives for sacrificial rituals are numerous. The primary goal of the sacrificer or ritual patron is his and his family's well-being. But the texts often focus on aiming for heaven (TS 4.1.10.5; ŚBr 6.7.2.6), gaining immortality, avoiding another death (*punarmṛtyu*) in the next world, and conquering the heavenly worlds. "Worldly" (*laukika*) motives such as desires for cattle, sons, and health, or intentions to harm one's enemy are also mentioned.

The Ṛgvedic ritual often includes animal sacrifices, mantras, and the energizing *soma* drink as the most esteemed oblation. The identity of *soma* is not yet clear despite plausible arguments that it is *ephedra* (Stuhrmann 1985; Falk 1989) or *Amanita muscaria* or *pantherina* (Stuhrmann 2006). From this, two major types of sacrifices developed in post-Ṛgvedic religion, when the society changed from a basically tribal and nomadic form of living to more segmented and settled kingdoms that gradually acculturated indigenous strata of the society and forms of living:

(a) Public rituals (*śrauta*) performed by a sacrificer or ritual patron (*yajamāna*) and one or more Brahman priests who act on behalf and for the benefit of the *yajamāna*; the textual basis of the Śrauta sacrifice is formed by the Śrautasūtras. Complex Śrauta rituals such as the piling up of large fire altars (*agnicayana*) or *aśvamedha* and the royal horse sacrifice demand a

3. For literature, see Hillebrandt 1897; Lévi 1898; Hubert and Mauss 1899; Oldenberg 1919; Gonda 1960, 1:104–73; Thite 1975; Biardeau and Malamoud 1976; Fuller 1992, 83–105; Malamoud 1996; Heesterman 1985, 1993. For more literature see Steiner 2010 and Jamison and Witzel 2003.

precise knowledge of the texts, a great number of specialists, and a great many sacrifice materials.

(b) Domestic sacrifices (*gṛhya*) are performed by the head of the house and his wife, in some cases with the help of a (domestic) priest (*purohita, pūjāri*), for example, life-cycle rites (*saṃskāra*) or morning and evening rituals (*agnihotra, saṃdhyā*); the ritual handbooks for the domestic rituals are the Gṛhyasūtras and a large number of similar texts (*vidhi, paddhati*). The *gṛhya* rituals require one fire, whereas the *śrauta* rituals generally need three fires.

These rituals can be classified according to several criteria. Vedic tradition (ŚBr 1.7.2.10; 2.2.2.1 et passim) differentiates between the central sacrificial objects or offerings, such as vegetarian food (*haviryajña, iṣṭi*), animal sacrifices (*paśubandha, aśvamedha*), and sacrifices including pressing the *soma* drink (*agniṣṭoma, somayajña*). We also find allusions to human sacrifices (*puruṣamedha*). Additionally, one could classify the Vedic sacrifices according to time and seasons, for example, new- and full-moon sacrifices (*darśapūrṇamāsa*); seasons, for example, tertiary sacrifices at the beginning of spring, the rainy season, and the cooler season (*caturmāsya*); the sacrifice in spring or autumn (*āgrayaṇeṣṭi*); function, for example, royal consecration (*rājasūya*); or initiation into the social group, for example, the Second Birth (*upanayana*), marriage (*vivāha*), or rituals for the ancestors (*pitṛyajña*).

According to the *Taittiriya-Āraṇyaka* (2.10), every householder must perform the following five great fire sacrifices (*pañca mahāyajña*): *ṛṣi-yajña*—honoring the seers (*ṛṣi*) by the study of the Vedic texts; *deva-yajña*—worship of the gods by offering to the sacred fire; *pitṛ-yajña*—offering libations to ancestors (*pitṛ*); *mānuṣya-yajña*—charitable offerings of food to humans; and *bhūta-yajña*—feeding animals, especially cows and birds.

The sacrificial arena (*vedi*) is mostly no fixed place of performance, but a place that can be established almost anywhere according to certain rules and measurements. In Ṛgvedic times, the location did not contain images that represent the deities, and even later, it is often not clearly visible to whom the sacrifice is addressed. The deities are invited, offered a seat prepared by *barhis* or *kuśa* grass and a *yantra* or a vase (*kalaśa*), fed with offerings thrown or poured into the fire, and praised and entertained with poems or litanies. The Vedic ritual thus has much in common with a symposium.

For all rituals, the fire, into which all edible and drinkable substances are thrown and "destroyed," is pivotal. The establishment of the fire (*agnyādheya*) requires a special sub-ritual; the one who is entitled to sustain the fire is called *ahitāgni* ("the one who has established the fire"). For some rituals, the

sacrificer has to undergo a special consecration (*dīkṣā*); he has to become godlike himself because only then could the gods accept what came to them and because only then was immortality possible for the sacrificer. Man is the sacrifice, the texts say several times, but also the gods are the sacrifice (TS 1.7.9).

Thus, the sacrifice became the meeting place and center, and it worked only when one knew about identifications and equivalents and had been initiated into them. In the process, the syllables, words, meters, and way of reciting were granted a special function. The word was magically charged, so to speak, and received sacred power. Every ritual act was effective only if the appropriate Vedic text was spoken by persons authorized to do so, in an unchanged formulation, in the proper intonation, with the proper meter: you could lose your son or have your arm broken if the meter was wrong.[4] From this time onward, a great number of Vedic mantras accompany the ritual acts, which would be invalid without them. The identification of the sacrificer with the sacrifice and the word was the most momentous of the identifications made in the Brāhmaṇa texts. It led to the internalization of the sacrifice ritual, its separation from social life, and finally with asceticism to the renunciation of the sacrifice.

The priests normally receive a ritual gift or payment (*dakṣiṇā*), nowadays often in the form of money or payment in kind. Originally, many Vedic sacrifices required four and more priests (*ṛtvij*): *hotṛ, udgātṛ, adhvaryu*, and the *brāhmaṇa*, plus several helping priests and other ritual specialists. Of these, mainly the *adhvaryu* survived.

Central to Śrauta rituals are three fire altars: (a) a circular fire of the domestic altar (*gārhapatya*, "householder's fire") in the west is the fire of the earthly world for cooking the offering; (b) a rectangular fireplace in the east (*āhavanīya*, the fire "to be offered to") for cooking the sacrificial rice and to receive the food offering as the heavenly fire; and (c) a semicircular fireplace in the south (*dakṣināgni*, "the southern fire") to protect from evil powers as a fire of the space between heaven and earth. In the middle, the altar (*vedi*) is set, on which the offerings are placed and on which sacrificer and gods meet. In animal sacrifices, a sacrificial pole (*yūpa*) is erected to which to tie the animal. Everything is measured and piled precisely according to specially developed geometric rules as preserved in the Śulvasūtras.

The basic form of the piled brick altar (*agnicayana*) is the stylized shape of a falcon (*śyena*), which helps the sacrifice to reach heaven and conquer the enemies and the worlds. Piling up such an altar takes several days and has an

4. TS 2.5.2.1; ŚBr 1.6.3.10 and 1.7.3.19.

extremely wide variety of forms; it is only one subordinate part of the Soma sacrifice. Its architecture is a model of how the macrocosm is reproduced microcosmically: whoever sacrifices creates the whole, says the ŚBr (3.6.3.1). The falcon altar (*śyenacit*) measures seven or seven and a half human lengths (*puruṣa*). The total number of bricks comes to 360, corresponding to the number of days in the lunar calendar. The basic measure of space is anthropocentrically related to the sacrificer, and the basic measure of time is oriented to the year. In the individual layers, the sacrificer (*adhvaryu*) places several objects, always while reciting the appropriate Vedic verses or sayings (*mantra*): a lotus leaf, gold tiles, gold mannikins, as well as a porous brick, a tortoise, a mortar and pestle, a fire bowl and (stylized?) heads of a man, a horse, a sheep, a cow, and a goat. All ritual instruments—cups, spoons, ladles, pots, pestle and mortar, and so forth—are newly made each time, mostly of wood or clay. The individual layers of the altar are piled according to precisely stipulated instructions of size with bricks in various patterns. Finally, a sacrificial fire is lit on the altar. Such *agnicayana* rituals have become extremely rare, although they have been revived in recent years.

The strong belief that the correct performance is crucial for the efficacy of the ritual has produced a ritual science, in which both man *and* gods depend on the sacrifice. Through this "science," the gods become partners to a ritually determined reciprocity, a kind of contract, subject to the same laws as man. This also means that the gods themselves have to sacrifice. Thus, the sacrifice has its own realm and agency because, basically, the sacrifice "needs" neither the gods nor even men (Heesterman 1978, 36–37). It exists for itself like a law of nature. Anyone who knows that the sacrifice is independent and eternal obtains immortality himself. This means that the sacrifice can be identified with knowledge (*veda*). The gods were the first who obtained this knowledge, the sacrifice, and thus immortality. The sacrifice became their self (*ātman*, cf. ŚBr 8.6.1.10):

> Prajāpati after creating creatures entered in affection into them; from them he could not emerge; he said, "He shall prosper who shall pile me again hence." The gods piled him; that is why they prospered; in that they piled him, that is why the piled (Agni) has its name. He who knowing this piles the fire (Agni) is prosperous. "For what good is the fire piled?" they say. "May I be possessed of Agni," with this aim shall the fire be piled; verily he becomes possessed of Agni. (TS 5.5.20.1–2)

The efficacy of the sacrifice thus relies on the knowledge of the correct equivalents. This principle of equality *similia similibus*—"the principle which permeates

the whole cult" (Hillebrandt 1921, 796) is called contagious or homeopathic magic in anthropology. Through family similarities or equivalents, a substitute or a part becomes the whole. Because the altar is built with the body dimensions of the sacrificer, he thus—literally—becomes not only the measure of all things but also the sacrifice; and because all powers such as the seasons, directions, meters, animals, and plants are "symbolically" built into the altar, the sacrificer becomes the whole along with the altar. Thus, the sacrifice is identified with the sacrificer.

Jan Heesterman has shown that the key to understanding the sacrificial ritual lies in this fundamental identification of sacrifice and self:

> The sacrificer, being the sole and unchallenged master of his sacrifice, performs his *karman* in sovereign independence from the mortal world. This *karman* is his self. The sacrificial fire, established through his own *karman* is equivalent with his inner self. Independent from the mortal world it cannot but be immortal and inalienable. Hence, the inextricable junction of fire, self and immortality. (Heesterman 1997, 58)

To sum up, in Hindu, especially Vedic India, the sacrifice is identified with the sacrificer: "The basis of the whole system is the identification of the sacrifice with Prajāpati" (Keith 1925, 445). Through the sacrifice Prajāpati is "all this" (*idam sarvam*) and much more. The gods were the first who obtained knowledge, the sacrifice, and thus immortality. But any human being who knows this obtains immortality himself. The sacrifice becomes his self (*ātman;* ŚBr 8.6.1.10; 14.3.2.1). At first, the gods did not want to give knowledge to men. But they passed it on to the Brahmans. The consequence was that the chain of identification of sacrifice = knowledge = immortality = Prajāpati (gods) could be completed with the link of "man": *puruṣo vai yajñaḥ*, "Verily, man is the sacrifice" (ŚBr 1.3.2.1). But man only becomes the sacrifice when he is identified with it ritually: "Verily unborn is the man insofar as he does not sacrifice. It is through the sacrifice that he is born; just as an egg first burst" (*Jaiminīya-Upaniṣadbrāhmaṇa* 3.14.8). What comes next results from the initiation, which itself is a collection of identifications, including the obligation to perform the fire sacrifice (*agnihotra*) every day: "A Twice-born man should always offer the daily fire sacrifice at the beginning and end of each day and night" (Manu 4.25). Anyone who does not light the fire anew every day is fallen (out of the caste), an outcast, with whom one may not eat (food cooked in the fire), who may not marry (Manu 11.60, 66).

Thus, the initiation and the authorization to sacrifice are linked genealogically in order to keep the knowledge of the sacrifice within the circle of one's own kinship group and clan. Only by marriage is it possible to get into this closed chain of identification. But this also happens because the wife ritually loses her own descent and is identified with the husband, so that the following soteriological chain of identification is possible: sacrifice (salvation) = knowledge (Veda) = gods = [father(= wife) > son] = sacrifice. Of course, this chain can begin at any place and is hardly complete.

The notion that the sacrifice is an independent realm, neither created by gods nor by men, has been elaborated in the Mīmāṃsā system. From an early period (200 CE or earlier), Indian philosophers and theologians developed ideas and classifications of religious and ritual acts. Basic distinctions are the one between *laukika* ("wordly, secular") and *vaidika* ("related to the Veda, religious"), or the one between acts that are "compulsory" (*nitya*), "occasional, caused, or contingent" (*naimittika*) and "optional, desiderative" (*kāmya*). Sacrificial acts are further divided by different words, repetitive acts, numbers, accessory details, contexts, and names. Moreover, the *mīmāṃsakas* or hermeneutical interpreters of Vedic rituals defined (Śrauta) sacrifices (*yāga*) by three constituents: *dravya* (material, substance), *devatā* (deity), and *tyāga* (abandonment) (MS 2.1.1–2 and 2.2.21–24). This means that the sacrificer offers (and thereby abandons) substances to deities. P. V. Kane paraphrases it correctly: "*yāga* means abandonment of *dravya*, intending it for a deity" (Kane 1974, vol., 2.2, 983). In a *homa*, for instance, the sacrificer pours the substance, namely, ghee, into the fire and thus abandons it for the sake of a deity.

Due to the fact that the power of the sacrifice effective just by their performance was placed completely in the hands of the priests, transmitted and preserved only within the Brahmanic clans and in a language incomprehensible to most "customers" and also to many priests who utter mantras and perform ritual elements they do not understand anymore, the sacrifice became almost autonomous and lost its meaningfulness. It was the Vedic ritual itself that was granted authority; its meaning became obsolete. The *homo ritualis* takes it for granted. Humans who wanted to give the ritual any meanings, for instance by using the ritual action for addressing new deities, had to invent new ritual forms even if they were based on the Vedic ritual. The *pūjā* is such a case. In other cases, the sacrifice basically remained what it was, but several new meanings could be ascribed to it. This holds true for the *homa* and modern forms of the *yāga*, which I will address below. I am not saying that the sacrifice could not change—the blood sacrifice is an example that demonstrates the contrary—but I hold the position that the *homo ritualis* believes in the power of the ritual without feeling obliged to search or to present

meanings and reasons for the rituals. This is best shown by the fact that the *homa* appears in different religious contexts.

7.2 The Fire Sacrifice (homa)

Rituals become obsolete. Most Vedic rituals are not or are rarely and differently performed today. A major transformation started in the middle of the first century BCE when the sacrifice was profoundly criticized, and other rituals such as gift-giving (*dāna*) were preferred. The reasons for rituals to be given up are various. In the case of Vedic rituals, causes seem to have been the complexity with its high degree of specialization of the ritual participants and their elite status, the long periods these rituals sometimes took, the textualization in an elite language, the high costs, and the loss of patronage during the Nanda and especially the Maurya empires (Bronkhorst 2011, 30). For many persons, it perhaps became too expensive to invite many priests and perform sacrifices that require a great number of ritual items. This is all the more true as religious alternatives and reform movements arose: spiritual and meditative practices, as well as forms of the devotional worship of gods in temples that did not always require priests. Sacrifice was even declared to belong to the Dvāpara eon (*yuga*), while *dāna* was declared as appropriate for the present Kaliyuga (Koskikallio 1994, 254). However, some Vedic rituals survived—even if in fairly different forms. Thus, the *yajña* turned into the *homa*, the *agnihotra* into the *saṃdhyā* rituals to be performed at dawn and sunset, the large *agnicayana* into the *mahāyāga*, and parts of the ancient animal sacrifice can be found in the Nepalese *balidāna* (Michaels forthc./b), and elsewhere.

The *homa* sacrifice is probably the most widespread Indian ritual. It can be found in Vedic and tantric and Hindu and Buddhist contexts. It moved from South Asia to later Mahāyāna Buddhism in Central and East Asia East, especially Japan,[5] and recently the West. It developed from the Vedic Śrauta ritual but is much simpler. The fact that different religious connotations did not basically alter the ritual justifies a closer look at the performances. In the following, I will compare Hindu and Buddhist (Vajrayāna) *homas* as performed in contemporary Nepal, especially in the context of life-cycle rituals. As it seems, it is above all the transcending character of the fire sacrifice that combines rather different approaches and "meanings."

The common feature of the various *homa* rituals is offerings (*āhuti*) that are destroyed or, more precisely, transformed in the fire. In all traditions, this

5. See especially Payne 1991 and Kolhatkar and Tachikawa 2013.

fire is called *agni* (cf. Latin *ignis*). It is deified as the god Agni who brings the offerings (grains, ghee, water, etc.) to the gods. In contradistinction to the Śrauta rituals with three fireplaces, the later *homa* has mostly only one fire. Typically, a temporal altar or sacrificial arena is built for this purpose. Most action is accompanied with mantras, depending on the branch of the Veda to which the ritual handbooks belong.

In the Smārta tradition, the *homa* is a ritual by which the totality of deities is invited for the protection and welfare of the main ritual event (*viśeṣakarman*). For an event to be auspicious, it is essential to invite a host of deities—the main (*mūla-* or *pradhāna-*) and accompanying (*aṅga-* or *parivāra-*), the personal (*iṣṭa-* and *kula-*), as well as the local deities (*sthāna-*, *deśadevatā*)—and to pacify the ancestors and possibly malevolent deities. All in all, more than 100 gods are sometimes to be invited and fed, among them the respective central deity. The *homa* ritual can last for several hours.

The Buddhist *homa* follows similar aims; a text quoted by the Jesuit and Vajrayāna specialist John K. Locke (1933–2009) states:

> The rite of the *homa*, called *jajnavidhana*, gives the fruit of satisfaction and salvation (*mukti*) to living beings, averts calamity from the country and brings peace; it is both used for the initiation rites of men and the setting up of deities [i.e., the consecration of images, etc.]. The performance of the various forms of the *homa* rite brings satisfaction to the gods manifest in a visible form. The main aim of the *homa* ritual is to provide plenty (*subhiksa*) to the whole world. (Locke 1980, 103f., quoting a *Kalaśārcana* manuscript)

In the modern day practice of the Smārta (Parbatiyā) tradition in Nepal,[6] the *homa* is an elaborate procedure. It is usually performed according to the instructions of a ritual handbook specialized in the laying down of the sacrificial fire (*agnisthāpana*). As the *homa* described in the *saṃskāra* manuals of the tradition (cf. C. Zotter 2009, 26–30), the *agnisthāpana* handbooks follow the basic structure given in the Gṛhyasūtra of the predominant Vedic school (cf. PG 1.1.2–4 and 1.5.3)[7] but contains several modifications and additions

6. The following account on the *homa* of the Parbitiyā is based on C. Zotter (2009), who relies on about a dozen initiation manuals, selected *agnisthāpana* handbooks, and his own fieldwork.

7. For the model *homa* in different Gṛhyasūtras cf. Kane 1968ff., vol. 2.1, 207–10; Gonda 1980, 346–62.

revealing that the *homa* has merged with the standard pattern of worship known from the *pūjā* (ibid.). The modern *homa* might be divided into the following parts (sometimes appearing intertwined in the actual sequence of acts):

Construction of a sacrificial pavilion (*yajñamaṇḍapa*): by erecting five piles made of bamboo, sugar cane, and twigs of the Himalayan cherry; attaching a decorated doorway (*toraṇa*) and a canopy filled with auspicious materials, such as a sacrificial cord, certain varieties of sweets (*kasāra, sela*), Areca nuts *(supārī*), popped rice (*lāvā*), *dūbo* grass, and flowers.

Preparations of the sacrificial place and the utensils: including a fivefold preparation of the sacrificial ground (*pañcabhūsaṃskāra*) by wiping the surface, smearing it with cow dung, scratching lines thereon, taking the earth out of the lines, and sprinkling the place with water;[8] drawing a *maṇḍala*-like pattern of lines (Nep. *rekhī*) on the ground with colored rice powder (cf. C. Zotter 2012, 297–303); applying the "five products of the cow" (*pañcagavya*); installing the "ritual vessel" and the "guest water" (*karmapātra-* and *arghyasthāpana*); selecting and placing of the Brahman priest or a substitution made of *kuśa* (*brahmavaraṇa*); declaring the auspicious day (*puṇyāhavācana*); placing of the so-called *praṇītā* waters in vessels (*praṇītāsādana*); spreading of *kuśa* grass (*paristaraṇa*) around the fire; placing the utensils (*pātrāsādana*) needed for the performance of the respective ritual; cutting (two *kuśa* blades) and preparing the "strainers" (*pavitrachedana* und *-karaṇa*); preparing the pot of water for sprinkling (*prokṣaṇīpātrasaṃskāra*) by sprinkling it with the *praṇītā* waters, and so forth; heating the ghee (*ājyādhiśriyaṇa*) by temporarily placing the container in the sacrificial fire; and warming the sacrificial spoon (*sruvapratapana*) and cleaning it (*sruvasaṃmārjana*) by wiping the spoon with the *saṃmārjanakuśa*.

Invitation and worship of deities: for example, of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Prajāpati, the four Vedas, and (as in every *pūjā*) the ritual vase (*kalaśa*), the light (*dīpa*), and Gaṇeśa.

Preparation and worship of the sacrificial fire: bringing the fire in a vessel made of bell metal (*kāṃsyapātra*) or (more common in actual

8. In actually practice, these acts, although still prescribed in modern normative texts, have been subject to modifications, for instance, the scratching of the ground seems to be replaced by the drawing of colored lines (see below).

practice) lighting it with matches on the spot; setting the fire (*agnipratiṣṭhā*) by different adoptions of *pūjā* standards such as invocation (*āvāhana*), visualization (*dhyāna*), and prayer *(prārthanā*) to the fire; conducting its life-cycle rituals (*agnisaṃskāra*) with mantras; placing of the kindling sticks (*samiddhāna*); sprinkling around (*paryukṣaṇa*) the fire with water.

Offerings to the fire: consisting of a set of fourteen ghee oblations (*caturdasājyāhuti*), *āhuti*s for the fifty-eight deities invoked in the *kalaśa* and—depending on the specific ritual the *homa* is part of—possibly further offerings.

Concluding rites: tasting the remains (*saṃsravaprāśana*) of ghee by the sacrificer (*yajamāna*); gift of the full vessel (*pūrṇapātradāna*), conducted by giving a leaf plate filled with rice to the priest; liberation of the *praṇītā* (*praṇītāvimoka*) by turning its vessel upside down; offering of the *kuśa* spread around the fire (*barhirhoma*); the "full oblation" (*pūrṇāhuti*), consisting of a fruit (usually an Areca nut) poured with ghee; the "great offering" (*mahābali*) to the Guardian of the Place (*kṣetrapāla*); the offering of a fruit known as the "generating of insight" (*medhakaraṇa*); the looking at one's own reflection in a vessel filled with ghee (*ghṛtachāyānirīkṣaṇa*); the auspicious sprinkling of water from the *kalaśa* as (*maṅgalābhiṣeka*); marking of different parts of the body with ashes (*bhasmanātilakakaraṇa*); and the binding of the protective thread (*rakṣābandhana*).

The Hindu *homa* in the Newar tradition[9] is generally performed by Rājopādhyāya priests during life-cycle rituals and other occasions such as the consecration of a house. The procedure for the *homa* ritual can be divided into the following parts[10]:

Preparing the sacrificial place: organizing the fireplace with unbaked bricks in two layers in a quadrangular form with two additional bricks each in the four directions; purifying the ground with a mixture of cow dung, red clay and water, placing to the north a rectangular one-layered platform of unbaked bricks for nine sacred vases for the main deities; brushing these bricks with mud and cow dung; erecting a

9. The following after Gutschow and Michaels 2008, 139–41; cf. Gray 1979, van den Hoek 2005.

10. For a more detailed description of such rituals see Kropf 2005, 384–406.

sacrificial canopy above the fireplace (*yajñamaṇḍapa*) with four bamboo sticks, sugar canes and banana poles at the corners of the sacrificial place; connecting them with threads on which several flower garlands, pipal leaves and coloured paper flags have been hung; placing of sacred vases (*kalaśa*) on the grounds in the four directions, a layer of unhusked rice as seats for the sacred vases and the eight vases representing the *aṣṭamaṅgala* on the rectangular platform in the north, the mirror (Nev. *jvālānhāykā*) to the east and the vermilion container to the west, together with an earthen vessel for yoghurt; filling of the sacred vases (*kalaśa*), especially the main vase (*pūrṇakalaśa*), are with water and milk and covering them with a clay cup with a piece of white cotton, a betel nut, rice (*akṣata*) and a coin; strewing with white and red powder to create several diagrams (*yantra*) on the altar (*vedi*) and on the ground, thus marking the seats for the deities, the priests and the sacrificer (*yajamāna*); hanging of a copper vessel (*ghṛtadhāra*) over the fire altar, from which liquid ghee will later be dripped into the flames.

Preparations: purification (*ācamana*, Nev. *nasalā*), worship of Gaṇeśa, worship of Viṣṇu with water (*arghajala*), ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*), worship of the *maṇḍala* in the fire pit with water and flowers, spiritual and ritual preparation of the priest (*nyāsa, tīkā*, water from the *arghyapātra*) and the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), worship of two pieces of firewood and two *kuśa* blades.

Worship of deities: worship of *sukũda* and Gaṇeśa; worship of Gaṇeśa, Yoginīs, Durgā, and *dikpālas* at a diagram on the southwest corner of the sacrificial space.

Preparation and worship of the fire pit (*yajñakuṇḍa*): The priest begins with incense etc. (*atra gandhādi*), he looks (*nirīkṣaṇa*) at the altar reciting the *gāyatrī-mantra* (ṚV 3.62.10), he touches the altar, sprinkles water on it, smoothening the ground (*mūlepana*) and worships the altar with unhusked rice, flowers (marigold) and *kuśa* grass. He then encircles the altar with three strings of cotton thread (*trisūtra*), and performs a Lakṣmī- and Vāgīśvarapūjā by creating two small heaps of *akṣata* and placing pieces of sugar cane on them.

Piling up firewood: The priest takes one piece of *aśvattha* wood, sprinkles *argha* water on it, recites once again the *gāyatrī-mantra*, and finally places four times four and three times three, a total of 25 logs of wood in the form of four squares and three triangles on the ground.

Kindling the fire (*agniprajvalana*): The priest touches his eyes with water, takes a small piece of wood, places a small cotton wick on it and lights

it, again reciting the *gāyatrī-mantra* and other verses. He then lights the fire.

Worshipping sacred vases (*kalaśārcana*) and all other deities on the sacrificial place with water, rice (*akṣata*), incense (*dhūpa*), popped rice and sweets (*naivedya*).

Feeding the fire with oblations and inviting the deities (*devapratiṣṭhā*): ritual cleaning of the three sacrificial ladles (*śruvā*, Nev. *dhagaḥ* and *catuvā*), cooking ghee, pouring ghee with the *dhagaḥ* into the fire, throwing ghee-saturated blades of *kuśa* grass into the fire, performing the ten life-cycle rituals for the fire by reciting appropriate mantras, offering eighteen kinds of wood with ghee, offering ghee with the *catuvā* ladle and *caru*—a mixture of several grains—for all present deities, mixing seven kinds of grains (*saptadhānya*) and offering it to the fire three times reciting the *gāyatrī-mantra* and three times in the name of Agni, Gaṇeśa, Durgā, the *kṣetrapālas*, Brahmā, Viṣṇu (Praṇīta), the ten *dikpālas*, the four Vedas, the Navagrahas, the Aṣṭacirañjivis, the seers (*ṛṣi*), the family gods (*parivāradevatā*, viz. Sūryanārāyaṇa, Sadāśiva, Gṛhalakṣmī, *iṣṭadevatā*, Varuṇa, Nāgarāja), Gaṇeśa, the five Gomātṛkās, the Aṣṭamātṛkā, Śrī, Lakṣmī, and all other gods. In the course of offering the grains the priest throws them into the fire as well as onto the seats of the deities.

Dismissing the deities and cleaning of the sacrificial place (*visarjana*).

In the Newar Buddhist tradition, tantric Vajrācārya priests, mostly in the contexts of life-cycle rituals, perform the *homa*. The following summary surveys the *Jajñavidhānakriyā* text.[11] It is divided into these ritual elements that are duplicated several times:

Preparing the sacrificial place (*yajñaśālā*): establishing the fireplace (*adhiṣṭhāna*), implementation of *kuśa* grass and firewoods, worshipping of directional deities, and ritual decision (*saṃkalpa-vākya*).

Preparatory rites: implementation of ritual objects (*thāpaṃ*), water (*argha*), purification with five cow products (*pañcagavya-śodhana*), worship of the Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Saṅgha) plus Varācārya (*gurumaṇḍala*), *bali* offering, a triple meditation to the deity in

11. Kept in the Āsā Saphū Guthi, ms. no. 3352, fols. 26–47; I am grateful to Manik Bajracharya for a synopsis of this handbook. For a more detailed description, see Locke 1980, 103–14; Gellner 1992, 157–59; and Lewis and Bajracarya's "Notes on the Newar Buddhist Homa Rituals" (n.d.).

question (*trisamādhi*), and invocations to the sacrificial vessel (*kalaśa-nyāsa*); *sūryārgha*; water to wash the feet of the guru (*gurupādārgha*); offering a seat (*āsana*) to the guru.

Homapūjā: setting up the *maṇḍala* (*adhiṣṭhāna*), setting up the fireplace (*agnikuṇḍa-adhiṣṭhāna*), consecration by *mudrās* (*mudrādhiṣṭhāna*); placing *kuśa* grass in the center of the fire pit; worship of the directional deities (*lokapālapūjā*); placing and purifying the wood pieces (*kāṣṭhapratiṣṭhā, kāṣṭhaśodhana*); ritual decision (*saṃkalpavākya*).

Summoning Agni (*samayāgni, samayāhuti*): visualization of the Conventional Deity (*samaya*) Agni: *agni-sthāpana, dhyāna* (*-bhāvanā*), invocation of the deities, *nirāñjana, kuśābhiṣeka, pañcopacāra* offering, dance postures (*lāśya*), hymn of praise (*stuti*).

Purification of ghee (*ghṛtaśodhana***):** *dhyāna* (*-bhāvanā*), *pañcopacāra* offering, *lāśya*-dances, hymn of praise (*stuti*), setting up the objects for oblations (*trijanena havya-adhiṣṭhāna*), oblations of ghee, *kuśa-grass*, eighteen firewoods to the deities such as Vajrasoma, Vajrāṅgāra; eighteen kinds of grains to the deities such as Vajrapusta, Vajravega; cleaning the sacrificial ladle (*sūrāpāta-śodhana*).

The first oblation (*prathamāhuti*): ritual decision (*saṃkalpa-vākya*), *pañcopacāra* offering, dance postures (*lāśya*), hymn of praise (*stuti*), sprinkling water from the conch shell (*tarpaṇa*), *caru* oblations (*caru-sādhana*).

Oblation to the Knowledge deity (*jñānāhuti*) (i.e. the visualization of the eternal divine power summoned from heaven): *vajra-bhāvanā/dhyāna*, 108-fold recitation of the *mūlamantra* of the favored deity (*sveṣṭadevatā*), *pañcopacāra* offering, dance postures (*lāśya*), hymn of praise (*stuti*), sprinkling water from the conch shell (*tarpaṇa*), oblations of grains, offering of *recaka*-wood, reciting the *hṛdayamantra*, meditation on the deity (*dhyāna*), oblation of ghee, ritual decision (*saṃkalpa-vākya*), *pañcopacāra* offering, *lāśya*-dances, hymn of praise (*stuti*), offering of water (*tarpaṇa*).

Oblation and worship of the principal deity (*devatāhuti*): ten life-cycle rites to the fire (*daśakarma*), offering of meat (*māṃsāhuti*), meditation (*dhyāna*), *pañcopacāra* offering, dance postures (*lāśya*), hymn of praise (*stuti*), sprinkling water from the conch shell (*tarpaṇa*), oblations of grains, offering of *recaka-wood* reciting the mantra of the deity.

Offerings (*bali*) **to the guardians of different directions** and to the goddess Kurukullā.

The Full oblation (*pūrṇāhuti*): oblations of eighteen kinds of grains and *recaka*-wood, oblations of different fruits, *śrīkhaṇḍa*, sandalwood (*candana*), and so on.

Ghee oblations (*saṃkhyāhuti*): to the Guardians of the Directions (*caturmahārāja*), the country (*deśa*), Dharmadhātu, the guardians of the place (*lokapāla*), Nepal (*nepālabhūmi*), all the deities (*sakaladeva*), the Buddha-Dharma-Saṅgha, the goddess Earth (Pṛthivī), the planets (Navagraha), the glorious king, to all the beings, the main priest (*mūlācārya*), the teacher (*upādhyāya*), the sacrificer (*yajamāna*), ritual decision (*saṃkalpa-vākya*).

Oblation of the remainder (*śeṣāhuti*).

Dismissing the deities and cleaning of the sacrificial place (*visarjana*).

At first sight, these three *homa* rituals look very different[12] with regard to the procedure, the material, the deities summoned, or the Hindu, Buddhist, or tantric interpretations and explanations given by texts and priests. As Locke (1980, 103) aptly notes, the Buddhist *homa* as compared to the Hindu *homa* is much more esoteric, since it is based on the *sādhana* visualization, which, in the end, can only be understood by the initiated tantric priest.

However, a closer look reveals striking similarities in the basic structure of the ritual. Common are the term (*homa*), the fire, the fire pit with baked or unbaked bricks, the ritual instruments (sacrificial ladle, etc.), the offerings of ghee, grain, and water, Agni as the principal deity, the invocation and visualization of (all) deities, the share in the sacrificial work between priest and sacrificer (*yajamāna*), the use of mantras or hymns of praise (*stuti*), the fact that the *homa* generally frames other rituals, and its indigenous characterization as a sub-ritual creating auspiciousness. The latter is especially emphasized in modern public *homa* rituals celebrated in India, Europe, and North America (see below).

All this confirms that rituals often survive just because of their transcending and elevating character, despite the different meanings given to them. Thus, the *homa* has integrated the Hindu and Vajrayāna pantheon. To a large extent, it has developed into *pūjā* worship with the Vedicization of image worship, and it has been given many tantric and Buddhist esoteric interpretations—all of which did not exist in Vedic times. The "original" idea of the Vedic fire or Agni, which brings the offerings through the smoke to the deities, is almost entirely gone. In the Hindu tradition, the *homa* has become a kind of worship of the deities, and in the Buddhist tradition, the tantric background is dominant: the priest identifies with the deity and, as Locke

12. See Kolhatkar and Tachikawa 2013, 8–15 for a detailed list of ritual elements of a Japanese Goma and its differences from the Hindu *homa*.

says, "infuses himself into the image. Here he infuses the spirit of the deity Agni into the fire. Though the outlines of this yogic process of the *sadhana* [sic] are obscured by the profusion of ritual detail in the *homa* sacrifice, it is clear from the text that this is what is going on, though little understood by most of the priests performing the rite and divorced from its context of yogic practices and meditation" (Locke 1980, 108). This transformational and transcending process of the *homa* sacrifice continues in modernized contexts.

The most recent change of the *homa* is characterized by its transformation from a small-scale ritual to a large, mediatized public event that has spread to the West (Bechler 2010). Its purposes have also changed, since political aspects of charity, public welfare, environment, or world peace have come to the foreground, especially when such rituals are performed by cultural, religious, or political institutions. Such (mega)events create new public spheres and are mediatized through print media, television, and the Internet—and new forms of *religio*. Nowadays, *homa* rituals can also be performed for others living abroad, or they can be ordered through the Internet. As a proof of its celebration, ritual gifts (*prasāda*) or photos or films are sent to the sacrificer.

The Californian Universal Church of Baba's Kitchen in Santa Cruz, for instance, offers *homas* that are available "to anyone, anywhere, for participation in the powerful blessings & healing that result from these divine fire ceremonies."[13] These rituals can also be ordered online "in your own name, or someone else's, and the names of sponsors" that are read out during the homa. It is promised that "the entire group of attendees says, 'Om MAMA' three times after each name, to send the fire's energy & healing vibrations to that individual." This form of Westernized *homa* celebration also goes along with a good deal of spiritualization:

> A homa is a sacred fire ceremony in which various forms of the Divine are invoked in a sacred fire that has been kindled according to the guidelines in the Vedic scriptures. They bring powerful healing and spiritual uplifting. (According to India's ancient spiritual tradition, certain ritual practices have the power to attract divine cosmic energy for the benefit of the practitioner, his or her household, and the world at large. One of the most powerful practices involves homas.) Certain special offerings are made into the fire while Sanskrit mantras are

13. The following quotes are from the homepage of this institution: http://www.karmatalk.com/homa_faq.htm#Sponsor%20A%20Homa! (accessed March 2, 2013).

> chanted. The combination of the powerful energy of the fire element, the most transformational among the Five Elements, and the chanted mantras creates extremely auspicious and purifying vibrations that are beneficial to all who attend the homa. The smoke that rises from a homa contains a powerful healing energy, and as it rises to the heavens it purifies the atmosphere, both physically and subtly, encouraging a peaceful environment and gentle weather. Even the damaging effects of natural catastrophes can be reduced through the performance of homas. The energetic vibrations that are invoked during a traditional Vedic fire ceremony represents one of the most powerful presence of the Divine on Earth. The element of fire is associated with the upward motion of the divine kundalini energy and is considered to be the most powerfully purifying element. Every kind of negative karma can be purified by the sacred homa fire, due to divine grace. It is true that sitting in one homa fire (for an hour or more) can roughly be the equivalent of doing intense meditation, for a month.

As Bechler (2010) elaborates, there is a tendency to denote *homa* and *havana* as predominantly private rituals focusing mainly on personal interests and needs, whereas (*mahā*)*yajña* and *yāga* are nowadays often regarded as major public events initiated by prominent religious leaders or organizations, wealthy business people, or political parties and focusing on cultural heritage, protection of environment, general happiness, and world peace. Merchandized with the help of the media and often accompanied by media coverage, these public *homas* have become spectacular festive events that regularly attract large crowds. Thus, in 2009, during the annual Pushkar Mela festival in Rajasthan, Shri Koshalendra Brahmacariji Maharaj organized a Mahāviṣṇumahāyajña ("Great Sacrifice for Great Viṣṇu") with the main intention of creating universal peace since Viṣṇu as the maintainer of the universe can ensure this harmony. Further, emphasis was laid on the purification of the air, which is supposed to come with the ritual procedure itself. Such rituals have "wordly" goals but are performed in a mode dominated by *religio*.

Another example is the eight-day-long "Viswa Maha Yagnam" that, in December 2012, was organized by the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam (Kanchipuram) at the Paśupatinātha Temple in Nepal. *The Hindu* reported in its online edition:

> Yagna for global welfare in Nepal
>
> "Two homams were held," S. Balasubramaniam, coordinator of the programme, told *The Hindu*. "One was Kamyaartha homam, for the

> fulfilment of desires and wishes. The other was Rigveda Samhitahomam, a prayer for the welfare of all creations on earth, including plants and animals, without expecting anything in return." (*The Hindu*, Dec. 6, 2012)

According to Frederick Smith (2000), the first public *yāga* outside the Indian subcontinent was performed in 1996 in Roundwood Park, London. The organizers, several diasporic Hindu communities, tried to be as "authentic" as possible but had to compromise and adjust to their environment and local requirements. They had to combine priests from different Vedic schools, adjust the mantras, and give the participants a much more active role than in a traditional context in India. For example, it was not only the acting priest (*adhvaryu*) who offered to the sacrifice but also members of the audience.

From this development, we can see not only how significantly the *homa* ritual has changed but also how persistent it is, despite many changes in meaning. Yet the identificatory pattern based on the identification of the sacrificer with the sacrifice, the use of mantras authenticating ritual action, and the importance of the fire in Hindu rituals has continued from Vedic times until today, even though among the Hindu Diasporas, another type of *homa* rituals have developed that is mainly addressed to Western audiences. As seen before, these *homas* are much more spiritualized and include aspects of wellness, health, and leisure.

7.3 Worship and Prayer (pūjā)

Śrauta sacrifice in Hinduism has almost lost its sacrificers since the Vedic deities in these rituals do not play such a dominant role anymore (F. Smith 1987, 3). Moreover, there are two more reasons for the decline of theses sacrifices: the long and demanding education and the high costs for performing such rituals. This is different with the *pūjā*, which denotes the worship of deities according to a ritual script that traditionally involves certain elements of service (*upacāra*) and that evolved to the major and often simple and comparatively inexpensive form of worship in Hinduism. However, the *pūjā* is a complex and highly varied ritual that cannot be reduced to aspects of communication and exchange with gods. As we will see in this and the following sections, the practice of the *pūjā* also entails less "religious" notions of individual or social power, gender, leisure, play, or commodification and yet keeps its mode of *religio*.

The term *pūjā* probably derived from *pūj-*, "to honor,"[14] and literally means "(devotional) worship, adoration, respect, homage." Generally, the *pūjā* includes the worship of icons, images or objects that represent the divinity or a group of divinities. It can be a separate ritual, but is often also embedded in larger rituals (e.g., *tīrthayātrā*) and festivals (*utsava, melā*). After some initial skepticism, image worship in temples has become from the fifth century CE onward increasingly popular, and nowadays, the *pūjā* is probably the most celebrated ritual in Hinduism. Though not limited to Hinduism, "the sheer variety of configurations of *pūjā* and *darśana* practices, whether prescribed (in written texts, but also orally instructed, typically by a *guru*) or otherwise 'constructed,' can be said to constitute in large part the aggregate of traditions loosely labeled 'Hindu'" (Valpey 2010, 380).

Despite some overlapping and similarities, the differences between the traditional (not the modern public-political) *yajña* and *pūjā* are obvious (see Lidova 2010 and Table 7.1, which outlines these differences).

Most theories on *pūjā*, to which I will return below, concentrate on the spiritual and material exchange between worshipper, priest, and deity.

Table 7.1 Differences between sacrifice (*yajña*) and worship (*pūjā*)

	yajña	*pūjā*
Place	Temporary sacrificial arena (*vedi*); accessible for the religious elite only (Twice-borns)	Temple, house, or often a public space
Representation of the deity	Mostly non-iconic	Mostly iconic
Persons	Brahman priests are obligatory	Brahman priests are not obligatory
Offerings	Soma, animals, grains, etc. are "destroyed" in the fire	Fruits, flowers, etc. are given/administered
Recitations	Mostly Vedic mantras	Mostly (purāṇic) hymns (*stotra, stuti*)

14. Other etymologies derive the term from **pṛñca kṛ*, "to prepare a mixture for someone" (P. Thieme), referring to a reference to the *madhuparka*, or mixture of honey and water that was commonly offered to guests; *puṣpa*, "flower" (P. V. Kane); or Tamil *pūcu*, "to besmear or anoint somebody with something" (J. Carpentier): see Valpey 2010, 381.

However, I will argue that the *pūjā* is not only a transformation and upgrading of a ritual element of the Vedic sacrifice but also an open vessel and mixture of diverse ritual decorum or elements. The *pūjā* is distinct from *yajña* in that the food offerings are mostly (but not exclusively) vegetarian, while animal sacrifices in Vedic have been and in folk and tantric currents still are common. Moreover, in the *yajña*, the offerings are "destroyed," whereas they are administered, transferred, or presented to deities or priests in the *pūjā*. This ritual is also distinct because it is not just a Brahmanic ritual, but one that can also be performed by "lay people," even women—at home, at public shrines, and in temples or on the Internet. Since there are no unambiguous rules for the performance of the *pūjā*, its agency and the forms are extremely open. It can be celebrated in a very short form of worship in a private context, for instance, in the house shrine, or in a daylong ritual or public festival in temples, such as Durgāpūjā.

Perhaps the most widespread form of *pūjā*[15] is the worship of a set of five deities (*pañcāyatanapūjā*), typically Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, and Devī. However, through the *pūjā*, not only gods are addressed but also humans: Brahmans, teachers (*gurupūjā*), kings, parents, especially husbands, elder brothers, guests, virgins (*kumārīpūjā*), children, politicians, film stars; other beings: cows (Nep. *gāipūjā*), dogs and other animals, or plants (e.g., Tulsī bush or the peepal tree); elements: the earth (*bhūmipūjā*), the sun (*sūryapūjā*), the fire (*agnipūjā*), the ocean (*samudrapūjā*); stones (*śālagrāmapūjā*); a water jug (*kalaśapūjā*), or books (*Sarasvatīpūjā*). Some people insist that the *pūjā* can and must be performed spiritually (*mānasikā pūjā*), in which form it is often understood as a criticism of the externality and formality of the ritual.

A *pūjā* can be performed on any ritually purified place. It is especially often celebrated in temples and at home. It can be performed for oneself or in the name of or on behalf of someone else. The priest can perform it for lay people or the community, the wife for the husband and the children, subjects for the king, the king for the country. Everyone is entitled to perform it, but if Vedic mantras are prescribed, only the Twice-born and often only the Brahman priest are allowed to perform it.

In a *pūjā*, the worshiper must prepare himself internally and externally and purify the ritual objects. If he has made the formal decision (*saṃkalpa*) for the *pūjā*, he temporarily becomes a god himself, since—especially in tantric rituals—he must identify with the deity internally and ritually (Fuller

15. For details, see Bühnemann 1988; Tachikawa 1983; Tachikawa, Hino and Deodhar 2001; Tripathi 2004; Valpey 2010.

1992, 61). The external purification consists of a bath, washing out the mouth, donning new or freshly laundered clothes, and renewal of the forehead mark. The internal purification (*ātmaśuddhi*) includes adopting a trusting attitude (*śraddhā*), the application of mantras, immersion in meditation, and visualization.

The procedure for a *pūjā* varies according to the school, the region, and the time. There are many basic texts (Āgamas, Tantras, Saṃhitās) and ritual handbooks, in which details are established (e.g., Bühnemann 1988). One of the most detailed handbooks is the *Pūjāprakāśa* of Mitramiśra (1610–40).

In general, the *pūjā* comprises standardized ritual acts, usually including sixteen gestures of respect (*upacāra*, set forth in Table 7.2) that are already mentioned in the sixth century *Ṛgvidhāna*.

This series is not compulsory. It can be expanded to, for instance, up to 108 gestures of respect including finger gestures and physical poses (*mudrā, nyāsa*) as in "tantric" rituals, or abridged to five gestures of respect (*pañcopacāra*) with anointing, flowers, incense, swinging lights, and feeding being more common.

Table 7.2 The Sixteen Traditional Gestures of Respect (*upacāra*)

1.	Invocation (*āvāhana*)
2.	Installation (*āsana*, literally "seat, throne")
3.	Washing the feet (*pādya*)
4.	Welcome (*arghya*)
5.	Mouth-washing (*ācamanīya*)
6.	Bath (*snāna*)
7.	Clothing (*vastra*)
8.	Girding (*yajñopavīta*)
9.	Anointment (*gandha, anulepana*)
10.	Flowers (*puṣpa*)
11.	Incense (*dhūpa*)
12.	Light (*dīpa*)
13.	Feeding (*nivedana, naivedya*)
14.	Greeting (*namaskāra*)
15.	Circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇā*)
16.	Gift (*dakṣiṇā*) or dismissal of deities (*visarjana*)

Such a service of worship is a mixture of invocation of the deity by his or her names[16] and devotional verses, songs, or prayers; revering the deity with bathing or washing the image in water or milk (*abhiṣeka*); offering a seat (*āsana*), mostly on graphic representations (*yantra, maṇḍala*) prepared on the ground that has been cleaned with cow dung; adorning the deity with clothes and a *tīkā*, that is, vermilion applied in the space between the eyebrows symbolizing the third eye; anointing it with sandalwood paste (*candana*); feeding it with food (*prasāda*), water (*tīrtha*), and unbroken and uncooked rice (*akṣata*); gestures of obeisance and subordination: bowing, pressing hands together (*namaskāra, añjali*) or prostration, or touching the floor or the feet of the worshipped image or person with one's forehead decoration; and entertaining the deity with hymns, songs, and gestures (*mudrā*). A central part of the *pūjā* is also pleasing the divinity with flowers (*puṣpa*),[17] fragrant incense sticks, (*dhūpa*) or with *ār(a)ti*, a plate (*thāli*) with a burning wick soaked in ghee (clarified butter) or camphor moved in a clockwise direction in front of the idol; this element is often performed at the end of a *pūjā* when the priest circulates the plate with the lamp, which is supposed to have acquired the power of the deity, and the worshipers cup their down-turned hands over the flame and then raise their palms to their eyes or forehead. The *ārti* can also be an elaborate separate ritual, such as the Gaṅgā Ārti offered every evening at the Dashashwamedha Ghat in Varanasi.

Functions and Meanings of Pūjā

The gods rejoice over the *pūjā* and are thus graciously disposed toward the person. An essential component of a *pūjā* are the gifts (*dāna*) given by the organizer of the *pūjā*. These include fruits, leaves, flowers (*puṣpa*), water (*tīrtha, tarpaṇa*), cooked or uncooked rice (*akṣaṭa*), betel nuts, and money. The food offerings are mostly vegetarian, although certain tantric traditions offer also meat and alcohol. For his offering, the one offering obtains religious merit (*puṇya*) and, indirectly, worldly advantages (*bhukti*), health, happiness, or wealth, but also a special form of favor from the deity (*prasāda*) or his

16. Also common are invocations and prayers consisting of names (*nāmajapa*). The idea that a single name and characteristics are not enough to fully understand a god's nature has led to the composition of texts, in which 100 or 108, 300, 1,000, or 1,008 names of individual gods are listed in the form of hymns (*nāmastotra, nāmastuti, nāmavalī*). By reciting such texts, the multiplicity in the deity's nature passes to the reciter. Cf. Wilke and Moebus 2011.

17. See A. Zotter 2013 for a detailed study on flowers in Nepalese rituals.

protection (*śaraṇa*). In "material" form, the *prasāda* consists of the return of the offered foods—sweets, (cooked) rice, fruits, ashes (*vibhūtī*), flowers, and so forth—by the priest.

In recent times, especially the complex exchange of material items (*prasāda, dāna*) given to the deity or the priest during the *pūjā* ritual has been debated. It has been argued (see below) that by eating what the devotees themselves have offered the gods, a relationship is created between them and the god, which corresponds with the social position and its rules of commensality. However, in the process, it is not altogether clear whether the deity has eaten food according to the view of the devotee or only consecrated it. This distinction is serious. If the deity took the food and "ate" it, the devotee eats (impure) leftovers. The devotee thus expresses his submission to the god, just as many other services, which the priest or the believer perform are "impure" or subordinate activities: foot-washing, clothing the deity, offering food, or cleaning the temple or ritual site.

The anthropologist Christopher J. Fuller (1992, 78), however, thinks that *prasāda* is not a return gift. Instead, through contact with the deity, the food is only transmuted, but the deity does not "eat" it. This was already discussed by Śabara (ca. fourth century) in his commentary on the *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* by Jaimini. In the ninth chapter (9.1.5.6–9), Śabara examines the belief that the gods have material bodies and are therefore able to consume and enjoy the offerings made to them, so that they can reward the devotee, the giver of the gifts. Śabara refutes this opinion and argues that the gods are neither corporeal nor sentient and thus cannot relish the offerings. His main and strikingly empirical argument is that offerings do not decrease in size when presented to the gods. Moreover, they are not presented according to the needs of the gods, but according to the wishes of the temple priests. This is why serving a guest and serving a god are two different acts.

Fuller also argues that in social life, it is a sign of higher rank to reject food, especially cooked rice. So, if the gods take food, they basically behave contrary to the fundamentals of the social hierarchy. Instead, the relationship between god and devotee reflects the relationship between man and wife. The wife cooks for the man and explicitly eats his leftovers, thus demonstrating her subordination. So, what is expressed in the *prasāda* is, according to Fuller, not the social caste hierarchy—for then the gods might not take anything, not even cooked rice—but rather marriage.

There is another argument against the pollution theory. The *prasāda*, which does not always consist of food but also flowers or coins, is usually given by the priest to the devotee, whose high rank in a ritual (not social) context is determined beforehand. But most important is that the hierarchy between

god and man is abolished through and in the *pūjā*. Through purification, man himself becomes "godly." Much effort is made, especially in Āgamic texts (cf. Tripathi 2004, 146–257), to purge the devotee (and the priest) of his bodily impurities and to deify him in order to communicate with the deity on an equal level. Lawrence A. Babb (1981, 310) has seen correctly that, in essential parts, the *pūjā* is such an identificatory process: the devotee is identified with the supernatural form of the deity, and the deity's excretions or leftovers are no longer impure, but rather—on the contrary—the purest substances—"What is filth to the world, is nectar to the awakened." By taking the *prasāda* or excretions of the god into himself, the devotee has an equal share of the highest substance and overcomes all worldly caste and kinship limits: "The result is the closest possible intimacy, tending toward identity, and any analysis not taking this into account is incomplete" (ibid., 307).

The *pūjā* consists of a set or kit of ritual decorum that can be arranged and combined in many variations. In the bazaar or in front of temples, one can buy kits of items necessary for any *pūjā*, and on the Internet (e.g., www.spiritualpuja.com/), one can enter several temples with a mouse click and, for instance, perform a Śivapūjā by deliberately lighting a lamp, offering flowers, or ringing a bell. The celebrant using such ritual elements transforms ordinary acts (eating, drinking, smelling, looking, clothing, etc.) into sacred acts and brings *religio* to everyday acts. This does not necessarily imply religion, as the *pūjā* of gurus or parents show, but a certain extraordinary reverence and respect. To a certain extent, the *pūjā* then blurs the rigid dichotomy of the sacred and the profane that has for so long dominated the discussions in the history of religions. It combines extraordinary festivity with atmospheres of pleasure and joy. *In nuce*, the *pūjā* kit of ritual decorum entails most forms of worship and forms the basis of the majority of ritual acts in Hinduism. *Grosso modo*, the ritual elements remain the same, but the object to which the *pūjā* is addressed varies.

This performative openness of the *pūjā* raises the question of meaning and intention, an aspect of ritual theory that will be deepened in Chapter 8. "*Pūjās* are always performed with some purpose," says the Japanese anthropologist Musashi Tachikawa (Tachikawa, Hino and Deodhar 2001, 7)[18]: the pious person seeks contact with the gods, and he or she might call attention to himself or herself with gifts and invocations to obtain their favor. This view is supported by the *intentio solemnis* (*saṃkalpa*) as articulated in many manuals,

18. Astrid Zotter (2013, 315), however, states that the *nityapūjā* must be performed without any articulated purpose.

when the worshiper or the priest in the name of the worshiper declares that he will perform the ritual "in order to please the supreme deity" (ibid., 33: *parameśvarapritya̅rtham*). Here, it remains open who the supreme deity is. As we have seen, the identificatory *habitus* can fill the "blank space" with many beings.

This variability also explains why the term *pūjā* can be used for so many simple or complex rituals that are very different with regard to context and circumstances of the event. The Lakṣmīpūjā during the Festival of Lights (Diwali) and the partly Smārta, partly Tantric Deśoddhārapūjā in Nepal (Michaels 2008, 55–68), where representatives of four *varṇas* are honored, are very different rituals, and the ritual elements (*upacāra*) form only a small part of the event, which is often surrounded by or embedded in less "serious" phases of play and leisure. Nevertheless, these performances are all three called *pūjā*—a term that often can be interchangeably used with *melā, khelā, vrata, yātrā*, and other terms for ritual events (Korom 1999, 151).

The arrangements of the ritual elements follows a certain "ritual order" (Rappaport 1999, 169–70; A. Zotter 2013, viif.), which is sometimes laid down in a ritual handbook. The *pūjā* can therefore be classified as a liturgical ritual (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994) with standardized norms and prescriptions. But the structure and performance vary according to the setting, traditions, locality, and worshippers. The center seems to be the worship of divinities as guests, but nowadays, there are two vibrant trends to emphasize elements that go beyond the aspect of pleasing a deity. These concern the prayers and the liturgy of words (*stotra, mantra*), as well as the visualization (*darśana*) of the deity.

The mutual sight of believer and god—called *darśana, dṛṣṭi*, "seeing (the god)"—is often considered the central part of Hindu *pūjā*. In this beneficial moment, the devotee encounters the god. *Darśana* persists as "a means . . . of participating in the essence and nature of the person or object looked at" (Gonda 1969, 4; cf. Valpey 2010, 384–94). The look of the deity is central, especially in the flame of the light (*dīpa*) presented on a *pūjā* plate. The deity sees this light, is in it, and the devotee encounters the deity by seeing the light too, by stretching his fingers over the flame, touching his eyes, and thus taking the deity into himself.

Modern Indian languages have a saying that the look is given and taken (Hindī *darśan denā, darśan lenā*) and that this alone is sufficient as religious merit. So, *darśana* is basically an exchange of looks, as the look in the eyes can be the most intense experience in the encounter with another person. "Seeing is a kind of touching," says Diana Eck (1985, 9), which creates intimacy.

History of the Pūjā

The emphasis on the aspect of material exchange in the *pūjā* has much to do with the history of this ritual, which developed from the Vedic venerating of distinguished guests to domestic and temple worship of divinities by analogy: just as the guests had been welcomed and offered food and gifts to delight them, so, too, were the gods welcomed in homes and temples and given pleasing offerings. Most contemporary scholars agree with the theory, which was first articulated by the German Indologist Paul Thieme in 1939, that the *pūjā* is a continuation of parts of the Vedic sacrifice, especially those elements that have to do with worshipping a guest (*madhuparka*). "Pūjā is . . . a clear continuation . . . of the Rgvedic guest worship offered to gods," say Stephanie Jamison and Michael Witzel (2003, 90; cf. Willis 2009, 111f.). And Kenneth Valpey (2010, 381) admits that, even though "the practice of *pūjā* may take on an extensive variety of details or idioms of expressions," it retains "a recognizable 'core' purpose, namely, to receive and satisfy a superior."

However, the exact history[19] of the *pūjā* is still uncertain. There is little textual or archaeological evidence that the Vedic gods were worshiped in the form of sculpted images. The gods were worshiped according to *pūjā* only from the fifth century onward (Willis 2009, 96f.). Shingo Einoo (1996) has shown that rudiments of devotional worship of images involving offerings to the deity, can be traced in the early Gṛhyasūtras (around 300–400 CE), but it is not clear how the *pūjā* became the focus of the Hindu religions. Popular religious influences from folk religions have probably been influential in this respect. Although the anthropomorphic care and entertainment of a deity, by waking, clothing, and the act of offering flowers and food, cannot be seen in the Veda, some forms of ancient worship appear also in the *pūjā*, especially in the ritual worship of a guest (*madhuparka* or *arghya*). Timothy Lubin (forthc.), however, demonstrates the reverse process, i.e. the Vedicization of *pūjā*-type offerings though assimilation to the *homa*: by superimposing Vedic ritual structures (such as that of the *homa, madhuparka*, or *vrata*) over them, by applying Vedic mantras, ritual elements that are alien to the Vedic sacrifice are appropriated in order to allow the Brahmin priest to gain supremacy, even in circles which did not previously engage Brahmin priests.

In the *pūjā* the deity becomes a sensual anthropomorphic *persona* with its anthromoporphic body and sensual feelings (Colas 2011, 2013). However, the question of whether the god "really" partakes of the offerings or not has been debated since early times (Willis 2009, 207–19).

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19. Cf. Willis 2009; Granoff 2004; Colas 2012; Lidova 2010.

Mantras and Pūjā

Normally, a *pūjā* is performed with many actions but—compared with Christian services—few words. Often, each of the sixteen gestures of respect (*upacāra*) starts with the recitation of the one of the sixteen verses of the *Puruṣasūkta* hymn (ṚV 10.90), but the content of this hymn does not correspond with the action. Similarly, mantras, that is, fixed syllables or a short sentence with a designated word order, which are ascribed a religious or "magical" power, or Purāṇic verses (*śloka*) are spoken or recited together with the *upacāras* or used to address a deity. In both cases, most worshippers do not understand what the priest is reciting in Sanskrit, and sometimes the priest does not understand it neither. They either whisper the mantras or speak them so fast that they become incomprehensible. But this does not always mean that mantras are not properly understood and have become dry, empty, magic words.

Vedic mantras are either usually short quotations of Vedic texts or seed syllables (*bīja*). Unlike hymns, mantras, especially the seed syllables, generally cannot be translated. Thus, in normal speech, the mantras *svāha, hrīṃ*, or *aim* have no meaning, like the magic formula "abracadabra," but they do have a ritual or mystical function. Mantras that are quotations from Vedic texts, on the other hand, do have a meaning, which, however, often does not correspond to the ritual act.

To be able to use the sacred power of mantras depends on (ritually correct) saying and hearing, not inevitably on understanding. In the Hindu view, a mantra condenses a comprehensive truth. Thus, the Gāyatrī verse given to the initiate in the *upanayana* ritual condenses the *Ṛgveda* and consolidates the force and immortality of the whole Veda. The recitation of mantras is therefore often symbolic wording adapted to the context.

Within the ritual context, there is a great variety in the use of the mantras with regard to (linguistic) forms, application, meaning, or function, and an astonishing diversity with regard to verbal, nominal, pronominal, gender, metrical, and other variants. Mantras have been deliberately rearranged, differently combined, extended, reduced, or applied in different mythological and ritual contexts.

> The tradition of these formulas—numbering far over thousand—is often very fluid, and many of them are liable to variation even to the point of showing almost all possible variants that the words constituting them are capable of. Part of the variants may owe their form to more or less conscious adaptations to a new context: Vedic schools did

> not regard as unalterable the text of formulas, which were foreign to their own *saṃhitā*. Not infrequently mantras have been rearranged or combined extended or curtailed. Besides, it appears that compilers of the manuals could hardly resist the temptation to add improvised words to a pre-existent mantra. (Gonda 1977, 565)

This hyperapplicability (Patton 2005, 67) of mantras has given them a certain arbitrariness. The lack of coherence and the missing semantic link between mantra and the ritual act has led to the assumption that only "'metaphorical interpretation' may sometimes add to the comprehensibility of the relation between the mantra and its context" (Gonda 1977, 568) and "that Vedic imagination has powerful associative, metonymic properties, linking mantric image to ritual action" (ibid., 3). Laurie L. Patton sees "particular hermeneutic principles based on metonymy, or associative thought" (ibid., 2) at work.

Since early times, Vedic mantras have thus been adapted to new contexts. Patton (2005) describes four phases: first the mantras were transferred from the poetic background of the *Ṛigveda* to the Śrauta sacrifices and Śrautasūtras, then to the domestic rituals and Gṛhyasūtras, and finally they were assembled for specific purposes in the Vidhāna texts. This application of Vedic mantras, their *viniyoga*, is, however, not only to be seen against the textual background but also in its ritual context (Staal 1979a; Alper 1989, 6–8, 12–14). Until now, the discussion about mantras has been dominated by questions of origin, efficacy, and typology, but the specific ethno-indological perspective has been neglected. Mantras have been classified as benedictions, blessings, prayers expressing good wishes, invocations, and praises that prevent misfortune or avert evil (Gonda 1977, 569f.). But the primary function of mantras is to transform ordinary acts into sacrificial or sacred acts[20]; without them, the acts would be ineffective. This precisely is the *viniyoga* principle by which ritual agents see some affinity between mantra and ritual act. Like bricks that can be reassembled to construct new buildings, mantras are verbal elements that can be used in different contexts, since the *viniyoga* principle, that is, the adaptation of mantras to ritual contexts, allows for a great variety. What matters is that certain ritual acts are performed by making them acoustically perceptible. Mantras are, in this context, like speech acts (cf. Taber 1989). They are a kind of ritual instrument, a formula with healing, apotropaic, or protecting qualities.

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20. According to the *Bṛhaddevatā*, rites are primary and mantras secondary (Patton 2005, 65).

Whereas all of these verbal expressions neither presuppose nor aim at an understanding of their contents, additional and new forms of texts are nowadays more and more used in *pūjās*: the recitation of prayers (*stotra*, also *stuti*, *stava*), explanatory sermons of priests and gurus, or the recitation of stories (*kathā*). As in most religions, prayer is a verbal communication with a god or goddess that in Hinduism is also very popular. Usually, such contact with the deities appears in hymns of praise and supplication, with which one prays for liberation from rebirth, for support or grace, or for the fulfillment of concrete wishes.

In addition to the *stotra* hymns, devotional songs and chants (*kīrtana, bhajana, vacana*, Hindī *satsang*) are now increasingly chanted during *pūjās*, which were composed anonymously by poet-saints and which form an essential part of the Bhakti movements. These texts are mainly sung, quite often accompanied by musical instruments, occasionally all night long. The gods want to be called upon audibly and entertained. From time to time, they have to be awakened with bells or the blowing of a conch. Prayers are therefore usually loud prayers, whose choice of words is fixed. The silent, freely formulated and thus less ritualized prayer in the form of a private dialogue with the gods remains undisclosed and certainly is not an established element of the *pūjā*; the ritual becomes more and more a liturgy of words, especially through the sermons and speeches of prominent priests or gurus, who increasingly like to comment and elaborate on the ritual action. This is especially intensive in *pūjās* that are broadcast on the many religious television channels. However, these meaningful hymns, stories, and sermons are an addendum to the *pūjā*, not an essential prerequisite. The acts are not changed through these texts, but remain a set of ritual elements that can be assembled in various forms.

7.4 E-darshan and Cyber-puja

Hinduism is going online. Festivals and religious events are broadcast; religious television channels such as Sadhana, Aastha, Paras TV, Sanskar, or Zee Jagran propagate religion, spirituality, mythology, and yoga and holistic health advice. You find e-greeting cards with Hindu motives, virtual aratis, digital darshana, online puja, and cell phone puja.

Following the privatization of television channels, the representation of Hinduism on the World Wide Web started in the late 1990s with poster images, which soon became animated or moving images, followed by interactivity using the mouse for clicking on e-pujas in which the online devotee places ritual objects—garland of flowers, a lamp, incense—before an image

of the deity. One can also wash the image (*abhiṣeka*), ring the bell, paste a *tilaka*, or move *ārati*.[21] Chants are played, or little *svastika* symbols flash on the screen. Many temples in India or in the Hindu Diaspora offer such services.[22] In some cases, the web master posts regular darshans to the e-mail addresses of those who have registered (Herman 2010, 166). Hinduism has readily accepted and integrated these new media and devices. And there are many reasons for it (cf. Scheifinger 2008).

First, there is the genuine mobility of the deities. Since Vedic times, the *stabilitas loci* of deities has never been very steady. The gods moved with the nomadic Vedic people. Since then, gods have been able to manifest themselves at many places and in various forms, in an image, object, plant, animal, or even humans. The *avatāra* or incarnation principle is an expression of the capacity of Hindu gods to descent and to manifest themselves in such manifold forms. Their representation on the Web was only the last step in a series of adaptations.

Second, Hinduism favors visualization over other sense perceptions of deities. "Virtually everywhere that Hindus live or work there are pictures of the gods," says Lawrence Babb (1981, 7), and Heinz Scheifinger (2008, 238) concludes from this statement: "Hinduism is particularly suited to cyberspace . . . because the visual nature of the WWW utilizes image above all else." The ubiquitous presence of Hindu deities on posters, calendars, and greeting cards and the easy integration of new forms of visualization into the new media show that it was not difficult to accept and establish the idea of connection to gods through the Internet.

Third, Hinduism is eclectic in nature or, in a way, "postmodern," in the sense of "anything goes" (Michaels 2008, 4; Scheifinger 2011, 236). It draws from different beliefs and practices. It is a patchwork religion of classes and castes, regions and localities that does not allow for a center, *pontifex maximus*, or binding morality, texts, and symbols. The identificatory habitus—in my view the most characteristic feature of Hinduism—supports inclusivistic or substitutive processes by which different religious expressions can be absorbed or identified. It also allows for integrating new media and approaches

21. See Marsh 2007 for a detailed description of several online pujas with many screen shots.

22. See, for example, the following websites: bangalinet.com, blessingsonthenet.com, dfwhindutemple.org, eprathana.com, hindunet.org, kalimandir.org, lokakuldevi.com, onlinedarshan.com, onlinepuja.org, rudrakhsa-ratna.com, saibaba.org, saranam.com, siddhivinayak.org, spiritualpuja.com.

to the gods, or, in other words, there is no authority for all Hindus to forbid creating such new forms of worship.

All of this demonstrates that the *darshan* experience could quite easily shift from physical images to television and Internet, since the iconographic inventory of Hinduism is "adaptable, readily portable from one or another medium" (Herman 2010, 152). However, these findings leave us with a number of questions that have to be pursued. How does the Internet, with its emphasis on sight and sound, touch the religious experience? The virtual offerings of incense and flowers do not smell, and the virtual water is not wet. Are these offerings a valid substitute for the "real" *pūjā*? Are cyber-forms of deities equivalent to *utsava mūrtis* (embodied forms of gods)? One certainly has to differentiate here between religion online and online religion—an important point made by Christopher Helland (2000) to distinguish between information presented by churches and other religious institutions on the one hand, and new interactive religious contents or spaces defined as religion online, on the other. The order of a *pūjā* to be performed at a certain temple with the transfer of its merit to the offerer or e-*yajamāna* is different from performing the *pūjā* oneself on the Internet, the cyber-puja.

Another open research question is how often and with what intention these virtual rituals are performed and accepted as valid forms of worship. Are they not more often than not sheer gimmickry? After all, most websites are in English, and thus address India's urban middle class, which is looking for new forms of spiritualism, but perhaps not so much for these forms of worship. For this, a detailed and reliable media anthropological study on the use of the virtual rituals is needed. However, there are indications, especially in the diaspora (Herman 2010, 157), that the e-rituals are not just used as a "funky supplement" for house or temple rituals, but as serious rituals. And there are indications that many devotees do in fact acknowledge the ontological status of cyber-forms of deities "as real and full forms of God Himself/Herself" (Karapanagiotis 2013, 63), arguing, for instance, that God is omnipresent or quoting a famous verse from the Bhāgavatapurāṇa:

> *śailī dārumayī lauhī, lebyā lekhyā ca saikatī /*
> *manomayī maṇimayī pratimāṣṭavidhā smṛta //*
>
> (Made) of stone, wood, metal, plaster, paint and sand (or) and of mind or jewels—these are the eight forms of an image (of deities). (*Bhāgavatapurāṇa* 11.27.12)

In this context, it apparently does not matter so much whether the venerated images have been consecrated or not. There are many examples, such as museum exhibits or Hindu calendar posters, where devotees worship unconsecrated images. Another example is the veneration of the television screen during the broadcast of the 1987–1988 *Rāmāyaṇa* epic classic:

> [M]any of those who wanted the series conducted themselves as if receiving *darshan* in front of a *murti*. Some bathed, put on clean clothes and removed their shoes before the transmission began. In some areas, a television set was set up as the focal point of a shrine. It was draped in garlands, anointed with the substances used in conventional puja rituals, and incense was burned in front of the screen. After the transmission, *prasad* was distributed. (Lutgendorf 1995, 242)

Another good example to study the career of a deity that started on the screen and ended in shrines and temples is Santoshi Ma ("Mother of Satisfaction"), which shows how media technology transforms forms of worship and rituals. Until the *Jai Santoshi Ma* film of 1975, this goddess was a local rural goddess, virtually unknown to most Hindus. The film, however, that narrates the story of the goddess and her passionate devotee Satyavati, caused veneration during the screenings in movie halls and made this "new" deity enter the pan-Indian Hindu pantheon in Hindu temples and shrines.

All of this suggests that cyberspace has indeed become a new place for ritual activities where people meet, communicate, and act somewhere out there. It is a new space where devotees go to or visit a website. But the question remains whether this cyberspace is really regarded as a truly religious and spiritual realm.

Conclusion

Rituals show not only different degrees of formality but also different modes of enactment. Three have been discussed in this part of the book: *individualitas*, *societas*, and *religio*. Whereas in life-cycle rituals the aspect of the transformation of individuals into a new life stage is at the center, festivals are mostly characterized by social groups coming and acting together. There are, however, rituals, such as vows and pilgrimages, that are sometimes performed more in the *individualitas* mode, and at other times more in the *societas* mode.

The *religio* mode is the most debated, but for my understanding of rituals, indispensable. In the development of the sacrifice from the Vedic origins to

modern forms of e-*pūjā* (Chapter 7), we could see how different meanings have been attributed to similar acts, but all of them carried the message of elevation and extraordinariness: a Vedic sacrifice may be full of religious connotations, but, as we have seen in Chapter 7.2, it may also be a ritual that predominantly promotes quasi-religious values such as peace or health. The sacrifice, especially the *homa*, can be seen both as a marker of group and religious affiliation identity, which differentiates social and religious groups from each other, and as a means to cross the border and to gain new elevating territory. In such a case, certain elements are adapted and others are incorporated into the ritual realm from outside. The ritual itself proves to be rather flexible by opening space for several interpretations and meanings—and thus for its modality, but all of them keep a sense of extraordinariness.

Another example was the *pūjā*. Given the complexity, variability, and history of the *pūjā*, it is not satisfactory to reduce its analysis to aspects of communication and exchange on the one hand, or worship and prayer on the other. The flexible kit of ritual elements, the fact that the *pūjā* is often (just) a small part of major rituals and festivals, and various modernization processes or changes in the procedure are influential for the modality of the ritual and suggest many other interpretations and meanings that would focus on individual or social notions of power, gender, leisure, play, or commodification as well—as festivals and processions also do.

In Chapter 5, we could see the mixture of these modalities by elaborating on the concept of the rites of passage. This concept was introduced by Arnold van Gennep in 1909, and was extended nearly fifty years later by Victor Turner, and now it has become a notion accepted worldwide. But we have also seen that this concept could only become so popular because it is simple and applies not only to passages in the course of life but also to many, if not most, rituals. These rituals are typically regarded as individualistic events. A brief look at the ancient Indian theory of *saṃskāra* has shown us that the rites of passage in the life-cycle have much to do with man's fear of his own mortality; for, in rituals—thus the theology, at least—the unchanging and unchangeable, in other words the immortal, is being staged. This stresses the aspect of *religio*. Yet the practice of life-cycle rituals also shows that they themselves form a considerable source of social renewals, are used to work things out, and are seen as a starting and return point for basic questions and new identities, which highlights the aspect of *societas*. The modality of a ritual depends on the mixture of these aspects in the performance and in the perspective of the participants.

Initiations, for instance, can be seen as social events of families, but also, from the doctrinal perspectives of the learned priests, as "individual" rebirths

into a world of immortality. In the male initiations, the boys are then identified with the immortal Veda; in the Ihi marriage, the girls are married to Buddha or Suvarṇakumāra or Viṣṇu, an immortal god; and in the *sapiṇḍīkaraṇa*, the deceased are transformed to "gods" (Viśve Devāḥ). All Hindu (and even the Buddhist) life-cycle rituals are performed together with the fire sacrifice (*homa*), which in Brahminical tradition is the Veda that stands for immortality and salvation (Chapter 7.1). Seen from the perspective of the Brahmanic-Sanskritic scriptures, initiation is therefore not only a transformation. It is also the identification of the initiated individual with the immortal sacrifice or Veda.

Such identifications are the basis of all sacrificial ritual practice and theology (cf. Michaels 2004a, 332–39). They are a vital characteristic of Hinduism. However, the awareness of the aspect of immortality is certainly not present for all ritual participants. In terms of doctrine, the initiation is a release from individualism aimed at incorporating the individual into immortality, making him equivalent with it. But an initiation has to do with individuals and actors, not with virtual ritual beings. The danger occurring, particularly in liturgically orchestrated and textually elaborated rituals, is that reality is seen as an imperfect realization of an ideal. It is assumed that rituals have to proceed by plan according to rules. Such rituals exist only in the minds of those who codify the ritual rules: priestly theologians and scholars. However, standardized rituals are also an expression of habits that are thought and felt, done and experienced, that are acquired, learned, and shaped in a specific culture; and introduced deliberately in this manner, they can be molded tactically, combatively, jokingly, or playfully. With the cultural knowledge acquired from childhood onwards most of the participants know what is permitted and what is not, what is good or bad, beautiful or repulsive.

Victor W. Turner underlined precisely this aspect with his emphasis on communitas and liminality, thus becoming one of the first to recognize the individual and social dynamics of rituals and their ability to change. But this dynamic character shows itself not only in the liminal phase but also in how rituals are dealt with in general—especially in the criticism and delimitation of rituals. Since rites of passage are also usually status-related events, not only the individual with his own social assemblage stands in the foreground; these rituals also have an effect on the outside. Because of the highly symbolic content, dissenters have an easy time of it in demonstrating their own positions. All they need to do is to substitute minor things or to criticize.

In Western society, one often regards rituals of transition within the life-cycle as a means of mastering such a transition, or even of mastering crises of life. This is not true of the groups we have been investigating. Rather, the

rituals indicate arrangements that are generally not thought about much and that do not have to be thought about. In the rituals, people mark their allocation to caste, age and gender groups, professional associations, and religious communities. However much the rituals depend on biological changes, yet these are themselves treated ritually. They are subsumed into a commonly accepted event and thus removed from the state of the individual. Natural events—death, birth, or menarche—are ritually carried out for a second time or are accompanied by ritual, and thus removed from the compass of the mortal and transitory world. Furthermore, because the rituals are carried out with much effort, festively and publicly, it is important that they be sensually persuasive, too. Only in this fashion do daily actions such as washing or feeding take on their elevated, extraordinary character. The organizers of the ritual use existing cultural patterns of presentation, which they, however, use in a playful, creative way. The rituals are therefore not to be regarded as stiffly stereotyped or even boring, a point made often in the scientific literature on ritual. On the contrary, a closer look reveals them to be extremely lively and vital events.

This, indeed, is where the strength of rituals lies: a cathartic, integrating strength permitting one to master the passages of life, but it is no new strength. Rituals show and prove themselves, time and again, to be an expression of the helplessness of man, an ostentatious admittance of his fragility. It is through rituals in the modalities of *individualitas, societas*, and *religio* that man tries to overcome the insecurity of life.

PART IV

Meaning

Framing, formality (with rule-governed repetitivity, what are in principle public performances, and variability), and modality (with *individualitas, societas*, and *religio*) are all indispensable components of rituals, but there are two more: transformation and affirmation. People make rituals, but rituals also do something with people. They somehow change the actors, and, in this sense, they mean something to them. It is this aspect that I will discuss in this part of the book, with which we will come back to the initial questions of the meaning and functions of rituals.

Basically, most rituals are either transforming (rites of passage in the broadest sense, healing rituals) or affirming, that is, cyclical renewals of an order. They either change the status or social role of the actors, or they affirm an existing tradition or order. The change of status in life-cycle rituals is, for instance, evident: a boy becomes a man, a bachelor a husband, a living person an ancestor, and so on. "The simple fact that ritual actors leave their secular or mundane life and enter into ritual, next engage in that ritual and experience, though the force of the canonical dimension of the ritual, a 'time out of time,' and finally come back to their mundane life, is central for the working of a ritual" (Houben 2011, 159).

There is also a wide consensus on the second aspect. Simply by being enacted, "rituals may be seen as continually re-creating and re-constituting society, real and postulated, by the very fact and act of the actors participating in them," says Johan Platvoet (1995, 34). And he adds:

> Moreover, many rituals, especially the collective or representative ones, express and re-create the solidarity, identity, and at times the boundaries, of a group or a society by their being performed at a particular time and place, in the special manner in which its participants are ordered, and by the prominent display and manipulation of objects which express unity and distinctiveness of that group. (Platvoet 1995, 46)

However, this view is in conflict with the theory of Frits Staal that rituals are pure activity without meaning. Let us therefore start with an ordinary view of rituals, before entering a path full of twists and turns. Most people would confirm that rituals are action(s). Just to believe in something is no ritual. And since any action is a physical change of something, any ritual is a change, transformation, or passage; in Mīmāṃsā terms, the performance of ritual (or sacrifice) is creating something new (*apūrva*). But to what extent does ritual need meaning and function to be understood? Is there not much more evidence that meaning is not absolutely necessary for ritual performance? After all, the meaning of ritual action is, beyond its performance, "not entirely encoded by the performers" (Rappaport 1999, 24).

In order to tackle these problems, I will first discuss the theory of the meaninglessness of rituals and then, in the next chapter, an indigenous Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of ritual—one of the few sophisticated and elaborate non-Western theories of ritual.

I wish to clarify the question of meaning by pointing to the modifications and transformations made to initiation in the Kathmandu Valley. From the plethora of initiation rituals that have formed among the Newar people, I choose only two: the initiation among Newar peasants in Bhaktapur and the initiation among Newar Buddhists in Patan (cf. Gutschow and Michaels 2008). Both rituals have much in common with the Hindu initiation described above (Chapter 5.2): the sex, and, up to a point, the age of the initiate; the fire, the tonsure, the salving of the neophyte, the issue of a forehead mark (*tīkā*), the involvement of the maternal uncle, placing of a cord, equipping the initiate with the paraphernalia of an ascetic, putting on new clothes, inviting friends and relatives, the communal meal, and then the celebration meal. The agreement is so great that differences can only be recognized when one looks very closely and has some previous knowledge. But these differences are serious.

Let us begin with the initiation ritual (Nev. *kaytā pūjā, mekhalābandhana*) of Newar Hindu peasant castes in Bhaktapur, only a few kilometers east of the capital, Kathmandu. Here, I will only take one example, which is, however, noteworthy enough. Again, there are many agreements with the Brahmanic Hindu initiation. For example, there is the tonsure with the remaining strand of hair and the bundle of grass. Yet there is a key difference: the peasant boys are not given the holy cord (*yajñopavīta*) across the left shoulder, but receive a hip cord and a loincloth (Nev. *kaytā*). The knot on the right side, in particular, is venerated. With all this, the initiate does not become a Twice-born; he does not acquire the right to study the Veda and carry out the sacrifice, even though the ritual is accompanied by sayings from the Veda, mostly

from the *White Yajurveda*. What, in the Hindu initiation of the Twice-born, is in the foreground, namely fire and the Veda, is lacking here completely.

In the Buddhist initiation (Nev. *bare chuyegu*), too, the hair is cut twice: the first time by the barber, at which point the strand of hair remains, as in the Hindu ceremony; it will be shaven off a little later—generally by the second oldest Buddhist priest (Nev. *upādhyā gurujyu*). As the strand of hair stands for the soteriologically important patrilinearity and ancestry, this small cut signifies a great step: turning away from the Hindu salvation ritual and turning to the Buddhist salvation ritual. Even though the Buddhist Newars pray to divinities and hope for salvation by these, this initiation, so similar in many ways to the Hindu one, now reveals itself to be that of an ordination to be a monk, the (if only temporary) acceptance of the youth into the Buddhist congregation. But the whole matter has little to do with ordination in Theravāda Buddhism and the meditative search for salvation, for almost all other ritual components are strongly influenced by Hinduism. Thus, the novice does not really become a monk, but after a short time returns to the bosom of his family, as is the case in the Hindu initiation. It remains, then, more of a family and caste-related ritual than a true ordination to monkhood.

In another sequence of this Buddhist initiation, it is even unclear whether this is an original Buddhist feature, or (which I think more probable) one that has "only" been reinterpreted as Buddhist. I am talking of the seven steps (*saptapadī*) on decorated leaves, which the small monk must take with wooden shoes, supposedly in memory of the first steps taken by Buddha Śākyamuni after his birth. For this sequence is also present in the Hindu wedding ritual, and the Hindu caste of the Śreṣṭha from Kathmandu, who are also Newars, practice it in the course of their initiation with no Buddhist background whatsoever.

We can thus see that every ritual has its right to stand for itself and to be considered quite exactly, and ritual elements might have different meanings or symbolic connotations. At the same time, its environment must be taken into consideration as well. Only then does the ritual reveal its sense—and elude it simultaneously. For rituals have this surplus of sense that makes them so variable. Many ritual elements and sequences just do not have any clear and unambiguous sense, although "essence drainers," who always look for commonalities rather than distinctions, would very much like them to have one. On the contrary, rituals are ambiguous and, for this reason, are particularly suited to being transferred from one ritual to another, from one social group to another, even from one religion to another. It seems that the question of meaning rather follows than governs the practice of rituals.

8

Meaning and Function

"ONE CAN STUDY ritual either because it makes so much obvious sense or because it makes no sense whatever" (Grimes 2013, 5). But can ritual be without meaning? Le rituel pour le rituel? Difficult as it may be to believe, theories to this effect are sometimes proposed.

The problem of the meaning or meaninglessness of rituals depends on the definition of meaning: sense, function, reference, symbolism, significance, semantic or analytic proposition, and so on. However, although there exists a vast body of literature on meaning and meanings in rituals, "there is no agreed-upon definition of what might constitute meaning in a ritual system" (Meshel 2014, 177). It has been argued that rituals are semiotic, semiological, or symbolic systems that signify or refer to something else, or that they do have certain psychological, social, or theological functions. I have already discussed such theories in the Introduction and will come back to them in the following section (8.1), in which I will concentrate on the Cultural Studies approach on meaning, especially on the idea of meaninglessness. This will be complemented by a Cognitive Sciences and neuropsychological approach (8.2) that has entered the field of ritual studies in recent years and might be a way out of the dichotomy of meaning and meaninglessness of rituals.

8.1 The Cultural Studies Approach

In 1979, Frits Staal famously proclaimed "the meaninglessness of ritual" in his best-known article of the same name, published in *Numen*. In 1994, Caroline Humphrey und James Laidlaw, too, in their widely discussed book *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship*, promoted a theory of the nonintentionality of rituals. McCauley and Lawson (n.d., 9) have also expressed much the same: "We think that much about religious rituals' forms are overwhelmingly independent of meaning." Already, Tambiah noted that ritual, being "conventionalized action", "in turn

psychically *distances* the participants from the ritual enactment" (1979, 123). Moreover,

> [r]ituals as conventionalized behaviour are not designed or meant to express the intentions, emotions, and states of mind of individuals in a direct, spontaneous, and "natural" way. Cultural elaboration of codes consists in the *distancing* from such spontaneous and intentional expressions because spontaneity and intentionality are, or can be, contingent, labile, circumstantial, even incoherent or disordered. (Tambiah 1979, 124)

The point is that in rituals, we do not deal with "intentions, emotions," and so on, but with simulations of intentions: "we can say that a large part of the intentions of the actors as regards the purpose and results of the ritual are already *culturally defined, presupposed, and conventionalized*" (Tambiah 1979, 127).

Prima facie theories of the meaninglessness of rituals seem to be absurd, given the fact that hundreds and thousands of studies on ritual demonstrate the social, communicative, or performative meaning of such events. However, such studies normally understand meaning in the sense of function, purpose, or goal. Basically, these studies use biologistic, functionalist, or religionist (confessional) arguments as I have demonstrated in the Introduction.

However, theories of the meaninglessness of rituals maintain the idea that rituals are not only formal actions but that the forms of actions are basically independent and that the symbols in rituals do not refer to anything; rather, they are context-independent and thus meaningless. It was Frits Staal[1] who most radically criticized most of the functional theories. For him, rituals are "primary" and "pure activity . . . without function, aim or goal."[2] Staal regards them as a closed, "useless institution" that "can only be abandoned or preserved" (1979a, 14). He denies that rituals are structured by a tripartite model (Van Gennep, Turner), that they are translations of myths or stories into acts (the myth-and-ritual school), or that they reflect social structures (Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard). He is especially opposed to the "meaning-under-every-rock symbolic analysis" of Victor Turner and Clifford Geertz that rituals transform cultural values, or that they are communicative or symbolic activity. For him orthopraxis, not orthodoxy, is decisive in the analysis of rituals.

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1. See Staal 1979a (revised version is reprinted in Staal 1990b).

2. Staal (1989, 131); see also: "ritual has no meaning, goal or aim" (Staal 1979a, 8).

Staal based his conclusions on a thorough study (Staal 1987a[3]) of the ancient Vedic fire ritual (*agnicayana*) as it was performed in 1975 in Kerala (Southwestern India) and as it is recorded in several ritual texts (Śrautasūtras) and manuals. The Agnicayana developed between the eighth and fourth centuries BCE, but is now only rarely practiced in its original form. The elaborate ritual involves, for eleven days, up to seventeen priests and many other participants who build a large bird-shaped altar in five layers with bricks and a great number of other ritual items. Especially important are three ritual fires in the ritual enclosure. Almost every ritual act is accompanied by the utterance of Vedic mantras.

Staal explains the existence of rituals phylogenetically: "Human ritualisation often follows animal ritualisation rather closely" (Staal 1989, 136). He holds that human rituals are structurally similar to ritualized animal behavior, and that language developed after ritual. Staal compares rituals with birds' songs,[4] which cannot be clearly identified from various situations or times of the day as calls, warnings, or courtship displays. New ornithological theories would show that birds mostly twitter without any reason, and not in order to warn or to court. Likewise, mantras (and *stobhas*) are recited and sung for various reasons but without any obvious purpose. However, people preserve their forms and transfer them, and these transformed mantras cross all sorts of religious social, geographical, and linguistic borders. Meaningless sounds do not change. They can only be remembered or forgotten (Staal 1979a, 12). Mantras are thus neither speech-acts, nor language, nor signs (cf. Chapter 7.3)

The same holds true of ritual. Quoting Van Gennep's observation that "the same rite, remaining absolutely the same, can change its meaning depending on the position it is given in a ceremony, or on whether it is part of one ceremony or another. The aspersion rite . . . is a fecundity rite in marriage ceremonies, but an expulsion rite in separation ceremonies" (1981: 128), Staal concludes that "it is only a small step from 'changing meaning' to: 'no intrinsic meaning' and 'structural meaning,' and from there to: 'no meaning'" (1981, 134), for ritual activity takes place in a clearly demarcated area or time, reduces contingency, and avoids risks by which ordinary activity is always endangered.

Staal does not deny that rituals can have more or less "useful side-effects" (ibid.). They can publicly express the right to marry or the pleasure in participation, but these side effects should not be mistaken for the functions or aims of rituals (Staal 1979a, 11). Or, as Jack Goody (1961, 159) would have

3. In 1990, Staal observed another Agnicayana performance of which he has written an unpublished (mimeographed) report (Staal 1990b).

4. For Staal's argument of bird's song, see Staal 1990a and my review (Michaels 1995).

it: "By ritual we refer to a category of standardized behaviour (custom) in which the relationship between means and ends is not 'intrinsic,' i.e. either irrational or non-rational." In rituals, then, means are not clearly related to ends. If there were a specific purpose to rituals (within rituals), other (or better) means could also, and sometimes better, fulfill the same purpose. The ritual lighting of a candle in the church is different from a technological lighting (e.g., by a fire lighter). Thus, no ritual is limited to just one function, since then one could use other or better means that also would fulfill the desired purpose. However, rituals are rather inflexible regarding their means. They cannot easily be adapted to new methods and purposes invariably. Since rituals are in this sense meaningless, many meanings can be attached to them: "The meaninglessness of it explains the variety of meaning attached to it" (Staal 1979a, 12).

According to Staal, it was religion that added meaning to primordial utterings such as mantras, and it was religion that created language. Thus, for Staal, religion is ritual plus meaning: "The chief provider of meaning being religion, ritual became involved with religion and through this association, meaningful" (1989, 137). Staal, however, understands ritual as anti-religion. It is not a subdimension of religion or society, but an autonomous practice with its own rules. Thus, ritual should not be studied as religion, but as syntax without semantics or semiotics. Consequently and following Lévi-Strauss,[5] Staal proposes to study ritual "in itself and for itself" (ibid.) and as "syntax" without reference to semantics. He thereby opposes the former, pre-Fregian idea that rituals (or words) are symbolic signs that refer to something external, in "reality" or transcendental.

Staal demonstrates the syntax of rituals, again using Agnicayana material, but also examples from music. By dividing complex rituals into small repeated ritual sequences (A,B,C . . .), he discovers certain structures such as recursive rules (B → ABA), which generate structures such as AABAA, AAABAAA, and so forth. Thus, the construction of a layer of the Agnicayana altar (A) is surrounded by two ritual sequences called *pravargya* (offering of hot milk to the Aśvins deities = B) and *upasad* (a ritual fight against of demons = C). A common unit then is BCABC, but since BC also forms a unit, the basic structure would, in this case, be BAB. However, the ritual elements can also appear in other sequences, for example, *pravargya*—(*upasad*—layer—*upasad*)—*pravargya* (BCACB); here, CAC would form one

5. "[O]ne should . . . first strip it [the ritual] of all the implicit mythology which adheres to the ritual without really forming a part of it, in other words, beliefs and representations that are rooted in a natural philosophy in the same way as myths" (Lévi-Strauss 1971, 598).

unit, so that the structure could again be reduced to BAB. In this manner, Staal, for whom the complexity of Vedic ritual is indefinite (1989, 91), presents other "syntactical" structures, such as embedding (ABA → BAB), inserting (BC → BAC), mirroring (ABC → CBA), serialization ($A_1A_2A_3$ . . .), and so on.

Staal has been heavily criticized.[6] Many of his critics[7] did not follow his narrow ideas of what religion is all about, his neglecting emic ideas as well as mythological or social explanations.[8] He was also criticized for failing to acknowledge that he had more or less "staged" the entire Agnicayana ritual, and subsequently denying the importance of attending to the pragmatics of rituals in general.[9] However, Staal was mainly criticized for his two interlinked theories, one of the evolution of ritual and the other of the meaninglessness of rituals. The first was regarded as highly speculative without even a shred of evidence (Mack 1991, 217f.), and the second was said to be "simply wrong" (Penner 1985, 11).

Staal's theory of the phylogenetic development of ritual is not only difficult to prove, but it also can be linked to sociobiological arguments (Wilson 1975; Burkert 1996) according to which rituals serve biological functions and must be explained by the principles of natural selection.[10] For these scholars, ritual actions are not only psychomotoric abreactions, but also phylogenetic, obsolete survivals of the past. Thus, a number of specialists on ritual studies—for example, W. R. Smith 1889, Cassirer 1973, Burkert 1996—have assumed the primacy of ritual over myth. For them, action comes before meaning. Rituals of hunting survived in sacrifices even in civilized societies, since they had been of phylogenetic advantage, such as the generation of fitness. They do not follow belief, and they do not create belief. They are transmitted independently of belief. Similarly, A. E. Jensen (1963) saw blood sacrifices as "survivals bereft of content." Houseman and Severi, who regard Staal's theory as "basically a theory of recitation" (1998, 186), have rightly criticized Staal's biological reductionism, evolutionary speculations about the animal origins of language, and "atomised view of ceremonial behaviour"

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6. See especially the 1991 issue of *Religion*, vol. 21, including a reply by Staal to his critics (pp. 227–34); cf. also Seaquist 2004.

7. Lawson and McCauley 1990; Grappard 1991; Penner 1985; Mack 1991; Strenski 1991; Thompson 1997, 1998; Houseman and Severi 1998, 186–88.

8. See, for instance, Scharfe 1990 or Witzel 1992.

9. See Schechner 1986, 1987, and 1990 as well as Staal's replies (1987, 1991, and 1993).

10. See Baudy 2006; Lawson and McCauley 1990, 167; cf. also Michaels 1997b.

(ibid., 187), in which the sum and arrangements of supposedly meaningless ritual elements do not count at all.

Staal's meaninglessness theory is, inter alia, based on transformational generative linguistics. He rightly shows that a simple referential theory of meaning is as inadequate in ritual as it is in language. Rituals do not mirror or express a certain meaning or sense (one could also say: idea, belief, world view), just as signs (e.g., words) do not simply mirror reality. Hans H. Penner (1985), however, has aptly shown that Staal is mistaken in his understanding of language and, consequently, ritual. Following Benveniste (1973, Penner says that "language as we all know is composed of signs, and all linguistic signs have phonological, syntactic and semantic components" (1985, 9). If, then, rituals have a syntax, they must have meaning, because the two cannot be separated. Syntax means the combination of signs, and signs always refer to something (which is their meaning). In other words, there cannot be syntax without signs, and there cannot be signs without meaning. Thus, syntax is always combined with meaning.

> Staal . . . does not argue that rituals are not semiological systems. On the contrary, he argues that rituals have a syntax, but they are meaningless. Given the . . . evidence from linguistics, Staal's position is simply wrong. (Penner 1985, 11)

Staal has rightly argued against the functionalist interpretation of rituals, for ritual "far exceeds the sociological and affect-related functions that may be assigned to it. Conversely, the meanings that may be attached to aspects of the rite far exceed the limits of the rituals itself" (Houseman and Severi 1998, 167). Paradoxically, Staal, opposing the reductionism implied in functionalist theories, is himself a reductionist, insofar as he neglects all meaningful aspects that people attribute to ritual. He is also a reductionist if he denies that the fact that people are involved in seemingly meaningless action itself means something.

Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, too, separate ritual activity from meaning. For them, rituals do not have any discursive meaning or hidden message that must be decoded by the ritual specialist. According to these authors, rituals are predominantly a different mode of action (see Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 267). As any object can have different colors, a ritual action can be performed with and without meaning and a certain intention (though all rituals require the intention to perform, i.e., the ritual stance):

> Perhaps some of the things we have tried to show in this book—that people may have a similar attitude to ritual acts as they have to natural kinds, thus endowing them with a strange facticity; that they learn how to perform ritual acts and have them inscribed in their bodies separately from the prototypical ideas they may come to have of them; and the fact that people can have such prototypes without knowing what the acts they represent "really" are—perhaps all this is the beginning of a psychological explanation of Wittgenstein's "an experience in ourselves." (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 266 ff.)

Humphrey and Laidlaw's starting point is the actor's ritual "commitment, a particular stance with respect to his or her actions" (ibid., 88). Asking what differentiates acting in a ritualized way from acting in an unritualized way, they answer that ritual actions are a distinctive way of "going on," characterized by four aspects:

(1) Ritualized action is non-intentional, in the sense that while people performing ritual acts do have intentions (thus the actions are not unintentional), the *identity* of a ritualized act does not depend, as is the case with normal action, on the agent's intention in acting.
(2) Ritualized action is stipulated, in the sense that the constitution of separate acts out of the continuous flow of a person's action is not accomplished, as is the case with normal action, by processes of intentional understanding, but rather by constitutive rules which establish an ontology of ritual acts. . . .
(3) Such acts are perceived as discrete, named entities, with their own characters and histories, and it is for this reason that we call them elemental and archetypal.
(4) Because ritualized acts are felt, by those who perform them, to be external, they are also "apprehensible." (ibid., 89)

Thus, Humphrey and Laidlaw speak of rituals as always being nonintentional, but not necessarily unintentional. They can be performed with a variety of motives, but whatever they are, these wishes or motives do not change the ritual acts and, more important, they are not at all necessary for recognizing ritual acts as such. Whereas, in the case of normal actions, the intention is necessary to distinguish them from other actions or to perceive them as such, ritualized actions are not characterized by the intentions accompanying them.

The *saṃkalpa*, the Sanskrit *intentio solemnis* to perform a ritual (see Chapter 1.1), cannot be considered a communicative or informative act because its purpose is neither to communicate nor to inform anybody about the motives to perform the ritual. It just signals that, from the given point in time onward, the sphere of existence has changed. Being principally a performative utterance in Austin's sense, that is, a promise or vow, it indicates, so to speak, a change of program, a shift to the level of ritualization, so that all actions that follow and are framed by the *saṃkalpa* and *visarjana*, the ritual dissolution, may be considered to be of a special (often sacred) nature. This is what Humphrey and Laidlaw call "ritual commitment." Thus, "in ritual you both are and are not the author of your acts" (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, 99).

Humphrey and Laidlaw develop their theory by concentrating on liturgical rituals, which involve a high number of prescribed acts. They claim that performance rituals such as healing ceremonies are less ritualized. They do not completely deny the intentional aspect of rituals, thus granting them some sort of meaning. Following Staal, they rightly do not accept that rituals can be reduced to one particular meaning or intention, but they, too, do not explain why rituals are performed or practiced nonintentionally.

To be sure, not all participants in rituals must agree with or know about their theological (or mythological, ideological, religious) implications. Not every girl or boy being baptized believes in God. For some people, the "Sacred Thread" of Hindu initiation ritual "means" a change in status, and for others it is a sign of social conformity or simply fashion. The girdling itself is an empty box that can be filled with all sorts of meanings: it can mean the initiation of a boy into a social group, clan, or family; the ordination of priests and ascetics; or merely decoration (with a sash). In the Indian context, the sacred thread can be substituted and used with almost opposite meanings, for instance, in the ordination ritual of sects that deny the doctrine of the "Twice-born" symbolized in the sacred thread (Michaels 1994b, Chr. Zotter 2013). Seen from this point, girdling is girdling, nothing more. However, in none of the given examples is girdling "pure activity." Rather, it is an action that is interpreted differently (i.e., it has different meanings) according to the context and interpreter.

Given the many more or less explicit reasons for the performance of rituals, and given the great quantity of exegetical literature on rituals, theories claiming that rituals are meaningless are indeed difficult to accept—for both practitioners and scholars of rituals. It seems evident that rituals are performed or celebrated because they do have meanings, and many theologians or priests keep pointing out that the practitioners of rituals have to be aware of the "real" meaning of what they are doing in order to gain the merit of it. In

other words, they should consciously perform the action (which implies that rituals can also be performed without such a consciousness). The conflict between those practitioners or priests, who claim that a certain understanding of the ritual is essential for the performer of the ritual, and those who regard such consciousness as unnecessary, has also resulted in religious conflicts and even wars, for example, the Christian debate over the question of whether innocent, unaware children can be baptized or not. It is significant that religious criticism of rituals especially stresses the inner awareness of the meaning of ritual action.

The Indologist Alexis Sanderson (1995) has given a detailed example of a similar argument. He first mentions that in Kashmirian, Śaivism rituals are performed in explicit opposition to the Vedic prescriptions of the meaning of these rituals. He then presents several examples from the Śaiva texts in which the aims of certain rituals are more or less explicit: liberation (*mokṣa*) from the bondage of transmigration (*saṃsāra*), or desire for supernatural powers and effects (*siddhi*) to enjoy rewards (*bhoga*) in this world or after death. For the seekers of rewards, called *sādhakas* ("masters [of powers]"), the rituals had concrete objectives: the killing of enemies (*māraṇa*), *the* subjugation of desired women (*vaśīkaraṇa*), and the quelling of dangerous powers (*śānti*). For the seekers of liberation, however, another problem of purpose and meaning arose: if rituals were performed in order to reach a liberated state, why then should these rituals continue to be performed after reaching liberation? If all the impurity (*mala*) of the soul has been destroyed, rituals having the "meaning" of destroying impurity seem to be obsolete. The answer given to this problem by the so-called left-hand Tantrism is consistent. Rituals must continue to be carried out because the bondage of *māyā* (illusion) remains, but one should no longer attach any meaning to them. Thus, perfect knowledge, which no longer has any object, itself becomes ritualized, losing all meaning. Such examples make clear that the meaning of rituals is more often hidden (unconscious) or esoteric than self-evident—even for insiders. Rituals must be performed consciously, and, at the same time, the consciousness should not affect the rituals too much.

Given these arguments, theories of the meaninglessness of rituals are not simply misleading. Once again: any teleological interpretation of ritual actions is contradicted by the required formality of rituals. Says Roy Rappaport (1999, 30): "It seems apparent . . . that ritual is not simply an alternative way to express any manner of thing, but that certain meanings and effects can best, or even *only*, be expressed or achieved in ritual."

If rituals are preserved even when the religion changes, if they are transmitted from one religion (culture, region, or period) to another along with change(s)

in meaning, then particular meanings cannot be the only reason for practicing them. Moreover, the fact that rituals are widely practiced without knowledge of their ("real") meaning, or that they are practiced even when one is consciously opposed to them, or that they are performed with a variety of intentions, clearly shows that particular meanings are not essential attributes of rituals.

However, the theory that ritual actions are completely void of meaning and function cannot consistently be proposed. For the next question would be: why are rituals without meaning? The answer to this question would provide the meaning (in the sense of significance) of rituals. I shall try to solve this conundrum by proposing the middle way "in a koan-like fashion" (Meshel 2014, 188 n.57): rituals are indeed without meaning, but this is a very meaningful (significant) fact. My argument is supported by the following three points.

First, it seems plausible that many ritual actions arose from actions for which good reasons must have existed to mimetically repeat and transmit them as cultural or habitual patterns. In many cases, great problems or conflicts might have stood at the origin of rituals. It was necessary—individually or collectively—to solve these existential problems. Birth, for example, is not ritualized among animals, but human beings apparently needed such rituals, perhaps after the consciousness of death arose and the existence of life had to be explained. The first time, thus, became an extremely important focal point for rituals, which are often treated as unchangeable. In myths, rituals often refer to these archetypal, idealized, or sacralized origins when nothing had to be changed because everything was in a perfect state or golden age. It seems to me that rituals, especially religious rituals, are intrinsically connected with this notion of changelessness. Rituals are rigid, stereotyped, and unchangeable because they are *per definitionem* difficult to change. This does not mean that rituals are invariable. On the contrary, they are altered without giving up the claim of being invariable.

Second, there were good reasons for societies to refer to this claim of invariability: phylogenetically, people learned to preserve and memorize cultural values and techniques over centuries without activating them again and again by rational choice; psychologically, not all activity had to be cognitively burdened; socially, not every position or status had to be legitimized; religiously, the tension between change and continuity could be borne. When social order vanishes, rituals also disappear.

Third, if people identify themselves in rituals with invariability and timelessness (in Vedic rituals, for instance, with the timeless Veda and the sacrifice), they resist the uncertainty of past and future, life and death. In rituals, they become "eternal," related to something that has always been there, never

changed and detached from everyday life and profanity. Rituals are based on authority, tradition, orthodoxy, and extraordinariness. Thus, rituals are staged productions of timelessness, an effort to oppose changeability, which implies finality (and, ultimately, death). One could also say that rituals express the human fear of one's own freedom.

In short, the meaninglessness of rituals only concerns the invariability of prescribed actions and the polysemy of rituals (i.e., the multiplicity of meanings). Apart from that, rituals have a great variety of meanings and functions. The tradition of commentaries demonstrates the history of the meaning of rituals. Moreover, the persistence of rituals requires that they serve some (adaptive) functions. If they were entirely without function, it would be unnecessary to transmit them (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 169). My point is that the significance of rituals lies in the fact that they often create an auratic sphere or arena of timelessness and immortality—at least in religious or semi-religious contexts:

> That which occurs in ritual's intervals is not historical but . . . timeless, and to participate in a canon is to escape from time's flow into "what is, in fact, often regarded as the unbounded, the infinite, the limitless," the absolutely true and the immortally vital (Rappaport 1999, 234)

Seen from this point of view, rituals can indeed do without any specific meaning, but this in itself is not meaningless, that is, without significance.

8.2 The Cognitive Sciences Approach

The first indication of the meaninglessness of rituals lies in a similarity between human ritual actions and animal behavior. Since animals repeat certain actions stereotypically—that is, without consciously knowing what they are doing—some forms of human action have also been considered more or less genetically or evolutionarily fixed.[11] However, since the ethologists—scientists studying animal behavior—are, more or less, prevented from raising questions of meaning by their biological and evolutionary paradigms, those who did extend these paradigms to the analysis of human rituals were unable to address the issue of cultural meaning in ritual, to say nothing of the even more complicated question of cultural variability and historical change in the meaning of rituals. In short, ethologist theories of ritual generally fail to explain the cultural differences in rituals.

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11. Huxley 1966; Lorenz 1966; d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus 1979.

The reasons in cultural studies for the perseverance of the ritual, as I have attempted in the previous chapters to describe them, must then perhaps be extended, or rather confirmed, by other, "newer" sciences of humanity. For, "if in contrast to the infinite variety of ritual contents, the ritual form is universal, then it is plausible to assume that the metamessages intrinsic to that form are also universal" (Rappaport 1999, 31). At any rate, quite a number of questions arise from the comprehensive material that has been produced by ritual research over the last few decades—questions, which are addressed to neuropsychophysiology and neurobiology. In the following, I will—as a layman—attempt to formulate some of these questions without pretending to have any valid answers to them.[12]

Ritual and Cognition

Can the proposition that rituals form a distinct mode of action, in which intentionality has been suppressed for the most part, be supported? Can this lead to modal forms of consciousness? It is noticeable that, in ritual, it is more a matter of carrying out some action correctly, rather than asking why it is carried out. As we have seen in the previous section, rituals have been described as "pure activity" (Staal 1979a, 1987), often meaningless, or having not just one meaning. This does not entail that rituals are not made without any motives. It is only remarkable that the individual motives of the ritual participants can differ, without this having any great effect on the execution of the ritual. At a confirmation, the confirmand thinks differently than does his or her parents, or siblings, or the priest. Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (1994) distinguish here between "nonintentionality" and "unintentionality." The confirmand undergoes the blessing because his or her parents wish this, or because everyone does it, or in expectation of the gifts to follow. The priest is happy to have a new member of the congregation and the parents are happy that their offspring is growing up. Whitehouse (2004) speaks of an "autopilot" often being switched on in rituals, which primarily draws on procedural memory. In fact, in these actions, the cognitive part is often suppressed, and it is more a matter of carrying out some action correctly, rather than asking why it is carried out. Rituals are

12. After initial attempts by Huxley (1966) and d'Aquili, Laughlin, and McManus (1979), it has been especially Lawson and McCauley (1990), Boyer (1993, 1994), McCauley and Lawson (2002), Argyle (2002), Andresen (2001), Whitehouse (1995, 2000, 2004), Whitehouse and McCauley (2005), and Alcorta and Sosis (2005), who have revived the discussion.

effective, it is said, even when one does not believe in them, as in the famous anecdote about Niels Bohr (1885–1962). As a journalist saw a rusty horseshoe hung up over the entrance to Bohr's holiday house, he asked Bohr how, as a physicist and Nobel prizewinner, he could be so superstitious. Bohr answered that he naturally did not believe it, but that he had been told that the horseshoe was effective even if one did not believe in it. Similar to the anecdote of Marie de Vichy-Chamrond, better known as Marquise du Deffand (1697–1780), a French hostess and patron of the arts who, when asked, "Do you believe in ghosts?" replied: "No, but I am afraid of them," many people, when asked, "Do you believe in rituals?" would answer: "No, but I practice them."

While the "ritual morphology" remains largely on the surface and in the realm of phenomenology, the search for connections within the ritual elements leads almost inevitably to a deep structure, assuming that there is a universal mode of action for rituals (cf. Meshel 2014, 205). Evidence for such a deep structure could be produced empirically, such as by developmental studies with children and youngsters, or by transcultural comparisons.

This work can already be seen in its inception, albeit only on a very small scale. Children start at age two to engage in a ritualistic behavior, which includes "perfectionism, attachment to favorite objects, concerns about dirt and cleanliness, pre-occupation with just-right ordering of objects, preferred household routines" (Liénard and Boyer 2006, 819), and this is regarded as part of their normal psychological development (Leonard et al. 1990). However, the psychologist Melanie Gail Jacobs, for instance, showed in her dissertation in 2005 that only on attaining school age are children able to understand rituals as rituals, and to regard it as necessary to perform their like in certain situations. For this, they must have a grasp of authority, age, and causality. Likewise, Lawson and McCauley assume an intuitive competence, an implicit or "tacit knowledge" for the ability to recognize rituals as such:

> Although this knowledge for some individuals may prove to be exclusively tacit, they demonstrate their knowledge, nonetheless, through their intuitions about the form of rituals and their successful participation in them. Participants in rituals who are unable to formulate explicitly even a single rule that governs their ritual system still have many, if not most, of the requisite intuitions about ritual form. (Similarly, many native speakers cannot state even a single rule of their grammars.) (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 77)

This ritual competence, as I shall call it, is acquired during childhood without any explicit instructions, like a sense of tact. And the same applies to the acquisition of language and grammar (Lawson and McCauley 1990, 78).

Ritual and Ritualization

How do the embodiment and formality of rituals relate to ritualizations in the animal world, where they clearly represent a form of communication within and between species?[13] As it would appear, some of these ritualizations are ontogenetically conditioned, others (e.g., birdsong as a mating behavior) are learned and permit of individual variation. What freedom is there in ritualizations and rituals? How do the embodiment and formality of rituals relate to ritualizations in the animal world, where they clearly represent a form of communication and signal within and between species? This question engages ethologists and researchers of comparative behavior.

There are actions to be found in all human cultures, for example, which have been observed by behavioral scientists in animals: bowing to higher-ranking others, ornamenting oneself by way of advertisement, masking to fool others. From the point of view of evolutionary biology, such behaviors can thus be interpreted as acts of communication between actors and public, in which visual, olfactory, tactile, and acoustic signals are simultaneously used to impress members of one's own kind. The parallels between (animal) ritualizations and (human) rituals leads us to presume that communities form rituals in order to suppress, as far as possible, individual behaviors.

Rituals are ubiquitous, that is, to be found in all societies. But at the same time, *individual* rituals are not something that man does without, for history shows that they can be changed and abolished again and again. Must we, then, assume some inherited disposition to rituals—an ability that constantly seeks culturally different forms?

It is also unclear in exactly what way the formation of rituals represents or represented any sort of evolutionary advantage or adaptation. Did ritual lead to the formation of community? Is ritual part of some strategy of precaution or provision?

To a large extent, rituals draw on the procedural memory, which, being implicit knowledge, can only be made conscious up to a point. This implicit

13. Dugatkin 1997; Lorenz 1966; Rowe 1999.

"background knowledge" is important, but in this case, explicit knowledge is not. Clearly, rituals activate religious knowledge better than do language, texts, or images. In some unexplained way, agency is suppressed, or passed on to others. It would seem that *something* is imparted in rituals, more than the participants intend to. For example, the creator (or author) of rituals is generally not identified so that the share of Ego in what happens is obviously reduced. Who knows who it was that actually invented the Christmas tree or chains of lights at political demonstrations?

Ritual and Learning

Rituals speak to emotions (Argyle 2002). Often, it is a matter of staged emotions, which activate the limbic cortex, not accessible to cognition. The impulses of attention triggered by this obviously contribute to culturally important processes of learning. The frequent use of dancing and music in rituals doubtless has to do with neurophysiologically measurable effects: skin temperature, muscle tension, cardiovascular function, perspiration, expression of norephines, neuronal fueling of the amygdala, and so forth. Rituals charge things symbolically and emotionally (Alcorta and Sosis 2005). This creation of relaxation, joy, and even, sometimes, ecstasy, seems to be an essential part of certain rituals, just as the frequent use of drugs is. Might it be so, that ritual activates certain parts of the brain, thus increasing attentiveness and heightening mood or a feeling of community? Something similar could be asked of rituals that frighten and are negative (Michaels 1997b). Is the reduction of emotional complexity to be observed in ritual a strategy to ease the psyche? Clearly, rituals have an effect on a communal consciousness over generations, a kind of swarm behavior, that may conceal some evolutionary advantage. Of course, one can assume that, in such processes, a specific context exists, outside of the everyday, that brings people out of their usual patterns of behavior and thus creates emotions of a quite different quality. Whoever has experienced fear in a frightening ritual will meet the fear of a real danger in a different fashion. Only by means of this cultural forming can rituals apparently be transmitted culturally.

In addition, neuroscientific findings on the phenomenon of emotional "infection" suggest that rituals of transition in the life-cycle are connected in a fundamental way with biophysiological processes and instrumentalize these to enable individuals a socially and culturally defined passage of status. The Berlin ethnologist Birgitt Röttger-Rössler (2009), especially, has pointed this out. But the cultural specialist Christoph Wulf (2013) has repeatedly pointed out, too, how very much rituals engender imitation and mimesis.

Rituals are particularly frequent and important in adolescence. This observation would agree with the fact that the ability to carry out rituals in an imitative way is accompanied by the development of the prefrontal cortex. Dopamine inhibitory input to the prefrontal cortex is greatest during adolescence, promoting in-group cooperation. Do rituals measurably alter the expression of neurotransmitters and endocrine levels? Many rituals obviously serve to express emotion and to channel it. This is then a matter of staged feeling, which activates the limbic system in a special way. The emotion, which can be quite hefty, triggers impulses of attentiveness and contributes to culturally important processes of learning because, for example, this helps to activate religious knowledge more thoroughly and to retain it better than language, texts, or images. Rituals seem, too, to enable the cultural binding of emotion and thus to spread it over a wide area.

Brain researchers assume a basic sort of circuitry in the brain, in which there is a kind of genetically determined fundamental knowledge that expresses itself in innate patterns of behavior, among other things. But the environment and learning are needed to enable the individual to develop. As rituals are found everywhere and in every society, one must indeed assume an inherited predisposition to ritual—an ability that seeks culturally varying forms of expression.

A matter for investigation would also be how repeated physical learning relates to the internalization and storage of the matter learned in the episodic memory. Because repetition is important for memorizing and learning, one might also say "no ritual without memory."

With this, we have come to the fundamental question of how, actually, learning functions. What happens in the brain exactly, when we perceive a sensual impression again and again, or when we repeat a certain movement? In this instant, new sensual stimuli meet an experience that has already formed traces in the brain; this, at least, is suggested by neurobiological investigations by a research group in Heidelberg led by Hannah Moyer. These neuronal networks are reactivated in the brain, and at the same time, they are brought up to date, as it were. In repetition, the same cells are activated as before, but the stored memory is placed in a new context by the repetition. In this way, structural changes occur in the brain. One might speak of a dialectic relationship between constancy and plasticity at this point. The neuronal processing that accompanies repetition could represent the biological basis for a link between present, past, and future. For rituals, this means that new experiences can be connected to earlier ones—those of past generations as well—by the rituals, and they can be passed on to future generations, too.

Clearly, the idea that rituals are always the same old thing is a fiction. For cultural science specialists have also been able to show that rituals not only

renew but actually also provoke the new, in contrast to widespread ideas. It seems that man needs as much ritual as he is able to replace it with other guarantors of social and personal stability (among them new rituals). "Modern" man, too, needs more ritual than he is aware of and, perhaps, more than he would like.

Ritual and Angst

As Freud has already noticed, rituals are often concerned with fears of specific dangers such as pollution and diseases. Purification and healing rituals are therefore common. In obsessive-compulsive disorders (OCD), one often finds obsessions with thoughts about contamination and contagion (Liénard and Boyer 2006, 819). As Liénard and Boyer report, Alan Fiske and his colleagues have compared "hundreds of ritual sequences with descriptions of OCD cases . . . that show that the same themes recur over and over again" (ibid., 819f.).

> OCD-typical features that also enter into rituals include specific (lucky or unlucky) numbers, use of special colors, repetition of actions, measures to prevent harm, ordering and symmetry, stylized verbal expressions, washing, concern with contagion, and so forth (Fiske and Haslam 1997). Those thoughts and practices are "egodystonic" in personal rituals, perceived as unwanted, unpleasant, shameful, or irrational. *But the very same thoughts and practices are socially approved in collective rituals*. (Liénard and Boyer 2006, 820 [emphasis added])

Liénard and Boyer therefore suggest understanding ritual as a "specific system for dealing with potential danger in the brains of humans," and they regard rituals as part of a "hazard-precaution system" (ibid.). This might be true, but I would add that this precaution system has a lot to do with the invocation of superhuman powers that are expressed in the *religio* mode of rituals.

So we are back to the general question: why do humans practice (religious) rituals? The simple answer is: because they are scared and want to ensure they not have missed any possibility of preventing dangers. Indeed, history of religions shows that there are no religions without elaborate notions of angst. Already, the term *religio* means awe or angst of gods. But how closely are anxiety and religion related? And do rituals help to overcome this existential anxiety?

It is not any anxiety that concerns religions but a fear of the fragility of the world or another world for which one has to prepare. It is not the fear of spiders or bridges that matters in religions, but the fear of death, of one's finiteness or that everything is linked to this otherworldliness. Animals feel limbic

anxiety but do not imagine afterlife. For the same reason, it is debatable whether small children can have religion. "A child is immortal because it doesn't know anything about death," says the German poet Friedrich Hölderin in his epistolary novel *Hyperion* (1797). This does not mean that children do not fear anything, but it is cognitive anxiety, especially the fear of severe injustice, pollution, disease, or death, which is in the center of religions. And that is why children are often admitted to organized religions only after or in puberty, that is, after they have matured and can feel and express this anxiety.

Religion seems to be a reaction to this existential angst, and humans are religious because religions help alleviating this anxiety. They propagate fearlessness: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God" (Isaiyah 41:10). For Indian ascetics, the gift of fearlessness (*abhayadāna*) is one of the central elements in the *saṃnyāsa* ceremony, even if this state of fearlessness is feared by them (Slaje 1994). It is precisely the anthropological constant of anxiety that regards intrepidness and freedom from fear as signs of a nonhuman, divine status: "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Thus, shamans have to prove their fearlessness by ritual tests of courage, and in Nepal, girls who are selected to become the Kumārī goddess are led into a dark room with a head of sacrificed buffalo; if they are not scared, it is seen as one of thirty-two signs of their divine status.

Religions also scare humans ("Fear of the Lord"). They threaten with ancestors (the unsatisfied deceased), Satan, punishment, doomsday, purgatory, the end of the world, or apocalypses. They speak so often of these scaring things that critics of religion from early on reached at the reverse conclusion, that is, without religion, no angst. Enlightenment, modernity, and sciences declared the fear of diseases, epidemics, catastrophes, or ghosts as lack of control of nature, which let humans in earlier periods take refuge in religions and angst-reducing rituals (Russell 1957). For Feuerbach, Marx, and Freud, the three major modern critics of religion, liberation from religion and ritual was also liberation from fear and angst and the "illusion of religion," as Marx wrote at the end of his famous phrase, "religion is opium for the people."

It appears that anxiety is *the* topic of religions, and worship and rituals are their favored means to overcome it. However, it is by no means clear whether rituals help to ease anxiety. This popular theory, also propagated by Freud and Victor Turner (1985a), seems to explain why, in scaring situations such as life passages, rituals are especially frequent: they help to overcome the liminal and dangerous state of being "betwixt and between" (V. Turner 1967b). But rituals rarely help to alleviate anxiety; the theory of Malinowski (1925;

cf. Homans 1941) that fishing in lagoons among the Trobrianders did not afford many rituals, whereas dangerous deep sea fishing required differentiated magic rituals, so that one had to conclude that such rituals would help in reducing anxiety, was already refuted by Radcliffe-Brown (1945, 33–43).

The theory of Frits Staal (1979a, 1989) says that rituals do not reduce anxiety but are partly an expression of it. Staal did not deny that rituals might reduce anxiety, but this would only be a side effect. The ritual itself does not have this or any function. It is pure activity, a kind of psychomotoric reaction in certain situations. This remains an interesting thought. Walter Burkert (1983), too, sees the primacy of rituals against myth. Hunting rituals survived in the sacrifice because they generated fitness in survival situations. This does not mean that ritual behavior is instinctive behavior, but suggests that limbic anxiety contributed to the cognitive coping with anxiety. The performative part of such strategies, that is, rituals, underpins the biological primacy of anxiety. In other words, rituals and religions "need" anxiety more than anxiety "needs" rituals and religions. Without awe, no awestruck religiosity.

There are many studies on mental health and religion, fewer on anxiety and religion. Most studies are related to well-being, death anxiety, or anxiety disorders. A critical review of seventeen major psychological studies on religion and anxiety (Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein 2004) reveals the conceptual and methodological weakness of such questions and reveals problems of samples and psychometric properties. The crucial methodological problem seems to be that in such studies, anxiety and religiosity is basically stated by self-report. But the lack of a broadly accepted definition of religion also contributes to contradictory and hybrid findings. What do we mean by religion: organizational religiosity (church attendance), religious sentiments and feelings and behavior (prayer), or religious belief in god(s) or superhuman beings? Even if we were conservative and took "religion" as the belief in superhuman beings (Spiro 1966, 85–126) or ultimate reality (which excludes soccer as religion), we would not easily know how to operationalize tests on religiosity because we do not know whether somebody says or pretends to be religious. And how do we separate spirituality from religiosity, if not by a visible practice, for instance, ritual? However, the authors conclude:

> In summary, the findings from the previously reviewed studies suggested that church attendance was related to decreased anxiety for several populations. Several authors concluded that having some type of religious affiliation was related to lower anxiety levels, and contemplative prayer was associated with increased security and less distress.

> Finally, when religiosity was conceptualized as intrinsic or extrinsic, intrinsic religiosity was related to less worry and anxiety. (Shreve-Neiger and Edelstein 2004, 397)

Other studies show that higher religiosity might be more harmful and in fact increase anxiety. And there are many studies that reveal no significant relation between anxiety and religiosity. Thus, the poor or varied operationalization of the construct has led to a number of contradictory or mixed findings. It remains an open question how to measure anxiety and its "healing" through rituals. This is perhaps possible for clear mental disorders and clinical anxiety such as the Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale, but not for a generalized anxiety.

For me, the problem of identifying the relation between anxiety and religion remains the following: If people say "I am scared (or not scared) because I encountered God, and therefore I practice rituals," one must not doubt it. But without being religious, it is difficult to prove that it "really" was God (and not a malevolent ghost) or whatever. Catherine Clément and Sudhir Kakar (1993, cf. Kakar 1992) demonstrated how culturally specific and gender specific religious behavior can be: at the end of the nineteenth century, Madeleine Le Bouc showed sever anxious mystic experiences, which were externally almost identical with what Ramakrishna experienced in Bengal. However, while Mme Le Bouc was hospitalized in a lunatics hospital, Ramakrishna was revered as a holy man. The proof that both were feeling anxiety can be seen by psychophysical body reactions (sweat, shivering, open eyes, tears, etc.), but from outside, one cannot differentiate between somebody who is full of fear because his wife left him or because he encountered god.

We now reach a point where we have to say that anxiety and religion are interrelated but not interdependent. In fact, we often come across a modern form of anxiety that does not have religious connotations. The fear of the end of the world and apocalyptic visions are all-pervasive: the destruction of nature, nuclear or climatic catastrophes, AIDS and new epidemic diseases, and terrorism. Is this anxiety another form of Ur-angst (primal fear) that comes in a previously religious but now secular way? As it seems, religious explanations for such scaring developments in humankind diminish. Psychotherapists rather than priests help to overcome such anxieties.

In a religious context, relief from anxiety is related to the afterworld. It is therefore also connected to mortality. But Auschwitz, Stalingrad, Hiroshima, and Fukushima have radically brought into question the trust in Enlightenment, reason, and the promise of salvation of modernity. Modern anxiety has become a basic feeling that does not necessarily need religion but perhaps

still needs rituals. Anxiety has become the prevailing mood in modernity. What began with Soren Kierkegaard (1844), the philosopher of angst, becomes with Martin Heidegger (1929) an all pervasive concern or worry (German "Sorge"), or with Jean Paul Sartre anxiety as freedom of Nothing ("Freiheit zum Nichts"), a kind of existential angst or disgust (French "degouté") that one has to accept.

In an empirical sense, anxiety is a psychophysical reaction to real or expected threat. The neurovegetative expressions of this anxiety are similar in all cultures: higher pulse, change of motoric behavior (apathy or hyperactivity), a feeling of constriction (cf. Greek *ἄνγός*), dizziness, nausea, perspiration, breathlessness, sleep disorder, breathing and swallowing difficulties, palpitations, irritability, and faintness, etc.). All of this is caused by a vegetative and neuroendocrinal activation and neurochemical mechanisms, for instance, neurotransmitter and neurohormones. Depression, phobias, and obsessions are common complications.

Yet these reactions are culturally and individually different. What in one culture can normally lead to restricted behavior and silence in another can lead to overt mourning and screaming. The generally calm reactions after the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011 are the most striking examples of this cultural difference. Whether such reactions are abnormal or pathological depends on culture. However, there is no doubt that anxiety is related to certain brain regions, especially the limbic system, that is, the mediobasal temporal lobe including amygdala and hippocampus. These, in an evolutionary sense, very old regions (see below) can also become pathologically hurt without psychological implications, but they mainly cause anxiety through neurotransmitter and neurohormones, which are related to the neocortex. This means that cognitive processes cause anxiety.

Problematic is the genetic factor. Although most scholars, based on clinical twin studies, assume that it exists with regard to pathological anxiety, definitions of anxiety depend on cultural implications. However, it seems that the percentage of at least pathological anxiety is almost the same throughout various cultures and societies (Günther and Hinterhuber 1979, 87).

Animals too are anxious. What differentiates humans from animals is that humans integrate the alarm system "anxiety" into cognitive processes so that they can imagine threat. I argue that this cognitive anxiety was one reason for the development of a broad system of precautionary measures that caused a unique evolution and diffusion of humans and religions over the world. Because humans learned to anticipate danger and threat, even in never-experienced situations, they developed a biological and psychological apparatus for survival. They could foresee dangers and try to avoid them.

They could use their hands for storing food in anticipated times of distress so that they must not use, as chimpanzees, two-thirds of their awake time for sustention searching. They could develop methods against diseases and floods, or invent arms and tools. They could become social beings in reaction to threats, or use dominance and submission for stabilizing groups. In short, they developed most sophisticated precaution systems. One such system is religion. However, they could not handle all sorts of danger. Rituals are an answer to this problem, a way to overcome anxiety that grows from these sorts of danger.

Thus, out of fear of punishment (by gods, ghosts, demons, or enemies) and existential anxiety, humans developed techniques of avoiding fears and anxiety, such as (ritualized) discipline and morality. Most theories of religion, from Freud to Durkheim, agree that religions imply control of egoistic behavior. Even Darwin (1966, 147) opined that through fear of punishment, humans realized that in the long run, it became more advantageous for them to estimate the common welfare higher than individual welfare. The evolutionary advantages of cognitive based anxiety and the related precautionary systems are therefore obvious.

By becoming cognitive, that is, ego-centered and linguistic, the objects of anxiety gain importance, but these too undergo selection processes. In Europe, few fear witches anymore. Ideas, methods, rituals, religious contents, or other cultural elements are constantly changing. In addition, in reaction to fears, various, at times competing, anxiety relief systems have been developed; in the West, these are presently pastoral theology and psychotherapy, or a religious and a scientific worldview. Moreover, contents of anxiety are less stable than anxiety disposition. There is no determined form of anxiety or Ur-angst, such as Freud's notion of patricide, but there are anxiety dispositions that are always culturally filled with new contents.

Konrad Lorenz opined that humans learned to handle primitive dangers but kept their anxiety potential and thus developed religion(s). What once was a wild animal became the projection of a ghost that now has to be destroyed in fantasy. For Lorenz, anxiety is an error of evolution, the blind gut of the soul. This position has been rightly criticized, for instance, through the proof that people developed fear of ghosts in areas where there were no beasts of prey. However, it remains possible that certain memes nest in brain regions that are cognitively not or hardly reachable. According to Turner (1985b, 275–89), this would be a rehabilitation of Carl Jung's archetypes. Here we have it again: the theory of the primacy or genetic potential of anxiety that brings forth religion with its various objects of anxiety.

In detail, many problems regarding the relationship between anxiety and religion(s) and the cognitive-emotional interrelations in the neuronal spheres

continue to be unsolved. Why do humans fear "instinctively" and from early childhood loud noises, large objects, or fire even before they have experienced the dangers of these? Why are infants normally full of fear when they see snakes without even knowing or ever having seen this animal? Why do humans fear flying more than driving cars even though—cognitively or "rationally"—it should be the opposite? Why is the heaven imagined above and not, for instance, in the earth (which is the paradise for the rainworm)? It seems there is a lot of intrinsic anxiety nested in the limbic system that drives our behavior in an irrational way. Rituals might partly belong to this sphere.

Evolutionarily seen, the limbic system belongs to the oldest regions of the brain that only in humans have been integrated into higher psychic functions. Phylogenetically anthropoids are different from other vertebrates mainly by the development of the neocortex. But the limbic system developed from the palaeocortex and archicortex, which makes for the major part of the brain cortex in lower mammals and to which the amygdala and hippocampus belong.

> By this evolutionary stage, the primitive mammalian, the major emotions, fear and anger, have emerged, together with their associated behavioral responses of flight or fight. . . . An animal deprived of its cerebral cortex can still find its way about, feed itself, slake its thirst, and avoid painful stimuli, but it has difficulty in attributing function or "meaning" to things: a natural predator will be noticed, for example, but not apparently perceived as a threat. Thus, accurate perception and the attribution of meaning evidently require the presence of the cerebral hemispheres. (Stevens 1982, 264, quoted in Turner 1985a, 256).

To be sure, animals, too, show anxiety—and not only fear of hunger or enemies. It can also be a "social" fear of being lost or separated from the pride. Apparently, such fears can also be learned or experienced in dreams. And there are animals within the same species that learned to be more anxious than others. Every chicken-hearted dog that has been beaten too often shows this. However, animals are anxious without believing in gods. Otherwise, one would have to concede that animals too have religions, which Darwin (1966, 10) was ready to concede with regard to his dog. But it is an anthropocentric construct to insinuate animals have religion(s). For not only anxiety is needed for religion but also the knowledge of anxiety, and then rituals can be designed.

Thus, the cognitive confrontation with the unknown (danger) and the indefinite, or the possibility of the imagination of a superior other defines a situation in which anxiety is the elementary form of existential orientation. To cope with this existential anxiety, humans developed precautionary

systems in which the unknown is substituted by the known, the strange by the intimate, the inexpressible by the word or myth, the undoable by ritual. In other words, humans are religious because they have not solved the perhaps unfathomable problem of anxiety.

Coda

The silverfish (*Lepisma saccharina*) belongs to the eldest animals. It has existed for 300 million or perhaps 400 million years, long before humans. It is so afraid that one rarely sees it. According to all we know, it has never developed religion or rituals, but, among other things, it likes to eat books and probably will continue to do so for as long as humans write books in which they ask questions such as "Why do humans need (religious) rituals?"

9

The Pūrvamīmāṃsā Theory of Ritual Efficacy

"ROBERTSON SMITH IS said to have given modern anthropology its first comprehensive theory of ritual. . . . But Smith was hardly the first to think critically and comprehensively about ritual" (Grimes 2013, 6). Indeed. India has brought to light an ancient, unique, and complex theory of ritual, the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, that is unparalleled in the premodern history of ritual studies. It is a theory in its broadest sense, because it entails generalized, abstract, rational, and logical thinking as well as a special vocabulary. It wants to find out how rituals work and determine the rules that make them work.[1]

Unfortunately, this theory has not yet been sufficiently described and analyzed, and therefore has not received the attention in religious studies that it deserves. The Pūrvamīmāṃsā, which contains many categories that have already been important in the previous chapters of the present book, is generally ascribed to the author Jaimini (ca. third century BCE) who (probably together with other authors) composed the basic *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* (MS) or *Mīmāṃsadarśana* text, containing roughly 2,700 aphorisms or *sūtras* in twelve chapters that are concerned with the nature of Vedic injunctions regarding the practice of sacrifice.[2] However, Pūrvamīmāṃsā neither offers a

1. For ritual as a craft, see Grimes (2013).

2. Chapters 1–6 deal with the instructions (*upadeśa*) for the performance of the sacrifice, Chapters 7–8 with the transfer or extended application (*atideśa*), and Chapter 9 with modifications (*ūha*). Chapter 10 (*bādha*) discusses which parts of the archetype sacrifice can be suspended. Chapter 11 (*tantra*) concerns the question of the individual or joint benefit of rituals (e.g., the ritual lamp [*dīpa*]) that is seen by many. Chapter 12 (*prasaṅga*) deals with the performance of subordinate parts done originally for the benefit of one primary ritual, but then for other primary rituals as well (like a big lantern at a palace sheds light on public roads as well).

full description of any ritual (Benson 2010, 31), nor could rituals be reconstructed from the Pūrvamīmāṃsā texts.

The primary concern of Jaimini is the nature of *dharma* and the function of ritual for realizing the *dharma*. In analyzing this relationship, Jaimini and his commentators or successors, that is, the followers of the Mīmāṃsā system, the Mīmāṃsakas, have dealt with a number of problems related to exegesis, hermeneutics, meaning, language philosophy, and perception, which will be of little interest to us here. Instead, I will try to focus on the ritual aspects of Jaimini, who regards the correct performance of the Vedic ritual as the only way to attain heaven and well-being. Thus, the MS is "the codification of rules about texts which in turn are about rituals which reach toward the absolute" (Clooney 1990, 21 following Garge 1952).

The system is called *mīmāṃsā* (lit. "reflection, examination, investigation") because it is a system of hermeneutics (which later also became important for the interpretation of Hindu law; cf. Francavilla 2006); it is also a pragmatic and logical apparatus to account for Vedic rituals and a systematic approach using analysis, characterization, correlation, and generalizations with a high level of abstraction and supra-mundane assumptions. Mīmāṃsā became one of the six classical systems in Indian philosophy. Tradition distinguishes between Pūrvamīmāṃsā ("first investigation") or Karmamīmāṃsā ("investigation into ritual action"), and Uttaramīmāṃsā ("posterior investigation") or Brahma-Mīmāṃsā, which is better known as Vedānta. This difference is based on the distinction between a ritualistic and a spiritual approach to the Veda. While the former approach concentrates on the practice of Vedic rituals (*karmakāṇḍa*), the latter deals with the spiritual and epistemological parts of the Veda (*jñānakāṇḍa*), especially with the knowledge of the Absolute (*brahman*) as described in the Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads.

The *sūtras* of Jaimini, who had his predecessors, are extremely short, elliptic, and difficult to understand. Out of the twelve chapters of the MS, the first has received the most attention because it deals with philosophical problems. Until now, it was almost only Francis X. Clooney (1990) who studied the MS without much referring to the main commentary of Śabara (third century CE) on which most Mīmāṃsā studies and later commentators rely. Among them, Kumārila Bhaṭṭa (seventh century CE?), Maṇḍana Miśra (eighth century CE), and Prabhākara (eighth century CE) are the most prominent.

Jaimini's ritual theory is not philosophy. Nor is it a theory for salvation: "Mīmāṃsā deals with dharma, not with mokṣa" (Halbfass 1992, 301). It is a science of ritual with philosophical implications. It is also not a religious system since it denies the influence of gods. For Jaimini, deities (*devatā*) are

mostly "names required for the dedication (*uddeśa*) intrinsic to sacrifice" (Clooney 1990, 237, referring to Indologist Madeleine Biardeau).[3]

The idea of Jaimini is that *dharma* is neither accessible to perception nor to reason. The Veda has its own authority; it is eternal and not of human origin (*apauruṣeya*). The sacrifice prescribed by the Veda is a closed system, which has its own efficacy similar to the sacraments in Christianity, which, according to some theologians, function *ex opere operato*, that is, independent of the character, merits, or capacities of the priests, sacrificers, and participants.

The intention of Jaimini is to explain the causality of the Vedic ritual. He develops a universalistic theory, repudiating the various schools and opinions mentioned in the Brāhmaṇas. He unfolds a rational hermeneutic method with a precise analysis of language and texts (see McCrea 2000), in which argument and objection are always competing until a coherent solution is found or given.

The Pūrvamīmāṃsā had been developed at a time when agnostic and Buddhist criticism of the Vedic ritual emerged, although it was mainly Śabara (ca. fifth century CE) who expounded the epistemological ideas of the MS. This text must therefore be seen as a kind of restoration of the Veda, trying to strengthen tradition, belief, and ritual at "a time when the whole religious and sacrificial system of the Brahmins still was in a comparatively unsettled and floating condition" (Thibaut 1882, ii). The Brāhmaṇa texts had been somewhat unsystematic and full of mystical significance, so that the sacrificing priest could only partially know how to practice the various rituals. From this results the chiefly practical character of the Pūrvamīmāṃsā and "the systematical analysis of that part of the Veda which refers to action, preeminently sacrificial action, the so-called Karmakāṇḍa" (Thibaut 1882, iii).

Given this situation, many ritualistic problems had to be clarified: the sequence of ritual episodes, the right to perform the ritual, the efficacy of the ritual, the role of mantras, how to deal with variations and abbreviations, the relation of Veda and the everyday, the hierarchy of rituals, and so on. In the following, I will concentrate on some of these aspects, trying to work out what one could perhaps call a very basic Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of ritual, although there is no homogeneous Pūrvamīmāṃsā system.[4] It may be called "theory," because the MS develops meta-rules (*paribhāṣā*) that are logical,

3. Later, Mīmāṃsakas objected that *apūrva* (see below) could not be the factor that of itself bestows the result or rewards of the sacrifice. Instead, they said that *apūrva* is finally caused by the deity addressed in the sacrifice.

4. I am grateful to Anand Mishra and the students who participated in a workshop and a seminar of the topic. Special thanks go to John Taber for his critical comments on and significant improvement of this section.

abstract, and context-free, which are necessary when there are no direct injunctions. I largely rely on Laugākṣībhāskara (eighteenth century?) and his *Arthasaṃgraha* (AS); Laugākṣībhāskara does not, as other Mīmāṃsakas, want to take an independent position, but intends just to explain the system to Mīmāṃsaka students.[5] I also use Thibaut's clear introduction to this text and Francis Clooney's impressive study *Thinking Ritually* (1990).

1. The absolute authority of the Veda expounds *dharma*.[6] The starting point for the Pūrvamīmāṃsā is the Veda, the revelation that is—more or less dogmatically—declared as absolute and eternal (*nitya*), so that it cannot be doubted or questioned by anybody. Dharma is defined by MS 1.1.2 simply as "a purpose indicated by a [Vedic] injunction" (*codanālakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmaḥ*). Śabara interprets *"purpose"* as what "connects a person with the highest good" (*tayā* [*codanayā*] *yo lakṣyate so' rthaḥ puruṣaṃ niḥśreyasena saṃyunakti*). He does not define "highest good," but he probably did not consider it to be liberation. Traditionally (e.g., in *Mahābhārata*), Vedic ritualists are represented as holding "heaven" (*svarga*) to be the ultimate goal.[7]

> Therefore the *dharma* has to be investigated, because it helps man to the highest good. (Śabara on MS 1.1.1)[8]

This dogmatic position with regard to the Veda is based on the assumption that the ritual must not be changed but repeated in the same way as ever. Ritual is of nonhuman origin, and through this fact, it is related to some unseen transcending result. However, the sacrifice and its result are not necessarily located in a transcendental sphere. For Jaimini, "words mean the same in the Veda as they do in ordinary speech" (Clooney 1990, 132), and "the Vedic arranges the ordinary in a particular way for an extraordinary reason" (ibid., 134).

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5. The AS, however, uses a lot of the systematization and terminology of the post-Śabara Pūrvamīmāṃsā; it is not a summary of MS.

6. The *dharma* of the Pūrvamīmāṃsā has little in common with the *dharma* of later periods or the *dharma* of Buddhists and Jainas. It is a rather complex term, as Clooney (1990, chap. IV et passim) has convincingly demonstrated.

7. Śabara, however, accepts the view already established in Mīmāṃsā circles that heaven is not a particular place but simply delight or happiness (*prīti*), without defining that further.

8. *tasmād dharmo jijñasitavya. sa hi niḥśreyasena puruṣaṃ saṃyunakti.*

2. What specifically connects one with the highest good is sacrifice (*yāga*) or ritual; so *dharma*[9] is equated with sacrifice. This is clearly stated in the *Arthasaṃgraha*:

> Now, if it is asked "What is the *dharma*? What is its characteristics?," (the answer is): "Only sacrifices etc." (and) "That is the *dharma* which is enjoined by the Veda and which has a clear purpose." (AS, p. 1)[10]

Yāga or sacrifice is then defined as an action enjoined on a person who wants to attain heaven, because heaven guarantees the fulfillment of all desired fruits.

Jaimini argues that what must be done—*dharma*—can neither be decided by perception nor by reasoning. In this context, Śabara—drawing from an earlier author, to whom he refers simply as "the Commentator" (Vṛttikāra)—discusses at length other sources of knowledge (*pramāṇa*): perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), language or verbal testimony (*śabda*), analogy (*upamāna*), necessary presumption (*arthāpatti*), and nonrecognition (*anupalabdhi*). (This systematization of the sources of knowledge or epistemology was more or less taken over by the Vedānta; it was disputed, however, by other schools of Indian philosophy.) The main reason perception is refuted as a means of knowing *dharma* is the belief that it can only apprehend existing objects but not the supernatural or transcendental results (*apūrva*) that *dharma* produces. The other *pramāṇa*s are then disqualified because they are based in one way or another on perception (cf. Taber 2005).

However, there are other sources of the *dharma* than the Vedic injunctions, for instance, *smṛti* (specifically, the *dharmaśāstra*s) or the conduct of the "good" (*sadācāra*) (i.e., those learned and practiced in the Veda), and much of the first chapter of the MS contains a discussion of the admissibility of these sources. Śabara *ad* MS 1.3.1, for instance, finds many injunctions in the *smṛtis*, such as constructing water reservoirs or going behind a teacher, which show

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9. Cf. Śabara *ad* MS 1.1.2. He specifically cites ṚV 10.9.16: "The gods offered a sacrifice by means of a sacrifice; these were the first *dharma*s." Jaimini speaks mostly of sacrifices, but for my purpose of comparing the Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of ritual with general ritual theories, I have, in the following, often changed "sacrifice" into "ritual."

10. *atha ko dharmaḥ kiṃ tasya lakṣaṇam iti ced ucyate. yāgādir eva dharmaḥ. tallakṣaṇaṃ vedapratipādyaḥ prayojanavad artho dharma iti* (AS p.1). Laugākṣībhāskara explains *yāgādi* with recitation (*japa*), austerity (*tapas*), gift (*dāna*), etc.

a visible result (*dṛṣṭārtha*), but they are not *dharma*-ful exactly because of this reason. Dharma itself must have an invisible purpose (*adṛṣṭārtha*).

According to Jaimini, if *dharma* could be grasped by perceptual knowledge or by reasoning, it would be connected to the human sphere that might be erroneous and limited, in the sense of being defective through the existence of death. Therefore, only the injunctions of the Veda, which are not composed by any human (*apauruṣeyatva*), can be the sources of any knowledge of *dharma*. For Jaimini, the Veda is neither created by gods nor the eponymic seers (*ṛṣi*). For him, the words themselves are authoritative; the relation between words and their meanings is natural and eternal, but not conventional. Jaimini wanted "[to] show that ritual and the Vedic word form a single, original and indivisible whole, which remains obligatory whatever the 'contemporary man' of the first centuries B.C.E. might have thought about it" (Clooney 1990, 24).

As a consequence, the intelligibility of the Veda, and through this revelation the sacrifice, was located "in the sacrificial event itself and not in the human person" (ibid., 164). The ritual became a closed entity, leaving no room outside of the ritual for those who wanted to reach heaven or any other goal. Within the MS, there are several objections to this view. For instance, it has been said (by the *pūrvapakṣin* or argumentative opponent) that the Veda mentions the names of "authors," the seers. Jaimini, however, responds that "the *ṛṣis* only expound the Veda, but their speech is not creative: there is nothing 'behind' it but the ever existent relationship of word-purpose-action, which can utilize any and all human agents as tools" (Clooney 1990, 168).

Another objection is that there are different Vedic schools and editions of the Saṃhitās, which shows that the Veda might yet have a human origin, but Jaimini also rejects this argument by stating that there is unity in such and other differences (*karmabheda*, see also below, no. 7). He declares these differences to be branches (*śākhā*, also the word for Vedic schools) of a single tree, that is, the differences follow the one sacrifice but do not preceed it. In other words, the Darśapūrṇamāsa or Jyotiṣṭoma always remain the same, no matter how differently they are performed or described. Whether the ritual is enacted at different times, places, or by other persons does not matter, because it always remains the "same" ritual.

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11. According to Clooney (1990, 138), *codanā* is more related to the Vedic injunctions and the injunctive force behind the arrangement, whereas *vidhi* is more related to the concrete performance of a ritual, which can also be a worldly ritual.

3. The sacrifice/ritual needs injunctions (*vidhi, codanā*[11]). For the Mīmāṃsakas, the most important of five kinds of Vedic statements are the injunctions, which predate the actions.[12] As mentioned above, for Jaimini, *dharma* is seen as a purpose (*artha*) that is justified or even prescribed through the Vedic injunctions (*codanā-lakṣaṇa*):

> The *dharma* is something useful indicated by an injunction. (MS 1.1.2)[13]

Injunctions are defined as words that cause action:

> "Injunction" is called a verbal expression that enjoins one to actions. (MSBh *ad* 1.1.2)[14]

The necessity to act is given through the verbal form, that is, the optative or imperative, as in the paradigmatic sentence, *svargakāmo yajeta* ("He who desires heaven must sacrifice"). This also means that any sacrificial activity requires Vedic injunctions. The imperative is given through the Veda, but not, as in common language, through a command spoken by a human. As later Mīmāṃsakas elaborated (Freschi 2012, 21), the injunction is defined as the exhortative meaning of an action given through its grammatical structure.[15]

Since there are innumerable injunctions in the Veda, one has to distinguish between several forms of *vidhis*. According to Laugākṣibhāskara, one has to distinguish primary or originative injunctions (*utpattividdhi*), which are independent of other injunctions, and secondary injunctions (*viniyogavidhi*), which are dependent on *utpattividhis*. The question of the relationship between these actions forms the major part of the MS and entails problems of ritual procedure (*krama*), hierarchy and succession of acts, the dependency of ritual elements, or the question of which ritual forms a model for others (*prakṛti-vikṛti*).

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12. *codanā punar ārambhaḥ*. (MS 1.1.5). The other statements are mantras, names (*nāmadheya*), prohibitions (*niṣedha*), and explanatory passages (*arthavāda*).

13. *codanalakṣaṇo 'rtho dharmaḥ*.

14. *codanā iti krīyāyāḥ pravartakaṃ vacanam āhuḥ*.

15. In Paṇineian terms: morpheme + *liṅ* (optative), *loṭ* (imperative), *leṭ* (subjunctive), or *tavya* (gerundive). Even though sometimes the indicative mood is also used in exhortative function, the basic form of the verbs in the Mīmāṃsā is not indicative of affirmative, but *liṅādi*.

Thus, if the *utpattividhi* is the injunction *agnihotraṃ juhoti* ("he has to perform the *agnihotra*-oblation"), the injunction *dadhnā juhoti* ("he has to sacrifice with sour-milk") forms an act that is subsidiary (*aṅga*) to the main (*pradhāna*) injunction *agnihotram juhoti*; it is thus a *viniyogavidhi*. Sometimes, no purposes are given for the *viniyogavidhis*, and these are then valid from the *utpattividhi*.

Furthermore, one has to differentiate between injunctions of performance (*prayogavidhi*) and injunctions of agency (*adhikāravidhi*). The former concerns the order of the ritual performance, the latter the question of who will benefit or receive the fruits of the sacrifice. The standard example for the *prayogavidhi* is the sentence, *vedaṃ kṛtvā vediṃ karoti* ("Having prepared the bundle of grass, he prepares the *vedi*" [altar]), which indicates that there is a prescribed order for ritual actions. The paradigmatic phrase for the *adhikāravidhi* is *yajeta svargakāmāḥ* (though it was nowhere found in the Veda), indicating that the ritual patron and not, for example, the performing priest, will be the one to enjoy the fruits of the ritual.

4. The effect of an injunction is created through some "motivation (to act)" or the activity that brings something into existence (*bhāvanā*, lit. "causing to be"). There are two steps of action designed after the sender (*bhāvayitṛ*) and receiver (*bhāvitṛ*) model.[16] First comes the activation of the intention, for example, the injunction. This is sent to the receiver, that is, the hearer of the injunction. If it corresponds, *bhāvanā* or motivation is created. This is first a creation of intention (*śābdībhāvanā*), which, as a result (*sādhya*), will lead to the will to act (*ārthībhāvanā*), looking for the appropriate instruments (*sādhana*). Thus, the *śābdībhāvanā* vested in the optative ending produces action in the sacrificer. That action (the *arthībhāvanā*) in turn brings about the sacrifice. The knowledge of what is to be done (*liṅgādijñāna*) then brings the "special mode of procedure" (*itikartavyatā*, lit. "Thus-should-be-done-ness") into existence. This is supported by glorificatory passages (*stuti*), and so forth, of the Veda. The injunction, "He who desires heaven through the *jyotiṣṭoma* ritual, must sacrifice," is rendered more desirable by the passage, "Where there is no extreme heat nor extreme cold nor any suffering" (*yasminnoṣnaṃ na śītam nārtiḥ*), describing the pleasures of heaven. The will to act (*ārthībhāvanā*), finally, leads to the ritual action, for instance, the sacrifice (*yāga*) and its components. The difference between an optative form (*liṅ*) used in ordinary language and

16. On the relation between.

the same used in the Veda is that the Vedic injunction does not have any human agent who instigates the action; it is simply the eternal word of the Veda that causes it. The word—says Jaimini (MS 1.1.29)—is prior to its usage (*śabdapūrvatvam*).

However, the relationship between word and action is more complicated than the view of Laugākṣībhāskara in his *Arthasaṃgraha*. This has been clearly exposed by Lawrence McCrea who is to cited here *in extenso*:

> Consider, for example, a typical Vedic injunction: "One who desires heaven should sacrifice with the Jytiṣṭoma" (*jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeta*). What is it that it to be brought into being by the action enjoined in this sentence? It might be at first seem as if it is only the sacrificial performance that is to be brought into being; it is, after all, the verbal root denoting sacrifice (√*yaj*) to which the optative (injunctive) suffix *-eta*, the element expressive of *bhāvanā*, is appended. But this will not do. If the injunction is to function properly (i.e. if it is to motivate its hearers to action), then the ultimate object to be achieved by its performance must be something desirable in itself. The only element in the sentence suitable for this role is heaven (*svarga-*); thus we must understand attainment of heaven to be the ultimate result of this sacrificial performance. People will undertake sacrificial action (or any action at all, for that matter), only if they can expect to accomplish some desirable result by doing so. If the thing to be brought into being by the performance of this Vedic injunction were merely the sacrificial act itself, no one would be prompted to action by it; the injunction would then serve no purpose whatsoever. The injunction will be purposeful only if we understand the sacrifice to be capable of satisfying the stated desire of the sacrificer; thus in the sentence, "One who desires heaven should sacrifice with the Jyotiṣṭoma," the object of the *bhāvanā*, the thing to be brought into being, must be heaven, understood as the ultimate result of the sacrifice here enjoined.
>
> Thus, The sacrificial performance itself, expressed by both the verbal root *yaj* ("sacrifice") and the word *jyotiṣṭoma* (the proper name of a particular sacrifice), must be understood as fulfilling the second "need" generated by the *bhāvanā*, that of a means or instrument by which the result can be brought into being. Thus the injunction, "One who desires heaven should sacrifice with the Jyotiṣṭoma," properly analyzed, can be restated as follows, "One should bring heaven into being by means of the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice" (*jyotiṣṭomena yāgena*

> *svargaṃ bhāvayet*). There is nothing in the sentence itself to fulfill the third need generated by the *bhāvanā*, that of a specific set of procedures to be followed in order to bring about the intended result. We know that we are to perform the Jyotiṣṭoma sacrifice in order to attain heaven, but we do not know yet precisely what is entailed by the performance of this sacrifice. For this information, we must turn to the sentences surrounding this primary injunction, sentences which will specify the preparation and offering of various sacrificial materials, the deities to which these materials are to be offered, the ritual formulas (*mantras*) to be recited in the course of these offerings, and so on. It is only when all three "needs" of the *bhāvanā* have been filled in this way that the Vedic injunction becomes fully comprehensible and, thus, performable. (McCrea 2000, 435–36)

5. Now to the relationship of the whole or primary (*pradhāna, mukhya*) ritual and its parts or secondary (*guṇa*), subsidiary (*aṅga*), or accessory (*śeṣa*) elements.[17] Rituals are composed of elements, which are structured according to rules concerning, for instance, the sequence of ritual acts. Since sometimes the descriptions of sacrifices in the Veda are interrupted by other sections, or through the separation of acts and mantras accompanying the acts, such problems of sequence, variation (or modification), and hierarchy of ritual elements have intensively engaged the Mīmāṃsakas. It is stated, for instance, that there is a precedence of mantra versus Brāhmaṇa portions in the Veda (cf. Thibaut 1882, v), or archetype and subordinate ektype rituals are distinguished (see below), or actions without "fruits" (*phala*), that is, results, are subordinate to actions with results (Clooney 1990, 165).

Above (no. 3), we have already seen the distinction between primary, or originative injunctions (*utpattividhi*) and secondary, or dependent injunctions (*viniyogavidhi*). The number of these often very simple *utpattividhis* in the Veda, for instance, *agnihotram juhoti*, is limited; the relationship of the other injunctions to them creates a hierarchy. The *viniyogavidhis* are, in fact, "injunctions of application by means of which all the actions and things subsidiary to a certain sacrifice (the so called aṅgas or members of the sacrifice) are intimated" (Thibaut 1882, ix). Consequently, these injunctions are numerous. Thus, the *utpattividhi* "He has to perform the *agnihotra*(-oblation)" (*agnihotram juhoti*) is specified by the *viniyogavidhi* "He offers by means of

17. For further forms of relationship, see Clooney (1990, 101–14).

sour milk (to be poured in the sacrificial fire") (*dadhnā juhoti*). In this case, Laugākṣībhāskara says, the sour milk is subsidiary (*aṅga*) to the *agnihotra* oblation, also because of the instrumental case *dadhnā*, which shows that sour milk is the means through which the result is accomplished.

The interdependence of ritual elements is also given through the indication of the results of rituals in the primary injunctions (*utpattividhi*) and the lack of them in other injunctions. The example of the AS is the following: in the *utpattividhi* "Who wants to reach heaven must perform the New and Full Moon Sacrifices" (*darśapūrṇamāsābhyāṃ yajeta svargakāmaḥ*), five preparations or fore-sacrifices (*prayāja*) are implied, among them *samidh* ("firewood"). The sentence *samidho yajati* ("He (has to) sacrifice firewood"), however, must be a dependent injunction, since the effect of offering firewood only becomes clear through the *utpattividhi*. In other words, the *utpattividhi* needs extensions in the form of further injunctions, the *viniyogavidhi* needs higher-ranked clarifications as to the intended result of the action.

Basically, the subsidiarity of certain ritual elements—materials, preparatory and subsequent rites—is given by the fact that these are regarded as action without any result of their own, if they are not connected to primary rites. One can even say that sometimes an action is considered subsidiary because it has a visible result, for example, the washing of the cup. A primary action generally lacks a visible result, hence a transcendental result, an *apūrva*, must be assumed.[18]

The means to find out the hierarchy of the sacrifice/ritual are six means: direct statement in the Veda (*śruti*), power residing in the words (*liṅga*), sentence or syntactical connexion (*vākya*), interdependence (*prakaraṇa*), place (*sthāna*), and name (*sāmākhya*).

The way to find out the succession of the ritual elements is supplied by the injunctions of performance (*prayogavidhi*). Here again, the AS provides six means of proof: direct statement or Veda (*śruti*), sense or meaning (*artha*), textual recitation (*pāṭha*), position (*sthāna*), *mukhya* ("principal matter"), and *pravṛtti* ("procedure"). Their relationship is highly complex and can only be understood from examples.

According to the AS, the full structure of the Darśapūrṇamāsa sacrifice is therefore to be divided into five pre-sacrifices (*samidh, tanūpāt, iḍa, bahis, and svāhākāra*); the principle sacrifices (*mukhyā yāgāḥ* or *aṅgīyāgāḥ*), in which oblations, which consist of pieces of oblations (*puroḍāśa*), are offered to the principle deities Agni, Viṣṇu, Agnīṣoma, and Indravimṛdh; full oblations to

18. Different views of what constitutes an auxiliary (*śeṣa*) are given at MS 3.1.2–4.

the Viśvedevāḥ; and three after-sacrifices (*anuyājāḥ*) consisting of speckled ghee (*pṛṣadājya*).

6. Regarding interdependence of rituals according to the archetype and ectype structure (*prakṛti-vikṛti*), not only the relationship of the whole ritual and its parts had to be explained but also the interdependence of rituals. The Darśapūrṇamāsa rituals, for instance, function as the archetypal *iṣṭi* and animal sacrifices (*paśubandha*), and the Jyotiṣṭoma ritual does so for the *soma* rites.

> Now we shall explain the *iṣṭis* in detail. Their basic procedure, following that of the Full and New Moon Sacrifices is pointed out once and for all.[19] (BaudhŚrS 13.1.1.—transl. Freschi and Pontillo 2013, 14)

This means that both rituals, which have been described at length in the Veda, serve as a model or archetype (*prakṛti, tantra*[20]) for less detailed described (ectypal) rituals (*vikṛti, prasaṅga*) and that, in the end, all other sacrifices are regarded as derivations from these two models.

7. Modification (*ūha, vikāra*) of Vedic injunctions and mantras is sometimes necessary. The Vedic texts are full of variations within the rituals. Thus, in one school, the cake is baked on eleven pans, in another on twelve pans.

Generally, Jaimini acknowledges six forms of differentiation of rituals (*karmabheda*, cf. Clooney 1990, 169–76): by word, repetition (*punarukti*) (this would not be necessary if variation in the repetition were not implied), number, name, materials, and context. However, he rejects, neglects, and downplays all of these differences, declaring that they do not matter and that the ritual act remains one only because there is no distinction (*viśeṣa*) in connection (*saṃyoga*) to the Veda, the basic form (*rūpa*) of the ritual, the wording and purpose of the injunction (*codanā*), and the name (*ākhyā*) of the ritual or sacrifice (MS 2.4.9; cf. Clooney 1990, 172). In other words, the authorizing text—for instance, *jyotiṣṭomena svargakāmo yajeta* (Jaimini *ad* MS 6.6.1)—and the basic form of its performance always remain the same (independent of the recensions); likewise, the injunction and the name "Jyotiṣṭoma."

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19. *athāta iṣṭīr vyākhyāsyāmaḥ. tāsāṃ sakṛt pradiṣṭam eva dārśapaurṇamāsikaṃ tantram [. . .].*

20. For the differences and analogies of *prakṛti-vikṛti* and *tantra-prasaṅga* see Freschi and Pontillo (2013) and Benson (2010, 766).

In some cases, however, it was unavoidable to change the mantras or the injunctions. This concerns offering material, the deities, time, place, or people. In MS 9.4.1–21, for instance, there is a discussion of whether the *adhrigu* mantra, in which twenty-six cuts of the sacrificial animal are mentioned, had to be adapted, that is, doubled, tripled, and so forth, if several animals are to be killed in the ectypal ritual. Occasionally, this was possible on the basis of analogy. Thus, according to MS 8.1.35, gold could be substituted by clarified butter, for both are brilliant (*tejas*). Honey and water offerings are declared to be modifications of the milk offering "because they share the similarity of being 'liquid'" (MS 8.1.40).

Jaimini's position is clearly in "favor of unity, arguing that the fact of variations in the *vidhi*, the overall order of a ritual in one or another school, does not indicate any fundamental difference in the rite. Such details alone cannot detract from the *aikakarmya* [unity of action] which is based rather on unity of purpose and word" (Clooney 1990, 175).

> Jaimini also says that no modification should be made in archetypal sacrifices. (MS 9.3.20)

Similar to processes of modification, problems of transference (*atideśa*) and options (*vikalpa*) of ritual elements had to be solved.

8. *Apūrva* (in later Mīmāṃsā), the unseen result or efficacy of sacrifices: this is the most controversial concept in Mīmāṃsā literature, and it is the most complicated. Since Jaimini says little about it in its later technical sense, the notion must be discussed considering later commentators and Mīmāṃsakas. *Apūrva* brings fundamental positions and differences regarding the relevance, efficacy, and goals of ritual to the foreground.

According to Halbfass (1992, 302), the term *apūrva* developed from grammatical discussions

> where it pertains to "prescriptive rules" (*vidhi*) that each teach something new, not said before. More significantly, numerous sources mention an old Mīmāṃsā theory of *apūrva*. . . . According to the theory indicated by these sources, *apūrva* is a synonym for *dharma* itself, and it is an impersonal and substrateless (*anāśrita*) potentiality, a kind of cosmic principle or power to be manifested or actualized by the ritual acts (*kriyāvyāṅgya; yāgādikarmanirvartya*). (Halbfass 1992, 302)

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21. *ekaṃ vā codanaikatvāt* (MS 4.3.14).

According to Jaimini, there can only be one result of a sacrifice,[21] which basically only holds true for independent, archetypal rituals. Only these create something new (cf. MS 8.1.5). That is why, according to Śabara (*ad* MS 2.1.6–8 and 2.2.1), subsidiary acts alone cannot produce and accumulate *apūrva*. Kumārila, on the other hand, assumes that the subsidiary acts have their own *apūrva* and are combined in the ritual to a comprehensive *apūrva* of the complete ritual. Both agree that incomplete acts will not produce any *apūrva* at all.

The basic problem the Vedic ritualists and, in fact, all ritualists face is the proof of the efficacy of ritual and that the notion of *apūrva* is designed to solve this problem. The standard example of the Mīmāṃsā is the example of the sacrifice burning down to ashes without any immediate result. In the words of Śabara (*ad* MS 2.1.5):

> Otherwise, if there were no such thing as *apūrva*, such injunction would be meaningless. For the act of sacrifice itself is perishable, so that the sacrifice were to perish without bringing into existence something else, then the cause having ceased to exist, the result (in the shape of heaven) could never come about. From this it follows that the sacrifice does not bring into existence something ([*anya*] *utpādayati*) (some force or potency which continues to exist and operate till such time as the result is actually brought about. (Clooney 1990, 225)

The standard, post-Jamini "apūrvic" answer to this problem is that the result is unseen (*adṛṣṭa*), or it will come into effect later, in heaven (*svarga*) or the next life.[22] In cases where heaven is desired, the solution is more or less convincing, at least not easily disprovable. In cases of optional (*kāmya*) sacrifices, it is less satisfying, as the result is declared to be more direct and concrete. In the *citrā* ritual, for instance, which is supposed to bring cattle, the result should be seen within one's lifetime. Kumārila, however, helps himself by postponing the eventual effect to the next life. Alternatively, he supposes intervening, counterproductive influences, as in the case of the *kārīrī* sacrifice, which should bring rain. Therefore, "(a)pūrva is a conceptual device designed to keep off or circumvent empirically oriented criticism of the efficacy of

22. See also the differentiation in the *Mīmāṃsānyāyasaṃgraha* between the "system of unseen effects: one results immediately from the main action in a rite, namely, the 'originative' unseen effect (*utpattyapūrva*), another from any particular combination of main actions which may be prescribed (*samudāyāpūrva*), and a third, the final unseen effect (*paramāpūrva*), from the first or second of these when they are accompanied by the various subsidiaries which have been taught" (Benson 2010, 36).

sacrifices, to establish a causal nexus not subject to the criterion of direct, observable sequence" (Halbfass 1992, 306).

The claim of unseen, postponed results of rituals is, of course, based on faith. Something is claimed, but if it cannot empirically realize itself, it is declared to be somewhere else. The unmasking example of Śabara is striking. If you are told "Devadatta (= N.N.) is alive," but discover that he is not in his house, you will assume that he is somewhere (cf. Clooney 1990, 227), but only, I would add, when you have already empirically encountered him before this. The case of heaven is evidently different from the presence of Devadatta. Śabara's *apūrva*, then, still "remains a content of 'faith'" (ibid.). However, John Taber says the "*pramāṇa* in question is *arthāpatti*, supposition. It is usually rendered as inference to the best explanation. As MS 2.1.5 implies, *apūrva* is required to explain the undertaking of the sacrifice to fulfill some purpose. This does not quite seem to be a kind of 'faith' to me. At least it is presented as rational" (personal note).

Jaimini himself does not use *apūrva* very often and, if so (cf. Clooney 1990, 232–39), mostly in a strictly temporal sense, indicating that Vedic injunctions create something new within the sacrifice.[23] After all, he deals predominantly with the efficacy of the Vedic ritual. For other Mīmāṃsakas, too, *apūrva* only results from the Vedic injunctions (and not from other texts). Jaimini, however, is concerned with the relation of word and action, but not with what follows the action. There is no transcendence in his concept of *apūrva*. Since he does not at all question the efficacy of the Vedic ritual, he does not need to construct a link—an intervening deity or *apūrva* located in the self (*ātman*) of the ritual performer—that bridges the gap between action and result or the epistemological gap between this world and the "other" world. For him, the ritual is a closed system, with no standpoint beyond it and without any human or godly influence whatsoever:

> Sacrificial, "apūrvic" causality seems to operate within a finite and well-defined set of conditions, a kind of closed system, in which it seems to be secure from outside interference: in bringing about its assigned result, the power of the sacrifice, that is, apūrva, will prevail over other possible influences, including those which might arise from the general karmic status of the sacrifice. (Halbfass 1992, 304f.)

For Kumārila, *apūrva* is a kind of "potency that gathers and stores the efficacy of the Vedic rituals and makes it possible for transitory sacrificial

23. *codanā va 'pūrvatvat* (MS 3.3.21).

performances to have lasting effects in the distant future" (Halbfass 1992, 301f.) and a power that is "somehow" accumulated. The question is, where is it located. For Kumārila, it is in the soul of the sacrificer, although it remains a potency (*yogyatā*) of the sacrifice (but not of the sacrificer).

> The causal potencies created and left behind by the sacrificial acts remain present as traces or dispositions (*saṃskāra*) in the person who has performed them; according to Kumārila, there is no other substratum in which they could inhere. (Halbfass 1992, 304)

Kumārila thereby develops a theory of the unseen (*adṛṣṭa*) results of acts, which forms the basis of nearly all Indian notions of *karman* and reincarnation (*saṃsāra*). Then ritual activity (*karma*) finally leads to enjoyment (*bhukti*) and liberation (*mukti*), but not through the production of merit (*puṇya*), rather from the exhaustion of *karma* since liberation or the cessation of rebirth cannot be caused by anything—especially not by any kind of knowledge. However, the obligatory *karma* (*nityakarma*) is essential since if one does not carry out such acts, one incurs demerit (*adharma*) (cf. Taber 2007). But since, from a soteriological point of view as developed in the Upaniṣads and by the Buddhists, any ritual is *karma*, it is thus not the source of immortality. On the contrary, it is another cause of suffering because it leads to rebirth and not final liberation. This view has given rise to early criticisms of Brahmanic ritualism, with that of Gautama Buddha as the most famous.

Conclusion

In the Vedic world, to which Pūrvamīmāṃsā clings, it is sacrifice/ritual that matters: "The sacrifice is the highest and best work (of ritual)."[24] It is in the microcosm of the ritual that the macrocosm is present and influenced, since both follow the same rules (although such an expression would not be found in the Mīmāṃsā). That is why Jaimini claims that only normal actions can become ritual actions (cf. Clooney 1990, 134), and the Veda "is a particular arrangement of the ordinary according to injunctions found in the Vedic text" (ibid., 160). To perform the ritual, then, means to perform *dharma*, which, for Jaimini, "is nothing but the rightly ordered sacrifice which we know from the Veda and the practice of Brahmins—there is no other standard by which the sacrifice could be judged, nor a truth beyond action to which it could be reduced or from which it could be deduced" (ibid., 159).

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24. *yajño vai śreṣṭhamaṃ karma* (ŚBr 1.7.1.5).

Due to the congruence between "microcosm" and "macrocosm," everything is derived from basic, repetitive rules. Other prescriptions are connected to these rules by meta-rules, such as "If it is not clear how to proceed, the basic form is valid. The more specific the injunction, the more authority it has";[25] "The *mantra* is more important than the *brāhmaṇa*" (cf. Thibaut 1882, v); "When injunctions of equal force are in conflict with each other, this is (called) an option (*vikalpa*)" (see GautDhS 1.4); "When the (sacrificial) object is not available, there is a substitute (*pratinidhi*)" (*Śaṅkhāyanaśrautasūtra* 3.19.2) and so on.[26] Different rituals are only actualizations of the prototype ritual (*aikakarmyatva*), which Jaimini postulates (cf. Clooney 1990, 175).

What does all this mean for the *homo ritualis*? The Pūrvamīmāṃsā has clearly understood and articulated one principle of ritual action (that I also regard as fundamental): it is the mindset, conviction, or belief that what has to be done, must be done—independently of individual doubts or skepticism. The *homo ritualis* submits himself to this principle and thereby accepts that the performer of a ritual (and his or her ideas of what the ritual means) is less important than the performance itself. In a way, rituals use "human agents as tools" (ibid., 169); they come to the performer rather than vice versa. The *homo ritualis* accepts that rituals are performed for some reason to which he personally must not subscribe. It is this unintentional side of ritual which must be better explored by the Cognitive Sciences.

The reasons humans submit themselves to ritual are manifold: solidarity, power, cowardice, agreement to its goals, and so forth. However, there is no convincing reason for the performance of rituals because there are always alternatives, and the criticism of rituals that accompanies rituals always proves their meaninglessness—except the social reason that it is demanding, if not impossible, to justify all action individually or by introspection. The *homo ritualis* is neither a *homo faber* (in the sense of the working human who is the artifex of his destiny) nor a *homo ludens* (in the sense of the human who plays). He is somebody who likes to hide himself despite being exposed to the public, because what he has to do is stipulated, and what he thinks about it is rather irrelevant. This is completely different from faith, modern art, or "modern" forms of love, where it is the individual who is asked to confess why he or she is doing something. In rituals, one can hide all motives and yet be

25. Cf. *prasaṅgād apavādo balīyaḥ* (ĀśvŚrS 1.1.22, cf. Freschi and Pontillo 2013, 66ff.).

26. BaudhŚrS mentions five tools for the arrangement of ritual (*kalpa*): mantras (*chandas*), exegesis (*brāhmaṇa*), trust in someone else's word (*pratyaya*), a customary rule (*nyāya*), and the format of the ritual (*saṃsthā*). Cf. Freschi and Pontillo 2013, 19f.

successful; the authors or designers of rituals do not matter and are rarely mentioned in the histories and records of rituals. This is why authoritarian institutions such as the military or schools like rituals so much. It is to educate de-individualized persons. In ritual, the situation is similar. Jaimini, at least, was very clear about this:

> The sacrifice is not subordinated to a teleology articulated from the human point of view; sacrifice is not undertaken simply for the sake of the acquisition of heaven and other results, even if human beings talk about in that way. Rather, the human participants in the sacrifice are considered and evaluated in terms of their place in the larger framework, secondary to the underlying unity of word, purpose, and action, and as in various conjunctions with things, actions words, hymns, etc. Jaimini subordinates every substantial reality to action; the performer is no exception, just as the deities and *ṛṣis* were not. (Clooney 1990, 193f.)

It is this "anonymity" and subordination to the work of ritual, the *karmamārga*, that the *homo ritualis* prefers. Was Louis Dumont right when he suggested that, in Hinduism, the individual can only come true if he leaves the world of (Vedic) ritual and society? From the *smārta* point of view, ritual activity results in religious merit (*puṇya*), which leads to enjoyment (*bhukti*) and liberation (*mukti*). But from a renunciatory point of view, almost any ritual is *karma* and, thus, not the source of immortality and liberation. On the contrary, it is a cause of suffering because it leads to rebirth and not final liberation. In both the *smārta* and the ascetic positions, ritual activity is considered to replace nature. Rituals are seen as constructions of a world with which man ritually identifies himself: "Man is born into a world made by himself," says the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa* (6.2.2.7). Only by ritual, but not by "normal" (*karma*) action, can one be liberated.

Thus, ritual action has to be separated from nonritual action, as the *Bhagavadgītā* (3.9) plainly says: "this world is bound by the bonds of action (*karma*) except where that action is done sacrificially." The difference between the *smārta* and a renunciatory view of ritual lies in the fact that in the latter even ritual action is abandoned (cf. the term *saṃnyāsa*, i.e., total abandonment) or interiorized. Renunciation is therefore often declared to be a nonritual state. The renunciant is (often called) *an-agni*, somebody "without the (visible sacrificial) fire(-ritual)." Only this step in physical and mental inactivity leads out of the epistemological gap between this-worldly ritual and otherworldly result of the ritual.

PART V

The Hindu Path of Ritual—Summary

What could be a Hindu theory of ritual? What is special for Hindu rituals? And what does such a theory share with a general theory on ritual? These are the questions that I will discuss in the following by way of summarizing and concluding.

Hinduism is often characterized as the "path of ritual" (*karmamārga*). *Karma* (also *karman, kriyā*; all words are derived from the verbal root *kṛ-*, "to do, to make") literally means "action, work, religious rite, ceremony." In early Vedic texts (ca. 1750–500 BCE), *karma* predominantly denotes the sacrifice. Only from the early Upaniṣads onward does it denote deeds leading to the cycle of rebirths (*saṃsāra*) and concern the ethical perspective that good action leads to higher forms of life (and no action to liberation).

Karma, "the work (of ritual)," as we now may translate the term, means indeed a lot of work. Traditional Hindu life is full of sacrifices (*yajña, homa, bali*), life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāra*), worship (*pujā*), festivals (*utsava*), pilgrimages (*yātrā*), vows (*vrata*), and interaction rituals such as greetings (*namaskāra*). The distinction between these types of rituals is not fixed, and often certain forms of rituals can be parts of more complex rituals. Thus, the *homa* fire sacrifice can be a preliminary element of a wedding, *pūjā* worships mostly form an essential part of pilgrimages and festivals, and the *namaskāra* gesture is part of the *pūjā*.

Hindu rituals have been classified according to many criteria: according to the main sacrificial oblations (vegetables or meat) or gifts (*dāna, bhīkṣā, prasāda, dakṣiṇā*), the sacrificial techniques (fire), the place (domestic, in temples, on public places, diasporic), or the forms of worship (*pūjā, arcana, darśana*). They can be performed externally (*bāhya*) or internally in one's mind (*mānasa*); regularly and recurrently (*nitya*), on certain occasions (*naimittika*), for example life-cycle rituals, or optional and connected with specific

wishes (*kāmya*); secretly (*gopya*) or in public; for oneself (*ātmārtha, svārtha*) or for somebody else (*parārtha*). The Mīmāṃsā texts differentiate between prototypes (*prakṛti*) and subordinate rituals (*vikṛti*). Thus the new moon and full moon sacrifice is the model for all sacrifices with food offerings (*iṣṭi*); and the *agniṣṭoma* is the *prakṛti* for all *soma* rituals. Some rituals are communal events with a more or less great number of participants, often in public spaces; others are more domestic and private rituals; the categories *śrauta-gṛhya* reflect some of this distinction.

To bring this diversity into a coherent theory, it is necessary to limit the scope when we speak of Hindu rituals. My focus in the previous chapters has been on Brahmanic-Sanskritic rituals. To be sure, these include a number of folk elements and non-Hindu (Buddhist, Muslim, Western) influences; there are, even with limitation, many hybrid, syncretic, or transcultural rituals; and the historical changes should not be underestimated. However, there is unity in diversity, and this is the Brahman priest and the Sanskrit textual tradition, for instance, in ritual handbooks. Vedic sacrifice and life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāra*) as well as most temple rituals almost always need a Brahman priest; *pūjās*; other festivals, pilgrimages, and vows (*vrata*) can also be celebrated without, but often these rituals are based on a Brahmanic-Sanskritic model derived from or linked to the Vedic sacrifice prototype.

This Brahmanic-Sanskritic dominance or influence in Hindu rituals can be seen in the four components of rituals that I have filtered out in order to differentiate ritual from ritualized or routinized behavior. These components show variable grades of intensity and mixture that allow us to characterize (Hindu) ritual as a special mode of action.

First, rituals are framed. Only then they are separated from the ordinary, everyday life; only then people are aware that the action is special and not "real." Since ritual action is action in this special mode, it is necessary to indicate the beginning and end of it. The example of the *intentio solemnis* or *saṃkalpa* has shown how the beginning of rituals is marked off in Hindu rituals, and the *visarjana* element shows how to end a ritual. Through the *saṃkalpa*, the ritual sphere is opened. This implies aspects of transcendence or—in Brahmanic-Sanskritic thinking—perfection in order to exclude or minimize nature or mortality, or contingency and uncertainty.

Second, rituals are formal; and this means that they are repetitive, in principle public and variable. Because of the fact that most actions in Hindu (*smārta*) rituals are accompanied by mantras, they are often also scripted rituals. The repetitiveness of Hindu rituals is given through more or less strict rules, often codified in ritual handbooks, which deal with prescriptive behavior and eventual deviations, but also with expiations in case of ritual

failure or mishaps. The form of the deviation and the context of the ritual sometimes provoke comical situations. The rituals are not actually intended to be comical, but their emphasis on being serious lets them sometimes appear, unintentionally, as such.

Most action is formal, but not ceremonial. The difference lies in the codification and the decorum. It forms the ritual "building blocks" or ritual elements, which can be used piecemeal in other rituals, and thus are not limited to only one meaning and function. For example, the form of ritual ablution in all Hindu, and to some extent in non-Hindu, rituals is the same for the most part, independently of the orientation of the rituals. We have seen this in the system of ritual ablution (Table 3.1) and in the methods of ritual variation (Chapter 2.1 and 2.3). For Hindu ritualists, there is also little difference, even in practice, in the question of whether ablution is an independent ritual or part of another ritual.

It is this redundancy in rituals that has led various researchers to seeing prototypes or archetypes in these actions. One can play around with them, vary them, repeat them, transform them, and imitate them. One can put them together in different ways like bricks. They can be analyzed as elements of their own language. These "building blocks" are, indeed, very suitable for scripts, handbooks, or liturgical compendia of rituals. The inventory of such patterns of action or restricted codes comprises decorum, in particular, and thus primarily body and speech.

The fact that rituals are rule-governed makes them in principle public and suitable for an ostentative demonstration of social coherence. Even if there are some secret tantric rituals, they can be imitated and repeated and are, in this sense, "public." This is, for instance, different from love, modern art, or faith, including *bhakti* where besides orthopraxis, a lot of individual mental (*mānasa*) authenticity is demanded. If the expression of love or faith becomes too formal and repetitive, it is soon disguised as stereotyped, empty, or "ritualized" and thus lacking "true" love or faith. Similarly, modern art claims to be individualistic and unique; if it is brought into a repetitive, "ritualized" system, it loses its characteristics.

The rules (*vidhi*) of ritual can be seen as their "grammars," and first approaches to model such systems with computer-linguistic methods are promising—despite considerable conceptual problems. Thus, most Hindu rituals display some basic structure or "grammar" that includes the following elements:

- Most rituals start with a more or less extended preparatory phase (*pūrvāṅga*), which includes fixing the auspicious moment, purifying the

ritual specialists (often the Brahman) and involved family members, purifying the house (*gṛhaśāntipūjā*) and arranging the sacred place by arranging the sacred arena or fire places, or drawing diagrams (*yantra, maṇḍala*) on the ground and decorating the location. Among the preliminary rites, elaborate rites, such as the worship of the ancestors (*nāndī-* or *vṛddhiśrāddha*) and the fire sacrifice (*homa, yajña*), are also found. All of this can also be seen as a separation from everyday life and an arrangement of the ritual arena that demarcates it.

- An important part of Hindu rituals consists of the ritual commitments made by the priest, ritual specialist, and/or sacrificer: the ritual bath (*abhiṣeka*) with water from a certain pot (*arghyapātra*), mental commitment (*nyāsa*), and the ritual decision (*saṃkalpa*).
- The main parts of the ritual are characterized by forms of exchange between the deities and participants, but also by special features or by core events, which are related to the age, function, time of the year, and/or social group of the participants and to the "story," myth, or plot of the ritual. These are the elements specific to this particular ritual, whereas other parts may well be recurrent ritual elements that may also be observed in the practices of other rituals.
- Various rites of salutation and worship, recitation of mantras or exclamations (*vyāhṛti*), and purifying acts accompany the main ritual acts, for example, the use of light (*dīpa*) and incense (*dhūpa*), mostly provided in the form of oil lamps accompanied by recitation of mantras, the sprinkling of a purifying application of a *tīkā* made of sandalwood (*candana*) or vermilion paste given to the deities and participants, the use of husked, uncooked, and unbroken rice (*akṣata*), or the change of the dress or the presentation of new clothes to the priest or participants.
- The concluding rites generally include obligatory offerings of rice, fruits, and money to the Brahman priest (*dakṣiṇā*) who, at the end, often grants the blessing (*āśīrvāda*) to the participants. In the final rites, the movable form of deities, sacred vases, and other holy items are removed (*visarjana*), and a *tīkā* and/or sacred thread together with *prasāda* is given to the participants who then might also take another ritual bath (*snāna*). Finally, the witnessing deities, such as the Sun or Viṣṇu, are released and a share of the *pūjā* material is sent to nearby deities. The very last part is mostly a joint meal (*bhojana*) of the participants.

Only when the ritual elements are related to one another does the type of ritual emerge as a whole. Each ritual element, each detail must be understood as part of an entire ritual. But the entire ritual consists solely of the

syntactical connection of the ritual elements. The Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of rituals has seen here a tied relation between archetypes (*prakṛti*) and ectypes (*vikṛti*) of rituals.

The repetitivity does not exclude variation, but on the contrary necessitates variability. This is due to the fact that each performance is different, and the contexts and agency often afford methods such as substitution, alteration, omission, fusion, reduction, repetition, and invention in order to handle the situative changes. We have seen that rituals undergo constant processes of change, adaptation, and renewal. K. K. A. Venkatachari (1996, 188f.) aptly says that "adaptation and transformation of rituals have been a part of the Hindu tradition from ancient times." Due to various factors of ritual dynamics, one observes that some rituals, such as many Vedic sacrifices, have become obsolete or survived in rather different forms. Other rituals like the *homa* fire ritual have become very popular and transferred into other religions and regions including Europe and the Americas.

Moreover, the variability also includes parts and phases of rituals that are less structured and deliberately designed for spontaneity and variation. Victor W. Turner called this part of rituals "liminality." It includes aspects of joy, happiness, leisure—expressed in dance, music, and emotions. However, only if these episodes are framed can they be part of the ritual, and only of they show features of formality, modality, and transformation/affirmation can they be seen as independent rituals.

Third, rituals vary in their modes of performance. With a view on Hindu rituals, I have carved out three modalities: *individualitas, societas*, and *religio* (to be sure, there are more). Some rituals are characterized by the fact that individuals are the main persons. This holds especially true for life-cycle rituals, but also for some vows or pilgrimages and healing rituals. I have called this aspect *individualitas* because this term accounts for the individualistic aspects even though most rituals are social events as well. In the Hindu context, life-cycle rituals (*saṃskāra*) are a domain of the extended families and clans; they are celebrated in the houses of the families. Seen from the Brahmanic-Sanskritic doctrine, *saṃskāras* make the individuals "perfect" for the gods. A major part of them is the exclusion of nature by ritually enacting and thus perfecting natural processes: birth, sexuality, death, and so on. It is also the identification of the individuals with the eternal, immortal Veda and thus the elimination of mortality. From this, an identificatory habitus emerges that widely characterizes the religious behavior of Hindus.

In other rituals, it is more a heterogeneous group or different groups that have the agency. This is especially true for cyclical rituals that are calendrically fixed. Examples that I have discussed are festivals (*utsava*) as well as

vows (*vrata*) and pilgrimages (*tīrthayātrā*) that have become established festivals. These events are often caste- or locality-oriented, and the aspect of the society is dominant. Major Hindu festivals attract masses of devotees and spectators. They create an atmosphere of brotherhood, group or caste identity and group solidarity—or, in Turner's words, *communitas*. I prefer *societas* because large festivals, especially pilgrimages such as the Kumbhamelā are sometimes not communal events but simply an assembly of thousands of individual forms of worship. Yet such festivals regularly are combined with fairs (*melā*) and markets in which notions of play, leisure, and commodification are important.

One of the most debated questions in ritual theory is whether rituals are religious or not. Some hold that the influence of superhumans is essential. Given the fact that for many Hindu rituals this is not true, but nevertheless an elevating aspect is evident, I have called this modality *religio*.

Fourth, transcendence. This aspect implies that the exact form of localizing, timing, and personalizing of ritual is, to a certain extent, the opposite of formulating a custom-made license for the ritual. It de-individualizes, de-chronologizes, and de-spatializes—in other words, transforms and transcends, the mundane world. Rituals cannot be conceptually reduced to the actual actions performed. These are not just repeated, and they are thus not remembered, but re-membered and always newly created. Seen from the religious concept behind it, a ritual is a unique totality. Thus the space and time mentioned in a *saṃkalpa* of a pilgrimage is conceptually not limited by geographical or temporal criteria. It is the space and time beyond the visible and measurable borders, which is realized—*in illo loco* and *in illo tempore*. This space is not the space within space but a singular, unique, symbolic space, which is connected with a myth or a primordial divine act and thus identified with the transcendent world. The borders of this space are ideative, not empirical.

In a ritual circumambulation, it is not the circumambulatory walk that gives the pilgrimage its sacred character, but the *solemnis intentio* or *saṃkalpa*. Only then are "normal" ways solemnly declared as sacred routes. This view seems to create a problem with localizing and timing rituals, for they always happen to occur in empirical space and time. However, for the *homo ritualis*, the religious feeling of space and time is absolute, not relative; it creates identities or distinctions, rather than similarities between spaces: Uttarakāśī is not similar to Kaśī; it *is* Kāśī! Thus any space is subjective or singular, but there is no space as such or *an sich*. A space *an sich*, or a transcendental space, does not exist because such a space would not need any empirical space. The Absolute cannot manifest itself; it has no sphere of existence (*loka*).

This is precisely the difference between religious and ordinary or "profane" concepts of space and time, and between rituals and ritualized behavior.

Localizing and timing rituals therefore means identifying the individual with religious forces that are regarded as absolute and singular. But only if a *saṃkalpa* is formulated and declared, and only if by way of the formula the individual is ritually identified with this religious force, is the ritual potency valid and able to provide the desired results, that is, the transformation or affirmation.

The last aspect poses again the question of the relationship between religion and ritual. According to Frits Staal, it is religion that first gave rituals their meanings. In his view, religion is the equivalent of ritual plus meaning: "The chief provider of meaning being religion, ritual became involved with religion and, through this association, meaningful" (1989, 137). Staal nevertheless regards ritual as a kind of anti-religion and as an autonomous practice with its own rules. This is why, for him, ritual should not be studied as a religion but as syntax without semantics. So Staal wants to study ritual completely "in itself and for itself." With this, he contradicts the idea, also expressed in the Pūrvamīmāṃsā, that rituals are symbolic systems of reference that point to a different ("higher") reality.

Rituals are indeed fabricated, because they are not only instrumental operations tailored to a specific purpose (e.g., encountering a god, allaying fears, or heightening the feeling of community), or expressive (e.g., ludic or theatrical) actions, but also—irrespective of the motives connected with them—they are intended as stagings of a freedom from purpose and intention. There are ethological and neuropsychological indications that rituals are often stagings of immutability precisely because a primary or archetypal state is associated with them: what was good once should remain so.

This also allows us to say that for this reason, many rituals are rigid, stereotypical, and largely unchangeable because they are directed against change and changeability. However, the formalism of rituals does not rule out variants and dynamics, but permits them in a circumscribed manner focused on the criteria I have named: authority, age, orthodoxy, or extraordinariness. Essentially, these criteria correspond with those I termed *religio*. In a Hindu context, these criteria could be mantra (authority), "Vedic" text (age), Brahman (orthodoxy), or framing, for example, *saṃkalpa* (extraordinariness, i.e., determination of the point in time by astral sciences, marking out the sacred arena, and the like).

This is why rituals are removed to some extent from human amenability—a point essential to the Pūrvamīmāṃsā theory of ritual. They preserve what is old, which cannot be touched. In this way, acquired knowledge and abilities

are also preserved, without their usefulness forever having to be legitimated anew; they can be more or less summoned on demand and are available as techniques in whatever new context might call for them.

Inasmuch as people in (religious) rituals stage timelessness and constancy, they counter in some respects the uncertainties of the new and the future, of contingency, and of the transition from life to death. Unlike Staal, I do not view the meaninglessness of rituals negatively, but rather as an expression of this staging of constancy. For Staal, rituals are a regression to ancient, prehistoric times, to the behavior of animals or little children, and so he shares the view of many that rituals obstruct progress. But to my mind, there must be some benefit in preserving rituals and their meaninglessness. And I see this as lying in the way they allow people to deal with both the potential for change and the necessity of preservation, with revolution and tradition. This possibility of overthrowing everything without simultaneously forgetting all one has learned from the past is exclusive to human beings. It is hard to learn something new, but even more so to forget the old. There, where people consider progress unnecessary, because nothing can be better than it already is, where they have no wish for change because everything is already good enough, where they re-member, as Kurt Hübner (1985, 142) says, the old and original by remembering it, there especially ritual is the means for choice: it works of its own accord, *ex opere operato*, by dint of its own nonreferential effectiveness, or—as the Mīmāṃsakas would say—out of the eternal Veda, but not because it has a meaning or remains limited to the one that people attach to it cognitively. And this is why I say almost ritualistically[1]: rituals are indeed meaningless, but that is not without its own meaning.

1. See Michaels 1999a, 40–45, 2003, and 2006a.

APPENDIX

Automatic Detection of Ritual Structures: A report by Nils Reiter, Anette Frank, Oliver Hellwig, Axel Michaels, and Anand Mishra

Starting from the observation that many rituals are composed from "ritual elements," which are combined according to "rules" of a ritual "grammar," a project in Heidelberg[2] conducted research on detecting characteristic event structures of rituals using computational linguistic methods. Prime candidates for such "elementary building blocks" of rituals were actions (events) along with their participants: actors in different roles, as well as objects and places. The project pursued a (computational) linguistic approach by analyzing the linguistic event structure of traditional textual sources prescribing or describing rituals. The linguistic description and interpretation of ritual actions on the basis of such textual material may be partial, can be of varying precision, and depends greatly on the scholar's choice of important actions. The project, therefore, made the conscious choice of applying computational linguistic (CL) techniques to analyzing the structure of rituals. This involved fully automatic semantic discourse analysis, including (a) the annotation of ritual texts with semantic predicate-argument structures (PAS) (i.e., the

2. The team of this project, institutionalized within the Heidelberg Collaborative Research Center "Ritual Dynamics," consisted of computational linguists (Anette Frank and Nils Reiter) and Indologists (Axel Michaels and Christof Zotter), together with Oliver Hellwig and Anand Mishra, who are competent in both fields. For the first results of this project, see Reiter 2014; Reiter, Hellwig, and Frank 2011a, and 2011b; Hellwig and Michaels 2013; Reiter, Frank, and Hellwig 2014.

recognition and formal encoding of events and their participants) and (b) the development of algorithms and statistical techniques that aim at detecting typical event sequences and recurring structures, on the basis of the detected events. This approach has the additional advantage of being applicable in other contexts, where supposedly parallel structures are to be discovered. In fact, such event-based structural similarities are said to exist in a number of literary genres (e.g., folktales).

Using established CL techniques, we enriched texts from ritual handbooks and textual descriptions of observed ritual performances with linguistic information, such as word classes and syntactic structures, and with representations for types of actions. For example, "giving" was annotated with semantic roles for the giver, the given (theme), and the taker (cf. Figure. A.1).

Statistical methods thus enabled us to identify similarities and differences of certain ritual segments, event sequences, and performers of ritual actions in different rituals (see Figure. A.2). Likewise, it became possible to verify, empirically and statistically, hypotheses on structural properties of ritual elements.

Our aim was to detect structural elements of rituals in general, but also characteristic elements and structures of life-cycle rituals of different "types." We followed a data-driven approach that made use of deep, qualitatively rich discourse-semantic analysis involving contextually connected event representations. Using semantically annotated texts as input, we designed algorithms and statistical techniques aiming at the detection of event patterns and configurations that are typical for rituals in general, or for particular types of rituals. We also developed a number of tools to ease inspection and quality control of the automatically computed structural representations. Because most natural language processing tools are trained on newspaper texts, their performance is poor when applied to other domains of texts. We were able to show that processing results can be significantly improved by applying (simple) domain adaptation techniques. We also applied techniques for extracting patterns and parallelisms of the event structure of different ritual descriptions and developed methods to visualize results so that the patterns found can be further analyzed.

The corpus of ritual texts used by the project contained forty-five text samples of Nepalese ritual handbooks on Hindu (and Buddhist) life-cycle rituals, published in Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 2008): eighteen English translations (*saṃskāra*) of prescriptive descriptions of traditional ritual handbooks composed either in Sanskrit, Newārī, or in a mixture of both languages; and twenty-seven descriptions written by Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels

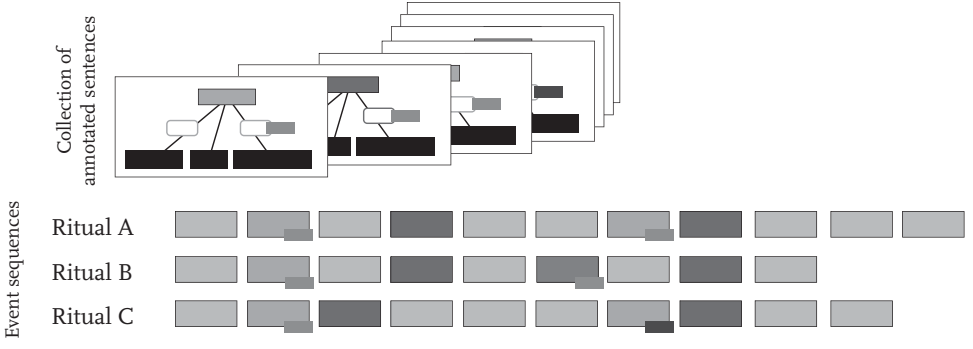


FIGURE A.1: Preparing the ritual handbook for CL analysis

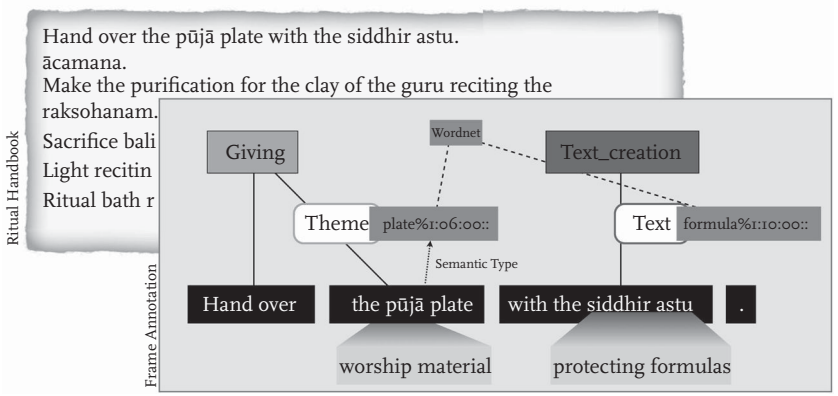


FIGURE A.2: Detecting similarities and differences in rituals

observing the performance of the respective ritual. The corpus contains 92.900 tokens (avg. 2020 per ritual), 18.812 types (avg. 409 per ritual), and 4.232 sentences (avg. 92 per ritual). For testing search and alignment procedures on a specialized subcorpus, we selected a core corpus of thirteen rituals. The selection criteria were thematic coherence, density of existing event class annotations, and the percentage of common sub-sequences of actions, which were determined on the basis of automatically computed frame annotations using hierarchical clustering methods.

Although the descriptions of rituals were available as English translations, due to the high amount of foreign (non-English) language material, they required additional preparation before entering the CL processing pipeline. First, Sanskrit and Newārī terms denoting ritual- or culture-specific concepts were replaced with English paraphrases to enable automatic processing. Second, most descriptions of rituals contain mantras, that is, fixed formulae handed down from the Vedic tradition. These formulae do not always convey an explicit meaning and cannot be paraphrased with an English expression. Nevertheless, it is crucial for the flawless performance—and the subsequent understanding—of a ritual to recite the correct mantra along with each ritual action. Therefore, mantras were replaced with numeric identifiers before feeding the texts into the processing pipeline and were later reinserted using these indices.

A dynamic search interface provides access to the complete linguistic annotations, including frame annotations and lemmata of the source texts. Ritual elements ("events") are displayed in their ritual contexts, accompanied with basic statistical evaluations of their occurrences. We further developed

methods for irregularity detection in ritual descriptions on the basis of the assigned frames. On a more general level, we used statistical tests of significance to contrast events specific for a type of ritual (e.g., feeding in an *annaprāśana* rite) with those that are found in most rituals of the Nepalese tradition (e.g., *pūjā*).

Our methods provide fast access to a limited corpus of ritual texts and offer different views on the structure of rituals. These could already be used to validate scientific hypotheses about rituals and their structures. At the current state of research, the main area of application for the tools and methods is knowledge validation, as a proof of concept for the chosen techniques. However, we also found cases of unexpected evidence. This aligns with current discussions in the emerging area of "Digital Humanities"—calibrating and critically understanding new techniques with respect to existing hypotheses is a first step to making new discoveries and realizing the full potential of data-driven methods.

A case in point is the sub-ritual of presenting a *dakṣiṇā* to the priest, which may serve as an example of knowledge generated using the analysis and visualization tools. It is a common idea in Indological research that the *dakṣiṇāpradāna* occurs regularly at the end of a sacrifice, because Indian tradition interprets it as the payment of the priest, received for performing the sacrifice. When the distribution of this action (realized by frame Giving and role Theme: *dakṣiṇā*) is examined using the newly developed tool for corpus exploration, we observe, however, a slightly different distribution. While most instances of the event of "Giving the *dakṣiṇā*" are concentrated at the end of ritual descriptions, some rituals contain this element at an earlier position. This finding may either point to the fact that the unusual rituals contain sub-rituals terminated by a *dakṣiṇā*, or that the Indological hypothesis has to be revised.

Moreover, statistical tests of significance, applied on automatically generated semantic annotations, provide methods for validating hypotheses from Indology and research in rituals. A frequently discussed question is whether and how local Nepalese rituals differ from the rituals found in the "Great Tradition" of South Asia. Using the statistical methods developed, we are, for example, able to show that the recitation of mantras is significantly less frequent in genuine Nepalese rituals such as the *Ihi* marriage, as compared to rituals that are derived directly from the Vedic tradition. This result coincides well with Indological intuition, but can now be validated using a data-driven approach.

In a similar way, using graph-based methods for knowledge discovery is an area with considerable potential in future research. We automatically

produced graphs that show the relations between agents and objects in the Nepalese rituals. These graphs reflect clearly how the main participants along with central requisites perform in the respective ritual.

All in all, we certainly still observe a gap between the Indological expectations and the results (in terms of, e.g., accuracy, representation, and expressiveness) that can be achieved using fully automatic annotation methods. Nevertheless, we understand that the results of this project are an important step forward toward narrowing this gap between quantitative and qualitative methods: visualization and search tools give the researchers access to the original sources, and further interface functionalities can be developed to allow researchers to correct erroneous annotations. The project has shown the range of feasibility for an automatic text analysis engine, indicating the limits of accuracy inherent in current approaches, but also their potential and ways for dealing with inevitable noise. Finally, from the point of view of research in Indian rituals, the project has provided new—and sometimes unexpected—insights into the overall structure of Nepalese rituals, which could not be obtained using traditional methods of text interpretation only.

Glossary

adhikāra Competency, agency
agni Fire, fire ritual, the god Fire
agnicayana The ritual of "piling the fire"
agnihotra Vedic fire ritual
agnisthāpana Establishing of the fire
agniṣṭoma Soma sacrifice (cf. *soma*)
āhavanīya The eastern of three fires burning at a Vedic sacrifice (cf. *dakṣiṇāgni, gārhapatya*)
āhuti Milk oblation
añjali Greeting gesture with joining the palms of the hand
annasaṃkalpa Decision for food (cf. *saṃkalpa*)
antyeṣṭi Death ritual
apūrva Unseen result of an act (lit. "unprecedented")
ār(a)ti Ritual worship of deities with light, lamp, and other →*upacāras*
bel (Nep., Skt. *bilva, śrīphala*) Wood-apple or Bengal quince, *Aegle marmelos* (L.) *Corr. ex Roxb.*
bilva → *bel*
brahman The Absolute, the Veda
***Brahman* (Skt. *brāhmaṇa*)** Priest, teacher, member of the highest class in the social →*varṇa* stratification
brāhmaṇa Genre of exegetic texts of the Vedic rituals
brahmarandhra Lit. "Brahma hole," the fontanel, where the tuft (*śikhā*) grows, which is not cut during the →*upanayana*
dakṣiṇā A gift presented by a client (→*yajamāna*) to the priestly officiant
dāna (Ritual) gift
darśana The beneficial view of a deity
darśapūrṇamāsa Full moon sacrifice
dharma Laws and customs of the Twice-born Hindus
dharmaśāstra Legal texts dealing with →*dharma*

dharmaśāstrin Judges and experts of the →*dharmaśāstra*

gārhapatya The southern of three fires burning at a Vedic sacrifice (cf. *āhavanīya, dakṣiṇāgni*), the householder's fire

gāyatrī Vedic hymn (ṚV 3.62.10) and mantra secretly given at the Hindu initiation

guthi *(Nep., Nev.)* Religious association

homa Fire ritual

kalaśa Ritual vase or flask containing water and/or milk, in which deities are invoked

kanyādāna Climax of the marriage ritual, lit. "gift of the virgin"

karma(n) (Ritual) action

kṛcchra Penance, atonement

kṣatriya The warrior class, member of the second highest class in the social →*varṇa* stratification

kumbha Vessel, water jar

kuśa Couch grass (*Desmostachya bipinnata* (L.) *Stapf*), the most sacred of Indian grasses

latyā (Nev.) Union with the ancestors on the 13th or 45th day of death rituals (cf. *sapīṇḍīkaraṇa*)

līlā Play, amusement, sport

liṅga Phallus-shaped symbol of Śiva

mahāyāga "Great sacrifice," performed mostly in public

maṇḍala Circular symbol in Hinduism and Buddhism, visual representation of the cosmos used in rituals and yogic practices

māsikapiṇḍa Monthly →*piṇḍa*

Mīmāṃsā Lit. "reflection investigation," the earliest of the six philosophical systems of Indian Philosophy focused on Vedic ritual practice and its exegesis

mīmāṃsaka Specialists in the interpretation of Vedic rituals

pañcāyatanapūjā Worship of a set of five deities, typically Śiva, Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Gaṇeśa, and Devī

piṇḍa Balls generally made of wheat flour and used in ancestor rituals

pīṭha Seat of a tantric deity

pitṛ, *pl. pitaraḥ* father(s), ancestor(s)

pradhāna Core (action), the main part of the Vedic ritual

prasāda Divine grace, ritual return gift in →*pūjā*

pravargya Offering of hot milk, introductory ritual element to the →*agniṣṭoma* or soma sacrifice

prāyaścitta, -citti Penance, atonement

preta Deceased person

pūjā Worship, prayer ritual with →*upacāras*

Purāṇas A group of mostly mythological texts

purāṇic Related to the →Purāṇas

Pūrvamīmāṃsā also called *karmamīmāṃsā*, the part of the →Mīmāṃsā system that focuses on ritual action with Jaimini's *Mīmāṃsāsūtra* as its main text

sādhana Lit. "a means to accomplish something," yogic and ritual practice

saṃdhyā Morning ritual and worship with prayers, self-purification bathing, and other ritual elements

saṃkalpa Ritual decision, *intentio solemnis*

saṃskāra Life-cycle ritual

sapīṇḍīkaraṇa Ancestor ritual (cf. *latyā*)

sindūra Vermilion

smārta Related to the →*smṛti*, the Brahmanic-Sanskritic and orthodox Vedic tradition

smṛti The "remembered" part of the Vedic literature, composed by humans and believed to be secondary to →*śruti* texts

snāna (Ritual) bath

soma A drink used in Vedic rituals, most probably made out of Ephedra

śrāddha Ancestor ritual

śrauta Related to →*śruti*

śruti The canonical Vedas as texts of the "heard" revelation (cf. *smṛti*)

śūdra The fourth class of workers, farmers, and servants in the →*varṇa* system of social stratification

svayaṃvara Ritual practice of choosing the husband by a girl of marriageable age

tilaka, *Nep.* **tilak, tīkā** Mark on the forehead, usually made with a paste of vermilion to honor someone

tīrtha Holy pilgrimage place

tīrthayātrā Procession to →*tīrtha*(s)

tulasī Basil plant sacred to *Viṣṇu* (*Ocimum sanctum L.*)

ūha Modification of rituals

upacāra Ritual elements in →*pūjā*

upanayana Male initiation of the upper Hindu classes by which a boy is made a Twice-born (*dvija*)

utsava Hindu festival

vaiśya The third class of traders, merchants, and some craftsmen in the →*varṇa* system of social stratification

varṇa Lit. "color," traditional system of social stratification with four classes (*brāhmaṇa* or →Brahman, →*kṣatriya*, *vaiśya* and →*śūdra*)

veda A group of the most ancient Sanskrit texts divided in the →*smṛti* and →*śruti* texts

viniyoga Application of Vedic mantras

visarjana The ending of rituals by which the invoked deities are released

vrata Vow

vyāhṛti Exclamation of certain holy syllables, especially *bhūḥ*, *bhuvaḥ*, and *svaḥ*

yajamāna Sacrificer

yajña*, *yāga Sacrifice

yajñopavīta Sacred Thread used in the →*upanayana*

yantra Geometrical diagram used in rituals and architecture

yātrā Procession

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Index

abhiṣeka (cf. *snāna*), 55, 85–6, 90, 100, 106–7, 111, 136, 240, 243, 251, 259, 314
Ablution (cf. bath, *snāna*), 61, 85, 136–9, 140, 143
adhikāra (cf. agency, competency), 118–19, 123, 126, 135, 300
adṛṣṭa, 40, 198, 306, 308
Āgama texts, 215, 250
Agency (cf. *adhikāra*), 12, 22, 72, 85, 89, 91–3, 118–48, 170, 218, 234, 249, 283, 300, 315
agnicayana, 29, 87–9, 231–4, 237, 271–3
agnihotra, 9, 130, 134, 202, 232, 235, 237, 300, 302–3
agniṣṭoma, 9, 232, 312
Altar, 29, 139, 225, 231–5, 238, 241, 271–2, 300
Alteration, (cf. variation, modification), 4, 23–4, 33, 42, 47, 120, 129–30, 135, 171, 315
Ancestor ritual (cf. *śrāddha*), 9, 111, 118–19, 122, 124, 174, 185, 199–205, 223
aṅga, 126, 135, 137, 238, 300, 302–3
Angst, 11, 285–90
añjali, (cf. greeting, *namaskāra*) 6, 58–9, 61, 64, 74, 251
Antyakarmapaddhati (AKP), 118–19, 121, 124
antyeṣṭi (cf. death ritual, funeral), 8, 125, 185, 187
Anxiety, 36, 197, 285–92
Āpastambagṛhyasūtra, -dharmasūtra, 64–5, 98, 123, 144
apūrva, 24, 32, 37, 40, 135, 229, 266, 295, 297, 301–7
Archetype, (cf. *prakṛti-vikṛti*), 24, 290, 293, 302, 304, 313, 315
Arena, ritual, sacred and sacrificial (cf. space), 41, 84–5, 106, 108, 129, 130, 132, 134, 150, 225, 232, 238, 248, 314, 317
arghya(*pātra*), 96, 99, 107, 239, 241, 250, 255, 314
Ariès, Philippe, 161
Asceticism, ascetics, 18, 47, 61–2, 65–8, 152, 188–90, 200, 209–11, 221–2, 233, 266, 276, 286, 310
āśirvāda, (cf. blessing), 56, 81, 87, 109
Assmann, Jan, 21, 161
Astrology, astrologers, 54, 98, 106, 113, 137, 188, 218
aśvamedha, 9, 128, 130–1, 231–2
Austin, John, 78, 92, 276
āvahana, 83, 90, 107, 110, 240, 250

Babb, Lawrence, 9, 61, 215, 253, 259
Bajracharya, Manik, 15, 242
Bath, ritual (cf. *abhiṣeka*, ablution, *snāna*), 34, 47, 49, 56, 86, 99, 134, 136–44, 187–9, 214, 217, 222, 225, 250–1, 261, 314, 322
Baudhāyanadharmasūtra, -śrautasūtra, 136, 144, 304, 309
Bechler, Silke, 97, 245–6
Belief (cf. faith), 2–6, 12, 22, 33–7, 140, 175, 190–1, 207, 209, 228, 234, 236, 252, 259, 266, 272–4, 281, 287, 295, 297
Bell, Catherine, 17, 20, 22, 38, 57, 71–2, 80
Bells, 42, 85, 149, 157–8, 258
Benson, James, 294, 304, 306
Benveniste, Émile, 46, 274
Bhagavadgītā, 26, 59, 310
Bhaktapur, xv, 98, 103, 118–19, 154–60, 166, 266
Bhakti, *bhaktimārga*, 3–4, 24, 136, 258, 313
Bhandarkar, Ramkrishna Gopal, 75
Birth, xi, 8, 14, 33, 179–180, 188, 191, 198–201, 204, 207, 209, 225, 230, 232, 264, 267, 278, 315
Birthday, 8, 179, 190, 212–14, 219–20
blessing (cf. *āśirvāda*), 41, 56, 62, 65, 83, 85, 100–1, 155, 197, 206, 245, 257, 280
Bloch, Marc, 21, 191, 203, 230
Body (cf. embodiment), 41, 49–52, 55–68, 85, 92, 96–9, 122–3, 129, 131, 137–40, 161, 198, 203–6, 209, 235, 240, 255, 288, 313
Bourdieu, Pierre, 21, 67
Bowing, 41, 58, 60–2, 65, 251, 282
Brāhmaṇa texts (cf. Śatapathabrāhmaṇa), 18, 24, 113–14, 120–1, 127, 130–4, 202, 233, 295, 302
Brahmans, 15–16, 30–1, 58, 62, 65, 68, 89, 112–13, 208, 235, 249
Bronkhorst, Johannes, xvi, 147, 237
Brosius, Christiane, xv, xvi, 24–5, 58
Buc, Philip, 20–1
Buddhism, xii, xv, 3, 8, 18, 24, 27, 33, 43, 90, 95, 102–5, 105–6, 110–11, 140, 183, 192–200, 207–8, 216, 237–8, 242–4, 263, 266–7, 296, 308, 312, 320
Bühnemann, Gudrun, 19, 61, 149, 225, 250
Burkert, Walter, 19, 273, 287

Caland, Willem, 123, 202
Candle, 26, 34, 41, 85, 179, 272
Cassirer, Ernst, 224, 273
Caste, 6, 16–17, 31, 45, 55, 68, 95, 105, 149, 154–5, 166, 184, 193–7, 211, 216, 220, 235, 252–3, 259, 264, 266–7, 280, 316
Celebration, 2, 7–8, 39, 42, 173, 179, 189–90, 195, 206, 211–12, 220–1, 245, 266
Ceremony, 1, 7–12, 16, 21, 25–6, 31, 33, 39, 51, 54, 63, 83, 143, 148, 173, 196, 267, 271, 273, 311
Chariot, 126, 147, 213–17
Circumambulation (cf. *parikrama*, *pradakṣiṇā*), 44, 70, 85, 97–8, 100, 103, 110, 134, 141, 187, 196, 213, 223–4, 250, 316
Clément, Catherine, and Sudhir Kakar, 288
Clifford, James, 30
Clooney, Francis X., 19, 73, 294–8, 302–10
Cloth, clothing, 41, 77, 96, 98, 110–12, 138, 162, 167, 189, 196, 201, 206, 209, 217, 250–5, 261, 266, 314
Colas, Gérard, 112, 255
Comic side of rituals, 136–46, 313

Communication, 3, 5, 12, 20, 23, 25, 30, 37, 41, 56, 60, 67, 73, 77–91, 146, 150, 158, 160–2, 247, 253, 258, 261–2, 270, 276, 282
communitas, 36, 165, 182, 189, 218, 263, 316
Competency, *see adhikāra*
Computer linguistics, 320
Consecration, 9, 86, 100, 183–4, 232–3, 238, 240, 243
Control, 11–12, 23, 36, 71, 89, 181, 229, 290
Crying, 7, 160–9, 201

dakṣiṇā, 46, 81, 90, 97–9, 109–10, 120, 233, 250, 311, 314, 323
dāna, (cf. gift, *kanyādāna*), 10, 46, 62–9, 95–100, 103, 108, 111, 119–23, 197, 204, 219, 237, 251–2, 311, 314
dance, 7, 10, 19, 27, 30–1, 35, 72, 82, 146–7, 151–9, 196, 208, 214, 217, 219–20, 223, 243, 287, 315
darśana, 98, 100, 186, 219, 248, 254, 311
darśapūrṇamāsa, 9, 87, 89, 232, 298, 303–4
Darwin, Charles, 290–1
Dasain, 155–7
Daśakarmavidhi, 81, 83, 87, 98–105, 194
De-individualization, 54, 69, 191, 310, 316
Death (ritual), xi, xv, 8, 25–6, 33, 72, 118–25, 129, 141, 158–65, 174, 176, 179–93, 198–210, 230–1, 264, 277–8, 285–7, 298, 315, 318
Death ritual, (cf. *antyeṣṭi*, funeral), 8, 25–6, 72, 118–25, 129, 161, 163, 179–80, 185, 187, 198–210
Decoration, decorum, 34, 41, 81, 85, 92, 126, 173, 217, 239, 249, 251, 253, 267, 276, 313–14
Deopatan, 149, 215–17, 220–1, 226
deśadharma, 130
Deshpande, Madhav, 51, 52, 115–16
Deśoddhārapūjā, 149, 216, 254
dharma in Pūrvamīmāṃsā, 37, 294–9, 305, 308
dharma, 3–4, 24, 37, 44, 47, 66, 68, 74–5, 112
dharmaśāstra, *dharmaśāstrin*, 24, 46, 58, 61–3, 74, 112, 123, 136, 188, 220–1, 297
dīpa, *see* light
dīrghasattra, 75–6
Dirks, Nicholas, 15–17
Douglas, Mary, 2, 11, 20
Drums, drumming, 42, 85, 117, 147, 149–50, 156–7, 223, 278
Dubois, Abbé Jean Antoine, 15
Dumont, Louis, 5, 18, 29, 63, 117, 196, 310
Durgāpūjā, 213–14, 239
Durkheim, Emile, 10, 12, 19, 50, 180–1, 183, 228, 290
Dynamics of rituals, xv, 1, 4, 7, 13, 21–3, 27, 29, 31, 34, 84, 127, 135–6, 163, 171, 263, 315–19

Ebersole, Gary, 160, 166
Eck, Diana, 254
Efficacy, 11–12, 23, 38, 40, 133, 135, 153, 159, 173, 224, 234, 257, 293–309
Eggeling, Julius, 131–5
Einoo, Shingo, 19, 255
Elevation (cf. extraordinariness, transcendence), 6, 83, 148, 228, 262
Eliade, Mircea, 12, 183, 189
Embodiment (cf. body), 63, 148, 156, 158, 223, 282
Emotions in rituals, 11, 36–7, 42, 72, 83–4, 146–7, 159–76, 270, 290–1, 315

Ethno-Indology, xii, 27, 114, 118, 257
Ethology, 19, 38, 279, 282, 317
Etiquette, 7, 62–3
Everyday action, behavior, life, 1, 7–8, 11, 20, 28, 31–8, 41–3, 48, 55, 57, 60, 69, 82–3, 91–2, 148, 151, 156–7, 164, 179, 253, 279, 283, 295, 314, 314
ex opere operato, 24, 38, 295, 318
Extraordinariness, (cf. transcendence, elevation), 13, 37–8, 67, 83–4, 139–40, 148, 177, 228–9, 253, 262, 264, 279, 317

Faith, 40, 92, 127, 134, 150, 191, 307, 309, 313
Fasting, 3, 10, 41, 46–7, 161, 188, 214, 219–23
Feast (cf. meal), 46, 103, 212, 214
Festival, (cf. *utsava*) xii, 1–2, 7, 9–10, 25–6, 33–4, 36, 39, 41, 54, 62, 137, 146–9, 151, 154–7, 160, 176, 179, 211–21, 227–8, 246–9, 254, 258, 261–2, 311–12, 315–16
Fire, fire sacrifice, 1, 9, 33, 75, 85, 88, 96–101, 107–8, 126–36, 140, 164, 180, 184, 187–196, 202, 206–10, 214, 221–3, 230–49, 267, 271–2, 291, 303
Firth, Raymond, 36, 229
Fischer-Lichte, Erika, 153–4
Flowers, 1, 9, 41, 57, 85, 99–100, 102, 107, 111, 120, 138, 155, 168, 179, 187, 217, 239, 241, 248, 250–5, 258, 260
Formality (of rituals), 20–3, 32–3, 37, 43, 69, 71–2, 119, 123–6, 129, 136, 146–7, 158, 170, 180, 249, 261, 265, 277, 282, 315
Fortes, Meyer, 203, 246
Foucault, Michel, 161 Framing, 33, 41–69, 71, 84–5, 88–90, 110, 128, 149, 158, 169, 265, 317
Francavilla, Domenico, 206
Frank, Annette, 319
Frazer, James, 17, 19, 181
Freed, Stanley, and Ruth, 2
Frequency of rituals, 2, 11, 169, 175, 215
Freschi, Elisa, 74, 89–90, 299, 304, 309
Freud, Sigmund, 11, 162, 183, 212, 285–6, 290
Fuller, Christoph J., 9, 122, 249, 252
Function (of rituals; cf. meaning), 9–13, 16, 24, 29, 36, 60, 78, 111, 136, 143, 151, 181–2, 211, 213, 232, 251, 256–7, 265–318
Functionalism, 10, 13, 78, 78, 183, 270, 274, 324
Funeral (cf. *antyeṣṭi*, death ritual), 25, 164, 166, 179, 180, 201–2, 206, 210
Fusion, 90, 111, 121, 129, 315

Game, 6–7, 33, 39, 41, 67, 94, 105, 146–7, 211, 218
Gandharva marriage (cf. love marriage), 81, 87
Garuḍapurāṇa, -sāroddhāra, 46, 119, 123–5, 204
Gāyatrī, 138, 187–8, 210, 241–2, 256
Geertz, Clifford, 20, 30, 270
Gellner, David, 95, 195
Gennep, Arnold van, 12, 19, 68, 83, 175, 179–83, 189, 190, 198, 262, 270–1
Gesture, 6, 8, 27, 41, 58–69, 71, 77, 82, 85, 217, 250–1, 256, 311
Gift, gift exchange (*dāna*), 10, 41, 44, 46, 60–9, 85, 96–100, 103, 120, 124, 131, 155–6, 188, 192–7, 201, 206–7, 233, 237, 240, 245, 250–3, 255, 280, 286, 297, 311
Gladigow, Burkhard, 81–2
Globalization, 1, 5

Gluckman, Max, 2, 12
Goffman, Erwing, 8, 20, 60
Gonda, Jan, 9, 19, 112, 114, 215, 254, 257
Goody, Jack, 20–1, 71, 271
Grammar of rituals, 33, 64, 72–111, 113, 126, 281, 313, 319
Granoff, Phyllis, 255
Great Tradition, 1, 18, 31, 98, 113, 194, 220–3, 323
Greeting, (cf. *añjali*, *namaskāra*) 6–8, 33, 41, 43, 58–70, 250, 311
gṛhya, Gṛyhasūtra, 86, 95, 98, 105, 110, 113, 123, 185, 194, 232, 238, 255, 257, 312
Grimes, Ronald L., xv, 7, 8, 20–1, 24, 32–3, 36, 42, 81, 118, 128, 136, 148, 173, 180, 212, 229, 269, 293
gurumaṇḍalapūjā, 107–10, 242
Gutschow, Niels, xi, xv, 105, 160, 168, 224
Gutschow, Niels, and Axel Michaels, xv, 81, 83, 90, 98, 102, 105, 111, 164, 166, 179, 184, 188, 192, 194, 201, 221, 224, 240, 266, 320

Hair, 41, 85, 101, 134, 162, 167, 182, 185–91, 202, 204, 209–10, 267
Halbfass, Wilhelm, 294, 305, 307–8
Handelman, Don, 20–1, 31, 42, 151, 157
Harvest cycle, 7, 10, 211, 213, 227
Healing rituals, 11, 38, 127, 245–6, 257, 265, 276, 285, 288, 315
Heesterman, Jan, 147, 207–8, 234–5
Helland, Christopher, 260
Hellwig, Oliver, 319
Herman, Phyllis K., 259, 260
Hierarchy, 12, 23, 36, 62, 68, 182–3, 193, 197, 217, 220, 252, 295, 299, 302–3
Hillebrandt, Alfred, 4–5, 112, 114–15, 235
Höfer, Andràs, 28–9
Holi, 26, 160, 214
homa, 9–10, 26–7, 38, 46, 90, 96–8, 100, 107, 111, 122–3, 194, 214, 219, 230–1, 236–47, 255, 262–3, 311, 314–15
homo ritualis, 2–7, 37, 40, 70, 127, 150–1, 159, 230, 236, 309–16
Honko, Laurie, 37, 176, 213
Houben, Jan. E. M., 80, 229–30, 265
Houseman, Michael, and Carlo Severi, 38, 42, 146, 180, 273–4
Hubert, Henri, 18, 231
Hübner, Kurt, 150, 318
Huizinga Johan, 5
Humphrey, Caroline, and James Laidlaw, 11, 19–20, 24, 35, 42, 55–7, 135–6, 212, 254, 269, 274–6, 280
Hüsken, Ute, xvi, 24, 91
Huxley, Julian, 19, 38, 279, 280

Identificatory Habitus, 3–6, 191, 230, 247, 253–4, 259, 315
Ihi marriage, 102, 104, 111, 115, 131, 192–7, 263, 323
Immortality, 179, 191–2, 200–1, 205, 207–9, 230–5, 256, 263, 279, 308, 310
Incense, 1, 9, 41, 59, 241–2, 250–1, 258, 260–1, 291
individualitas, 11, 32, 35–9, 175–7, 228, 261–5, 315
Initiation (cf. *upanayana*, *vratabandha*), vi, xv, 1, 8, 33, 35, 39, 87, 102, 108, 111, 116, 134, 141, 149, 174, 179–94, 197, 202, 208, 212, 230, 232, 235–6, 239, 262–3, 266–7, 276
Innovation, 24, 33, 175, 219
Intensity, 11, 37, 160, 170, 177, 312
intentio solemnis (cf. *saṃkalpa*), 32–3, 37, 39, 55, 57, 62, 92, 165, 165, 169, 215, 253, 276, 312

Intentionality, 39, 46, 48, 55–7, 61, 132, 136, 269–70, 275–6, 280, 309
Internet, 26, 30, 245, 249, 253, 259–60
Invention of rituals, 22, 24, 122, 124, 129, 161, 171, 315
Invention, 22, 24, 122, 124, 129, 135, 161, 171, 315

Jacobson, Knut, 222–3
Jaimini, (cf. Mīmāṃsāsūtra), 42–3, 135, 252, 293–310
Jamison, Stephanie, 231, 255
Jensen, Adolf E., 12, 273

Kakar, Sudhir, 288
kalaśa, 81, 87, 99, 107, 109–10, 120, 232, 239–43, 249
Kane, Pandurang V., 19, 46–7, 58, 62–5, 123, 136–8, 223, 236
kanyādāna (cf. *dāna*, gift), 96, 99–100, 103, 187, 192–7
Kapferer, Bruce, 19, 146
Karma(n), *karmamārga*, 4, 8, 26, 95, 136, 140, 200, 205–6, 235, 246, 294–5, 308–11
karmakāṇḍa, 294
Kathmandu, xi, xv, 62, 94, 154, 192, 216, 218, 266–7
Kerzer, David I., 10–12, 23, 35, 40
Kölver, Bernhard, and Hemraj Shakya, 115
Kropf, Marianna, 240
kuśa, 44, 47–9, 96, 99, 107, 130, 138–9, 191, 201, 204, 232, 239–43

Lakṣmī, 1, 157, 214, 241–2, 254
Langer, Robert, 23
Langer, Susan K, 77, 151
Lawson, E. Thomas, and Robert McCauley, 12, 20, 78–9, 86–91, 174, 228, 269, 273, 279–82
Leach, Edmund, 7, 20, 77–9, 83, 87, 151, 213
Learning, 34, 185, 187, 191, 283–4
Leisure, 42, 85, 218, 247, 262, 315–16
Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 7, 171, 272
Lévi, Sylvain, 28–9, 127, 231
Levy, Robert, 154–5, 157, 196
Liénard, Pierre, and Pascal Boyer, 2, 33, 211, 281
Life-cycle (ritual, cf. *saṃskāra*), 3, 8–9, 19, 27, 33–6, 39, 42, 84, 94–5, 105–10, 126, 155, 174, 179–210, 213, 219, 228–32, 237, 240–3, 261–5, 311–12, 315, 320
Light in ritual, (*dīpa*), 9, 57, 107, 214, 239, 250, 254, 293, 314
līlā, 9, 146, 214
Liminality, 34–5, 39, 80, 125, 146–7, 175, 182, 189, 209–12, 263, 286, 315
Liturgy, liturgical, 19, 71, 72, 78, 82, 90, 93, 112, 123, 126, 157, 173, 212, 254, 258, 263, 276, 313
Localizing (cf. space), 5, 44, 50, 54, 69–70, 316–17
Locke, John, 238, 242, 245
Love marriage (cf. Gandharva marriage), 81, 87, 95, 166, 194, 197
Love, 12, 25, 58, 141–2, 167, 186, 194, 309, 313
Ludic character of rituals, 159, 182, 212, 317
Lutgendorf, Philip, 261

madhuparka, 96, 99, 248, 255
Mahābhārata, 143, 223, 296
Mahābhāṣya, *see* Patañjali
Mahotsava, 41, 215
Malinowski, Bronisław, 11, 183, 210, 270, 286

mānasa, mānasika, (cf. ritual criticism) 44, 46–7, 133, 137, 223, 249, 311, 313
maṇḍala, (cf. space) 100, 107, 109, 113, 121, 150, 155, 222–5, 239, 243, 251, 314
maṅgala, 8, 111, 159
mantra, 30, 50, 56, 75, 84–5, 89, 95–6, 99, 100, 102, 105, 107, 110–12, 133, 136–41, 187–91, 210, 230–40, 250, 254–8, 271–2, 302–5, 309, 312, 314, 317, 322–3
Manu, Manusmṛti, 16, 47, 50, 62–5, 72, 123, 132, 136, 138–9, 197, 235
Manual (cf. ritual handbook), 4, 17, 72, 81–4, 95, 112–13, 118, 220, 238, 253, 257, 271
mārga, 4, 136, 310–11
Marriage (cf. *vivāha,* wedding), xi, xv, 6, 8, 17–18, 33, 54, 57, 80–1, 87, 90, 94–100, 102–5, 108, 110–11, 115–16, 143, 160, 166–9, 174, 179–85, 187, 190–7, 208, 232, 236, 252, 263, 271, 323
Masuzawa, Tomoko, 14
Mauss, Marcel, 18, 62–3, 67–8, 181, 231
McCauley, Robert, *see* Lawson, E. Thomas
McCrea, Lawrence, 295, 301–2
Meal (cf. feast), 41, 84–5, 99, 101–4, 109, 128, 187, 189, 218, 266, 314
Meaning (of rituals; cf. function), 5, 10–11, 13, 19–22, 29, 35, 38, 48, 56, 60, 75, 80–2, 111, 126, 146, 153, 160, 173, 194, 206, 211, 236–7, 244, 247, 251–8, 262, 265–318
Meaninglessness, 19, 38, 56, 88, 143, 266, 269–79, 309, 318
Media, 1, 22–7, 30, 37, 40, 58–9, 94, 146, 148, 245–7, 259–61
melā, 9, 211–14, 246, 248, 254, 316
Meshel, Naphtali, 76–87, 92–3, 269, 278, 281
Mill, James, 15–17
Mīmāṃsāsūtra (cf. Jaimini), 42–3, 46, 135, 236, 252, 293–310
Mimesis, 4, 39, 149, 160, 170, 278, 283
Minkowski, Christopher, 87, 90
Mishap, 34, 72, 127–36, 171, 313
Mishra, Anand, xvi, 74, 295, 319
Mistake in rituals, 72, 112, 113, 127–35, 144–5, 171
Modality, 32, 35, 42, 147, 173–7, 228–9, 262, 265, 315–16
Modernity, 2, 5, 7, 26–7, 29, 199, 286, 288–9
Modes of rituals, 11, 31–2, 39, 165, 173–5, 177, 212, 228, 261, 315
Modification (cf. variability, variation, dynamics, *ūha*), 24, 32, 40, 51, 88, 90, 94, 203, 218, 238–9, 245, 247, 262, 266, 293, 316
Moore, Sally, and Barbara G. Myerhoff, 12, 21, 37
Mourning (ritual), xv, 161–5, 198, 206, 289
Moyer, Hannah, 284
Müller, Friedrich Max, 15, 17–18
Müller, Klaus-Werner, 120–2
music, 10, 30, 35, 72, 77, 82, 85, 99, 111, 146–51, 156, 158, 161, 168, 170, 188, 212, 217–19, 258, 283, 292, 315
Myth, mythological, 12, 41, 70, 85, 131, 150, 157, 158, 211, 220–6, 256, 270, 273, 276, 278, 287, 292, 314, 316

Naipaul, V.S., 25–6
namaskāra, (cf. *añjali,* greeting), 33, 58, 60, 64–5, 250–1, 311
Nandy, Ashis, 3
Navadurgā, 153–9, 216
Negelein, Julius, 127–30, 135

Nelson, Judith K., 160, 166
Neurosciences, 169, 269, 280, 283–4, 289, 317
New and Full Moon sacrifice, *see darśapūrṇamāsa*
Newars, xi, xv, 3, 94, 98–115, 118–19, 124, 129, 164, 168–9, 192–7, 215–27, 240, 242, 266–7, 320
Night vigil, 10, 46–7, 54, 69, 87, 91, 214, 219–21
nitya-maimittka-kāmya, 137, 236, 253, 296, 308, 311
nyāsa, 106, 241, 243, 250, 314

Offerings, 69, 85, 100, 119, 123, 134, 202, 231–52, 255, 260, 302, 312, 314
Oldenberg, Hermann, 14, 18
Olivelle, Patrick, 3, 183, 209–10
Omission, 90, 111, 121, 128–30, 135, 171, 315
Oppitz, Michael, 82, 86, 117, 150
Ortner, Sherry, 22

Pañcakrośīyātrā, 44, 218, 224
Pandit (pundit), 14, 17–18, 26, 30, 44, 141–2
pāṇigrahaṇa(*vidhi*), 97–100, 116, 187–8
Pāṇini, 64, 74, 116
Paraskāragṛyasūtra (PG), 138, 144, 238
parikrama (cf. circumambulation, *pradakṣiṇā*), 100, 187, 213, 223
Parpola, Asko, 112, 114
Parry, Jonathan, 204–5
Paśupati(nātha), 49, 51, 61, 65, 149, 216–19, 221, 246
Patan, xv, 103, 118, 149, 154
Patañjali, 64, 74, 76–7, 143
Pattern of rituals, 2, 5, 34, 42, 48, 52, 73, 77, 81, 86, 88, 98, 103–4, 110–11, 229, 239, 264, 278, 283–4, 313, 320
Patton, Laurie L., 80, 257
Penner, Hans H., 73, 173, 273
Perfection, 6, 127, 135–6, 180, 183, 281
Performance, 1, 4–6, 11, 13, 15, 19, 23, 27, 30–2, 35, 40–2, 46, 54, 71–7, 93, 114, 118–21, 135, 146, 149, 153–4, 159, 170–1, 195, 211, 218, 232–9, 246, 249, 254, 265–6, 271, 276, 282, 294, 298, 300–4, 308–9, 315, 320, 326
Performative turn, 20, 22, 183
Performativity, 19, 32, 34, 72, 80, 159–60
Personalizing, 50, 54, 69, 316
Pilgrimage (cf. procession, *tīrthayātrā*), 1, 10, 36, 44, 47, 54, 69, 70, 120, 152, 176, 211–16, 219–27, 261, 311–16
piṇḍa, 119–25, 187, 203–7, 209, 223
Platvoet, Johan G., 7–8, 34, 71, 157, 170, 173, 211, 265
Play (cf. *līlā*), 5–7, 9, 31–2, 37, 57, 123, 146–9, 153–61, 183, 211–12, 214, 218, 229, 247, 254, 262, 316
Power, political and social, 9, 12, 15–16, 21–3, 28, 62, 65, 86, 115, 151, 159, 193, 224–5, 229, 233, 236, 245, 247, 262, 307–9
Power, supra-human, 10, 36–7, 251, 256, 277, 285
pradakṣiṇā, (cf. circumambulation, *parikrama*) 85, 97–8, 134, 141, 187, 223–4, 250
pradhāna, 90, 126, 135, 238, 300, 302
prakṛti-vikṛti, 24, 135, 299, 304, 312, 315
prasāda, 46, 61, 109, 156, 217, 245, 251–3, 311, 314
prāyaścitta/i, 34, 44, 120, 127–35, 144, 171, 225
Prayer, 41, 82, 85, 91, 154, 186, 206, 240, 247–58, 262, 287
preta, 118–19, 121–5, 164–5, 201–5, 209, 210

Procession (cf. pilgrimage, *tīrthayātrā*), 7, 36, 85, 103–4, 147–52, 156–7, 164, 168, 187, 211–28, 262
Public sphere, 26, 176, 219, 245
Publicity, 32, 34, 72, 170
pūjā, x, 9, 19, 38, 46, 60, 81, 83, 87, 95–6, 102–4, 107–10, 119–23, 147, 155, 176, 213, 214, 216, 219–23, 232–62, 311–14, 322–3
Purāṇas (cf. Garuḍapurāṇa), 44, 56, 68, 123, 141, 220, 260
Purity, impurity, 7, 16, 60–3, 65, 68, 101, 116, 122, 130, 140–1, 165, 185, 191, 197, 202–3, 206, 210, 212, 224, 252–3, 266, 277
Pūrvamīmāṃsā, 19, 24, 37–40, 73, 89, 229, 266, 293–310, 315, 317

Radcliffe-Brown, Arthur Reginald, 11–12, 165–6, 270, 287
rājasūya, 9, 147, 232
rakṣabandhana, 176, 214, 219, 240
Rappaport, Roy, 20–1, 69, 71, 83, 254, 266, 277, 279–80
Rebirth, 8, 207, 209, 258, 262, 308, 310–11
Recitation, xii, 35, 44, 81, 96, 104, 106–7, 110–11, 130–1, 135, 138, 141, 144, 147, 225, 243, 248, 256, 258, 273, 297, 303, 314, 323
Reduction, 90, 93, 111, 122, 129–30, 135, 171, 315
Reiter, Nils, 319
religio, 32, 35–9, 63, 84, 89, 176, 228, 245–7, 261–2, 316
Religiosity, 14, 20, 34–7, 173–4, 287–8
Renou, Louis, 28, 74, 90
Repetition, repetitivity, xii, 5, 33–5, 71–2, 83, 89, 90, 110, 129, 130, 135–6, 141, 145, 149, 158, 170–71, 265, 284–5, 304, 315
Ṛgveda (RV), 115, 128, 130, 138, 187–8, 225, 231, 241, 256
Ritual and evolution, 17, 38, 181, 273, 279, 282, 289–91, 318
Ritual and language, 73, 77, 79, 91
Ritual criticism, (cf. *mānasa*) 20–4, 56, 133–4, 136, 140, 143, 208, 249, 263, 277, 295, 306, 308–9
Ritual Dynamics Centre, Heidelberg, xv, 7, 29, 80, 319
Ritual element, 9, 21–4, 34, 40–4, 63, 72, 78–92, 98–111, 121–7, 170–1, 194–6, 202, 236, 242, 249, 253–8, 262, 267, 272–4, 281, 299, 302–5, 311–14, 319–23
Ritual handbook (cf. manual), 24, 27, 30, 34, 43–4, 72, 75, 81, 87–90, 98, 111–21, 124, 170, 194, 232, 238, 242, 250, 254, 312
Ritual, the term, xii, 2, 6–8, 13, 19–21, 31–2, 37
Ritualization, 2, 8, 11, 19, 38, 57, 60, 161, 163, 173, 176, 282
Rospatt, Alexander von, xv, 102
Röttger-Rössler, Birgitt, 283
Routine, 7, 33, 36–7, 39, 71, 139, 148, 151
Rule-governed behavior, 2, 34, 40–1, 72–3, 112, 265, 313
Rules of rituals, 9, 22, 34, 62–7, 73–227, 124, 126, 131, 137, 157–8, 170, 198, 263, 272, 275, 293–5, 302, 309, 313, 317, 319

Sacrifice, (cf. *homa*, *yāga*, *yajña*) 231–147 et passim
Sacrifice, animal and blood, 9, 104, 145–5, 216–17, 231–3, 236–7, 249, 273, 304
Sacrifice, human, 2, 216, 232
Salomon, Richard, 115–17, 225
saṃdhyā, 9, 232, 237

saṃkalpa, (cf. *intentio solemnis*), 9, 32–3, 43–58, 67–70, 81–92, 96–101, 106, 109–11, 123, 138, 215, 221, 241–4, 249, 253, 276, 312, 314, 316–17
Saṃkalparatnāvalī, 44–49
saṃsāra, 8, 56, 183, 200, 277, 308, 311
saṃskāra (cf. life-cycle ritual), 8–9, 36, 44, 111, 183–5, 191, 195, 230, 232, 238–40, 262, 308, 311–12, 315, 320
Sanderson, Alexis, 277
sapiṇḍīkaraṇa, 25, 72, 118–25, 129, 185, 187, 204, 210, 263
saptapadī, 97–8, 100, 187, 192, 194, 196, 267
Śarmā, Harinātha, 44, 47, 49
Śatapathabrāhmaṇa (ŚBr), 42, 89, 128–35, 231–5, 308, 310
Sax, William, xvi, 11, 118
Scales in ritual, 35, 37, 60, 118, 174–6, 245
Schechner, Richard, 19–20, 152–4, 157, 273
Scheifinger, Heinz, 259
Scripts of rituals, 9, 34, 37, 72, 82, 112, 148, 153, 160, 168–70, 174, 212, 247, 313
Seaquist, Carl Andrew, 79, 84, 86, 90
Searle, John, 56, 78, 92
Sharma, Mahendra Raj, xv, 98, 118
Shreve-Neiger, Andrea K., and Barry A. Edelstein, 287–8
Siegel, Lee, 141–3
Silence, 41, 47, 85, 128, 161, 188, 289
Singer, Milton, 29
Śivarātri, 36, 54, 91, 213–14, 219–221
smārta, 24, 98, 105, 119, 194–5, 221, 227, 238, 254, 310, 312
Smith Brian K., 9
Smith, Frederick, 119, 247
Smith, Jonathan Z., 215
Smith, William Robertson, 18–19, 223, 293
Smṛticandrikā, 62, 64–5, 68, 136–7
snāna (cf. *abhiṣeka*, ablution), 34, 45, 47, 50, 85–6, 90, 111, 136–8, 250, 314
Snoek, Jan A.M., 7, 32, 83
societas, 12, 32, 35–9, 176–7, 211–12, 216, 218, 228, 261–5, 315–16
Soeffner, Hams-Georg, 13
Solidarity, 12, 23, 36, 50, 165, 175, 183, 197, 211, 213, 216, 218, 265, 309, 316
soma, 9, 53, 130, 231–4, 248, 304, 312
Space, ritual and sacred, (cf. arena, *āsana*, localizing, *maṇḍala*) 50, 69, 147–51, 158, 163, 222, 224, 316
Speech acts, 46, 48, 55–7, 78, 91–2, 257, 271
Spencer, Paul, 152–3
Sport, 7, 25–6, 39, 211, 218
śrāddha (cf. ancestor ritual), 8, 103, 106, 111, 119–27, 176, 185, 187, 204, 223, 250, 314
śrauta, Śrautasūtra, 9, 24, 113, 126–9, 138, 231–8, 247, 257, 271, 309, 312–19
śruti, 56, 63, 126, 303
Staal, Frits, xvi, 19, 56, 76, 79, 80, 83–4, 88, 257, 266, 269, 270–6, 280, 287, 317–18
Stability (of rituals; cf. unchangeability), 13, 20–3
Standardization, xii, 10, 34, 40, 58, 71, 78, 86, 116, 140, 250, 254, 263, 272
Starobinski, Jean, 67
Stereotypicality, 24, 33–4, 39, 71–2, 119, 135, 140, 170, 264, 278–9, 313, 317
Stevens, Anthony, 291
Stipulation, 41–2, 56, 90, 111, 147, 165, 169–70, 174, 212, 225, 234, 275, 309
Substitution, 11, 35, 71, 90, 91, 120, 125, 129–30, 239, 315

Taber, John, xvi, 257, 295, 297, 307–8
Tachikawa, Musashi, 19, 237, 249, 253
Taittirīyasaṃhitā (TS), 231, 234
Tambiah, Stanley J., 2, 6, 19, 29, 35–7, 56, 146, 170, 269, 270
tantra in Pūrvamīmāṃsā, 89, 90, 293, 304
Tantrism, 34, 141, 154, 216, 226, 237, 242, 244, 249–51, 254, 277, 313
Tears, 160–9, 201, 288
Theater, 6–7, 19, 30–1, 57, 151, 153, 170, 211, 218
Thibaut, George, 114, 295–6, 302, 309
Thieme, Paul, 9, 255
Thite, Ganes Umakanth, 127, 129, 131, 133, 231
Thompson, George, 56, 273
tīkā, tilaka, 58, 62, 102–11, 120, 196, 241, 251, 266, 314
Timing, ritual time, 13, 40–4, 48, 50, 54, 69–70, 82, 124, 149, 151, 158, 219, 232, 265, 316–17
tīrtha, tīrthayātrā (cf. pilgrimage, procession), 10, 36, 46, 120, 139, 141, 143, 176, 213–16, 219, 222–7, 248, 251, 316
Transcendence (cf. extraordinariness, elevation), 6, 37, 69, 165, 176, 228–61, 307, 312, 316
Transculturality, 5, 13, 25–7, 281, 312
Transfer (of rituals), 1, 13, 22–6, 63, 68, 73, 86, 90, 105, 111–12, 161, 206, 222, 231, 249, 257, 260, 267, 271, 305, 315
Transformation, 23, 31–3, 37–8, 40, 63, 110, 149, 154, 157–8, 182–6, 211, 219, 237, 245, 249, 261–6, 274, 315, 317
Trautmann, Thomas, 14, 16–17, 68, 197
Tripathi, Gaya Charan, 249, 253
Tsuchiyama, Yasuhiro, 86
Turner, Victor, 7, 11, 20–1, 33–7, 80, 146–7, 152, 175, 179–80, 182–3, 189, 190, 215, 218, 262–3, 270, 286, 290–1, 315–16
Tylor, Edward, Burnett, 18

ūha (cf. modification, variability, variation), 24, 40, 90, 293, 304
Unchangeability (of rituals; cf. stability), 4, 19, 22, 24, 40, 71, 262, 278, 317
upacāra, 9, 110–11, 121–2, 215, 247, 250, 254, 256
upanayana, (cf. initiation, *vratabandha*) 8, 116, 183–8, 256
Upaniṣad, 8, 133, 141, 209–10, 235, 294, 308, 311
Urban space, urbanity, urbanization, 1, 25, 164, 206, 260
utsava (cf. festival), 9, 36, 46, 211, 214–16, 248, 260, 311, 315

Vājasaneyīsaṃhitā (VS), 95, 102, 115, 130, 138
Vajrayāna, 24, 237–8, 244
Valpey, Kenneth, 248–9, 254–5
Varanasi, 44, 147, 155, 189, 213–14, 223–4, 251
Variability, (cf. dynamics, modification, variation, *ūha*), 34–5, 39, 72, 116, 120–7, 144, 146, 170, 254, 262, 278–9, 315
Variation (cf. dynamics, modification, variability, *ūha*), 24, 32–5, 72, 78, 116, 118, 120, 123–9, 136, 146, 180, 184, 195–6, 253, 282, 295, 302–5, 313, 315
varṇa, 9, 16, 55, 216, 254
Vatsalājātrā, 149, 215–17
Venkatachari, K. K. A, 112, 315

viniyoga, 257, 299, 300–3
visarjana, 46, 57, 90, 99, 109–10, 189, 242, 244, 250, 276, 312, 314
Viṣṇusmṛti, 62, 65, 205
Visualization, 13, 240, 243–4, 250, 254, 259
vivāha, (cf. marriage, wedding), 8, 81, 87, 95–8, 100, 111, 185, 187, 232
Vow (cf. *vrata*), 10, 33, 36, 46–7, 55, 62, 75, 92, 126, 176, 185, 188, 211, 213, 219–21, 261, 276, 311–12, 315–16
vrata (cf. vow), viii, 10, 36, 46, 55, 75, 92, 176, 219–21, 254–5, 311–12, 316
vratabandha, (cf. initiation, *upanayana*), 185, 187, 191
vyāhṛti, 97, 131, 138, 314

Weber, Max, 18, 37, 61
Wedding (cf. marriage, *vivāha*), 51, 83, 95, 98, 102–4, 110–11, 116, 149, 160, 166, 179, 180, 184, 187, 191–7, 220, 267, 311
Werlen, Iwar, 78–9
Wezler, Albrecht, 130
Wheelock, Wate, T., 56
Whitehouse, Harvey, 11–12, 20, 169, 173–4, 176, 228, 280
Wilke, Annette, 147, 251
Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 34, 94, 275
Witzel, Michael, 19, 255
Worship, *see pūjā*
Wright, Daniel, 154
Wulf, Christoph, xvi, 160, 283

yāga, mahāyāga (cf. *yajña*), 9, 26, 214, 230–1, 237, 246–7, 297, 300, 303, 305
yajamāna, 9, 27, 54, 69, 84, 105, 119–21, 125, 231, 240–1, 244, 260
yajña (cf. *homa*, *yāga*), 9–10, 38, 40, 85, 107, 143, 214, 219, 230–49, 311, 314
Yājñavalkyasmṛti, 63, 205
yajñopavīta, 38, 121, 138, 150, 166, 187

Zotter, Astrid, xv, xvi, 253–4
Zotter, Christof, xv, xvi, 238–9, 276