

Freedom In Exercising Religious Rituals And Ceremonies – A Study

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ABSTRACT:- Ritual is nothing but a sequence of activities which involves gestures, words etc which is performed in a sequestered place and performed according to set sequence. Rituals may be prescribed by the tradition of the community. Ritual may be defined as the established form of a ceremony. It is done in a particular situation and its repeated whenever the situation arises in the same manner as done before. Ceremony is nothing but the formal religious or public event. An event in which a person or a group of individuals celebrates a particular event is known as ceremony. Ceremony is also the ritual observances and procedures required or performed at grand and formal occasions. A religious ceremony may be defined as a celebration which has religious meaning. An example for formal occasions is the proclamation of a new queen. But, when it comes to religious ceremony, it is different, an example for religious ceremony is sacred thread ceremony which is celebrated by the Hindus. As we all know that India is a country which has different religions. The Indian Constitution also has given the citizens of India the right to profess any religion. Article 25 – 28 deals about the right to freedom of religion. All the religions are treated equally before the law. There are various forms of rituals and ceremonies which are followed by the people of different religions. The paper discusses about the origin of rituals and ceremonies and also the various forms of rituals and ceremonies which are followed by Hindu, Muslim and Christian. The paper also discusses about whether the Hindus, Christians and Muslims have the freedom in exercising their religious rituals and ceremonies.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Hinduism most of the people consider rituals as the most important part more than the doctrine and belief even the Veda itself talks more about rituals. The Hindus follow certain painful rituals and they believe that their sins will be forgiven by performing such rituals. Some of the rituals followed by Hindus are piercing of tongue, piercing of body, walking on the fire, throwing babies from top of the roof etc and some of the ceremonies are sacred thread ceremony, birth ceremony etc.

The origin of Islam date back to the seventh century. Prophet Mohammed in his 40th year got the revelation from Allah through the archangel Gabriel. After 13 years of suffering he migrated to Mecca. For 23 years he transmitted the Quran orally. The Muslims follow the ritual of circumcision for which the origin is not known. Some say that the Prophet himself was circumcised hence they follow this ritual. Some of the religious rituals which are followed by the Muslims are prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage, animal sacrifice and some of the ceremonies are birth rites, shahada, funeral rites, nikkah.

The origin of Christianity in India was when St. Thomas came to Kerala. The Christianity spreader with the invasion of Dutch and French. The rituals followed by the Christians are Mass, confession, Holy Communion, Baptism, Rosary. The Roman Catholics consider the Mass as the most important part as it is considered as the Lord's Last Supper. Marriage is one of the most important ceremony for the Christians. The objective of the study is to research whether the people belonging to different religions have their absolute right in performing their rituals and ceremonies.

RITUALS AND CEREMONIES FOLLOWED BY THE HINDUS RITUALS

The following are some of the religious rituals which are followed by the Hindus.

1) Piercing of the tongue

A metal rod is driven into the tongue. They believe that by doing this they attain spiritual purity. In Bengal, the piercing of the tongue is done by the people who belong to low caste, even now in some parts of Bengal, the low caste people are not allowed to learn, they are treated very badly. The tongue piercing is done on the eve of Bengali New Year. They believe that by bearing such pain, it will cleanse their soul. Many have advised them not to practise this ritual as there is a chance of being infected but the people say that they are following from ancient days and till date none of them are affected.

2) Piercing the body

The piercing of the body is done for the Lord Murugan and his devotees perform this ritual following 48 days of fast. The pierce the body with hooks and some tries to pull heavy vehicles. The piercing of the body is a ritual which are followed by the Tamilians in the month of Thaiposam.

3) Throwing the baby from roof top

The ritual of dropping the toddlers is followed by the people of Maharashtra. They throw the Toddlers from a rooftop of at least 15 metres. They throw the toddlers as it is believed that, by performing this ritual, they will ensure good health and prosperity for their families.

4) Bani Festival

The Bani Festival celebrated at the Devaragattu Temple. hundreds of *lathi* -wielding devotees gather at this temple to hit each other on the heads at midnight! Drenched in blood, these men go on with the *celebration* till the beak of dawn, to commemorate the killing of a demon by Mala-Malleshwara (Shiva).

5) Nag panchami

It is celebrated all over India. It is celebrated on the fifth day of lunar month of Shravan. The devotees feed the Snake with venom with milk and even rats. It is believed that snake won't bite on Nag Panchami.

6) Fire Walking

This is a ritual which is practised in Tamil Nadu which have pread to Sri Lanka. The devotees walk on the bed of fire. This ritual is performed as it is believed to grant wish and blessings from the Goddess Draupadi.¹

II. CEREMONIES

The following are the certain ceremonies which are followed by the Hindus.

1) The sacred thread ceremony²

After the birth of the child biologically, the child is believed to be twice born after he has been accepted officially into is varna. When he seeks his identity in a spiritual manner he accepts his spiritual teacher as his father and the Vedas as his mother. In this ceremony, he receives a sacred thread known as Jenoi. He must wear the sacred thread throughout his lifetime. The ceremony includes shaving the head, bathing, wearing new clothes. He begs alms from his parents and other relatives. He then hears Gayatri mantra from his guru and then the guru gives him the spiritual name. After wrapping around the thread on his round thumb he must chant the prayer at dawn, noon and dusk. He takes the vow that he would learn Vedas and serve his teacher. He concludes by offering dakshina to his teacher.

2). Birth ceremony

As the name suggests this ceremony is performed to welcome the baby into the world. As a part of the function, the father places ghee and honey on the tongue of the baby and whispers the name of the God in his ears.

3). Name giving ceremony

As the name suggests this ceremony is performed on the day on which the baby is given name. This ceremony is celebrated around the eleventh day after its birth. On this day the family astrologer announces the horoscope of the child.

The following are the various other ceremonies which are celebrated by the Hindus

- i) The first outing, on this day he takes the Darshan of the temple and the deity and in the evening he takes the darshan of the moon.
- ii) The first grains
- iii) Mundan
- iv) Piercing ear lobes.

5) vivaha

Vivaha, the marriage, it is considered to be the most important samskara. According to vivaha , the couple would stay together for lifetime only except when the husband renounces the world. In those days, divorce was not given and widows were not allowed to remarry. If a women accepts her partner from a higher caste, the opposite would be shunned.

¹Unusual rituals and festivals of India that will give you goosebumps by Hermant Sharma.

²Www. Religionfacts.com

There are much variation according to the regional and denominational variations. But some of the features are common which are given below:

- [1] Welcoming the bridegroom
- [2] Exchanging flower garlands
- [3] The daughter being given in marriage
- [4] Sacred fire ceremony
- [5] Holding of hands
- [6] Circumambulation of the sacred fire
- [7] Marking of the kum – kum
- [8] Taking seven steps
- [9] Tying knot
- [10] Viewing pole star
- [11] Receiving elders blessing
- [12] Exchanging gifts.

III. RITUALS AND CEREMONIES FOLLOWED BY THE MUSLIMS

The following are some of the religious rituals followed by the Muslims ³

- 1) Prayer
Prayer is considered to be one of the most important part for the Muslims. The Muslims are expected to pray at least five times in a day that is on dawn, noon, mid noon, sun set and at night. They can even pray extra if they wish. Their prayer includes physical actions, verbal sayings etc.
- 2) Fasting
As we all know the meaning of fasting as restraining from food , water. The Muslims are expected to fast during the month of Ramzan. They fast for 30 days. During these days they must restrain themselves from food, water from dawn to dusk. They can even fast on the other days as they wish. It is also an opportunity for the wealthy person to experience a day without food and realise the difficulties of the poor.
- 3) Pilgrimage
The pilgrimage is a holy pilgrimage which every financially and physically well Muslim is expected to go for a pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime. Some even perform religious rituals by going around the Kabba. These days of pilgrimage are expected to be spent in a spiritual manner.
- 4) Charity
Giving charity is one of the most important aspect of Islam. Every Muslim is expected to contribute some amount of money to the poor. The contribution depends upon the income which a person receives every year.
- 5) Purification
Before prayer and before performing certain rituals the Muslims are expected to wash their face, feet, arms and hands which is known as “Wudu” in Arabic. This ensures high level of hygiene.
- 6) Animal sacrifice
The Muslims believe that it is God who have created the animals for them so they have the right to eat the animals and on special occasions when the animals are killed a part of it is given to the poor.

IV. CEREMONIES FOLLOWED BY THE MUSLIMS

The following are some of the religious ceremonies which are performed by the Muslims

- 1) Birth rights⁴
The Adhan is nothing but prayer which is whispered into the baby's right ear, it must be the first words which the baby hears. Many Muslims circumcise their boy baby on the seventh day of its birth. The origin of the circumcision is not known but some say that since Prophet Mohammed himself was circumcised hence they also perform this ritual of circumcision.
- 2) Shahada
The shahada is nothing but which makes a persons entry into Islam. The entrance to the Islamic religion can be made at any age. The ceremony is mostly done in the mosque. In this ceremony the person confesses his faith by bearing witness in the public.
- 3) Nikkah
The Arabic words Nikkah (marriage) literally means "to tie up together" for ever or the union of the sexes and in law this term means 'marriage'. Under Mohammedan Law, marriage (Nikkah) is a civil contract, the main

³Ourmuslimneighbour.org

⁴www.ulc.org

object whereof is to legalize sexual intercourse and the procreation of children. Quran, which is a collection of the words of God, directs every Muslim to marry a suitable woman of his liking. It is, therefore, a religious duty of every Muslim to marry according to the rules of Islam. Any person who does not marry without any reasonable excuse, disobeys the words of God. According to Islam marriage is a Sunnat muwakkidah. Muslim marriage is treated as a mere civil contract and not a sacrament. observation seem to be based on the fact that Muslim marriage has similar characteristics as a contract for instance—

- i) As marriage requires proposal (Ijab) from one party and acceptance (qubul) from the other.
 - i) There must be a free consent of the parties or of their guardians.
 - iii) The parties to the marriage must be competent.
 - iv) There must be Quid pro Quo, which is called as Mahr (Dower) and it is the consideration for the contract of marriage between the parties
 - v) The terms of the marriage – contract may be settled by the parties themselves.
 - vi) There is also a provision for the breach of marriage known as divorce.
- 4) Funeral rites
The deceased body is washed properly and its wrapped around with Kafan. The dead body must be buried in such a direction that it faces Mecca. All those who are participating in the funeral must take a handful of sand and place on top of the grave.

V. RITUALS AND CEREMONIES FOLLOWED BY THE CHRISTIANS

RITUALS

The following are some of the rituals followed by the Christians⁵

- 1) Baptism
In olden days only the adults are given Baptism because it is a belief that all our sins get washed away with the holy water and that's why only elderly people were given baptism. In olden days the people were dipped in the holy water but, nowadays, Baptism is given to the new born child. The head of the child is sprinkled with the holy water and the child is blessed.
- 2) Confession
Confession is nothing but owing up to something which we believe and telling it forthrightly to all who should hear it. In Bible it refers to two things namely :
 - i) Confessing faith in Christ to the world
 - ii) Confessing sins to God.
- 3) Holy Communion
In the Holy Communion, the bread is considered as the body of Jesus Christ and the wine is considered as the flesh of Jesus Christ. It is believed that Holy Communion is the receiving of Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. The Bible says that “ He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him”. To receive Holy Communion worthily its necessary to be free from sin. One must have an intention to obey the church laws on the fast required before Holy Communion out of reverence for the body and blood of our Lord. The word of the Lord says that “ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily, will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord”.
- 4) Mass⁶
The word Mass was derived from Latin word “missa “ which means disposal. The Roman Catholics consider mass as the most important part as it is considered as the Lord's Supper. The Catholic Church believes that the Mass is exactly the same sacrifice that Jesus offered on the cross at Calvary.
- 5) Praying the Rosary⁷
Rosary is nothing but a set of prayers which is said during the meditation on events in the lives of Jesus and Mother Mary. A rosary is also the string of beads that the worshipper uses to count the prayers. Praying Rosary is one of the most important part for the Roman Catholics.

CEREMONIES

Pre- wedding⁸

⁵www.whiskeycatholic.com

⁶en.m.wikipedia.org

⁷www.patheos.com

During the pre – wedding ceremony the bridegroom as well as the bride celebrates their bachelor party. The bride celebrates her spinster party in which her friends shower her with gifts and then the bride offers them a pink cake in which a thimble is hidden. It is believed that the person who gets the thimble will be person to get married next.

Wedding

The groom sends a car to pick up the bride and waits for her outside the church. After she arrives, the Best man of the groom welcomes her with a bouquet of flowers. Then the couple walks down the corridor gracefully to reach the altar. There the priest awaits them and offers them best wishes. He then reads psalms from the Holy Bible, which is followed by sermon called Homily on the sacredness of the wedding. Following this, he asks question to the bride and the groom regarding their consent for the marriage. These rings are blessed by the priest first, to instill love and faith between the two. After this the couple is blessed by the gathering and the priest. The wedding concludes by signing on a register and the couple walks down the aisle, arm in arm. A copy of the signed page is later sent to the Registrar of Marriages.

Post wedding

Both bride and groom will be welcomed by the guests followed by cutting of the cake and the couple feeds each other. The toast master then offers toast in the honour of the couple. Then the reception party is celebrated with dance and dinner party.

CASE LAWS

1) S. R Bommai v Union of India⁹

In this case, the Supreme Court held that secularism is the basic feature of the constitution. The State treats equally all religions and religious denominations. Religion is a matter of individual faith and cannot be mixed with secular activities. Secular activities can be regulated by the state by enacting the law, justice Ramaswami observed that secularism is not anti – God.

2) N. Aditya V. TranvancoreDevaswom Board¹⁰

The Supreme Court held that Brahmins do not have monopoly over performing puja in a temple. A non – Brahmin can be appointed as a pujari if he is properly trained and well versed with rituals to be performed and mantras to be recited.

3) Church of God v. K. K. R. M. C Welfare Association¹¹

In this case, the Supreme Court held that in the exercise of the right to religious freedom under Articles 25 and 26, no person can be allowed to create noise pollution or disturb the peace of others. The custom of religious prayer through the use of loudspeakers is not an essential element of any religion. The high court gave direction and guidelines for the control of noise pollution and not to make Church to keep speakers of lower level are legal in view of the pollution control provision.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper discussed about the rituals and ceremonies of Hindus, Muslims and Christians. Persons can propagate any religion as their wish and nobody can restrict them. One can profess and celebrate any festival but it must not disturb the public. In one of the judgements it was given that the custom of religious prayer through the use of loudspeakers is not an essential element of any religion. From this it can be concluded that it is not an absolute freedom but it is restricted.

⁸ www.culturalindia.net

⁹ AIR 1994 SC 1918

¹⁰ AIR 2016 SC 209

¹¹ AIR 2000 SC 2773