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“Religious Shrine a Social Space ”

“A study of a religious shrine and its impact over our society”

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Introduction

We were recently required to visit the Religious Shrine of some of the well-known deities of the country. Our Sociology project involved us in carrying out, a field review of something like this was not performed by till now, and this is the first time where we would not be visiting the Shrine for worshipping the God but to observe and interpret the daily routine of the Shrine.



Choosing the Shrine was tough, but the idea was to choose a shrine small in size which did not have much crowd. Thus, our choice was the Ramdev temple located near my house. The temple was located 250 meters from the house, which belonged to a Rajputanadeity who is followed by a majority of the population of Rajasthan. The location was easy to visit and record the daily routine and to interact with people and to observe the place. A Hindu Priest called the "Pandit" sat

in the temple, and was responsible for opening and closing of the temple on time. His house was situated within the temple premises, about 50 meters away. In the evening, the veterans of society would often come to sit there for experiencing the peaceful melodies of the evening prayers. The routine followed in the Shrine started with the early morning prayer which is locally called the 'Aarti' which takes place from 6:00 am to 7:00 am which is followed by the 'Prashaad distribution ceremony'. The same routine is following at sundown when most of the people of our neighbourhood gather for the evening 'Hawan' and 'Pooja'. At around 9:00 pm, the Pandit closes the temple and return to his house.

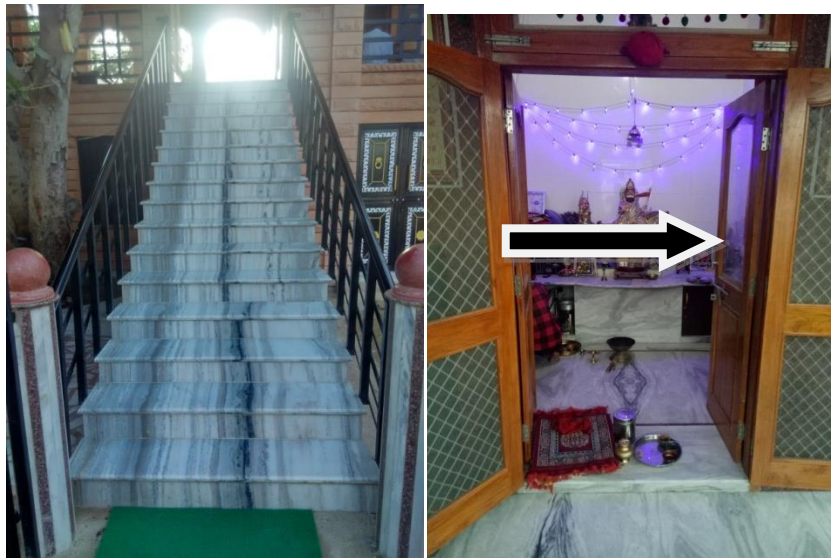
History

The deity 'Ramdev' is not a mythological figure, but a historical king. During 1352-1385 AD he ruled the state of Rajasthan and devoted his life for the upliftment of the poor and underprivileged people of the society.

On investigation with the neighbourhood, it was recorded that most of the locals were not aware of the history of the establishment and did not have any idea about diety himself. However, when established, it was small in size, i.e. four by four feet of the concrete platform and on it a small hut-like structure in which the portrait was placed, people use to throw wheator 'Bajra'. Near the Shrine there was an area designated to feed the birds.



Within two years, the popularity of the Shrine increased, and the establishment was deconstructed into a more prominent temple. The money for the construction was donated by all the Rajputs families in the colony.



Because of the construction, the number of people visiting the Shrine increased.

Moreover, since then a "Pandit," i.e. a Hindu priest is available in the day time all the temple. These are two of the many changes which took place after the construction of the new temple. This event, as mentioned above, reminded me of Karl Marx, who once stated that – "*the social changes are affected by the changes in the material condition*". Furthermore, the same was happening here; the material changes in the formation of the new construction lead to many social life changes in our society.

First Day(16th October 2017)

I got up at 6:00 am as it was the first day of my field review and as I wanted to experience the morning routine of the temple. I arrived at the temple by 6:30 am, to my astonishment there was a mass gathering of roughly 100 people in the area. There was a proper place in the corner of the boundary wall for people to leave their slippers and shoes before entering the temple. At this moment, I recalled the distinction made by MsEmile Durkheim between the terms Sacred and Profane, where the slippers were considered to be profane, whereas the premises of the temple was described as sacred. People who were coming from their visit were taking out some time to feed the seeds to the birds. This act of feeding the birds was considered as an act of "POONIYE" which means- a virtue. When I reached the Shrine, the morning Aarti of worshipping the deity was being performed by the "Pandit". As it was my first day, I decided not to interact with anyone, but just to observe the prayer. The prayer was the inclusion of songs and shlokas, along with which the temple musicians played instruments like the bell and drum. All the individuals present were clapping their hands in a particular pattern. After the prayer was over, the Hindu priest distributes the "PRASAD" a type of sweet, to the present people. The People made a row, and line by line came forward for the "JYOTI" and took the "PRASAD" given by the Hindu priest.

I was at the end of the row when my turn came the Hindu priest saw me he told me that, " mandir me "Naha KeAanaChahiye" meaning that " you should come to the temple after you take a bath." He assumed this fact, and he was right this morning, I didn't take a bath before starting my day. Further, I smiled and apologized to him for my conduct. I understood that the priest of the temple considered it essential "to visit a temple after you have taken a bath". After the prayer, many left the premises of the temple for work, and very few sat for half an hour, they sat in a particular

order facing the deity and reciting the shlokas, in a little voice. I thought that this could be an excellent time to interview one or two of them. One of the significant barriers for me was the age difference between the people present. Thus, I did not force my luck with it and returned home.

In the evening, I wrote all my observations in my notebook. Furthermore, I made a plan for the next day.

The second day (17th October 2017)

I woke up at 5:00 am and went straight to take a bath before going to the temple. I reached at 6:00 am, and bought some seeds of wheat and 'bajra' for feeding the birds after the Aarti. I observed the activities of the Pandit, as he very mainly went about cleaning the utensils which were used in the "AARTI". He washed them with the ashes of the previous days "AARTI" which I found to be quite peculiar. The ashes are considered to be sacred because people take it as a blessing of God. About 6:15 am the prayer started, and by that time, people began to gather. After the prayer, I waited till the people moved out because I wanted to interact with the "Pandit Ji". When I found him done with his doings, I requested him to sit with me because I wanted to know about the deity of this temple and its history. The priest was very kind and humble, his name was "Puneet Sharma" 33 years-old and belonged to a Brahmin family. I asked him about the history of the deity and the construction of the temple. The main point which I noticed was that the collection of money for making the temple was only from the people belonging to a particular caste. I asked about the room in which the idol of the deity was placed, he replied that only he was allowed to enter that room and that all the ritual of cleaning the models and its changing clothes were performed by him. This shows the hierarchy of status in the society; a special status is given to a particular individual or a group based on many factors, factors like caste, wealth, family prestige, his profession and many other.

The time which I spent with Mr Puneet Sharma in talking, there were many inferences which I have drawn some are; that he was the typical Brahmin, who is very clear about facts such as what is profane and what is sacred, what will be accepted by the God and what will be not. What is "PUNIYE" and what is "PAAP". These all distinctions were only based on his values, which were given to him by his ancestors. I know this fact because when I asked about the sources of all these distinctions, he answered that, "Mere baba Bhi Ek Pandit the, aur "Yeh Saari Shiksha unhi ki

di hui hai” means, "all these distinctions was told to him by his father who was also the Hindu priest in his village." After the discussion, I took a leave for my home at about 10:00 am.

In the evening, I wrote the discussions and observation of the day and tried to connect this to my classes of the sociology. As a student of sociology, we know that " people have their own thoughts of what is wrong in the society and what ought to be in the community." which was described by the " Clifford Geertz " in his essay " Deep Play ". Here also Mr Puneet, the pandit Ji was describing me the faults and the flaws in the ritual and what is the appropriate rules or the ways to perform a ritual.

And by his talks, I also got to know that, he is an Ethnocentric person, means " the one who thinks his culture is the best." because while interviewing him, his primary focus was on the caste difference. He was in support of this distinction which is made on the bases of castes.

Third day (18th October 2017)

Today I decided to attend the AARTI of the evening, so I reached at 5:30 pm before the sunset, there I observed that many locals were already present there. Some were sitting quietly, some were talking, but they all were old and often came in the evening to the temple. The same procedure was followed in the evening also, cleaning of the utensils with the ashes of the morning AARTI, some flowers also were brought by him, from the nearby house. He then started the evening prayer, everyone arrived in the centre of the temple when Pandit Ji made a low pitch sound with the help of a "Shank" means a shell which is used as a musical instrument in the temples. Then the prayer began, and it was the same as of the morning one. The same routine was followed in the evening. Also, prayer then the distribution of sweet means the Prasad, by the Hindu priest. After the prayer, many left the premises for their respected houses, but those who stayed were the ones who also stood in the morning after the morning prayer. Now I decided to interact them, one of the most laborious tasks of my field review or should I say the only most challenging part.

So, I interacted a man, I said him that I want to talk to him, because I am writing my observation on this temple and willing to cooperate the followers of this deity, and he agreed to help me. So, I first asked him about himself, his name was "Budh Singh Rathore", and his age was 54, approx because even he was not sure of his generation. He was the follower of Ramdev, and his whole

family member were the followers of Ramdev Ji. The female members of his house weakly perform the fast on Tuesday. I asked him why only Tuesday then he replied that this day is considered to be the day of Ramdev Ji.

Further, I asked him is there any restriction on the females of the family in following the ritual. This question was not directly asked because I thought it would be awkward to straight away strike the point. To which he replied that no ... no such discrimination is there between the male and the female members. After this, he got up and said that he has to go, and blessed me before leaving for his home.

After this a returned to my house and noted down the observation.



Fourth day (21st October 2017)

I was not able to go to the temple for two days because of Diwali Festival, but today I decided to reach in the evening and to interact one more person, for my satisfaction because I was unable to infer information from people. This time after the evening prayer, I was searching for the one

who would not hesitate to express his or her feelings. I was searching for the one who would be of somewhat my age, but there were only the old aged people, who were there to find peace. At last, I interacted a granny whose name was "SarlaKanwar" age around 60. But she was more confident to talk about all the distinctions which the family member made on the basis of gender.

So, she told me that the females are not treated in a similar way as the boys or the males of the family. But this discrimination was only for the performance of rituals and the cultures and not for any other category, like education or any other factors. The sacred and profane distinction was also imposed on the females, like at the time of menstruation the females are not allowed to touch the belongings of the temple, not allowed to even enter the room where the deity is placed in the house. That 3-4 days are totally isolated for them, only for the performance of the rituals and not anything else, like leaving alone and eating in the separated utensils.

"Insaaniyat sebhaddkekuchbhinahi", these were the last lines of her to me before she left for her home which means, "humanity is the supreme belief" and the infer which I drew out of this was that she was telling me not to do the same which others are doing in the name of caste, Dharam, puniye, paap, i.e., the virtue or the vice. And use your own reasoning and understanding to follow a particular ritual.

When she left, I stood there till 8:30pm and was thinking about her. Then I returned home, but the line was still doing something to my mind, do not know what but she forced me to think about her talks.



Conclusion

By this the only thing, I was able to infer was the real images or the real experiences of what the sociologists like Durkheim, Karl Marx or Clifford Geertz wanted to convey. They interpreted the society in many contexts, and these interpretations were the base of my whole research.