

Abstract

"Journeys for Boons": Cognitive aspects of pilgrimage in the Himalayas.

Swedish text with English summary: Swedish title: Ge ifrån och förä hem: Kognitiva aspekter av pilgrimsfärder i Himalaya. By Andreas Nordin.

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Pilgrimages to Muktinath, Pasupatinath, Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar in the Tibetan and Nepalese Himalayas form part of a broader South Asian pilgrimage tradition. Pilgrimages are usually analyzed as culturally heterogeneous and contested events. Through the application of cognitive anthropological analyses it is, however, possible to identify regularities and common processes in pilgrimages. This study focuses upon fundamental regularities in pilgrimages, in the form of ritual interaction with culturally postulated divine actors.

The first chapter presents the inquiry and includes an overview of earlier research carried out on pilgrimage. An overview of earlier theories of pilgrimage is presented. The chapter is concluded with a section in which methodological and ethnographic reflections are made upon the conditions of carrying out fieldwork among pilgrims.

Chapter two presents the theoretical background. Cognitive and epidemiological theories are suggested for cultural analysis of the pilgrimages. Pilgrimage is here assumed to be a religious activity that has particular regularities. Cultural selection in religion is discussed and theoretical concepts are introduced. It is assumed that counterintuition is significant in religion and that it explains the selection of ideas about supernatural actors. Cognitive ritual models such as frequency theory and form theory are considered appropriate for the analysis of various aspects of pilgrimages.

Chapter three presents the ethnographic contexts of the pilgrimage cultures at Muktinath, Pasupatinath, Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar in the Tibetan and Nepalese Himalayas.

Chapter four discusses the ways in which pilgrims categorize pilgrimages. Variations in the folk terminology of the *Tirtha Jatu* are analyzed. The cartographic knowledge of the pilgrims is also discussed and it is proposed that cosmological maps are irrelevant for making one's way to a pilgrimage site.

Chapter five explores the pilgrims' explicit motives in terms of soteriology, everyday goals and health needs. These motives are analyzed in relation to ideas of karma and coincidence. Pilgrims' understandings of vows and divine favour are discussed.

Chapter six examines pilgrims' conceptions of supernatural actors. Pilgrims describe here which characteristics a divine actor possesses and how these may influence the life of the pilgrim. Analysis is performed in relation to pilgrims' understandings of freedom and supernatural omnipotence. The recurrent cultural theme of pilgrims' divine dreams is also discussed.

The seventh chapter explores the importance of the hardship and risk associated with the pilgrimage. The notion of *dukha* and ascetic ideals are investigated and ideas concerning sacrifice are analyzed as exegetic rationalizations of the experiences that are gained through participating in a pilgrimage.

Chapter eight discusses the idea of sacrifice as it appears in relation to notions of good and bad death during a pilgrimage. Notions of good death have broad currency, although religiously motivated suicide is considered a cardinal sin. Pilgrims' views of ritual suicide carried out during pilgrimage contradict theological ideologies that render suicide acceptable in the vicinity of pilgrimage sites. This section analyzes ideas of good death on the basis of the fact that the pilgrimage goal constitutes a context of cognitive validation.

Chapter nine looks at the way in which substances are moved to and from pilgrimage sites in the form of sins, blessings and gifts. Notions of substances and gifts are analyzed as understandings based upon anthropomorphic agency. The flow of substances during pilgrimage is explained through reference to psychological essentialism and contamination (magic).

Chapter ten summarizes the dissertation. It is proposed that when pilgrimages are viewed in crosscultural perspective, they constitute a relatively coherent category. It is suggested that pilgrimages presuppose ritual interaction with culturally postulated supernatural actors. This feature calls into question the validity of prevalent models, which see pilgrimages as political constructions or psychosocial vitalization. It is also argued here that pilgrimages are peculiar in that they are structured according to ritual intuitions regarding supernatural immediacy. Ideas of supernatural immediacy offer a context of validation for pilgrimages. Understandings of supernatural immediacy are established through belief in miracles and belief in the dissemination of blessings from the pilgrimage site.

Key words: Pilgrimages, Hinduism, cultural selection, commonality, supernatural actor, counterintuition, supernatural immediacy, gifts, sin, blessing, contamination (magic), psychological essentialism, imagistic mode of religion, theological incorrectness, context of validation, Muktinath, Pasupatinath, Mt. Kailash and Manasarovar.