

Religious Rituals: An Empowering Mechanism for Risk Reduction (A Study with Special Reference to Pulin Utsav)

Dr. Nirja Singh¹

Available online at: www.xournals.com

Received 4th August 2018 | Revised 7th October 2018 | Accepted 11th December 2018

Abstract:

The rituals are patterned, repetitive behavior focused on the super-natural realm and the enactment of belief expressed in myth and doctrine. Regularly performed rituals are called periodic rituals. Non-periodic sacraments, on the contrary, occur erratically, at random times, in response to impromptu or unprepared events. This article reveals the role of religious rituals in coping with the sudden events like, flood. In the spiritual beliefs of many native civilizations, humankind is inseparably allied to nature. Torrential rains and river behavior are discussed and communicated, bestowing with the requisite for high-tech cautionary systems. A universal view that sees water principally as a source of life, rather than jeopardy, marks the way residents prepare themselves to palliate with floods. Therefore, there are some non-periodic rituals which are traditionally performed at the time of flood. One of the best examples is Pulin Utsav, which is illustrious only when the Yamuna water arrives in to Gyan Gudri, the village of Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh, India) on the bank of the river, an occurrence seen once in several years. Thus, the study shows that religion is a crucial force behind the manner a society or community interacts and copes up with an environmental hazard.

Key Words: *Religious rituals, Periodic rituals, Non-periodic rituals, Indigenous, Environmental hazard*

Authors:

1. Principal, National P.G. College, Lucknow, Utter Pradesh, INDIA

Introduction

Religion denotes to all methods and sorts of belief approaches based on mysticism, faith and spirituality in divinity, in contrast with secular philosophy, which can also unite as well as identify groups, religious belief systems are those that center around some form or forms of the divine (Schipper, E.L.S., 2010).

Religious beliefs do not only provide a support system but it is a ray of hope in adverse conditions. At the same time, the worldview of any people provides a sense of identity for the entire community or group. Thus, religion remains as the most powerful forces influencing individuals and group decisions, livelihoods, perceptions of nature, natural hazards and associated risk and works as a strategic force behind the manner a society community intermingles with philosophies of disaster and development.

Religious Rituals

The rituals are patterned, repetitive behavior focused on the super-natural realm and the enactment of belief expressed in myth and doctrine. Spiritual ritual has commonly been seen as obligatory in deepening spiritual intuition. The recurrence of rituals implants religious attitudes and values in the lives of the worshippers. Ritual also articulates and accentuates the things that muddle a faith-community together and rituals portrays basic needs, values and aspiration of both the individuals and the communities.

Regularly performed rituals are called periodic rituals. Non-periodic ceremonies, on contrary, occur unevenly, at erratic times, in response to certain unscheduled events.

Risk Reduction during Disaster

Risk Reduction, which reduces the impact of hazards of a disaster, involves mainly three basic measures - mitigation, preparedness and advocacy. Mitigation is a way of decreasing the scale, frequency, and also the effect and intensity of vulnerabilities. Preparedness is a holistic approach which engages in itself the strengthening of locales, community, government and non-government activities to withstand, response and recover from hazards; whereas, advocacy is concerned with the social, economic, environmental, and political issues, which are related with to the magnitude and causes of effect of hazards.

According to Schipper (2010), sociology of cultural anthropology, religion, and ethnology are some emerging arenas of educational analysis to better understand the position of religion in society and culture, and addressing the topics, like as religion and its correlation with other things like, technology, science, politics, and education. Unfortunately the significant part of religion in shaping attitudes, insights and manipulating key decisions is habitually overlooked, predominantly anthropogenic connections with ecosystems, including our conduct and approaches towards nature. Religion is a noteworthy factor that is generally not discussed in mainstream debates and only a few studies have been conducted in this regard (Bolin, R.C. & Bolton, P. 1986; Schmuck, H. 2000; Campbell-Nelson, J. 2008; Reale, A. 2010; Schipper, E.L.S., 2010 & Harris, D., 2012). Against this drawback, this article reveals the part of religious rituals in calamities – from religious elucidations of calamities to the part of religious organizations in disaster preparedness, mitigation, reconstruction, and response and through the example of Pulin Utsav, of Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh, India), i.e., a non-periodic religious ritual.

Methodology

The area for the present study was the villages of Vrindavan, situated at the bank of river Yamuna. Both the sources of data collection, i.e., primary as well as secondary sources, have been used. Local residents, devotees, priests of the temples and visitors were interviewed.

The data has been collected through quasi-participant observation. Maintaining the position of a researcher, observations of their activities and behaviour were done by remaining at the periphery, which facilitated in bringing out a vibrant picture of the role of the religion risk reduction in a disastrous condition.

An interview guide was used to capture history of the area, profile of natural dangers and calamities that have affected the civic life, periods of occurrence of disasters, type of the short term and long term strategies they were used to adopt, religious activities during natural hazard which could ease and hence enrich the pliability of the community to threats.

Result and Discussion

In the spiritual practices of many native traditions, humanity is inseparably allied to nature. Torrential rains and river behavior are discussed and

communicated. Even in case of climate change, where the scientific certainty is rapidly growing and impacts are already being felt around the world, certain religious group hold on to different explanations of natural phenomena.

Flood in Hinduism: In Hindu mythology, the faith about the cause of flood is deeply embedded. The Indian philosophy embraces beliefs related that floods or terrific downpours are caused to finish the sinful age and begin a new phase.

According to Hindu religious philosophy, Lord Vishnu, one of the Trideva, is closely related with water bodies, even he abode in Kcheer Sagar. Lord Vishnu has taken several incarnations to protect the universe. Matsya Avatar according to Matsya Purana and Krishna Avatar in Dwapar Yuga are closely related with water bodies and flood.

The tri-rivers Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati, are amongst the most sacred rivers in India. The Yamuna is the largest tributary river of the Ganges (Ganga) in northern India and holds a very important position in Pushti Marga of ShuddhAdvita, where Lord Krishna is the main deity and various stories connected with Him are found in Hindu Religious texts, especially the Puranas.

Lord Krishna, was born in a prison cell at Mathura in the captivity of King Kansa. The night of birth was witnessed by heavy rains which led to river Yamuna being in floods. Pulin (banks) of river Yamuna was the favourite place, of Lord Krishna, so various rituals and festivals related to the river are celebrated. Of all these, one significant festival is Pulin utsav, which is celebrated in Vrindavan, when the water enters in Gyan Gudri, which is a religiously significant place and is believed to be blessed by the prolonged discourse - stream of knowledge by Uddhava, friend of Lord Krishna to the gopis and gopas.

Flood in Vrindavan and Celebration of Pulin Utsav

Pulin Utsav is illustrious only when the Yamuna water enters in Gyan Gudri, sandy banks of river Yamuna at Vrindavan, a phenomenon seen once in several years. Most recently, it was celebrated in September, 2010, after the huge gap of 32 years, as the last time water reached at Gyan Gudri was in the year 1978.

As the Yamuna river rose and touches the step of the holy Lal Gudri temple, spilled its water onto its

banks in the sacred city of Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh, India, hundreds and thousands of devotees and pilgrims, turned up to be part of the glorious event at the shore and set lit lamps floating in the water to celebrate the auspicious ceremony of 'Pulin Utsav'. Pilgrims, who came to visit the various temples devoted to the Lord Krishna, were feeling blessed to have arrived at the time of the spiritual glory of river Yamuna.

All Vrindavan temples sent diyas (earthen lamps) to this place. People continued to light lamps on the river banks until the water receded. According to them they were praying to thank the river Yamuna and to ensure that it stays peaceful. The prayers were being offered to maintain peace and calmness in the river - so that it does not bring any harm to the residents. Devotees turned up in huge figures and spent hours at the ghats, offering special prayers and floating lamps to the river.

The flood situation was very severe as the neighbor districts like Agra were the worst hit by the swollen Yamuna, masses of villages had been removed and the water had swamped thousands of acres of farm lands. However, in the flooded area of Vrindavan, there was no panic or frustration. Even, the people were celebrating the Pulin Utsav at the time of this natural hazard, because they feel that perhaps the Yamuna was in spate this year just like centuries ago when Lord Krishna was born. As the flooded river meanders its way through the land of the cowherd God, hordes of curious people have converged on the ghats (river banks) in Vrindavan.

Devotees and pilgrims coming here and were ecstatic to see the Yamuna in its full magnificence, just like it once used to be. The water level in the river crossed the lower danger mark of 495 ft. (Times of India, 2010), bringing alive the legend of Krishna, when the newly born Lord Sri Krishna lowers his feet into the river while his father Vasudeva was transporting him across the river. River Yamuna entering Gyan Gudri has its own significance and offering of prayers at this time is believed very auspicious.

It has been widely reported that livelihood of the people was enormously affected due to flood hit; people were facing many problems to adjust themselves with the disrupted environmental conditions. Usually, in the disastrous condition like this, people use some short-term and long-term approaches to handle or familiarize to the situation. But, the people, who reside on the river-banks of

Yamuna, explained the flood as the will of God and prayers as the best response. The people expressed their faith in God inferring the high floods as His tactic of displaying His supremacy and analyzing their faith. It was thought that God Himself had sent the floods, but he also gave the strength to survive them. Thus, this spiritual feeling plays as the best strategy, as it unites the people at the time of disaster and increase co-operation, calmness, peacefulness, positivity and strength among them. Generally, disasters generate panic, negativity and anxiety in people, which in turns multitude the harms of hazardous condition, but in this particular place, Pulin Utsav not only minimizes the negativity, anxiety and panic, instead generates and maximizes calmness, unity and spirituality as a driving force to overcome the troublesome situation which is the first and foremost required condition in disaster management.

Conclusion & Suggestions

It is a very interesting fact, that the celebration of the festival Pulin attracted the researcher, which resulted in the form of present paper. The researcher wants to conclude with the note that if disasters have to be managed successfully, the indigenous cultural and spiritual practices and worldview of the natives must be studied and analysed by the agencies to get a community level co-operation for mitigation and preparedness of any forthcoming event.

Therefore, religion is a fundamental energy behind the way the society interacts with vulnerability, as religiosity and belief in calamity as creation of God that gives them mental strength and make the people prepare to cope with adverse conditions. Thus, the ritual reduces the frequency, scale, intensity and impact of this natural hazard, hence, is strengthening the capacity of communities to withstand, respond and recover.

It can be concluded that the Pulin Utsav at Vrindavan, not only reduces the risk but turns a calamity into an event, a spiritual event!



References:

- Bolin, R.C. & Bolton, P. (1986). *Race, Religion and Ethnicity in Disaster Recovery*. University of Colorado: Boulder.
- Campbell-Nelson, J. (2008). "Religion and Disasters : A Critical Reflection Post Alor Earthquake 2004". Working Paper 8 . East Nusa Tenggara : Institute of Indonesian Tenggara Timur Studies Publication.
- Harris, D. (2012). "The Impact of Cultural and Religious Influences during Natural Disasters (Volcano Eruptions)". Retrieved from Earthquake Report: <http://earthquake-report.com/>
- Reale, A. (2010). "Acts of God(s): The Role of Religion in Disaster Risk Reduction". *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. No. 48, October 2010.
- Schipper, E.L.S. (2010). "Religion as an Integral Part of Determining and Reducing Climate Change and Disaster Risk: An Agenda for Research". In: Voss, M. (ed.) *Der Klimawandel: Sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*. VS Verlag, Wiesbaden, Germany, pp. 377-393.
- Schmuck, H. (2000). "An Act of Allah: Religious Explanations for Floods in Bangladesh as Survival Strategy". *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, Vol. 18 (1), pp. 85-95.
- Times of India. 27 September, 2010. "Devotees Offer Prayers as Jamuna water reaches temple in Vrindavan". Vrindavan (Uttar Pradesh) India.