

ESSAY QUESTION 1.

Introduction

Magic has been an important concept in the field of Anthropology that has always amused and made scholars curious to know its reality. It has formed an important part in the studies of magic, religion and science and several scholars like Malinowski and Durkheim have researched extensively over it. Witchcraft and sorcery are two important elements of magic that have created a stir in the society and many people have questioned its realities and dark secrets (Frankle, R. and Stein, Ph., 2005). This essay discusses the ideas of witchcraft and sorcery in the context of larger society and culture. To compile this essay, a comparison of witchcraft present in Bali and Vanuatu has been presented.

The case of Bali

The people of Bali have always given importance to the notions of religion that include God, people, Buta- Kala and the witches. These four entities have been important elements that have framed the notions of religion among the Balinese society. The context of witches has been a confused issue when it comes to Bali, because it is a vast topic and people have been reluctant to discuss about it openly. They believe that witches are extremely obnoxious and can cause harm to their society. In fact, taking their names can cause disaster and destruction in people's lives. This is why there have been rare cases of witchcraft accusations and people have limited its secrets into gossips and indirect talks. Therefore, because of the notions and fear of people, witchcraft has been difficult for the anthropologists to study, as it lacks proper evidence and investigation. Although Bali has been a culturally diverse society, but the notions of religion and magic have been uniform across all the regions and tribes. They represent the religion through a symbolic structure that largely comprises of the fear of sorcery and an awkward way of demonstrating black magic or witchcraft. The people of Bali believe that feelings of anger or offense can lead to negative impacts that may make the individual open to the attacks by mighty forces, or what is called as witches. The knowledge and actions of Balinese people is dependent on two categories namely, *tengen* that goes to the right and *kiwa* that goes to the left. Thus, magic is present in two forms comprising or *tengen* or *kiwa*. The 'right' path of magic results in consciousness of one's duties and awareness of one's relation to the god. The 'left' path leads to selfish behaviour, greed and profiting oneself on the expense of others. The people of Bali believe that God represents *tengen* and animals represent *kiwa*. The humans come somewhere in between and they may choose either

of the two options. Moreover, in order to become a witch and practice black magic, it is important to study *pangiwa*, which is the magic of left. After people study *pangiwa*, they often exclude themselves from social relationships and relationship to god, while coming closer to the sphere of animals. These people practice magic in the guise of animals such as, pigs and monkeys. The *leyak* is one of the disguised creatures of the Balinese culture, who is considered as the lowest form of animal and people often believe that is the most useless class, which is only created to disturb the lives of others and impact them negatively (Howe, L., 1984).

Furthermore, people distance themselves from such practices and protect their families and themselves with poise, gaiety and friendliness, which also avoid circumstances of anger and offense. Another manner through which the Balinese and particularly the Northern Balinese protect themselves is by not caring about such practices. It prevents confusion and keeps people away from the dark forces. The social life of people from North Bali is regulated by joyful and cheerful practices so that they do not offend anybody and promote fear. Such social expression has made the North Balinese as one of the most poised people of the world. The anthropological studies have noted that Balinese have an intense fear of witchcraft and sorcery, which has completely influenced their social lives. Several studies reveal that the fear from witchcraft and black magic can be seen in small incidence of lives for instance, people collect their hair after combing to ensure two things – first that nobody is able to practice black magic on them, and second, to ensure that they do not offend anyone. Moreover, different types of fear can be seen at different stages of one's lives. Young unmarried people and their parents fear of the love magic, while nursing parents fear of their baby's death due to witchcraft. They also believe that illnesses are the result of black magic and people die because of them (Wikan, U., 1987).

The case of Vanuatu

The context of witchcraft in Vanuatu is much different from Bali because many women in Vanuatu were accused of practicing witchcraft and unlike Bali; people have diverse beliefs and notions of witchcraft and sorcery in the Vanuatu chain. This is a problem that poses a challenge for anthropological interpretations because differing practices and concepts of witchcraft in this region makes generalizations difficult and reduces the reliability on the present data. Furthermore, the process of colonization increased mobility across Melanesia, which is one of the main islands of Vanuatu, as a result of which, various cultural practices

including sorcery altered and modified. It is also pointed out that sorcery has been described as a medical term in Melanesia, like Malaria because when people are not able to identify the reason for sudden death of a person, they often believe it as a consequence of sorcery. However, after the colonization, the cases of sorcery had declined in this region to spread of modernity, western education and medications and rise of individuality since people found capitalism and entrepreneurship more attractive, which is why they reduced their dependency on sorcery (Tonkinson, R., 1981).

In the Melanesian society, the role of sorcery is important to display someone's social status. It can either increase the social status or decrease it, which is a contrary practice in the Vanuatu region. People also believe that a person with high social status often invoke sorcery on themselves and their families because of jealousy by other people. The Melanesians lived in lineage based hamlets and large villages that were headed by their chiefs. These chiefs had power over others by their control on sorcery that was used to threaten the tribesmen and gain their loyalty. Sorcery was practiced as a formal institution that helped people to access control over others and maintain the Vanuatu society. In such cases, sorcery was considered as a legitimate institution as it also helped to win feuds and mark one's authority over others. To maintain their power, the chiefs were often suspected to practice sorcery and suffice their personal ends and greed. Thus, people were uncertain over sorcery and continued to believe that it was practiced for personal gains and selfish aims. Hence, the locals of Melanesia feared practicing it (Bladon, L., 2007).

However, after the colonization, people thought that the chiefs had lost their control over sorcery and the belief established that anybody can get access to sorcery, which reduced its legitimacy in the Vanuatu society. This perception was resisted by the chiefs initially but due to the spread of Christianity, the chiefs were not able to take control and sorcery was seen as a negative entity according to, Christian beliefs and lifestyle. This perception also led to several witch hunting expeditions and people were sacrificed on the pretext of their control over sorcery. The main aim of people in Melanesia was to address the practitioner of sorcery and attack them. It was seen as a way of communication between the sacred and profane. People also believed that sacrifices helped to close the channel between life and witchcraft, while providing with an offering to please God (Rio, K., 2014). Later, with the outbreak of diseases and high death rates, people of Melanesia blamed it to sorcery and took it as a proof that sorcery was out of control. The tensions between the Christian leaders and chiefs continued to exist as chiefs believed in the practice of sorcery, while Christians did not allow

it due to their religious notions. Thus, many chiefs remained illiterate and unbaptised till 1940s and also formed a council to kill those who went against them. Hence, the beliefs of sorcery and its power continue to exist in the minds of older chiefs (Tonkinson, R., 1981).

As a result, teacher –catechists decided to challenge the chiefs openly, but they chiefs retaliated in fear that whatever authority they are left may also lose. Hence, the chiefs were later removed from the island for many years on the grounds of anti- colonial cargo- cultists. However, people resisted the new rules and laws that the Christian teachers had imposed on their loosely formed society and they were overthrown later. Life of Melanesia was again normal and the region remained isolated without education, western practices or medical facilities, which resulted in outbreak of diseases and deaths that were continued to be blamed on sorcery. After several years, a Christian leader forcefully campaigned against sorcery and eradicated many magical objects. New medical centres opened up and western medical treatment became available to the people, which brought about the notion that sorcery had drastically reduced from the Vanuatu region (Tonkinson, R., 1981).

Discussion

The cases of Bali and Vanuatu demonstrates that the practice of witchcraft and sorcery were extremely important elements of their society. In both of these societies, witchcraft had differing perspectives and ideologies; however the common notion of fear from them existed in both the cases. The situation can also be compared to the notions of religion in the old world. Religion was seen as a law making institution that controlled the lives of people, before state came into existence. Similarly, magic also maintained law and order in the primitive society. The notions of magic hold strong believe and controlled the lives of people living in tribes and villages. The fear from black magic and dark entities influenced the social order and people behaved in appropriate ways so keep themselves safe of such practices. However, there are several distinctions in the case of Bali and Vanuatu as both of them had many different notions of magic. The Balinese society feared magic and behaved in the best possible way to ignore it and not think about it. They were scared that their action might displease or offend someone. The social life of Balinese was made on the context of being joyful and careless when it comes to dark magic and witchcraft. Moreover, people who practiced magic stayed away from the society and kept to themselves only. There were no instances of accusations also and people did not spoke about witchcraft openly. Thus, what

we see is a discreet Bali society in terms of witchcraft and sorcery (Frankle, R. and Stein, Ph., 2005).

In the case of Vanuatu, sorcery was considered as a legislative institution and people believed that it helped to control the society and win over feuds with other villages. It was also seen as a creation of social status, wherein people who had access to sorcery were believed to be of high importance. The chiefs had monopoly of sorcery and took control over their tribes. However, the spread of Christianity took control over the Melanesian society and accusations of witchcraft and sacrifices became the new social order. In this case, sorcery has created a stir in Vanuatu and resulted in continuous social change (Rio, K., 2014).

Therefore, the ideas of witchcraft and sorcery have impacted Bali and Vanuatu considerably and the lives of people have influenced in such a way that dark magic became an important element of their society. The comparison shows different ideas of witchcraft in different society shapes their social lives and alters the lives of people to a large extent (Howe, L., 1984).



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