

SRI LANKA

KAPFERER, BRUCE. *A Celebration of Demons. Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. xviii + 293 pages. Illustrations, photos, map, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$32.50, ISBN 0-253-31326-0; Paper US\$18.50, ISBN 0-253-20304-X.

From among the many rituals the Buddhist Sinhalese of the working class and the farmers of the Galle region in southern Sri Lanka perform, Bruce Kapferer selects mainly the Mahasona (Great Cemetery Demon) exorcism for treatment in this book. He says that he himself has observed the ritual about eighty times. He records it in great detail and then adds his analysis and his reflections. Employing a structuralist approach, he sets out to expose the characteristics of the Sinhalese worldview, of how they see their religion, of their cultural tradition, and of their social structure. The author opposes the hitherto current trend in this kind of research to reduce the etiology of a patient's sickness merely to physiological and psychological factors or to social causes (as e.g. to say that spirit possession of women is frequent in male dominated societies). Rather he strives to place sickness into a very wide perspective which comprises not only social, cultural, religious and cosmological, but politico-economic factors as well. This definition of sickness coincides with the content of the meaning the exorcists give it in the various stages of the very elaborate healing rituals.

While he observes and analyzes sickness and its rituals, the author never loses sight of the principles which provide the foundations for a wider cosmic unity in Sinhalese culture, society, and worldview. In this manner he arrives at a standpoint where he understands sickness never as only a matter of the person afflicted. To him sickness is something that disrupts the order within a family, a group of relatives and a regional society; it even disturbs the cosmic order prevailing between demons, human beings, and deities, who all have their appropriate place in the cosmic totality. To cure sickness through rituals means therefore nothing less but to reorder and reconstruct the cosmic order which encompasses the person concerned.

This kind of analysis and interpretation is by no means a novelty in anthropology today. However, by successfully bringing together the curing rituals of Sri Lankan Buddhist society into this framework of interpretation the author surpasses what other anthropologists have achieved so far. Using a structuralist approach and the methodology of performance studies as his tools, he appears to take great pains theoretically to overcome the achievements of other researchers who had studied Buddhist society of Sri Lanka. Consequently he examines and criticizes the statements of A. Ames, I. M., Lewis, G. Obeyesekere and others, painstakingly explaining the concepts he is using himself, and showing in a skilled analysis of the rituals themselves that his concepts reflect the true state of affairs and are logically consistent.

As a consequence, the book is construed as something like a 'concepts—examples series' where concrete and vivid examples alternate with explanations of abstract and difficult concepts.

To me personally the following parts of the book were of special interest: the analysis, in chapter 4, of three examples showing how sickness is related to culture, society, and cosmology; the religious, cultural, and social definition of the etiology of women's sickness in chapter 5; the analysis in chapter 6 of how Sinhalese Buddhists view demons; and, in chapter 7 the description and interpretation of a curing ritual as it unfolds. As a whole, thanks to its minute descriptions, the book is of eminent value as source material.

To date numerous descriptions and analyses of curing rituals have been published in other studies on Sri Lanka, but to my limited knowledge there is none that offers detail in such a degree as this book.

The author describes the cosmic position of demons and their role in the human world with much detail, but if I were allowed to be a bit demanding, I think we would have less difficulty in understanding the Sinhalese attitude towards sickness and ritual, had the author told us what kind of reaction the frightfulness of the 'devouring demons' provoked in the Sinhalese and had he given examples which would show something of the 'atmosphere of fear' noticeable in their everyday life. He also refers repeatedly to 'power' as e.g., when he speaks of Buddha's power, a demon's power or the power of a ritual. However, while he defines other terms rigidly, it is unfortunate that he never defines the often used term 'power.' This is the more regrettable since any ritual can be conceived as being based on a belief that there is some kind of power which eventually will bring about the expected result.

The author points out ambiguity as being one of the fundamentals in Sinhalese cosmology, but it seems to me that the ambiguous factors which appear in his examples can similarly be discerned in the structure of the Japanese pantheon and in Japanese religious behavior. Granted the difference between Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism, there is a necessity for comparative research into this problem, because both countries belong to an area of Buddhist culture.

Victor Turner's influence looms great in the author's approach. He applies Turner's insights in trying to grasp the religion, culture, and society of the people of Sri Lanka as a totality, using the Mahasona exorcism as a vantage point. But, as a result, he greatly contributes also to a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

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PAPUA NEW GUINEA

GESCH, PATRICK F. *Initiative and Initiation. A Cargo Cult-type Movement in the Sepik Against its Background in Traditional Village Religion.* Studia Instituti Anthropos 33. St. Augustin / Germany: Anthropos-Institut, 1985. Xvi+347 pages. Appendices of interviews, bibliography, maps, figures, tables and plates. Paper DM 68.000, ISBN 3-921389-96-8.

This is a description of a Cargo Cult in New Guinea known as the Mt. Rurun Movement, which reached its peak of fervor on July 7, 1971, when crowds of people went to the top of Mt. Rurun to remove survey markers which had been put there as part of a navigation-communications network. The center of the movement was in the East Sepik Province but the preliminaries to the removal of the markers and the aftermath involved many people from a widespread area.

P. Gesch was once a missionary in the area of the movement, but did this study for his Ph.D. in Religious Studies. In the first instance, and correctly so, I think, he considers this movement basically a religious movement, and tries to explain it as such. He does not look at it primarily as an economic effort to get white man's cargo (hence the common name for this type of endeavor, Cargo Cult), nor as an incipient political effort at unification, as others have done. These movements, common in New Guinea,