

UNIVERSITY OF NATAL

**ORALITY AND THE SIXTEEN VEDIC
SANSKĀRAS**

C DEBIPERSAD

1995

ORALITY AND THE SIXTEEN VEDIC SANSKĀRAS

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Orality-Literacy Studies in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Natal, Durban

DATE : 7 December 1995

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I, Chandraprakash Debipersad, declare that, except for quotations specially indicated in the text, and such help as I have acknowledged, this dissertation is wholly my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree in any other university.

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Abstract

In this dissertation an examination of oral style in the Sixteen **Vedic Sanskāras** with particular reference to the Naming, Marriage and Death ceremonies, has been made. **Sanskāras**, which originated in the **Vedas**, have been orally transmitted from teacher (**Guru**) to pupil from generation to generation.

The Introduction outlines the role of **Sanskāras** in the life of a Hindu and its link with the ancient **Vedas**. The oral features that facilitate memorisation and transmission of the **Mantras** are mentioned. The three universal anthropological laws of Marcel Jousse are applied.

The first chapter focuses on the theoretical framework of orality where important terms are defined. The contribution of Marcel Jousse and Ong are highlighted. The orality-literacy continuum is elaborated upon. The important role of memory skills as a facilitator of the transmission of knowledge is explained.

The second chapter deals with the origin and the classification of **Vedic** literature. The role of the Sacred Fire (**Yajna**) in **Sanskāras** is emphasized. It is around this ritual fire that the ceremony and the oral traditions revolve. The fire is central to all the rites and ceremonies and the litanies constantly refer to the fire as the vehicle of transmitting the aspirations of the devotee to God.

The third chapter states the reason for the choice of the topic and summarises each of the sixteen **Vedic Sanskāras**. This is followed by the identification of oral elements in the Naming ceremony.

The evidence of orality in the marriage ceremony features in chapter four, initially establishing the importance of the marriage ceremony and thereafter outlining the essential steps of a Hindu marriage.

The death ceremony is described in chapter five with special reference to evidence of oral style expression therein.

The conclusion emphasizes the role of orality in keeping alive the Hindu tradition and customs. It also augurs well for further research in **Vedic** literature.

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Acknowledgements

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude many individuals who generously shared their expertise, time and patience to facilitate the completion of this dissertation.

I am greatly indebted to Dr B Rambilass - Department of Indian Languages (Sanskrit) at the University of Durban-Westville, who supervised this research. Under his inspiring supervision and that of my co-supervisor, Miss R P Fanning (University of Natal), my research was allowed to proceed smoothly. Both individuals provided valuable perspectives for my consideration.

The completion of this dissertation was also influenced by the assistance I received from the following people:

- 1 Mr H Mockthar of Bonella Secondary and Mrs R Sookrajh (University of Durban-Westville) for their editing support and constructive input.
- 2 Mrs Seritha Surujpal (subject-reference librarian - University of Durban-Westville) for the intensive literature searches conducted.
- 3 The officials of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, South Africa, for loan of Vedic literature, the retrieval of which would have been impossible without them.
- 4 Finally, members of my family for their patience, understanding and support throughout the study period; in particular, my sister Usha, for the transliteration of religious texts and my dear wife, Urvasi, who has been a constant source of inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

Vedic culture which embarked on systems and institutions to assist man constantly in his endeavour to rise from lower truth to higher truth, and ultimately to God consciousness, recognised that man is influenced by impressions he receives from his social environment. These impressions or **Sanskāras** are acquired by the soul in every birth, that is, past, present and future. An intrinsic feature of Vedic philosophy is the belief in reincarnation. The purpose of the institution of **Sanskāras** was to exercise conscious control coupled with the right channelling of the **Sanskāras**, which accumulated in their totality, make up the personality of the individual. (Siddhantalankar:1969:149)

Pandey (1982:32) defines the term **Sanskāra** as **religious purificatory rites and ceremonies for sanctifying the body and mind of an individual, so that he may become a fully fledged member of the community.**

The **Sanskāras**, which originated from the **Vedas**, serve as the cornerstone of the cultural complex of Hindu society. They are the ritualistic prescriptions upon each individual of society at different stages in life. They are directed towards the socialization of individuals through symbolic religious performances. The rites and ceremonies relating to the **Sanskāras** symbolise codes and customs, reflect social relations and strengthen norms and values of a society. They establish the

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importance of "this worldly" life in relation to the ultimate goal which is Spiritual Bliss (**Moksha**) in the after life and help organise distinct coherent cultural patterns.

According to Vedic belief, in this life, a Hindu has to be conscious of his existence. A radical change of personality and character can be brought about by a controlled supervision of impressions. This gives the Hindu the much aspired ideals which become part and parcel of his very being. The birth of the soul (**Atman**) in the human form is an occasion given to it to unfold it's spiritual beauty through the performance of the **Sanskāras**.

Vedic culture had advocated and put into execution an organised system for the practice of **Sanskāras** which covered the whole life-span of an individual from birth to death. The Hindu sages realised the necessity of consciously moulding the character of individuals and therefore they utilized the system of **Sanskāras** for this purpose.

According to Vedalankar (1985:6) the mind of an individual during early childhood is brought under the propitious influence of the **Sanskāra**. The rituals which are part of the **Sanskāra** leave a permanent impression on the mind of the child. The members of the family are also influenced by the **Sanskāras** which purify the surroundings and create a spiritual atmosphere. This ensures that the entire household is influenced by the **Sanskāras**.

Statements are often made about verbatim oral memorization of the **Vedic** hymns in India. The **Vedas** are old and lengthy collections, probably composed between 1500 and 2000 B. C. Since there is no consensus on the date of origin of the **Vedas**, it shows the vagueness of present day contacts with the original settings, in which the hymns, prayers and liturgical formulas evolved into these collections. The **Vedas** have thematic elements, formulaic elements and oral mnemonics as part of their structure. Oral transmission was important in the history of the **Vedas** because teachers (**Gurus**) and their students devoted intensive effort to verbatim memorization, even criss-crossing the words in various patterns to ensure oral mastery of their positions in relation to one another (Ong:1982:66).

Since the **Vedas** were repeated by individuals or groups in an oral society, the composition had to be structured to facilitate memorisation. The texts contain oral elements such as mnemotechniques, repetition, sound and rhythmic patterns, alliterations, symbolism, etc. These devices are invaluable tools in the oral tradition which was originally the only means of transmission of the **Vedic** texts.

Of all the aptitudes and behaviours which characterize human beings, language is the most uniquely human. It is everywhere, in speech, writing, sign language, in the mind or dream, in a conversation, or in active use to solve problems. It is a vehicle of power, a means of creating, preserving and performing, in this instance, knowledge and culture of the oral tradition.

Without language, the accumulation of shared knowledge and customs which is called culture would be impossible. A present day reader becomes a new link in a chain of human communication stretching back into the distant past, a chain that only language can create. (Traugott and Pratt: 1980:2).

However, there is a marked difference in the use of language and thought between oral and literate societies. Literate societies have the technical skills of presenting communication in written form. These societies have libraries containing printed texts that have stored information. These can be easily referenced and assessed objectively. Oral societies on the other hand depend on memory to store and transmit information. They are also assisted by customs, ceremonies and traditions.

The aim of the study is to analyse the presence of oral elements in the sixteen **Vedic Sanskāras**, with specific reference to the naming, marriage and death ceremonies.

Any discussion on the oral tradition which is associated with oral societies must include the contribution made by Marcel Jousse in this field. This great French scholar used anthropological laws to explain man's response to the universe. In order to explain the manner in which man expresses himself in the universe, Jousse used the word **Geste** instead of **gesture**, to explain these reactions.

Gesture is defined by Sykes (1978:361) as "**significant movement of limb or body, use of gestures as rhetorical device, etc; (fig.) action to evoke response or to convey intention**".

The use of body language by an individual is consistent with Jousse's idea of language as a form of action. "**An individual is nothing but an ensemble of movements (of gestures) combined in different ways.**" Godfernaux (Jousse:1990:9)

Jousse formulated three universal laws governing oral style language: 1. Mimism 2. Bilateralism 3. Formulism

1.Mimism

Mimism is the tendency in man to receive, register and replay the actions of the universe.

2.Bilateralism

The human body being bilateral in nature; its response to the universe is bilateral.

3.Formulism

This refers to the ability of man to crystallize all his experiences and express them in the form of propositional gestes.

In the course of this dissertation it will be seen that the principles and concepts governing oral style expression are applicable to a study of the sixteen **Vedic Sanskāras** with special reference to three **Sanskāras**. As an adherent of the **Arya Samaj Movement** which propagates Hinduism with its source originating in the **Vedas** and **Upanisads**, the topic **Sanskāras** has a personal appeal.

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The advantage of learning the **Yajna** (Fire ritual) and the **Sanskāras**, from parents who are ordained **Vedic** priests, has among other influences, opened the way to a study and appreciation of **Vedic** oral traditions.

Chapter One : Oral Tradition

1.1 Theoretical Framework : Orality

Communication in oral societies was not achieved through writing, but by direct verbal expression. Both speaker and audience interacted simultaneously. A variety of mnemotechnical skills were used in their aural-oral form of communication. It is important to note that society was first formed with the aid of oral speech, long before the advent of writing.

The word "speech" merely refers to utterances, sentences, sounds or words; the word "oral" includes the entire body when communicating. In the words of Ong (1982:6-7) **"human beings communicate in countless ways, making use of all their senses, touch, taste, smell, and especially sight, as well as hearing "**. He (1982:7) mentions Gesture as an example of non-oral communication.

"Orality" according to Finnegan (1992:6) is a more generalised term that usually contrasts with "Literacy", sometimes associated with assumptions about the social and cognitive characteristics of oral communication on the significance of oral culture within broad stages of historical development.

Botha (1991:5) adds that Orality, as a cultural anthropological concept, does not refer to spoken discourse as such. Spoken discourse is part of almost every imaginable facet of being human, and transcends mentalities and cultures as a phenomenon.

He (1991:5) adds that orality "refers to a comprehensive experience of symbols in the habitat of sound". Orality fundamentally shapes cultural factors such as the storage and transmission of knowledge.

It is important to distinguish between Primary and Secondary Orality. In societies where there is Primary Orality speech is not committed to writing. In Secondary Orality a situation is indicated where new technologies create a synthesis of oral and written modes of thought and discourse (Ong:1982:135). However, in this study, we shall be concentrating on Primary Orality.

In an oral culture, people interact with each other by means of oral skills, speaking and singing to each other. They are usually identified as traditional people who do not possess history in the modern sense of the term. They depend on their memory which serves as a storehouse for information. However, they are unable to think in high levels of abstract terms or to project themselves into situations beyond their experience. Oral tradition has been characterised by oral style and oral expression which are synonymous.

Marcel Jousse (1990:95) explains oral style by examining the psycho-physiology of the propositional geste. By doing this we can establish the origin of the phenomenon of "parallelism of clauses" which play a vital role in the world of human thought and memory. Once we have made a propositional geste, the semiological motor mechanism initiates another propositional

geste (during the period of rest). This automatic flow of propositional gestes is evident in oral people where the flow of their sentences display balance and repetition. It is aptly described by Jousse (1990:98) as **"their sentences follow each other at a gentle trot like docile sheep moving always from subject to object and compliments, passing over the little bridge of the predicate."**

Oral style is characterised by rhythm. Rhythm is evident during the replaying of the propositional gestes in the Rhythmic Schema, the Recitative and the Recitation. Rhythmic Schema was **"the set of two, sometimes three parallel Balancings, each Balancing being given rhythm in accordance with the characteristic rhythm of the propositional gestes of the language recited."** (Jousse:1990:100). The effort used in recitation is far greater than that used in spoken language.

Using information from research conducted on recitation by spontaneous people Jousse showed clearly binary and ternary rhythmic schemas. He also showed evidence of psychological automatism in the flow of the Recitatives and Recitations.

An example of rhythm is present in the following **Mantra** (verse) which has been extracted from the marriage ceremony.

OM PĀDYAM PĀDYAM PĀDYAM PRATIGRHYATĀM

(May this water for the purificatory rite of washing the feet be received.)

In the above **Mantra**, the repetition of **"AM"** contributes to the melodious and musical rhythm during its recital.

One often wonders how the oral people were able to remember the many thousands of rhythmic schemas. Jousse (1990:125) explains that this is possible by juxtapositions of relatively few clichés or traditional formulae. Since writing was unknown, rhythmic schemas using mnemotechnical means were used to memorise.

Ong (1982:37) categorised nine characteristics of oral expressions in trying to explain orally based thought: additive, aggregative, redundant, conservative, close to human lifeworld, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory, homeostatic and situational. These characteristics were used to consolidate the memories of the listeners using their thought and linguistic patterns. Oral Formulae were also used to help implement rhythmic discourse and act as mnemonic aids.

1.2 Orality and Literacy

The Orality-Literacy dichotomy has been continually highlighted by writers at all levels. However, in reality this dichotomy exists at a more generalised level, intertwined with numerous complications. However, research has highlighted differences in styles of presentation either in oral or written form. Hymes (Botha:1992:7) states that the majority of features are not differences of degree, of one more or one less, but they co-exist and collaborate in every age among all people. In a sense there is an artificiality to any generalisations about "oral" versus "literate" cultures.

Mcluhan (Botha:1992:6) adds that the two types of civilisations (oral and written style) are opposed. In a universe of orality, human beings internalise their experience of history without conceptualising it: they conceive of time in circular patterns, space is conceived as a dimension of nomadism, and collective norms reign empirically over behaviour. The use of writing on the other hand, implies a disjunction between thought and action, a deep seated nominalism, related to a weakening of language qua language, the predominance of a linear conception of time and a cumulative notion of space, individualism, rationalism and bureaucracy.

Finnegan (1988:140-141) argues that it is essential to work in a dichotomized framework in order to make a comparative study of orality-literacy. She presumes that orality is characterised as small scale, face to face, rural and non-industrial, communal and conformist rather than individualist, and dominated by ascribed kinship, religion and reversed traditions; literacy-typically urban and bureaucratic, characterized by a respect for rationality, individual achievement and impersonal norms, heterogenous and secular. She feels that such a juxtaposition is essential to see each as valued and meaningful in its own context. She also feels that, such contrasts lead to a greater understanding of our own distinctive characteristics.

Ong (1982:6-7) states that the contrast between orality and literacy place greater emphasis on literacy studies than linguistics. He felt that in addition to language, sound was also

of great importance because it relates to thought. Elaborated sign languages are substitutes for speech and dependent on oral speech systems. Writing, he feels, commits word to space enlarging the potentiality of language and restructuring thought. Written texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly to the world of sound.

Ong (1982:8-9) states further that human beings in primary oral cultures which do not feature writing, learn and practise great wisdom, but they do not "study". They learn by apprenticeship, discipleship, by listening, by repeating what they hear, by mastering proverbs and ways of combining and recombining them.

Finnegan (1988:18-21) distinguishes writing from the spoken word as a form of communication on the following grounds :

(i) Writing gives permanence to verbal expression. Words are transmitted through space over time in permanent and unchanging form.

(ii) The possibility of communication at a distance is now feasible instead of relying on face to face communication. She believes that this has far reaching implications for social and political organizations.

(iii) with oral literature, communication depends on personal performance, on audience response and on the direct personal interaction between author and public. Written literature results in the author being independant and withdrawn. There is no need for immediate action.

(iv) Writing remains permanent over time. It leads to the creation of bureaucratic organization. Abstract thinking and scientific history depends on writing. In oral cultures people tend to remember events and narratives in accordance with their own preconceptions and expectations.

Finnegan (1988:22-23) cites Goody's theory that the technology of writing is relevant both for the transmission of accumulated knowledge from one generation to another and also for contact between different cultures. He (1968:5) also states that the spread of religions like Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism has been made possible by writing. That these are all "religions of the book" dependant on literacy.

Tannen (1982:4-6) conducted a study of non-autonomous (oral-society) and autonomous (literate society) people viewing a film based on a rural setting. His analysis of the narratives showed that non-autonomous people emphasized the theme of the story, focused on interpersonal involvement etc.

Participants from the autonomous society concerned themselves with the correct temporal sequence, focused on the content of the film, treated the film as a decontextualized object, and were highly critical of the film in an objective sense.

Autonomous people view the use of formulaic language and clichés negatively. Oral people however, believe the use of formulaic language legitimizes their words and provides them with the necessary confidence. A continuum exists between formulaic

language on one hand and relative novelty on the other (Tannen:1982:4-6). These differences are consistent with the views of Ong (1977) and Olson (1977).

Kay (Tannen:1982:9) points out that in literate societies comprehension is based on the content (external evaluation) while in oral societies language depends on "**simultaneous transmission over other channels, such as paralinguistic, postural and gestural**" which are the basic tools of internal evaluation. A word may be spoken with certain intonation, tone, gesture and facial expression; whereas the written word must stand alone.

While many writers propound the theory that there is a great division between orality and literacy, there are some who believe on the basis of research, that at some point or another, there is some interaction between the written and the oral.

Studies of Xhosa poets (in a transitional society between oral and literate) have revealed that, when oral and literate cultures come into contact, changes do occur. However the changes are minor because culture plays a vital role. Oral formulaic expressions, repetition, opening and closing formulas and personification all permeate written poems. Writing the poem allows the poet to memorise verbatim. Traditional style is transmitted to the written poem because it is embedded in the conscious and the unconscious. Writing may change the cognitive structures, but in the long run it will not affect the use of

formulaic expression in the written form. Kaschula H. (Sienaert E., Bell N., and Lewis M.:1991:120-132).

The orality-literacy interaction is far more complex than one can imagine. During an oral performance the performer is given a greater degree of flexibility to adjust his narration, he is allowed to be more spontaneous and adapt his narration

1.3 Orality and Memorisation

Oral societies depend on direct verbal interaction, so that they can communicate with each other and transmit their rich cultural heritage. Whereas in literate societies information is stored in books which can be referred to at any time, in oral societies memory and tradition are heavily relied on to preserve and perpetuate information. It involves the use of Jousse's three laws: mimism, bilateralism and formulism, in their daily lives. In oral societies communication is affected by both speaker and audience being present. Furthermore mnemonic and mnemotechnical devices were used during the oral-aural means of interaction.

It is therefore essential that people from oral societies possess very good verbal memory skills. This of course would differ from literate societies, where the emphasis would not be on verbatim memorization. In literate society, a person can repeatedly return to the text to perfect his verbatim mastery.

In an attempt to explain the verbal memory skills of oral people, their works were studied critically. In the case of Homeric poems, which were basically oral in nature, it was found that they consisted of thousands of hexameter lines. Parry (Ong:1982:58) showed that hexameters were made up of formulas, groups of words for dealing with traditional materials, each formula shaped to fit into a hexameter line. The poet possessed a vocabulary of hexameterized lines without end. It is evident that these formulas could be easily interchanged without changing the story.

Lord's study (1960:17) of oral poet's memory of songs sung revealed that, though metrically regular, they never sung the same way twice. He found that the same formulas and themes recurred, but they were stitched together or "rhapsodized" differently in each rendition even by the same poet, depending on audience reaction and the mood of the poet.

According to Havelock (1963:157) memorization was possible by economising on linguistic statements enforced by both verbal and musical rhythm pattern. During an oral performance, a series of motor reflexes in the body combined to make memorization, future recall and repetition more effective.

Jousse explained memory on the basis of psycho-physiology. He implies that both mnemonic faculties and mnemotechnical devices are necessary for memory. Jousse (1990:165) states that memory is the experiencing and understanding of revivifications set off

by receptions, whether ocular, auricular, manual, laryngo-buccal etc. Memory is the condition sine qua non for the intelligent re-enactment of past or remote actions and for reproductive and combinatory mental activity.

Jousse's reference to mnemonic faculties and mnemotechnical devices, as instruments to memorise, bears relevance to modern day learning processes. We commonly use clichés, alliterations, assonances and additives in our modern day writings. In oral societies it was quite common for individuals to commit entire books to memory. The facility of writing has made it unnecessary to tax the memory, by memorising large volumes of information.

Sacred recitations, that were initially revealed, maintained the original form even after the introduction of writing. This was achieved by the faithful disciples committing to memory the verses, in its original form. Due to the religious nature of the information that was orally transmitted, it remained unchanged in form. However some scholars have accepted this fact with a degree of scepticism, stating that variations may have arisen during oral transmission. Variations may be due to social pressures or what the audiences can tolerate or expect to hear.

The use of oral statements such as proverbs, adages, aphorisms, riddles and verse to preserve cultural information and to facilitate memory tend not to be explicit or to say exactly what they mean: they require context and prior knowledge for their interpretation. (Olson:1977:263)

At present, the change in emphasis from oral memorisation to the reliance of the text can be attributed to the demands of the modern technological age.

Chapter Two : A Chronological Study of Vedic Literature

2.1 The Origin of Vedic Literature

The religion of three hundred million people calling themselves Hindus is based on the **Vedas**, a most ancient and most wonderful body of literature, which, it is claimed, is not the production of man but the voice of God Himself and co-eternal with Him (Radhakrishnan:1958:182). The Hindus trace the original source of their cultural life to the **Vedas**, which they regard as divine truth revealed to the seers (**ṛṣis**) in their supra-normal consciousness. **Vedic** authority is often quoted as the source of the religion, philosophy, ritualistic practices, conduct and social relations of the Hindus.

It is believed by Hindus that the **Vedas** contain all forms of knowledge and their teachings are in complete consonance with the principles of the pure sciences.

Max Muller (Sarda:1906:220) states that "In the history of the world; the Veda fills a gap which no literary work in any other language could fill."

Prior to the re-discovery of Sanskrit in the eighteenth century by the early orientalist like William Jones and Max Muller, comparative philology was confined to the study of Greek and Latin. With the discovery of Sanskrit a whole new world of Comparative philology was born which was based on the Indo-European family of languages with Sanskrit, Latin and Greek

becoming sister languages derived from the lingua-mater, the Indo-European prototype.

Sāyanācārya (Prabhāvanānda:1969:25) adds that God created the whole universe out of the knowledge of the **Vedas** which existed before the creation of mankind.

The **Vedas** comprise four books which are: **R̥gveda, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda** and **Atharvaveda**.

The four **Vedas** are said to have been revealed to man by God during the creation of the universe. According to Sharma (1985:22-23) God revealed this eternal knowledge (**Veda**) to the first four intelligent, virtuous and pious souls who were born during the creation of the universe. These seers (**r̥sis**) imparted their knowledge to a fifth seer called **Brahmā**. **Brahmā** was the first seer to acquire and impart this replete knowledge of the whole truth (**Brahmavidya**) in which all the laws and sciences have their foundation.

Sharma (1985:23) argues that human beings acquire knowledge both by impulse and contact. Contact is only possible between two physical existants. God, being conscious and formless is not a physical existant, but is Superior in Knowledge which he can impart. Since a physical contact was impossible between God (formless) and man (physical existant), God could only impart Knowledge to human beings by the force of impulsions. Impulsion gives rise to thought which rests on language. Language is

important for conveying ideas and therefore speech can only be possible in language.

The Impulsive Knowledge gained from God was actually the **Vedas** in the Sanskrit language. According to this theory, Sanskrit was the first language on earth drawn from the roots of natural sounds called **Dhwani**. The Sanskrit language represents all the classes of sounds in terms of vowels, consonants, syllables and accents. Hence the **Vedas** were transmitted orally from generation to generation over the years. However, with the development of script, people regarded it easier to record the **Vedas** in writing until the advent of the printing press. Even after the formulation of the Sanskrit script (**Devanāgarī**), **Vedic** texts were still committed to memory and not written down as this procedure was feared to be subject to the loss of purity and sanctity of the hymns.

The **Vedas** were composed in the form of hymns (**mantras**) which were a mixture of poetry, prose, song and miscellany. The hymns were later classified into the present known four **Vedas**. Since the **Vedas** were orally transmitted from Preceptor to pupil over time they were called **Śruti**. The preservation of the entire text of the **Vedas**, intact by oral transmission throughout the centuries is a unique phenomenon in world literature. The preservation of the **Vedas** aimed at strictly maintaining its purity and sanctity, was achieved by the introduction of different modes of recitation of the individual hymns (**mantras**).

Radhakrishnan (1958:XLIX) identified five modes of recitation:

(i) Continuous Recitation (Samhitā - Pātha)

This was the normal text governed by the rules of metre and rhythm.

(ii) Word Recitation (Pada - Pātha)

Each word in the text was recited separate from the compound, in its own specific accent.

(iii) Step Recitation (Krama - Pātha)

Each word was recited twice, being connected both with what precedes and what follows. eg.ab, bc, cd. etc.

(iv) Woven Recitation (Jata - Pātha)

The word combinations were recited twice, the second time in reverse order. eg. ab, ba, ab, bc, cb, bc. etc.

(v) Compact Recitation (Ghana - Pātha)

In this instance the order was as follows : ab, ba, abc, cba, abc, bc, cb, bcd, dcba, bcd. etc.

The above system of recitation has achieved great success in protecting the text from interpolation, modification or corruption.

Versification in Vedic hymns (mantras) is in the form of stanzas. Each hymn has a minimum of three and a maximum of fifteen verses in the same metre. Some hymns however, consist of a succession of single stanzas or groups. A group has either three stanzas in the same metre or two stanzas in different metres. The number of syllables in the common type of stanzas vary from twenty to forty eight.

Example: [Ag/ni/mī/de/ pu/ro/hi/tam/] [ya/jna/sya/
de/vam/rt/vi/jam/] [ho/tvār/am/ ra/tha/dhā/ta/mam/]

(I revere Agni, who is the Benefactor, who is God of the Yajna, who is the regulator of the universe, who draws the elements close to us, who is the repository of wealth.)

The above **Mantra** is divided into three groups of eight syllables, each giving a total of twenty-four syllables.

2.2 Classification of Vedic Literature

The whole life of a Hindu from conception up to the last funeral rite, has to be solemnised at prescribed stages by the recitation of **Vedic** hymns (**mantras**). From these it may be evident how profound the influence of the **Vedas** has been on this great and ancient civilization. In classifying **Vedic** literature, we shall be able to determine the position of the **Vedic Sanskāras** in relation to the various texts.

Vedic literature includes all the literary works that emerged from the **Vedas** to the Epic period during which the **Bhagavadgītā** was written. The main constituents of **Vedic** literature in order are : **Vedas, Brāhmanas, Āranyakas, Vedāngas, Upavedas, Darsanas, Epics, Purānas.**

With reference to the origin of the **Vedas** no consensus has been reached. B.G.Tilak basing his calculations on astronomical data from the **Vedas**, regards the date to be 8000 B.C. However, using calculations based on geological data, N.B. Pavagi dates the

origin of the Vedas to be 70 million B.C.
(Siddhantalankar:1969:xxii)

1.The Four Vedas

The Four Vedas are **Rgveda**, **Yajurveda**, **Sāmaveda** and **Atharvaveda**. Initially all the hymns were in a mixed form comprising poetry, prose, song and miscellany. The great seer **Veda Vyāsa**, classified these hymns into poetry, prose, song and called them **Rg**, **Yajur** and **Sāma Vedas** respectively. The **Atharva Veda** remained a miscellaneous composition. Since the Vedas were compilations, they were referred to as **Samhitās**. The **Rgveda** deals with knowledge and has 10 522 verses. The **Yajurveda** is concerned with action and has 2 006 verses. The **Sāmaveda** highlights worship and has 1 875 verses. The **Atharvaveda** comprises miscellaneous subjects and has 5 977 verses. The Vedas have a total of 20380 verses. (Sharma:1985:19)

2.Brāhmanas

The **Brāhmanas** are mainly in prose form. They contain detailed descriptions of sacrificial rites, specific duties and rules of conduct.

3. Āranyakas or Upanisads

Both refer to the same class of literature. They basically deal with philosophical texts and the knowledge propounded by saints and seers who have retreated to the forests. This class of literature was part of the **Brāhmanas**. According to Siddhantalankar (1969:XXVI) authors of **Vedic** literature belonged to two different schools of thought. The first school believed in the ritualistic interpretation of the **Vedas**. They performed elaborate sacrifices or **Yajnas**. The second school did not accept the ritualistic tradition, but maintained a philosophic meaning to the purpose of life.

4. Vedāngas

Following the **Āranyakas** were the six **Vedāngas**. These were designed to aid in the correct pronunciation and interpretation of the texts. The six **Vedāngas** are :

Śikṣa (science of articulation and pronunciation)

Chanda (science of prosody)

Vyākaraṇa (grammar)

Nirukta (etymology of **Vedic** vocabulary)

Jyotiṣa (astronomy and astrology)

Kalpa or **Sutra** (ritual, ceremonial)

The **Kalpa** or **Sutra** is the most important because it stipulates the ceremonies and sacraments that are to be performed in the journey of life. It also stipulates the nature of society - the

division of the **Aśramas** and **Varnas**. The individual's place in society is given prominence.

There are three broad categories of **Sutras** viz. **Srauti**, **Grhya** and **Dharma Sutras**.

The **Grihya Sutra** contains the details of the Sixteen **Sanskāras** that are performed from birth to death at various stage of life.

5. Upavedas

These texts supplement the **Vedas**. They are:

Ayurveda (medicine)

Dhanurveda (military science)

Gandharvaveda (music)

Śilpaveda (mechanics or architecture)

6. Darśanas

They represented the six systems of philosophy which formulated their own independent theories regarding the origin of the universe.

7. The Epics

The two main epics are the **Mahābhārata** and the **Rāmāyana**. The fundamental concepts found in the epics are in conformity with the **Vedic** view of life.

8. Purānas

The **Purānas** deal with customs, ceremonies, fasts and feasts of the Hindus. Astrological considerations that played an important part in the **Sanskāras** developed in the **Purānas**.

2.3 The role of Yajna in the Sanskāras

The **Yajna** (sacred fire) is central to all Hindu religious ceremonies. The **Yajna** is performed in all the sixteen **Sanskāras**. While the **Yajna** is being performed oblations are offered in the form of **ghee** (clarified butter) and **sāmagrī**.

The **sāmagrī** consists of sandalwood, vegetable matter, medicinal herbs and roots.

The act of offering the **ghee** and the **sāmagrī** into the sacred fire is done to the chanting of sacred verses (**mantras**). This is called **Āhuti** (oblation). **Āhuti** is offered with the chanting of the word "**svāhā**". Dayanand (Upadhaya:1946:64) states that the word "**svāhā**" signifies that speech should be consistent with the knowledge in our mind.

Agni (fire) is one of the names of God. It represents radiance and heat. The flame of the **Yajna** symbolises the victory of light over darkness, of knowledge over ignorance and prosperity over poverty. While performing the **Yajna**, prayers are offered to God and verses, which have lofty thoughts in praise of His attributes and functions, are sung. Through **Yajna** Hindus get the opportunity

of studying the **Vedas** and other scriptures so that their mind and intellect becomes pure.

An important benefit of the **Yajna** is that it purifies the surrounding air because of the health-promoting ingredients that constitute the **sāmagrī**. The nature of the fire is such that it breaks up the ingredients of the **sāmagrī** into atoms, which destroy the germs responsible for diseases.

It is clearly evident that **Sanskāras** be performed in such sanctity. The act of oblation of both **ghee** and **sāmagrī** to ignite the sacrificial flame is to perform the physical **yajna**. The spiritual **yajna** refers to the disciplining of the mind, intellect and soul (Vedalankar:1979:83).

Chapter Three

Summary of the Sixteen Sanskāras and the identification of Oral elements in the Nāmkarana Sanskāra

3.1 Reasons for choice of topic

It is important to note that amongst the **Hindi**-speaking Indians in South Africa, there are two streams of practice with regards to the performance of religious ceremonies. They are the **Vedic** (reformist) and the **Purānic** (traditional). In the marriage and naming ceremonies, both streams draw from the "**Grhyasutras**". In addition to observing the procedure prescribed in the "**Grhyasutra**", the **Purānic** followers observe certain traditions that have been handed down over the generations. The **Vedic** followers, who through the influence of Swami Dayanand, the founder of the **Arya Samaj Movement**, perform the ceremonies according to the prescribed **Vedic** text, wherein adaptations have been made to suit present circumstances.

For this study, I have used the "**Sānskar Vidhi**" (Book of Sacraments). This book was written by Swami Dayanand, who founded the **Arya Samaj Movement** in Bombay in 1875. Being a Hindu reformer, he revised the sixteen sacraments and the **yajna** by explaining the different rituals according to ancient **Vedic** tradition. The "**Sānskar Vidhi**", has been used as a basic textbook for the training of **Vedic** priests in South Africa. Using this book as a basis, I shall attempt to analyse oral elements present in the sixteen **Vedic Sanskāras**, with specific reference to the

Naming (Nāmkarana), Marriage (Vivāha) and Death (Antyesthi) Ceremonies.

3.2 Summary of the Sixteen Sanskāras

The sixteen **sanskāras** are outlined by Vedalankar (1979:91-94) as follows :

1. Garbhadhana

In this **sanskāra** which is performed after the wedding ceremony, the couple pray for a healthy and noble child.

2. Punsavana

Three months after conception, **Punsavana** is performed to ensure the sound development of the child in its embryonic stage.

3. Simantonnayana

For the full development of the organs of the embryo **Simantonnayana** is performed six or eight months after conception.

4. Jatakarma

Jatakarma is performed on the day the child is born, to welcome the child into the world.

5. Nāmkarana

On this day, eleven days after birth, the child is named.

6. Niskramana

After the fourth month, **Niskramana** is performed. The child is taken out into the open and exposed to nature. A prayer is done for the long life of the child to invoke blessings for good health, prosperity and longevity.

7. Annaprasāna

This **sanskāra** is performed when the teeth begin to appear between the sixth and eighth month. This marks the weaning of the child to solid food.

8. Chūdakarma

During this **sanskāra**, the Ceremony of Tonsure, is performed at any time from the first to the third year. The hair from the child's head is removed for the first time. A prayer for good health and sound mental development is conducted.

9. Karnavedha

In the third year, this **sanskāra** is performed by piercing the lower lobes of the ears.

10. Upanayana

Upanayana is performed at any time, from the age of five to eight years. Having performed this **sanskāra**, the child is placed in the care of a teacher (**Guru**). The child is given the Sacred thread (**Yajnopavit**). This thread symbolizes the commitment to the path of life laid down by the scriptures. The act of celibacy, the control of the sense organs (**Brahmacharya**) is of prime importance to the student. The three strands of the Sacred thread, represent the three letters of the religious symbol **A.U.M.** The three strands also denote the three disciplines of life, which are knowledge, action and devotion. Formal education begins after the performance of this **sanskāra**.

11. Vedārambha

This **sanskāra** is performed immediately after the **Upanayana**. The student commences with the study of spiritual knowledge as contained in the **Vedas**. The student prays for attainment of a sound intellect.

12. Samavartana

Samavartana is performed between the twenty-first to the twenty-fifth year, when the student has completed his studies. The student who has now graduated, begins a new life of self-reliance

and independence. He now participates fully in the socio-economic life of the community.

13. Vivāha

Once the stage of celibacy is completed, the student moves to the stage of the householder if he decides to marry. Two individuals start a life-long companionship after having lived independent lives.

14. Vanaprashta

At the age of fifty-one years, the householder stage (**Grihastha-Aśrama**) is completed and the Renunciation stage (**Vanaprastha-Aśrama**) now commences. Having handed over all the responsibilities to his son, he is free to lead a life of austerity and meditation.

15. Sanyasa

This **sanskāra** is performed when he renounces his wealth, family ties and desires for fame. The saffron robe of an ascetic (**Sannyasi**) is adorned. He renounces all worldly attachments and adopts a universal outlook.

16. Antyesthi

After death, when the body is cremated, this **sanskāra** is performed. Prayers are recited for the peace of the departed soul and for the comfort of members of the bereaved family. When the body is cremated, it becomes part of one with the five elements: earth, water, fire, air and ether.

3.3 Identification of Oral elements in the Naming Ceremony (Nāmkarana)

Nāmkarana sanskāra is performed on the eleventh day since the birth of the child. On this day the ceremony commences with the parents of the child, priest and guests. The **Yajna** is performed with oblations of **ghee (purified butter)**. Having positioned themselves in a manner required by the scriptures, in this instance, with the father holding the child, the **Yajna** is performed. The father offers one oblation of **ghee** and **sāmagrī** whilst pronouncing the **mantra**:

OM PRAJĀPATAYE SVĀHĀ

(Salutations to God Almighty)

This procedure is followed by four oblations. Each oblation is offered to the following:

TITHI, NAKSHATRA, TITHI DEVATA, NAKSHATRA - DEVATA.

The above represents the lunar dates and the stars under which the birth of the child took place.

Next, while the mother holds the child in her lap, while the father observes the healthy breathing of the child and pronounces the following mantras:

1.KO'SI KATAMO'SI KASYĀSI KONĀMĀSI.

(O Child ! Who are you ? What are you ? Whom do you belong to ? What is your name ?)

2.YASYA TE NĀMĀMANAHI YAM TWĀ SOMENĀTĪ TRPAMA.

(We know your name and satisfy with milk.)

3.BHUR BHUVAH SVAH SUPRAJĀH PRAJĀBHIH SYAM SUVIRO
VĪRAIH SUPOSAH POSAIH.

(In this world may we be blessed with good progeny, noble heroes and with proper sustenance.)

4.OM KO'SI KATAMOSYESHO SYAMRTO'SI ĀHASPATYAM MĀSAM
PRAVIŚĀ SAU

(O Child ! who are you ? Whom do you belong to ? Really you are immortal and you belong to all - blissful God. May you enter into the months after months in the reign of God)

For this study, the above Sanskrit **mantras** have been selected from the Naming Ceremony, to highlight the oral elements therein.

One of the common features of the above **mantras** is the use of Propositional Gestures which is a strong characteristic of the Oral Tradition. The Propositional Gestures are in the form of short sentences such as :

- "KO'SI" - "Who are you ?"
"KATAMO'SI" - "What are you ?"
"KASYĀSI" - "Of whom are you ?"
"KONĀMĀSI" - "What is your name ?"

The questioning technique in the above sentences emphasises the existence of the child in this world.

In each of the four clauses, the verb used is "ASI", preceded by the interrogative pronouns : "KA", "KATAMA", "KASYĀ".

The use of the verb "ĀSI" and the interrogative "KA", repeatedly facilitates recitation and memorization. The word "ĀSI" is derived from the verbal root "AS" which means "To be".

An examination of the above four **mantras** reveals examples of alliteration which assist in the pronunciation of mantras.

The examples are as follows:

In **mantra** 1. "KA" and "ĀSI" are repeated.

In **mantra** 2. "YA" and "MA" are repeated.

In **mantra** 3. "BHU", "SU", "AH" and "AIH", are repeated.

In **mantra** 4. "SI" and "AM" are repeated.

The effectiveness of the above oral device is that it contributes to a harmonious atmosphere during the naming ceremony. It also serves as a traditional mnemonic device, when the audience is expected to follow the recitation of the **mantras** by the priest. Audience participation is further enhanced, when the priest requests members of the audience to recite "SVĀHĀ" during the offering of the oblations. This illustrates one of the universal laws of Jousse that is Mimism, because the participants of the ceremony imitate the priest's gestures when offering oblations. It is interesting to note that, the alliteration in **mantra** 1 follows a sequential pattern in each of the short sentences, while in **mantras** 2, 3, and 4 there is a variation where the alliteration either occurs in alternate sentences or randomly.

The questions in **mantra** 1 are examples of propositional gestures, which constitutes Parallelism, since there is a balance between the questions and corresponding answers. Parallelism is to be found in **mantra** 4, i.e. The questions "Who are you ?" "Whom do you belong to ?" is balanced by the corresponding answers: "You are immortal and you belong to all blissful God." This questioning and answering technique is an example of Bilateralism.

The specific distribution of short and long vowels enhances the steady rhythm during recitation and in this manner memorization is facilitated. eg. in **mantra 3**

"BHUR" "BHUVAH" "SVAH"

The vowel "U" in "BHUR" and "BHUVAH" is repeated. The "A" in "BHUVAH" and "SVAH" is short. This technique is prevalent in all the **sanskāras** which is a characteristic of the **Sanskrit** language.

Elision occurs in **mantras 1** and **4**. Elision undermines the propositional gesture's association with the idea of a sentence in the grammatical sense.

"KO'SI" of **mantra 1** and **4** is actually an elided form of the sentence "KOĀHSI" ("KAH + ĀSI" = "KO'SI")

The use of adjectives such as "good", "noble", "proper" and "all-blissful" promote the positive aspects of a religious life. These words bring out virtues that the child is supposed to be instilled with. This ritual has a definite significance in the building of a healthy society. This in turn, lends importance to the perpetuation of the ceremony through the oral tradition. Accordingly the oral tradition becomes perpetuated.

The metaphorical device in **mantra 4**, invokes the blessings of God for the child to enter the "reign" of a virtuous life, where he can become a good citizen. Just as the subject of a king must submit his loyalty and devotion to the king in a similar manner

the child has to submit to God in a spiritual form. This comparison emphasises that a close communion between ruler and his subject must exist, to consolidate the existing social structures. Here again, it has become necessary to keep alive the tradition of the ritual, so that the social order is maintained.

It is significant to note that sometimes, **Jatakarma sanskāra** is performed together with the **Nāmkarana sanskāra**. The **Jatakarma sanskāra** is performed at birth, in order to welcome the new-born child. The rituals accompanying this particular ceremony are highly symbolic. The father writes (**AUM**) on the tongue of the child, using a thin bar of gold which has been dipped in honey. Thereafter, he whispers the word "**VEDO - SAI**" (you are **VEDA** - knowledge) in the ear of the child. Thus the child is introduced to the name of God and the **Veda** at the time of birth.

Of all the names of God **OM (AUM)** is supreme and the most comprehensive. The word (**AUM**) is made up of three letters i.e. **A, U, and M**. 'O' is a diphthong of the simple vowels **A + U**. The three letters are symbolic of the three attributes of God.

A (Akāra-creator) - denotes the power of God to create the Universe.

U (Ukāra-preserver) - denotes the power of God to preserve the Universe.

M (Makāra-dissolver) - denotes the power of God to dissolve the universe.

The actual act of writing the name of God before naming the child, signifies that the child must acknowledge the supremacy

of God. The use of gold symbolizes wealth while honey represents purity. This ritual is performed for the child to attain wealth and lead a pure life. The act of writing and whispering the name of God, are examples of gestures.

In an examination of selected **mantras** from the **Nāmkaran Sanskāra**, the wealth of oral tradition has become more evident.

CHAPTER FOUR

Evidence of Oral Tradition in the Marriage Ceremony (Vivāha Sanskāra)

4.1 Importance of Marriage Ceremony (Vivāha Sanskāra)

The marriage ceremony (**Vivāha Sanskāra**) is the most important of all the **Sanskāras**. Marriage is given prominence in the **Grihyasutras** because it is the origin and centre of all domestic sacrifices. When religious consciousness developed, marriage was not only a social necessity but became a religious duty incumbent upon every individual (Pandey:1969:153).

In the **Vedic** tradition, marriage is seen as a ceremony whereby two souls are brought into union spiritually, mentally and physically in the sacred bond of matrimony. Marriage enables man and woman to find their partners in life. The institution of marriage is essential for procreation and the continuation of the human race. Whilst disciplining one, marriage enables one to satisfy one's emotional and physical needs in a religious and socially acceptable way.

The marriage ceremony also marks the progression of a Hindu from the celibacy (**Brahmacharya**) to the householder (**Grihasta**) stages of life (**Aśramas**). Hinduism has recognised the need to formulate an individual's life into four stages (**Aśramas**) for his full development. The four stages being, 1. celibate (**Brahmacharya**) 2.

householder (**Grihasta**) 3. recluse (**Vanaprastha**) 4. renunciate (**Sannyasa**).

During the stage of celibacy, an individual engages in study and maintains a strict control of his body senses. In the life of a Hindu, control of body senses is an important prerequisite for spiritual development.

Although the marriage ceremony occurs over one day, several pre-nuptial ceremonies are conducted. A great festive mood prevails during the period before the marriage ceremony, not only in the household, but also in the entire neighbourhood. This is marked by traditional music, folklore dancing, coloured lights, pomp and glamour.

The many aspects of the marriage ceremony has been transmitted from generation to generation, either intact or readapted to suit changing local circumstances. The marriage tradition reflects the aesthetic feelings and moods of the folk, their social, political and cultural interactions. They reveal their cultural dimensions and traditional values. They also mirror the realities of life (Boodhoo:1994:10).

Having outlined the essential features of the marriage ceremony, attention will be focussed on selected **mantras** from the **Sanskar Vidhi** to investigate the oral skills used in the transmission of the **Vedic** marriage ceremony. In this study, special emphasis will be placed on the important role of rituals and the wealth of symbolism associated with the marriage ceremony.

4.2 Outline of Marriage Ceremony (Vivāha Sanskāra)

The essential features of Hindu Marriage Ceremony will be listed in order to place in context the relevant section chosen for this study.

The essential features of the Marriage Ceremony are:

1.Receiving of the Bridegroom (Madhu-Parka)

The bridegroom and his party are welcomed by the bride when they arrive at her residence. The bride offers the bridegroom a seat, water to drink and a mixture of milk, curd and honey to eat.

2.Acceptance of the Bride (Kanya Grahana)

The parents of the bride, place the right hand of the bride on that of the bridegroom's and grant them permission to undergo the marriage ceremony. The bridegroom accepts the bride and presents her with clothing and jewellery.

3.Lighting of the Sacred Fire (Yajna or Havan)

The bride and bridegroom enter the marriage canopy (**Mandap**) and garland each other. The Sacred Fire is lit (**Havan**) to commence the marriage ceremony. Clarified butter (**Ghee**) and sweet smelling ingredients (**Sāmagrī**) are offered as oblation accompanied with the chanting of sacred verses (**Mantras**). The Sacred Fire symbolizes the illumination of the mind, knowledge and happiness.

4. Taking of the Sacred Vows (Pani-Grahana and Pratiya)

The bridegroom clasps the right hand of the bride and both exchange sacred vows.

5. Stepping on the stone (Śilārohana)

The bride places her right foot on a piece of rock. The significance of this act is that the bride and bridegroom promise, regardless of the vicissitudes of life to remain true to each other, as firm and steadfast as a rock.

6. Offering of parched rice into the Sacred Fire (Lājā-Homa)

Parched rice is offered into the sacred fire by the bride and bridegroom for mutual long life, health and prosperity.

7. Encircling the Sacred Fire (Maṅgala-Pakirama)

The bride and bridegroom go around the sacred fire four times, dedicating themselves each time, to the observance of the sacred vows of marriage.

8. Taking of Seven Steps (Sapti-Padi)

With a knot tied between the clothing of the bride and the bridegroom, to indicate the fusion of two hearts and the union of two different families, the bride and bridegroom take seven

steps, symbolising their entry into married life. As they take each step, they invoke the blessings of God for :

1. Nourishment
2. Strength
3. Wealth
4. Knowledge
5. Children
6. Health
7. Love and Friendship

9. Sprinkling of water and looking at the Sun (Jala-Sincana and Sūrya-Darśana)

Water is sprinkled on the couple for peace and calmness. The bride and the bridegroom look at the Sun and pray for a long and happy life.

10. Completion of Havan and Blessing (Purnāhuti and Aśirvāda)

The marriage ceremony is completed with the final offering of **Ghee** and **Sāmagrī** into the sacred fire. Thereafter the bride and the bridegroom are showered with blessings for a successful married life.

(Reproduced from a tract "Essential features of the Hindu Marriage Ceremony" - Published by the Ved Niketan.)

4.3 Evidence of Orality in some selected Mantras of the Marriage Ceremony

For the purposes of this study the following **Mantras** and their translations have been selected from the **Sanskar Vidhi**.

1.OM PĀDYAM PĀDYAM PĀDYAM PRATIGRHYATĀM

(May this water for the purificatory rite of washing the feet be received.)

2.OMARGHORGHORGA PRATIGRHATĀM

(May this water for the purificatory rite of washing the face be received.)

3.OM ACAMANIYAMACAMANIYAMACAMANIYAM

(May this water for the purificatory rite symbolizing the cleansing of the inner - self be received.)

4.OM MADHUPARKO MADHUPARKPO MADHUPARKAH PRATIGRHYATĀM

(May this mixture of honey and curd symbolizing proper nourishment be received.)

5.OM BHŪR BHUVAH SVAH. MADHU NAKTAMYTOSHASO MADHUMATPARTTHIVAM RAJAH. MADHU DHAURASTU NA PITA.

(May the night and dawn be sweet, may the earth be sweet, may the heaven be our father (protector.)

6.OM BHURBHUVAH SVAH. MADHUMANNO VANASPATIRMADHUMAN ASTU SURYAH. MADHVIRGAVOM BHAVANTU NAH.

(May the trees be sweet to us, may the sun and its rays be pleasant to us.)

7.OM GAUR GAUR GAUR PRATIGRHYATĀM

(May this cow be received.)

In each instance, the bridegroom answers by pronouncing:

PRATIGRHRĀNI meaning "I accept".

An analysis of the **Mantras** above indicate a strong association with orality. Some of the predominant oral skills that have been used throughout the selected **Mantras** are :

1. Invocation

The repeated use of the Divine syllable **OM** by the Priest during the ceremony, denotes an appeal to the Supreme Being to bear witness to this very sacred ceremony. While the bride, holds a pot of water and requests the bridegroom to sprinkle water on his feet and face, she is in fact invoking God to bless them. This represents external cleansing. In **Mantra 3** the bride's request to the bridegroom to sip the water, is a reference to spiritual cleansing.

OM in **Vedic** tradition is the most exalted of all the names of God. In the **Bhagavadgītā** (8:13), **Krsna** says, "One who on uttering the one-syllabic **OM** leaves this body in the thought of the Lord, finds **Supreme Bliss**". Thus the repetitive use of the syllable **OM**, is believed by the Hindus, to generate great power and to purify the mind and intellect. An important requirement in its utterance, is that it should be repeated with fervour, understanding and earnestness, if one wishes to witness the power of **OM**.

2.Alliteration

A common characteristic that prevails in all seven **Mantras** is alliteration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, repeated use of certain words and syllables emphasises the value of alliteration as a mnemotechnical device. For example, the repeated use of the syllable, **PĀ** in the word **PĀDYAM** (foot) in **Mantra 1** , stresses the call made to God to endow the bridal couple with a firm foundation for their future. Likewise, the alliterative use of words in the remaining **Mantras**, serve to demonstrate a double meaning i.e. the physical and spiritual aspects of a Hindu's life.

3.Rhyme and Rhythm

Each of the first three **Mantras**, which represent the purificatory ritual, end in a common rhyme i.e. "**AM**".

Rhyme has been used in these **Mantras** to make them phonologically cohesive, created by the interaction of sounds and meanings. The efficient use of the end-rhymes complements the meaning of purification during recitation. This idea is supported by the dictum of Traugott and Pratt (1980:70), which is, "**the sound must seem an echo to the sense**". It would seem that, in order to facilitate the retention of the **Mantras** in the memory a key word has been used, to trigger the sound - symbolism associations. The key words in **Mantras 1, 3 and 4** are : **PĀDYAM** , **ĀCAMAN** and **MADHU** respectively and their repetition emphasises the main theme of each **Mantra**.

Much of the rhythm in the above **Mantras** comes from the repetition of similar syllables, which are within or between the sentences, for example, within **Mantra 1** the **A** sound - stress in **PĀD** is long, while the **A** sound-stress in **YAM** is short. Between **Mantras 1** and **2** the occurrence of the common word **Pratigrhyatām** has similar long and short sound stresses. Like rhyme, rhythm is also a source of cohesion and sound - sense connections. Both rhyme and rhythm contribute to the melodious recitation of the **Mantras** by the priest during the ceremony. It also assists in the pronunciation and memorization of the **Mantras**.

4. Repetition

The hallmark of oral tradition is the repetition of words, syllables and vowels. This is clearly evident in the **Mantras** selected.

In **Mantra 1** the word **PĀDYAM** is repeated thrice.

In **MANTRA 2** the word **GHOR** is repeated twice.

In **MANTRA 3** the word **ACAMANĪYAM** is repeated thrice.

In **MANTRA 4** the words **MADHUPARKO** are repeated thrice.

In **MANTRA 5** the word **MADHU** is repeated thrice.

In **MANTRA 6** the root word **MADHU** is repeated thrice.

In **MANTRA 7** the word **GAUR** is repeated thrice.

The word **PRATIGRHYATĀM** is common in **MANTRAS 1, 2, 4 and 7.**

The word **OM** is present in all the selected **MANTRAS.**

The bridegroom's response to the bride's request by repeating **PRATIGRHRĀNI** (I accept) is an example of the replay of propositional gestes.

The analysis above demonstrates an extensive use of repetition of words both, within **Mantras** and between **Mantras.** This typifies the oral tradition in the **Sanskrit** language.

5.Symbolism

In **Mantras 1, 2, and 3** reference to the use of water in the purification ritual, emphasises both the physical and spiritual aspects of this **Sanskāra.** The purificatory ritual is an example of Mimism. This example has been discussed in chapter three.

At one stage of the ceremony, the bride offers the bridegroom a mixture of honey and curd (**MADHUPARKAH**) to sip. This action is accompanied by the recitation of **Mantras 4, 5 and 6.** At a literal level, the **MADHUPARKAH** is important for nourishment, energy and purifying the digestive system. At the figurative level, the **MADHUPARKAH** symbolizes the bridegroom's wish to be pure in thought, deed and action. Since honey is sweet, it is believed that the bridegroom will always utter sweet words. Curd which is a dairy product, is essential for maintaining good health on the one hand, while on the other, it is hoped that the bridal couple will enjoy a "healthy" relationship.

Personification is exemplified in **Mantras 5 and 6** to accentuate the need for "sweetness" in the married couple's life. Night symbolizes darkness and ignorance while dawn heralds light and knowledge. Dawn comes daily with its message of freshness, hope, happiness, duty and perseverance. Dawn invigorates both externally and internally. It "swallows" the darkness and presents the bright and powerful sun. In a similar manner, **Mantra 5** exhorts the bridal couple to search within themselves, for the vision of the ultimate Divine Light, thus overcoming the darkness of ignorance. In **Mantras 5 and 6**, a strong image of a mother-figure and father-figure is portrayed, when the earth is personified as a mother or wife, while heaven is regarded as a father or husband. The reference to antonyms such as night-dawn, heaven-earth and father-mother are examples of Bilateralism.

According to **Mantra 6**, the mention of the word "trees" is a reference to the need for proper sustenance, for the bridal couple. The personification of trees, is effective because it illustrates that the bridal couple must always be in harmony with each other, just as the elements of nature are.

The quotation "may the sun and its rays be pleasant to us", can be likened to the relationship between husband and wife. As the earth (wife) makes the sun (husband) its central point and revolves around it, similarly a wife makes her husband the central figure of her life. The rays of the sun light up the

earth, likewise the wife achieves glory through the vows and pledges of her husband, thus allowing her virtues to prevail.

During the marriage ceremony the bride's family offer the bridegroom a cow or money as a gift while pronouncing **Mantra 7**. The Hindus revere the cow because it is likened to a mother. A mother feeds her child with milk, similarly the cow's milk serves as nourishment. Humanity in general, depends on the cow for milk and its by-products. Due to practical reasons it is important to note that in South Africa, gifts are offered instead of a cow.

Hindus believe that they should co-exist in with all elements of nature. The constant reference to nature in some of the **Mantras**, can be attributed to the Hindu reverence for nature, which can also be traced to the **Vedas** where some of the most beautiful and poetic depictions of nature are contained. The oral devices that have been discussed so far bring out the beauty of nature, and man's need to respect nature.

Within the context of **Mantra 6**, the word **OM** represents the tripartite division of the universe: the earth, atmosphere and heaven. The Hindus believe that God pervades all three spheres. Man relies on all three for sustenance. The earth provides man with food , shelter and clothing. The atmosphere is the region of wind, lightning and rain. In the heaven, the sun provides the life-giving rays and heat. At this juncture, it must be noted that, the number three is always regarded with reverence by

Hindus. The word **OM** is denoted by three letters (**A U M**) as discussed in chapter three. This accounts for the fact that some **Mantras** are repeated thrice. During certain rituals, such as the sipping of water the rite is repeated thrice, hence the importance of chanting a verse or performing an act thrice.

Although, the Hindu marriage ceremony has been outlined in this chapter, it is necessary to elaborate on the significance of a few of the rituals in order to understand the oral tradition. All rituals are accompanied by recitations of **Mantras** and at times, certain gestures for example, the offering of a seat and honey, curd and milk mixture, to the bridegroom is an indication of hospitality.

Another instance is the "taking of the seven steps" which is of paramount importance, which if left out, would result in the marriage not being recognised. Presently, a marriage is recognised only when it is registered; as required by a literate society. Yet the legal authority empowered in the ritual of the "seven steps" has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. The actions of offering a seat, a cow and the "taking of the seven steps" illustrate Mimism.

The language skills and rituals that have been analysed thus far, reveal that oral culture functions according to memory and performance skills. Ritual is an essential feature of oral tradition. The marriage ceremony still continues to perpetuate the rich cultural heritage of the Hindus over the generations because of orality despite the vicissitudes of time.

CHAPTER FIVE

Evidence of Orality in the Death Ceremony (Antyesti Sanskāra)

5.1 Description of the Death Ceremony

According to Hindu belief, the living body has two main components, the living body and the soul (**Ātmā or Jīva**). The individual is capable of contemplating, thinking and performing actions only when the soul is present. The body is considered dead only when the soul leaves the body.

The **Sanskrit** word for body is **Śarīra**, something that can be destroyed. The body is not permanent and therefore upon death, it returns to its five main elements namely, earth, water, fire, air and ether. The common practice among Hindus, is to dispose of the dead body by cremation. For hygienic and economic considerations, cremation is regarded as the best way to dispose of a dead body.

The last rites or the death ceremony (**Antyesti Sanskāra**) is normally performed at the crematorium. The **Mantras** recited by the priest at the death ceremony are directly related to the famous Hindu doctrine of reincarnation or rebirth (**Punarjanma**). It is firmly believed that, since the soul is immortal, it enters another body after death. In this way the cycle of birth and death continues, until the soul attains a state of eternal bliss

(**Moksa**), a state attained after a person is redeemed by penance according to the law of **Karma**.

Before the last rites are performed, relatives of the deceased bathe the dead body and adorn it with new clothes. The accepted practice is to cremate the dead body on a pyre, using wood, **ghee**, sandalwood and **sāmagrī**. The trend today is to cremate the body in an incinerator, using flammable gas. During the pre-cremation rites, the priest recites the relevant **Mantras** as prescribed by sacred texts including the **Bhagavadgītā** and/or **Rāmāyana**. Verses that are recited explain the nature of the sojourn of the soul on this earth and the philosophy of liberation. The priest may even give a simple discourse on eschatology in Hinduism.

Since the modern practice is to place the body in a coffin, the oblations are placed into the coffin containing the body. The coffin or a shell containing the body is then moved into the incinerator for cremation. The ashes are then disposed of in a river or the sea.

5.2 Evidence of Orality in the Death Ceremony

In order to trace elements of orality in the Death Ceremony, once again, a few **Mantras** have been selected for study.

The **Mantras** selected for this ceremony are :

1. PRĀNEBHYYAH SANDHIPATI KEBHYAH SVĀHĀ.

(Salutations to the vital airs and their associated powers.)

2. PRTHIVYAI SVĀHĀ. AGNAYE SVĀHĀ.

(Salutations to the earth. Salutations to the fire.)

3. ANTARIKSĀYA SVĀHĀ. VĀYAVE SVĀHĀ.

(Salutations to the atmosphere. Salutations to the wind.)

4. DIVE SVĀHĀ. SURYAYA SVĀHĀ.

(Salutations to the day. Salutations to the sun.)

5. DIGBHYAH SVĀHĀ. CĀNDRĀYA SVĀHĀ.

(Salutations to the quarters i.e. cardinal points.

Salutations to the moon.)

6. NAKSATREBHYAH

(Salutations to the constellations.)

Certain characteristics of oral expression are identifiable in the **Mantras** listed. There is a series of short sentences (propositional geste) in the sample. In this part of the death ceremony, four relatives of the deceased, offer oblations of **Ghee** to the sacred fire (**Yajna**) under the supervision of the priest. The offerings are accompanied by the recitation of the above **Mantras**, which are composed of short sentences, thus assisting in their utterance and memorization. The offering of oblations of **Ghee** by the participants is mimism because they follow the directive gestures of the priest.

Another example of mimism in the death ceremony is when each of the participants and audience clasp their hands. In Hinduism, the clasping of both hands, signify reverence to God during prayer. This act has been handed down from generation to

generation and typifies the oral tradition. It is interesting to note, that this gesture is also used as a traditional form of greeting.

Whenever, an oblation is made, the word **Svāhā** is uttered. In this instance, **Svāhā** is repeated in the first five **Mantras** to emphasize the fact that, the oblations are made to God. This ritual, involves the individuals, placing both their open palms together when making the offerings. This action is another example of mimism. The **Mantras** are examples of mimism, because they constitute actions directed to the various elements of the universe, which Hindus believe God pervades (Omnipresent).

The repetitive use of **Svāhā**, is an example of oral formula, that enunciates the principle of reverence to God and His Supremacy, as well as an acknowledgement, that everything belongs to God. Many examples of oral formulae are present in the verses of the **Sanskāras**.

Bilateralism exists in **Mantras** 2, 3 and 4 where one observes the balancing of both sentences within each of the **Mantras** respectively, for example, "Salutations to the earth", is balanced with, "Salutations to the fire". A sense of harmony is achieved by the use of bilateralism.

The elements of the universe are personified in all **Mantras** because salutations are offered to them. Each of the elements- the air, earth, fire, atmosphere, wind and sun- has life- giving

properties. All these are vital for the growth and sustenance of the human body. After death, the elements that constitute the human body, return to their original source when it is cremated according to Hindu rites.

The act of offering oblations to these elements, is in fact, an appraisal of God, the creator of these elements. Respect for nature, by the Hindus has always been a distinguishing feature of the oral tradition.

God, who, according to Hindu belief is regarded as being formless, manifests himself through the matter that comprises the universe. The universe is comprised of five substances (matter), i.e. earth, water, fire, air and ether. Similarly, the human body is composed of these substances. The cosmic form of God is symbolically projected into the distinctive substances of the universe as follows:

In Mantra 1 and 3 His head is represented by the air and the atmosphere. His feet symbolizes the earth with fire emanating from his mouth. The sun is representative of His eyes while the moon is compared to His mind (**Mantras 4 and 5**).

According to Hindu belief, the human form was created by God with manifold, cosmic physical forces, become manifest in the organs of the human body. The human body is supposed to represent, in its constitution and composition, a microcosm of the cosmos, the macrocosm. This demonstrates the creative cosmic power of God. (Vedalankar et al:1981:86)

In a metaphorical sense, the moon which is synonymous with peace and happiness is compared to the mental bliss a person experiences when these **Mantras** are recited. The reference to "day" and the "sun" in **Mantra 4** symbolizes the rebirth of the soul after death, according to the law of Reincarnation.

The meanings inherent in these **Mantras** serve as a means of comfort and solace to the members of the bereaved family. They also highlight the belief that the body serves as a temporary abode for the soul. After death, the soul enters a new body and life continues.

Rituals, which form part of Hindu tradition, have been sustained through the centuries by their practice as prescribed by the relevant **Sanskāras**. In the death ceremony, some of the prescribed rituals are as follows:

1. the cremation ground should be situated in the south direction.
2. the corpse should be laid on the funeral pyre with the head facing the north. Wood and **Ghee** should cover the corpse.
3. A lamp of **Ghee** should be lit from which a piece of camphor should be kindled. A male member of the family, then lights the pyre, beginning in the region of the head and proceeding to the region of the feet.
4. After the ceremony, the bereaved family members are required to bath as a form of purification and perform the prayer for peace. (Dayanand:1985:357)

Ritual number three is an example of Bilateralism because the corpse is lit, initially at the head and then proceeding to the

feet. A typical example of Bilateralism occurs when the priest sprinkles water in the east-west and north-south directions of the sacred fire. This act signifies the prayer for peace "in all corners" of the world.

The

death ceremony, being the last rite, marks the end of a person's life on earth and the beginning of a new life for the soul. The **Mantras** and the accompanying rituals serve to pacify, comfort and spiritually strengthen the bereaved. The oral tradition in the death ceremony plays a psychological role in the bereaved family's acceptance of the pain and loss associated with death.

Conclusion

In this study, three **Sanskāras** namely the Naming (Nāmkarana), Marriage (**Vivāha**) and the Death (**Antyesti**) ceremonies have been analysed to identify elements of orality. It was found that the **Mantras** of the **Sanskāras** contain a wealth of oral tradition. The extensive use of oral devices such as, keywords, rhythm, rhyme, alliteration, propositional gestures and symbolism etc., have ensured the perpetuation of the **Sanskāras** over the generations, in whichever part of the world Hindus have settled.

The three universal laws of Mimisim, Bilateralism and Formulism as propounded by Marcel Jousse, have been shown to underly the **Sanskāras** chosen. This has enforced the belief that the oral tradition is a powerful avenue in keeping the Hindu culture and religion alive. The practice of the relevant rituals and prayers during the **Sanskāras** reaffirms the role of oral style in the Hindu way of life which is greatly influenced by a modern, literate society.

Hindus who have their roots in India have settled in large numbers abroad. Their descendants have lost touch with the very ancient tradition of the **Sanskāras**. This dissertation will serve as an invaluable contribution in making Hindus aware of and appreciate their rich cultural heritage which draws from the ancient **Vedic** age.

A detailed exploration of the three selected **Sanskāras**, indicate a great scope for further research of the remaining thirteen **Sanskāras** because of the extensive use of orality present in them. Hindu priests are in a more fortunate position to realise the importance of the **Sanskāras**. They could contribute to a better appreciation of the **Sanskāras** in their explanatory talks, by stressing the meanings of the **Mantras**.

The **Sanskāras** contain the entire Hindu view of life and they are of great philosophical importance as they deal with the complete span of the life of an individual. It is a Hindu conviction that if the **Sanskāras** were observed, there would be greater progress and a more religious atmosphere would prevail in the family. This would lead to contentment, peace and happiness in society. The **Sanskāras** would also be instrumental for bringing about peace in the world at large (Vedalankar:1985:14).

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