RLST 100

Introduction to Religious Studies

Instructor: Ian Brown

Ritual and Society: Sikhism

By Vaibhav Sharma

200365101

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Vaibhav Sharma: Society Sikh Society Of Regina

Arkamita Singha Roy Chowdhury: Power Regina, Saskatchewan

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Field Research Analysis

We chose Sikhism for analysing rituals and visited Sikh temple. Sikh’s refer to their temple as Gurudwara. During my visit, I noticed one of the rituals being performed by a group of people together and it’s called Langar. Langar is a ritual where everyone is welcomed to help cook, serve, clean or eat the food at the temple. I noticed people of all religions volunteering to participate in this ritual. There were no restrictions on participation and everyone was welcomed but I noticed most of the people participating in cooking and cleaning were Sikh’s. They were all working together in a group with proper coordination as they were trained professionals but later I found out that most of them are volunteers who are just visiting the temple. People participating in this ritual were divided in four major categories such as cooking, serving, cleaning and eating and they often rotated from one activity to another. A group of people were focused on cooking and making sure there is enough food for everyone whereas another group was completely focused on cleaning the utensils and serving food to people. Even though people of all ages and races were allowed to participate, the majority of participation was dominated by Sikh’s. This ritual can only be performed by a group and it symbolizes equality among different people as everyone with differences gets to work together as a team and build relationships in a society. This activity should be seen as a ritual as it promotes a message of equality and brings people from different social groups together to work as one.

The ritual of Langar plays a key role in developing skills for people participating in it. According to Nye(2004), Rituals are not bound to just personal level or what people do themselves but it helps connect with other members of society and create relationships over time which helps define oneself. I think the ritual of Langar teaches participants to work together with discipline and teach vital skills required to function well in society. Participants explore working at a fast paced activity with complete strangers. This brings people together as they learn to trust each other during these rituals. This ritual also helps participants grow over time and become better self by indulging in this ritual over time because they practice essential skills like multitasking and hard work which are required to succeed in life. According to Nye(2004), individuals not just transform at a personal level but instead on society level where their identity is established among other members of society and the dynamics of this ritual helps participants achieve exactly that. Also, this ritual symbolizes equality as people from all the different religions are welcomed to participate and grow together.

Another Ritual I noticed at the Gurudwara is segregation of men and women in the prayer hall. Upon entering the temple, I washed my hands and covered my head to proceed to the prayer hall where Sikh people pray to their holy book. As soon as I entered, I noticed all the men going to the right side and women going to the left. There were two queues that led to the holy book to pray and then it went back to the sitting area. The sitting area is also in the prayer hall and separated for both men and women. I noticed some chairs at the back for the elderly but everyone else was sitting on the floor and facing the holy book. Everyone entering the prayer hall was following the same ritual and sitting separately regardless of their age, race or religion. The whole gurudwara was full of chatter but not the prayer hall. There was no chatter and all you could hear was the temple head sitting beside the holy book and praying. This segregation is considered a ritual as this activity drives people of different sex apart and allow them to just focus on prayer and god.

The ritual of segregation in prayer hall allows participants to detach from the opposite sex and focus on their prayer and god. This helps participants not only to detach but to also get together with other men/women of the society. This leads to togetherness and getting to know other people in the society. As Nye(2004) suggests, Ritual helps create new relationships with different people of the same/different society by doing an activity together. This ritual achieves exactly what Nye is stating as it allows participants to achieve solidarity and pray together with complete strangers. This leads to new relationships as this ritual is carried out repeatedly every time anyone enters the prayer hall. This ritual also signifies the different role of men and women in society by separating them in their individual groups.

Before this class, I always had an unanswered question about why people choose religion and what they believe in god. The reason behind this question comes from my non-belief in religion and god. Upon all my interactions with religious people in the past, I have always asked a question: “ what is it that I cannot achieve in life that a religious person who believes in god can ?” and I never received a satisfying answer which led me to follow my own lead and disregard all the doctrines related to religion. I still never got an answer to why most of the people in the world choose to have a religion and follow god.

After taking this class, I realized the religion and rituals that come with it, help people figure out a way of living their life. It helps them give purpose and gives answers to difficult questions like “what is the meaning of life?” and “why bothers living?”. I have always been a huge fan of philosophy and read lots of different philosophers to help me find these answers for myself so I never felt the need of religion. I realized religion helps other people find the same answers of life in god. I was born in a hindu Brahmin family but since adulthood I never consider myself to be a part of any religion. So, this class did not change my own religious beliefs but I have a better understanding of other people’s religious beliefs. We explored both eastern and western religions and it made me understand why religious people do what they do. For example, I never knew why muslim people follow Shyria law before this class but I got learn a new prespective on the law after this class.

Before this assignment, I used to think sikh people are very violent due to the historical events of 1984 in Punjab, India but after meeting and exploring the religion, I realized that it’s not true and what I knew about Sikhism was a small part of the big picture. After reading Nye’s theories and the theories discussed in class, I started looking at religion from a different perspective and started analysing the things that would go unnoticed before.

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### Citations and Bibliography

NYE, M. (2004). Religion: the basics. London: Routledge.

Grading rubric:

**RLST100 FIELD RESEARCH ANALYSIS – GRADING RUBRIC**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **A: Excellent** | **B: Good** | **C: Adequate** | **D: Marginal** | **F: Inadequate** | |
| **Description** | Description of ritual.  No assumptions or interpretations. | Description of ritual.  No assumptions or interpretations. | Description of ritual.  No assumptions or interpretations. | Description of ritual.  No assumptions or interpretations. | Description of ritual.  No assumptions or interpretations. | |
| **Analysis** | Explanation of theory.  Use of theory.  Quality of analysis. | Explanation of theory.  Use of theory.  Quality of analysis. | Explanation of theory.  Use of theory.  Quality of analysis. | Explanation of theory.  Use of theory.  Quality of analysis. | Explanation of theory.  Use of theory.  Quality of analysis | |
| **Support for Analysis** | Evidence.  Reasoning. | Evidence.  Reasoning. | Evidence.  Reasoning. | Evidence.  Reasoning. | Evidence.  Reasoning. | |
| **Paragraphs** | Structure.  Focus. | Structure.  Focus. | Structure.  Focus. | Structure.  Focus. | Structure.  Focus. | |
| **Reflection** | What you used to think about religion.  What you think now.  Why does it matter to you? | What you used to think about religion.  What you think now.  Why does it matter to you? | What you used to think about religion.  What you think now.  Why does it matter to you? | What you used to think about religion.  What you think now.  Why does it matter to you? | What you used to think about religion.  What you think now.  Why does it matter to you? | |
| **Writing** | Clarity.  Diction.  Grammar.  Punctuation.  No typing errors.  No biased language.  No colloquial language. | Clarity.  Diction.  Grammar.  Punctuation.  No typing errors.  No biased language.  No colloquial language. | Clarity.  Diction.  Grammar.  Punctuation.  No typing errors.  No biased language.  No colloquial language. | Clarity.  Diction.  Grammar.  Punctuation.  No typing errors.  No biased language.  No colloquial language. | Clarity.  Diction.  Grammar.  Punctuation.  No typing errors.  No biased language.  No colloquial language. | |
| **Requirement** | | | | | | **Penalty** |
| Assignment: submitted on time | | | | | | 5 marks/day |
| Assignment: includes grading rubric | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Formatting: in MS Word .doc or .docx | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Formatting: in Times 12-point font | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Formatting: double-spaced | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Formatting: first line of each paragraph indented | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Formatting: assignment is not more than 1500 words | | | | | | 5 marks |
| Formatting: each page after the title page is numbered | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Title page: present | | | | | | 2 marks |
| Title page (if present): includes all information | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Nye’s book: title in italics every time | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Nye’s book: title spelled correctly every time (including correct capitalization) | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Citations: quotation marks used for any text taken word-for-word from Nye’s book or from “RLST100 Field Research Analysis – Theories” | | | | | | 5 marks |
| Citations: page number included whenever Nye’s book is quoted or “RLST100 Field Research Analysis – Theories” is quoted or whenever an idea from Nye’s book is explained | | | | | | 5 marks |
| Citations: in correct Chicago Manual of Style author-date format | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Bibliography: present | | | | | | 2 marks |
| Bibliography (if present): in correct Chicago Manual of Style author-date format (note: the correct citation format for “RLST100 Field Research Analysis – Theories” is provided in that document itself) | | | | | | 1 mark |
| Sources: Students must use Nye, and if they like, the “RLST100 Field Research Analysis – Theories.” **No other sources are permitted** | | | | | | up to 50 marks |

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Assignment Grade:** | **Grade before penalties** | **Penalties** | **Final grade (out of 100)** |
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