CHAPTER IV

 RITES OF PASSAGE
Arnold Van Gennep was one of the pioneer scholars, who stressed the social importance of non-periodic rituals or rites or occasional rituals. He termed these rituals as "Rites of Passage". He interpreted these rituals as a transition or passage from one social status to another. He called these ceremonies or rituals as "life cycles", such as the events of birth, puberty, marriage, pregnancy and death, concerned with the life cycle of an individual. Non-periodic rites are performed as and when the occasion demands and are not routine in nature, as those rituals are connected with the economic cycle or periodic festivals. Non-periodic rituals are also performed at the time of crisis situations like outbreak of epidemics, drought, lack of sufficient rain, etc.

There is no fixed day or month or year to perform these non-periodic rituals. These rituals are individual or family oriented rather than communal oriented. In human societies, biological changes in terms of age are associated
with the social status as well and these changes are ceremonially observed in all the societies and more so in the pre-literate society.

According to Gennep\(^{36}\) the rituals connected with the life cycle are composed of three consecutive elements such as separation, transition and re-integration. As put by Malefijt,\(^{37}\) the elements of separation disengages the individuals from his former status, that of transition gradually removes the barriers to the new status, and that of the re-integration marks his acceptance into everyday life in his newly acquired status.

The Patnuls perform various kinds of rituals connected with rites of passage. They are presented in the following sections.

Pregnancy and Child Birth

The ceremonies of pregnancy and child birth generally

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constitute a whole. Often, the first rites separate the pregnant woman from the society, from her family group and sometimes even from her sex. They are followed by the rites pertaining to pregnancy itself, which is a transitional period. Finally come the rites of child birth intended to reintegrate the woman into the group to which she previously belonged or to establish her new position in the society as a mother, especially if it is her first delivery.

According to the belief of the Patmul Salis, children are given by God and that they are the reincarnation of their ancestors. Even though they are aware of the casual connection between sexual intercourse and conception, they believe that without the blessings of God and ancestor spirits, no woman would be able to conceive. Everybody knows that pregnancy lasts for eight to nine months and in some cases upto ten months. If menstruation stops for two or three months consecutively, it is an indication of conception. When a woman is certain about her pregnancy, she informs her mother-in-law. They welcome the birth of a baby, as it is a sign of the expansion of the family. However a male child is preferred to a female child, for the reason that it is the male child upon whom generally the
parents fall back during the old age and also it is the male children who are more helpful in economically productive activities.

A pregnant woman is permitted to indulge in sexual intercourse for the first five months of pregnancy and do all activities. The pregnant woman is to follow a number of taboos on her diet and movements. It is customary to send a woman to her parental house in the fifth month of her pregnancy. This has two practical implications. Firstly, she escapes doing any type of work in the advanced stage of pregnancy and secondly she escapes living with her husband and cohabiting.

Information is conveyed to the parents or brother of the lady and it is binding on them to come in a party to take her. In her husband’s village or town, a ceremony is performed by her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. New clothes are presented to her, and she is given dry fruits, sweets and gold ornaments or some money. This is symbolic of her anticipated motherhood. Various songs particularly suitable to the occasion are sung at this ceremony and she is given a warm send off. The parents or brothers of the
lady may confine such a ceremony to the first confinement of the woman and during the subsequent conceptions she may be allowed generally to live at her husband's house. A ceremony called Srimantham is performed at the time of first pregnancy only. This is done according to family tradition either in fifth month of pregnancy or seventh month of pregnancy. Generally it is performed in husband's house. The parents of the pregnant woman visit in her husband's house and give her new clothes, coconut, vermillion and little quantity of turmeric tubers and varieties of sweets and fruits. On the day of the ceremony, the pregnant woman is given an oil bath and her mother presents her with new clothes. All important and close relatives of the family and all the women of the locality are invited. All the elderly women bless her on the occasion. The pregnant woman touches the feet of all elderly women seeking their blessings. Then vermillion is distributed to all the guests. Some of the women present blouse pieces, betel and other gifts to the pregnant woman. Special vegetarian dishes are prepared and offered to ancestor spirits and family deities. Later, all the guests are served food. The priest fixes an auspicious day for sending the pregnant woman to her parents' house for the purpose of delivery.
The pregnant woman enjoys a different status in the area, compared to that of other women. She is respected by the members of the community. The older women teach her the general health principles, what to eat and what not to eat during pregnancy and after delivery. The pregnant woman should not eat papaya (Carica papaya) and black coloured fruits. They believe that papaya fruit causes abortion. Eating of black fruits like Neredu (Engemia Jambolana) leads to the birth of black skinned offsprings. They should not eat the flesh of dead animals.

Child Birth

Formerly the delivery used to take place in the mother's house. Now-a-days, there is a change in this practice and those who can afford are admitting the pregnant woman in Maternity Hospital for delivery, especially for the first delivery. Still a majority of families among them stick to the old tradition and delivery is being arranged in the house only.

As soon as the time for delivery approaches, the assistance of a mid-wife is sought. The mid-wife is an old woman who is well experienced in conducting deliveries in
their community. An old cot and old mattress are given to the pregnant lady and dung fire is prepared and kept in a corner of the confinement room. The mid-wife will be keeping watch in that room. Sometimes when the delivery is difficult the help of a doctor is sought. The child birth takes place in the house. The mid-wife cuts the umbilical cord of the child with a knife and buries it in a secluded spot far from that house. The mother is given a wash and change of clothes and decoction of asafoetida, jaggery, vamū and pepper seeds is given to the woman to maintain body heat and to strengthen her. Then the child is given a bath with warm water and gingelly oil or castor oil is applied to the child and the child is kept in warm clothes. According to Subhashini,38 "Purudu or child birth" also pollutes and all members of the same "intiperu" observe ritual pollution. The prescribed number of days vary for different kin depending on the degree of proximity. "Purudu" or child birth does not have as much pollution attached to it as death. The members of the same intiperu however observe eleven days pollution.

Among the Patnuls, the mother and child are kept secluded from the rest of the members of the family in the house for a period of 7 to 13 days according to their custom, as she is considered impure. She is forbidden from approaching the place of worship of "demudu qudi". The remanant part of the naval cord dries off and falls off after a few days. On the final day of seclusion, the mother and the child are given a purificatory bath and are given new clothes. On that day friends and relatives are invited. After the bath the new born child is given a taste of honey. The mother is also given a special liquid prepared from herbs to protect her. The new born child and the mother are taken to the well. The child's mother worships the well, which is considered as Gangamma Talli. She fills a pot of water from the well and it is offered to the household deities and sun God. After the worship the pollution caused by birth is removed and she is permitted to resume her normal life.

Namakaranam

The child is named at a particular ceremony observed specially for the purpose. This ceremony is performed either on the last day of the first month, or during the
third month of the child or before the child completes the second year. This is done according to family tradition. The ceremony is also known as "Barasala or Perupettadam". Generally, the names of ancestors or the local deities are given to the child. They have simple names such as Srinivasulu, Narayana, Subrahmanyam, etc. Girls have similar names in the feminine form such as Narayanamma, Subbamma, Kantamma, etc. All those who attend the function give gifts to the child and the gifts are in the form of cash or kind.

The family name is characteristic of all Andhra families. It is attached as a prefix to the personal name and a person's identity is often referred to by his family name. Since Andhra society is patrilineal, the family name of a boy remains the same throughout his life, but a girl changes her family name, when she marries and it becomes that of her husband's family.  

Tonsure Ceremony

This is a ceremony associated with the first hair cut of a child, when the child is 3 or 5 years old. Among the Patnul Salis, the ceremony varies from family to family. The ceremony takes place on an auspicious day fixed by the priest. Their family deities like Muneswarudu, Gurappa, Venkateswara, Naga Devata, Subramanyaswamy, etc. are worshipped. Generally, this takes place in any temple in Tirupati and Tirumala. The child's maternal uncle plays an important role in this affair; on the day of the ceremony all the neighbours and relatives are invited. The child is bathed in warm water and vermillion mark is put on its forehead. The child is made to wear new clothes presented by its maternal uncle. The family along with guests go to a nearby garden or temple. If it is a garden they select a tree and place the idol of their family deity and worship. According to family tradition the child sits on the lap of maternal uncle. He then clips with scissors the hair of the child at three places. Next the family barber gives the child a clean shave. Then the child is given ritual bath, there itself by the maternal uncle. If the child is a girl, the ears are pierced by a goldsmith. The barber and
goldsmith are presented with rice, vegetables, clothes and money for the services rendered. After the ceremony they return home and a feast is given to all the relatives, guests and a few important members of the town.

Puberty

Menstrus is considered to be the most impure of all emissions. As Frazer points out, "the motive for the restraints so commonly imposed on girl at puberty is the deeply ingrained dread which primitive man universally entertains of menstrual blood. He feels this dread at all times, but especially on its first appearance, hence the restrictions under which woman lies at her first menstruation, are usually more stringent than those which they have to observe at any subsequent recurrence of the mysterious flow".

A girl is regarded to be impure for a certain period and she becomes pure and attains her normal status after taking the purificatory bath on the final day. The duration

of seclusion naturally varies from region to region, from caste to caste and from culture to culture.

The Patnuls observe that girls menstruate for the first time between the ages 13 and 15 years. The event is called "Rajaswala". The girl is segregated for a period of seven or nine days from the family. It is said that there was a time when the isolation period of the girl lasted for about 21 days. In one of the corners of the central hall some quantity of paddy and palm leaves are spread. On the first day of the first menstrual period, ladies in the locality attend the function on invitation. In the presence of all the members, the girl is seated on the palm leaves. The lady of the house offers kumkum to all the ladies present and distributes "Akshintalu" (rice soaked in turmeric powder) to all of them. All the womenfolk bless the girl by sprinkling the "akshintalu" on her head. Meanwhile one of the ladies of the family prepares a sweet with gingely seeds the jaggery in sufficient quantity and distributes the same to all the ladies who attend the function. On the next day the lady of the house distributes "pittu" (which contains cooked rice flour, jaggery and ghee) to all the families in the locality.
For the entire period of seven or nine days, as the case may be, of seclusion the girl strictly must not cast her shadow on any person and must not cast her eyes on her husband, if she is married. She should not go near deities or enter the kitchen or important places of the house. She is not allowed to touch any person or any household articles. For nature's calls, she has to go out of the house before sunrise or after sunset. In any case she has to take care not to be seen by any male members other than those of her own family. In all her movements she is guided by her paternal aunt. On the seventh or nineth day morning as the case may be, the girl is given an oil bath early in the morning. A woman during her periods must avoid participating or attending any ritual. Supposing in the midst of a ceremony she finds that she is in her periods, she must immediately withdraw, otherwise she makes impure the rest of the members and all other things around. This brings the wrath of Gods upon the household. During her periods her paternal aunt serves food to her leaf plates. At the end of the ritual, all the leaf plates are collected and burnt. It is believed by the Patnuls that these leaves used by the girl during her periods carry an infection and therefore need to be burnt.
In the morning of the last day of seclusion, the lady of the house invites all the women folk in the locality. Meanwhile the girls' paternal aunt collects all the articles used by the girl and wraps them with a blanket. She then cleans the place where the girl spent the period. The place is then decorated. All the articles wrapped in the blanket are then taken by her to the backyard. The girl is then copiously smeared with turmeric powder and is given a purificatory bath. After the bath the girl is exposed to the fumes of benzoic powder and is made to wear a new saree and blouse preferably yellow in colour. All the womenfolk that attend the function also clean their hands with turmeric water. The girls' mother sprinkles akshintalu in and around the house and also distributed them the womenfolk. All of them bless the girl by sprinkling akshintalu on her head. Then the head of the family gives a feast to all relatives. Some special dishes are prepared for the occasion and offered to the departed spirits of the family. The invitees take part in the feast. Betel leaves and arecanuts are also distributed to the invitees after the feast. All the people who attend the function both men and women give presents to the girl. Some give her money. The money so received is handed over by the girl to her father after the ceremony is over.
No special ceremony is observed during the subsequent menstruations. She is simply kept secluded for a period of two or three days and is made to take purification on the third or fourth day. Then alone she is admitted into the house. Thus the women under menstruation do not cook food. Finally the girl during the period of menstruation is not permitted to touch the family deities. They are not allowed to move freely even among women during the period. The husband of the girl is also forbidden from taking part in any religious function.

Marriage

Manu considers marriage as a social institution for the regulation of proper relations between sexes. Among the Hindus the selection of marriage partner is subjected to several number of rules and regulations, which specify whom one may or may not marry. These rites and regulations are not uniform all over India, nor are they always the same for all communities in a particular region.

According to Kapadia, marriage is an institution of society which has different implications in different cultures. Broadly speaking, however, marriage may be defined as a "socially sanctioned sex relationship involving two or more people of the opposite sex, whose relationship is expected to endure beyond the time required for gestation and the birth of children". The social sanction of most cultures would imply a stable relationship, hence, marriage is not co-extensive with sex and excludes relationships with prostitutes or any other sexual relationship which is viewed as casual and not sanctioned by custom, law or church. In fact, every caste has its own peculiarities which distinguish it from others. Traditionally, marriage regulations may be broadly classified under two categories: Exogamy and Endogamy. The first clearly shows an outer orbit, outside which an individual may not marry. The second draws an inner orbit inside which marital relationships are forbidden. According to tradition each caste is regarded as a small group, within which certain important social rules apply. In fact, the rule of endogamy expresses a desire to

maintain the group solidarity of the caste. The rule of
endogamy is considered to be ritually sanctioned and it is
observed with great stringency. The Researcher was
particularly informed by the people of the Patnul community
in Tirupati locality, and this is confirmed from her
personal experiences of cases from other places in this
region, that violation of this rule results in the
excommunication from their caste. Not a single case of
inter-caste marriage was reported in this part and the
people were sure that no transgression of the sacred rule
had taken place within living memory. Rules of exogamy
prohibit a person from marrying certain of his caste members
related to him by bonds of kinship real or fictitious.
Relatives are prohibited from inter-marrying that is
swagotra. Among Patnuls the age of the marriage generally
varies between twenty and twenty five for boys and between
fifteen and seventeen for girls. Child marriages are very
rare.

As mentioned earlier, marriage is allowed between a set
of relatives belonging to the outside gotras. Selection is
done accordingly. As usual in the Patnul community parents
of the boy start negotiations with the parents of the girl
and fix the alliance. When the parents of a boy know about a girl of marriageable age in the locality, they enquire through mediator about the details. Then negotiations with her parents start. Sometimes the mediator might be having some girls in view. In consultation with a Brahmin purohit, the mediator fixes a day for visiting the parents of the girl and informs the boys' parents. The boy's father accompanied by wife, the mediator, the priest and one or two close relatives visit the bride's village and stays temporarily in a friend's residence. All of them gather and discuss the matter. If the proposals are acceptable to the girl's father he accepts in the presence of all the people and all of them take supper in the same house. If the alliance is in between cross-cousins, no negotiations or bargaining regarding dowry, etc. take place.

On the auspicious day accepted by both the parties the parents of the bride accompanied by relatives visit the parents of the boy to invite the boy to their house for marriage. They stay at the boys' house for the night. They will be given a vegetarian or non-vegetarian dinner (depending on the economic status of the family) that night and a breakfast on the next day morning. After breakfast
the bride’s party returns to their house accompanied by the
bridegroom, his parents and other relatives and friends. By
the time the marriage party arrives at the brides’ place, a
pendal is erected in front of the bride’s residence. It is
covered with coconut leaves and strings of mango leaves are
tied around the pendal. The entire house is cleaned and the
walls are white washed. Soon after arrival, the bridegroom
is directly taken to the bride’s house. The mother-in-law
fixes bottu on the forehead of the bride and groom and they
are made to stand side by side in the premises. She then
smears turmeric water on the faces of the spouses. She then
gives ritual bath to both of them with water brought by
young girls in new earthen pots. The groom’s father then
presents new clothes to them. The groom is taken to the
pendal again and is made to sit on a wooden plank and he
performs the puja to the Navagrahas. Similarly, the bride
performs the Gowri puja inside the house. After celebrating
the Gowri puja the bride is taken to the pendal and is made
to sit on a wooden plank opposite to the bridegroom.

A curious ceremony, confirming the migration of Patnuls
from Sourashtra to Devagiri and from Devagiri to Vijayanagar
and eventually to further South, is performed at their
marriages. Before the marriage, the bridegroom's party go to the bride's house and ask formally for the girl's hand. Her relatives ask them in a set form of words who they are, and where from they come. They reply that they are from Sourashtra resided in Devagiri, travelled South to Vijayanagar and from there came further South. Then the groom's party ask the bride's party the same question and receive the same replies.

A temporary partition is arranged between the bride and bridegroom by means of a dhoti. At the auspicious moment each of them takes a small quantity of crushed cumin and jaggery (jilakara and bellam) symbolising the commencement of marriage rites. The groom places the same over the head of the bride and similarly the same is repeated by the bride at the same time. The cloth partition is removed. Two tiny discs of gold tied to a thread, coloured with turmeric, a necklace of black beads, silver toe rings and some other ornaments are placed in a plate while the drums are being beaten, at the fixed auspicious moment the boy fastens the sacred pusti around the neck of the girl. Then the necklace is also tied. This ritual is considered very sacred by all Hindus. The spouses then exchange garlands and all the
elders present there bless the couple by sprinkling akshantalu on their heads. Later the couple are given presents by friends and relatives. Then a feast is given to all relatives, friends and other invitees and important members. The feast is one of the most important features of the ceremony. The male members prepare rice and other vegetarian dishes in an open place within the backyard of the house. Women assist them by fetching water and slicing vegetables and any other assistance needed. Finally, after the feast, the bride is ceremonially handed over to the groom and his parents in the presence of all relatives and friends attending the function.

Death

The last ritual in the life of an individual is death. Death is the result of departure of the soul from the body. Premature death is believed to be due to the curse of the supernatural beings. Generally, most of the Hindus cremate their dead. A burial is commonly given to a child or person dying due to epidemics like small pox, cholera, etc. Funeral rituals performed in the memory of the departed soul, also serve as occasions for the gathering of kith and kin. It is believed that the departed soul must be honoured
more than the living, with all necessary ceremonial pomp and show. The Patnuls are known to cremate their dead with sitting posture. Usually the young are buried without any elaborate rituals. Actually a corpse is not allowed to remain uncremated for more than 12 hours among them. The corpse is kept for that time in order to facilitate the visits of all relatives and friends from the locality as well as surrounding places to have a last look at the deceased person. Cremation is usually done during day time only. Nights are believed to be the wandering times of the evil spirits. In this community the death of a person is associated with prolonged series of ceremonies. Soon after the death of a person in any family it is customary for the cross-cousins to convey this sad news to all the nearest relatives. The corpse is kept in the central hall in a sitting posture. One of the nearest relatives of the deceased makes necessary arrangements for the coffin, bamboos for the pier, dung cakes and firewood and other essential articles needed for the cremation ceremony. The chief mourners are the widow or widower, children, daughters-in-law and the maternal relatives of the departed. The corpse is laid on the bamboo pier, covered with white cloth and tied to the pier with a rope. Then the corpse is
decorated with various kinds of flowers. Corpses of males are covered with white cloth and married women having husbands are wrapped in yellow coloured cloth, while widows are wrapped in white wrapping. Rice flour mixed in water is sprinkled on the bamboo pier. It is now carried by four pall bearers. The pall bearers are generally the nearest relatives of the departed person. Since the family of the deceased is considered impure, it is served food on that day by any one of the other families belonging to different gotras. Then the dead body is bathed. They prepare a bamboo ladder consisting of eighteen transverse poles and the dead body is placed on it. The corpse with the pier is decorated with different kinds of flowers.

The dead body is covered with new clothes, which are white in colour. At the same time the performer of the funeral rites is also given a bath. If the person dies on an auspicious day, it means that they need not observe any special rites before taking the corpse to the burial ground. But, if he dies on an inauspicious day or moment, the main performer will tie a live chicken to the pier very near to the legs. The members of the community believe that by observing this tradition the departed person will not be
turned into a devil or spirit or ghost. Then the chief performer takes some betel leaves, a small piece of arecanut and a little quantity of lime and places them in the mouth of the dead body. This symbolises the break of connection of the dead person with that of his or her house. One of the nearest agnates puts caste marks either transversely or longitudinally on the forehead of the departed person. If the deceased is a woman, they put vermilion mark on her forehead. If she is a widow, this custom is not observed.

In this community, according to their custom, all the personal belongings of the deceased, like tobacco pouch, tumbler, shoes, etc. are also placed on the pier on which the corpse is laid. In olden days, the ornaments, if any, on the body of the dead person were left as they were. But, now this practice is discontinued. Some people put coins over the dead body. In the absence of sons or nephews, the Caste Council makes a selection of the pall bearers from their community. Persons whose wife is pregnant or is in mensus, and whose parents are alive are not eligible to act as pall bearers. Women who are pregnant or on mensus do not follow the dead person to the cremation ground.
Customarily, if the deceased person is a woman and has the husband living, it is the duty of the last son to perform the rites. If the deceased is a man, it is the duty of the eldest son to conduct the ritual. In the absence of sons, other relatives would perform the ritual. In case father and mother die in the same year, and if they have only one son, the son is not allowed to conduct both the ceremonies. He will perform the ceremony of his deceased father, if father died first, and the nearest agnate performs the ritual of his mother. In this community nephew plays an important role. In a winnowing fan are placed parched rice (borugulu), betel leaves and some change of small coins. The person who performs the ceremony carries fire, kindled in a new earthen pot and leads the funeral procession; followed by the nephew who has the winnowing fan. The procession includes the community members, the Brahmanic purushot, dasari and other relatives. As the procession moves on, the nephew sprinkles a handful of parched rice, betel leaves including coins in small denominations over the body of the deceased. The pier is carried by men, generally the nearest kin or relatives of the departed persons. As the male members move towards the cremation ground, which is generally situated outside the
locality, preferably near a river, if there is one, womenfolk mourn. Then the house is cleaned and washed and the womenfolk after a brief mourning, retire to the backyard for taking bath.

The ceremony at the burial ground is brief. In the cremation ground a pyre is erected on dung cakes and fuel wood. The dead body is laid on the pyre, with its head pointing to the south. The outer new cloth wrapping is removed and thrown to a side and the corpse is covered with fuel wood. Kerosene is sprinkled on it and fire set. The chief performer of the family takes a mud pitcher containing water and walks round the corpse, and the pyre, as he reaches the head point of it, the Brahmin purohit makes a small hole in the pot. Like this they continue the process twice, and on the third and final round the purohit breaks the entire pot. Dung fire is set on the head point by the chief performer without looking at the dead body. Immediately after the pyre is lit, the mass of mourners who accompanied go to a tank or well or river, take bath and change their clothes, thus they remove the pollution caused by their accompanying the dead body.
Next day the "paludina" ceremony is performed. Only male members of the departed person's family participate. Ash is collected from the cremation ground and with it they prepare an image, decorated with caste marks. Then one of the nearest relatives places three stones on the spot where the head of the deceased is laid. Now they offer milk, honey, urine of a cow, betel leaves, and arecanut, ceremonially to the dead person. Then he applies the fumes of benzoic powder. Camphor is dedicated in the name of the departed person. Coconut which is kept in a small pit near the head point of the departed is offered to the crows, as they believe that the soul of the deceased person has returned home to take food. The same process is repeated every day during the entire period of pollution. On the 12th day after death, all the nearest mourners take their purificatory bath and change their clothes. Then the Brahmin purohit sprinkles sacred water on all the persons of the family. By doing so the members of the departed family attain the normal ritual status. In the meanwhile arrangements are made for the final ritual, for which all caste members, relatives and friends from other places are also invited. The main performer receives new clothes from his maternal uncle. Before the feast starts, the chief
mourners normally offers the menu to the soul of the departed ancestor and takes little quantities of all the food items, and prepares a ball like shape with them, and offers the same to crows. Then they all partake in the feast, having washed away the ritual pollution caused by the death.

Generally, ceremonial mourning is observed for a period of one year. No marriage will be performed in a house in its year of mourning. Widows are forbidden to visit or attend any socio-religious function. If her presence is found to be essential, first she has to worship the local deity and make offering to the deity and then only she is permitted to attend any function.