

REPORT ON RESEARCH CARRIED OUT UNDER THE S.S.R.C. GRANT FOR SUMMER, 1977.

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The S.S.R.C. grant kindly given me for the summer of 1977 was used to investigate the scope and nature of religious fairs (jatras) in India, particularly in Andhra Pradesh. Except for a passing comment in a few anthropological ethnographies, nothing has been said about these fairs which constitute one of the most widespread socioreligious phenomena of much of South Asia. The reason may be, in part, that the fairs are part of the regional infrastructures - above the structures of the village which are the concern of anthropologists, and below the macrostructures analysed by sociologists and political scientists. Moreover, they are primarily a rural phenomena. But it is precisely because of their regional nature that these fairs play an important part, not only in the religious lives of the people, but also in the dissemination of ideas and values of all types over wide areas, so much so that the state governments have begun to use them (and with considerable effect) to introduce ideas of population control and community development.

Jatras are similar in some ways to pilgrimages on the one hand (extensively studied by Turner 1967, 1974; and Bhadwaj 19 ) and to festivals on the other (studied by Lewis 1956; and Dube 1961). Like the former, they often involve the aggregation of people from a wide area, and are characterized by liminality and *communitas*. On the other hand, they are often located in social centers and express community identity. But fairs are unique in their contribution to regional communication and integration. To a considerable extent the standardization of Indian culture over broad regions is due to the movements and interaction that

takes place at jatras. In short, these fairs serve much the same functions that mass communication media do in western societies.

My research into jatras began during my two years of field research in an Indian villager. There I had occasion to attend a number of them in southern Telangana, and to make extensive anthropological notes. But my focus on jatras as a religious phenomena in their own right began with my discovery of the extensive documentation of jatras found in the 1961 Indian Census. While many of the states of India have published reports on jatras within their boundaries (generally in one or two volumes), Andhra Pradesh released eighteen district-wise volumes (three are yet to be published) exclusively on jatras. These volumes include not only locations, estimated attendances and religious characteristics on most of the jatras of A.P., they also include a wealth of local lore on the gods, goddesses, spirits, and saints that are the center of religious activities, and on local histories. In many ways these provide an excellent set of materials that can be compared and contrasted with the puranic materials of the region.

By the summer of 1977 I had already begun to tabulate the various personages that serve as the centers of worship at jatras, and to aggregate estimated attendance of each according to district and taluq. The summer was spent in pursuing what turned out to be a very extensive task, namely to collect biographic and mythological materials on each of the more than one thousand personages that are worshipped in jatras, and to create maps showing the distribution and intensity of worship for each in order to gain some idea of their importance. I also wanted to gain an overview of the phenomenon within the state.

In terms of the first of these, I spent a great deal of time going through each of the district volumes gathering together a list of the beings worshipped at jatras in A.P. (see table 1.), and the myths and histories associated with each. These included Hindu gods and their consorts and assistants. Here it is obvious that Siva (worshipped in some 140 forms) and Vishnu (some 70 forms) are dominant. This is not surprising in the light of our current knowledge of Hinduism in South India. It does show, however, the way in which Hinduism has been adapted to local settings and personalized at the village level. What is surprising, and largely unreported, is the spread and scope of worship of female village goddesses, nature deities, and male and female saints. In addition more than two hundred Muslim saints revered at durgas, the Muslim equivalent to jatras, was also documented.

Elmore (1925) has mentioned about two dozen female deities of South Indian in his study of village religion. In this research I have traced and mapped the worship of more than three hundred and fifty of them. For many of these I was able to gather village myths and ritual data. Village goddesses stand in sharp contrast to Hindu deities. They demand blood sacrifices, are served by low and untouchable priests, and are identified with particular villages and lands. They are amoral and capricious - bringing disease, misfortune and droughts when they are angry, but protecting the people from enemies and disasters when placated. Jatras for village deities often cut across caste lines, and unite a village to fight a common enemy or to generate village strength in its competition with other villages. Though often localized in nature, jatras to village goddesses make up a majority of the fairs (see table 2.).

Nothing has been written about a third focus of jatra rites, namely the veneration of saints, both male and female. Here a number of clear patterns emerge. Male saints, for the most part, are sages or caste gurus whose tombs have become shrines. Female saints often have explicit histories, some dating back six or seven centuries. Most of them were deified after committing sati upon the death of their husbands. The myths associated with saint worship are extensive and show strong ties between land, politics and religion.

Muslim jatras, referred to as dargas, center around tombs of Muslim saints, many of whom were important leaders in Indian Islam or were missionaries who brought Islam to the local villages. More than two hundred such saints have been identified, and biographies on many of them compiled.

The compilation of the mythologies associated with each of these many personages involves drawing together diverse stories and information from the eighteen volumes. This work has been almost completed.

The second focus of the summer was spent on analysing the distribution and intensity of worship for each of these various beings. Information from the Fairs and Festivals of A.P. was entered into the computer at the University of Washington. Using a SIMAP program, maps were generated showing the worship patterns for more than one hundred of the main personages (for samples see Figures 1 - 5). Worship of the remaining ones turned out to be located in only one or two villages, There seemed to be no real value in mapping these to gain an overview of the data. Some of the summer grant was spent hiring a computer programmer to help me set up the initial runs. Computer time was donated by the University of Washington, Department of Anthropology.

Near the end of the summer I began to explore the possibility of extending the study to other parts of India. Data is available on fairs for more than half of the Indian states. Bruce Caron who assisted me with the programming (who is also an anthropology graduate student) developed an interest in the use of computer mapping and did some preliminary surveys on other states. He has since gone into the use of computer mapping for anthropological research, and has developed several models at the University of Pennsylvania. I also began some survey work on Maharashtra and Tamilnad. I also explored the possibility of looking at jattras over time. I found and obtained a copy of a survey of fairs in the old state of Hyderabad which was undertaken under the direction of the Nizam in 1935. While not covering the whole of A.P., there is sufficient overlap to permit some historical comparison. This work was begun in 1977 but not completed at that time.

I have continued to pursue the study of regional infrastructures, particularly jattras, since the summer of 1977. After moving to California, the institution where I now teach has assigned me a half time research assistant who has spent much of his time on the subject. In 1979 the institution also granted me assistance to go to India to pursue further research for a month.

As it now appears the project should lead to several articles. One of these has been requested by Current Anthropology. There is enough material for a monograph of two, for the Muslim durgas warrant a treatment in their own right. I have read several papers based on the research at professional gatherings, but hope to complete the work on A.P. within a year or two. I have also made extensive use of the results in

my classes on India and the anthropology of religion.

Finally, let me express my deep appreciation to the S.S.R.C for its grant. This has enabled me to develop a new line of research which has added significantly to my own career development, and hopefully to the fields of anthropology and South Asian studies.