

"The Science of Ritual"

"Man is addicted to ritual activity, a fact that is true of modern society as much as it is true of ancient societies, and that applies to so-called primitive communities as much as it applies to the so-called civilized world. In this booklet I argue that we need a science of ritual if we wish to understand man in all his manifold activities. I also claim that such a science already existed in ancient India. The Indian science of ritual was a thoroughly rational discipline with a great respect for facts. Though the ritualists who developed this science believed in the efficacy of ritual, their belief did in no way affect or interfere with their scientific enterprise. I hope that the claim that it did exist may add substance to the argument that we need such a science. ..."

"The only three disciplines that are nowadays interested in ritual are anthropology, psychology, and the study of religion.....The science that was closest to the ancient Indian science of ritual was grammar. The importance of Pāṇini's grammar has long been known to linguists, and it is no longer controversial to state (with a variation on Bloomfield) that Pāṇini's grammar is one of the greatest monuments of the scientific genius of man. There is no single work in the Indian science of ritual that can claim so exalted a position. However, the Śrauta Sūtras exhibit a similar scientific spirit and comparable qualities.

Among Sanskritists, specialists of Vedic ritual employ various, sometimes overlapping approaches : traditional, philological, historical, and anthropological, with and mixtures from a variety of other disciplines. Ideally, I am addressing ritualists, but since I argue that we need but don't have them, it is only logical to conclude that I have not yet succeeded, at least in this respect."

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