



WORKING PAPERS

**Ceremony and Ritual in the
Indian Parliament**

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GCRPo8/02

“Cultures are built on the edge of an abyss. Ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy”

(Kenneth Burke)

I

Despite continuing and, some would say, the growing attacks on parliamentary institutions as weak, corrupt and out of touch, they continue to be important to the politics of states. Parliaments make laws and develop public norms¹. For citizens in democratic systems State openings, debates in parliaments, no-confidence motions or resignation speeches all make for grand theatre. Often parliaments are housed in grand buildings that symbolise the power of these institutions as well as that of the nation. These spectacles ceremonies and rituals become markers of recognition of both ourselves as ‘national’ Subjects as well as of the distance between ordinary citizens and political elites or within sections of political elites and institutional nodes of power.

Parliaments are also often presented as undifferentiated institutions although they are historically marked with deep divisions of class, race, gender, (dis)ability and sexuality. In most cases parliaments remain privileged spaces dominated by men from the upper classes, castes or dominant religions and races. For example, men constitute on average 83% of all members of parliaments world wide². This privilege finds shape, colour and voice in parliamentary ceremony and ritual as they make visible links with the past, renew a sense of identity of ‘the nation’ as well as the nation-state and construct/reproduce historical privilege.

The conceptualisation of the project on ceremony and ritual in parliament assumed that these are deployed both to awe and to put beyond contestation the everyday workings of institutions and in so doing secure the dominant social relations that

* My thanks to Faith Armitage, Sarah Childs and Joni Lovenduski for insightful comments on the first draft of this paper. Shortcomings are all, of course, mine.

¹ This section draws upon the presentation made to the Leverhulme Trust by Shirin Rai, Sarah Childs, Joni Lovenduski and Georgina Waylen; Date.

² The figures for the three countries represented in this research are as follows: S.africa 66%, India 92% and UK 80%

obtain within it. Following Agamben³, we started this programme with the question ‘Why does power need glory?’ and suggested that the answer might be that glory blinds those who investigate power with all its embellishments, its attachments to the powerful⁴. The majesty of power is delineated through ceremony and ritual – materially and discursively and in so doing it structures the possibilities of opposition. Routinisation, socialisation and ritualisation do not here mean powerlessness or meaninglessness; on the contrary through these processes power becomes invisible, sedimented, ‘commonsensical’ and part of our way of thinking about ourselves as well as those who govern us. This is important because governmental power is vicarious – it is constructed and reproduced, in part, through ceremony/ritual through which new meanings of power are inscribed. Values, norms and hierarchies become in/visible through parliamentary ceremony and ritual – mirroring dominant social relations on the one hand and on the other, almost through a sleight of hand, making them disappear from view. It is this quality perhaps – of combining hyper-visibility with invisibility – that makes it so important to study ceremony and ritual in politics. It is in the staging and performance of parliamentary ceremony and ritual that we can begin to read off the symbolic and political significance attached to them.

There is a distinction made between the two in that ceremony is often defined as “the formal activities conducted on some solemn or important public or state occasion: the coronation ceremony”, making the formal occasion important to the performance. Ritual, on the other hand, is defined as “an established or prescribed procedure” for the performance of ceremony (Random House Electronic Dictionary), emphasising performing of timely and regulated activities that make the ceremony. Scholars have outlined some distinct features of ritual: *repetition*; *acting* or performance, which suggests contrivance and not spontaneity, *stylization* involving “actions and symbols used are extra-ordinary themselves, or ordinary ones are invested with special meanings, setting them apart from others; *order* as a dominant mode, through precise and organised (sometime exaggeratedly so) events; evocative style of staging events to produce a sense of *belonging*, which

³ The Power and the Glory’, Giorgio Agamben, 11th B.N.Ganguli Memorial Lecture, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi, 11 January 2007

⁴ Agamben, following Foucault, makes the point that “this is an incredibly sophisticated fiction, this subtle economy of power according to which god in order to govern absolutely must act as if the creatures were governing themselves”; *ibid.*

might lead to commitment – to the cause; and a collective dimension which has a social meaning (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 7-8). Often, however, ceremony and ritual are used interchangeably. In this paper, my concern is not to explore the differences between the two, although this distinction needs to be further explored in order to reveal the interplay between the formal and informal, the staged and the familiar in ceremony and ritual, but to understand why and how they might be important in our analysis of parliamentary institutions.

II

Power then is at the heart of this conceptualisation – power that circulates in different ways in order to be effective. One starting point for our research is whether immanent power is also “least accessible to observation, to actors and observers alike, thereby presenting empirically minded social scientists with a neat paradox”⁵? If so, do ceremony and ritual reflect or hide power? Are they there so that the internal social contradictions are obscured through the pomp and circumstance on view or do they allow the powerful to repeatedly underscore dominant social relations, therefore keeping chaos at bay?⁶ Our second starting point, therefore, was that while ceremony and ritual are a spectacle, which militate against indeterminacy, they are also internally fragile and need repeated shoring up because of the challenges that new actors bring to the stage. The reflection of power in ceremony and ritual, while seemingly constant over time, is constantly shifting – like disturbances in a pond, ripples of disorder roll out through the performance of these but are also quickly contained, reverting the pond to its fragile stillness in the moment. As the traces of power in the performance of ceremony and ritual become discernable to those bystanders, disruption becomes a possibility. Such disruption by its very nature is not predictable and takes different forms, which can be highly creative and carry within them the potential of opening up new political spaces, vocabularies and discourses which challenge the dominant modes of power. Those who are ‘space invaders’ (Massey, 1996; Puwar, 2004) in parliaments, for example, are both the ‘other’ within its borders – MPs elected by varied constituencies, carrying the legitimacy of electoral mandate - and potential

⁵ Stephen Lukes, 2005, *Power: a Radical View*, Basingstoke: Palgrave; also see Agamben, *op.cit.*

⁶ One challenge before us as a programme would be how to research these broad thematic observations or questions?

conspirators challenging the circulation of power within institutions –women MPs who make public the racism, sexism and homophobia operative in parliaments⁷. As we shall see below, this makes them participants in ceremony and ritual and also bystanders or the audience to the spectacle of power that is cast within parliaments.

The disruptive power of the excluded in the way in which they recognise, challenge and refute what ceremony and ritual seek to make invisible, routinise and embed makes the casting of the spectacle of the powerful always fraught with dangers. This aspect – of responding to the spectacle of power – is also the reason why we need to study more closely ceremony and ritual. So, parliamentary ceremonies and rituals are contested and evolving and political ruptures often demand changes to ceremony and rituals in order to reflect transformative politics. We can see in today's spectacle the ghosts of past rebellions as well as the traces of new ones.

In this paper I analyse how we might be able to study ceremony and ritual and through this study analyse the working of political institutions – to see, in brief, how the study of ceremony and ritual can help us understand power as moving between constitutive and constituted power, between law and execution, between legislation and implementation. My analysis is based on a gendered study of the Indian parliament, where both its colonial heritage and its postcolonial democratic ambitions have been played out.

III

As a vital part of the political theatre in India the parliament is a national stage where politicians display their craft, make fine speeches and also create unseemly spectacles that challenge dominant hierarchies, sometimes embarrass and even disgust their audience. This is a stage where civility and courtesy rub shoulders with abuse and impertinence, where the corridors are full of people who dress for their parts – in their regional state costumes, in *saris* or *salwar-kamiz* – and those who continue to sport 'western formals', where there are at least fifteen languages in which dialogue is delivered and translators are kept busy and employed. If

⁷ 'Racism rife in Commons, says MP' 2008 *The Observer*, Amelia Hill and Jo Revill Sunday April 13 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/apr/13/race.houseofcommons>

nothing else, the parliament does give the impression of being representative of this large, complex and varied country.

The stage that is the parliament of India was itself an afterthought. The original plan was for a chamber inside the Viceroy's house (the current Rashtrapati Bhavan or the Presidential palace), where the advisers of the Viceroy, six in total, could work. It was only because of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 that a need for a Central Assembly arose⁸. Sir Edwin Lutyens⁹ and Sir Herbert Baker were commissioned to build the Parliament House, the foundation stone for which was laid on the 12th February, 1921 by H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught. The building was completed and was opened for business by Lord Irving in 1927, a mere twenty years before the British quit India. The parliament building reflects both the rejection of India's colonial past and its continued presence in its daily functioning.¹⁰ The Parliament House reflects Lutyen's classical design as well as Indian architectural features and materials¹¹; it was of course built entirely with Indian labour – builders, stonemasons, gardeners and painters. It is “a massive circular edifice 560 feet (170.69 metres) in diameter. Its circumference is one-third of a mile 536.33 metres and it covers an area of nearly six acres (24281.16 square metres). The open verandah on the first floor is fringed with a colonnade of 144 creamy sandstone columns-each 27 feet (8.23 metres) high. The building has

⁸ The Montague-Chelmsford reforms included the following:

1. A bicameral system, with two houses 1) Upper house consisting of 60 members and 2) Lower house consisting of 145 members - Council of States and the Central Legislative Assembly
2. A system of diarchy was introduced under which reserved subjects remained under the purview of the hands of the British and 'transferred subjects' were handed over to Indian Ministers.
3. The British was responsible for defence, external affairs, currency and communications etc.
4. Separate electorates were allowed to Muslims and Sikhs.
5. The executive council of the Viceroy was to include 2-3 Indians.
6. The Viceroy could overrule the Central or Provincial Legislative Assembly.
7. A commission would be appointed after every 10 years to review these reforms and to present more reforms.
8. 6 million voters were allowed to vote.

⁹ For a fascinating account of the building of the entire complex of state buildings in the context of struggles over architectural styles and reputations, political debates on sites and spaces and struggles over financial costs see J. Ridley's biography, *Edwin Lutyens*, 2002; thanks to Christine Battersby for alerting me to the book and also its loan.

¹⁰ <http://loksabha.nic.in/> - *Virtual Tour*, Accessed 11.03.08

¹¹ And yet, Lutyens insisted that India did not have an 'architecture', that what the Viceroy's House needed to reflect was not a misguided influence of Indian architecture on his classical design but imperial power of Britain in colonial India; *Edwin Lutyens*, 2002

twelve gates...”¹². The Doric columns, the wide corridors and the high ceilings that make up this building, especially its predominant and domed Central Hall are truly impressive and provide a grand setting for the business of Parliament. The same red (upper house) and green (lower house) upholstery as in Westminster is intact in the two chambers. The transfer of power on the 15th August, 1947 from British to Indian hands took place in the Central Hall, which was also the site where the Indian Constitution was framed¹³ and where Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister made his iconic speech announcing India’s independence.



In the Central Hall also hang twenty three portraits of ‘distinguished Indians’ of which only one is that of a woman – the only woman Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi¹⁴. Only one of the portraits is of a Dalit leader – Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, national leader, member of the Constituent Assembly and a stalwart of the movement of the lower (Backward) Castes in India. Within the walls of India’s parliament the gender and caste imbalance in Indian politics becomes visible – in the small number of women elected as well as in the participation of women in this theatre of politics¹⁵. However, most women MPs I interviewed for this research refute the suggestion that the parliament is a masculinist institution – “before we enter parliament there is discrimination; once we become MPs there is no difference between men and women in parliament”¹⁶. External and internal exclusions¹⁷ (Young, 2000)

¹² <http://164.100.24.209/news/our%20parliament/par11.htm>; accessed 20 March 2008

¹³ The Hall was refurbished for the sitting of the Constituent Assembly, which met there from December 9, 1946 to January 24, 1950

¹⁴ The installation of the painting of ‘Swatantryaveer [nationalist hero] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, a leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (a right-wing Hindu nationalist party) created some discomfort and even furor in parliament, reflecting the deep seated ‘secular’ political discourse of the majority of the Indian political elite.

¹⁵ Under the 9th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, Backward Castes and Tribes have a ‘reservation’ of twenty two percent of parliamentary seats.

¹⁶ Kiran Maheshwari, BJP, 6.12.05; Margaret Alva, INC, 7.12.05; Ranjeet Ranjan, 1.03.06

operate, with or without recognition here – from the portraiture in buildings to membership of institutions – and are sedimented through the ceremonial and ritualistic aspects of performance in parliament. A comment in a debate by the Lok Sabha Speaker illustrates this point. He addresses a male member who is interrupting a female colleague: “Tomorrow is the International Women’s Day. Therefore, I have decided to permit women to speak today. In the whole year, let them speak at least for one day”¹⁸. While ensuring that the female MP can speak the Speaker also points to the exceptional context in which he, the Speaker, is able to exercise his authority to provide space for her to speak ‘because it is the International Women’s Day’. We realize that women find it difficult to make space to speak in parliament on other ‘regular’ days and also that a rather paternalistic ethos operates in parliament with regard to women who are being referred to as marginal to the core business of parliament: “In the whole year, let them speak at least for one day”. Does the Speaker let interruptions go on other days, when it is not the International Women’s Day? How, then, are women able to participate effectively in the day to day business of the House? Both external (women being generally left out or interrupted when they participate in parliamentary business) and internal (lack of effective opportunity) exclusions are visible here.

IV

What are ceremony and ritual and what do they tell us about institutions, participants and social relations in specific historical contexts?

The first problem that we need to address (and one which I will mention here only very briefly because I have not arrived at any conclusions myself), is disaggregating ceremony and ritual. While many scholars do not wish to distinguish between the two and point to the inevitable overlap between these, others make clear distinctions between the two. For those who like to distinguish between the two,

¹⁷ “External exclusions name the many ways that individuals and groups that ought to be included are purposely or inadvertently left out of for a discussion and decision-making...internal exclusions [are] the ways that people lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others even when they have access to for a and procedures of decision-making” (Young, pp. 54-55).

¹⁸ <http://164.100.24.208/debate/debtext.asp?slno=5508&ser=&smode=#548>; Accessed 28 April 2008

ceremony means an activity that is infused with ritual significance, performed on a special occasion while *ritual* means the prescribed order of performing ceremonial acts. We could therefore also point to the hyper-visibility of ceremony and the invisibility of ritualised performance. We could also distinguish between formal power and informal power, exercised and performed by those who are invested by institutions to exercise formal power and those who exercise informal power by performing or subverting institutional rituals. Much more work needs to be done on the need for keeping ceremony and ritual separate, and distinguishing them not only from each other but also from other institutional concepts such as procedures and protocol and theoretical concepts such as spectacle.

In terms of what ceremony and ritual tell us about institutions, participants and social relations in historical contexts, we need to study their function¹⁹. What is their purpose? Why is so much effort expended in their performance and in preserving their form? There are three broad explanations that I will consider here. First, is Durkheim's concern in the study of ritual to understand how in a society of individuals, do we achieve social coherence? Second, who performs ceremony and ritual and how? The focus here is on the performance as well as performativity, which is both constituted by and constitutive of Subject positions. Third, we seek to understand not only what are ceremony and ritual and who performs them but for who are they performed? Who is the audience of ceremony and ritual? In the following sections I will address all these three aspects of the study of ceremony and ritual.

¹⁹ Following Morriss (2002), Lukes outlines three contexts of studying power – first, 'practical' or what can power do for you? In the context of ceremony and ritual, we would need to understand what form these take, what they might do in both expected and unexpected ways to us? Second, 'moral' or where we can study those with responsibility of significant outcomes. In the context of ceremony and ritual, we could examine whether their performance over space and time can lead to specific outcomes for which attributable power can be attached either to the act of performance or to those who support/oppose that performance. Finally, power can be studied in an 'evaluative' context – where disagreeing with Morriss, Lukes argues that social life can be understood as an interplay of structure and agency, where choices to act are limited by powerful structures, which themselves 'expand and contract' over time. In the context of ceremony and ritual too we can find that periodic evaluations, strategies to protect or challenge, are sometimes successful in radically changing form, performance as well as the evaluation of ceremony and ritual and at others are constrained by the powerful and therefore unable to change (Stephen Lukes, 2005, *Power, A Radical View* 2nd ed., pp. 66-69).

Durkheim's focus was on internal social coherence achieved through a common recognition and translation of ritual to create order in society. There was also, however, in this order the presumption of the sacred – ritual was by definition attached to religion's boundedness, providing cohesion and at the same time legitimacy to that cohesion. Ritual is endlessly repeated over time, celebrating as well as renewing a community as each generation is taught and comes to recognise key features of ritual that it can identify with – individuals within a community recognise others as co-participants in rituals. The participation in ritual then defined society, as well as made recognition of those 'of the society' possible. Of course, for Durkheim this society was not a modern, pluralistic society – Durkheim's clear distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity, where the mechanical was associated with the pre-modern and elementary forms of religions and the organic with modern societies and complex and hierarchical religion limited his analysis (Moore and Myerhaoff, 1977: 6).

Durkheim, and those who followed in his footsteps, used ritual to understand religious and traditional societies. Rituals were, indeed, seen as 'traditionalising' mechanisms through which societies cohered. Moore and Myerhoff²⁰ take issue with this approach by suggesting that secular rituals are as powerful markers of modern communities and polities as are the religious rituals of traditional societies – indeed that the two are often imbricated²¹: "...if religion is defined ...as having to do with spirits...then surely the sacred is a wider category than the religious...Unquestionable tenets exist in secular political ideologies which are as sacred in that sense as the tenets of any religion" (p. 3). They also make an explicit connection between ritual and ceremony and legitimacy: "ritual and ceremony are employed to structure and present particular interpretations of social reality in a way that endows them with legitimacy" (p. 4). A collective ceremony is a dramatic occasion, with a stable purpose and is many layered in its meanings which allow them to reflect social relations (p. 5). For the study of parliaments, taking seriously secular rituals is a key element of research. Durkheim then is a good starting point for us here in that he asks the fundamental question about why we need to study

²⁰ Moore, Sally F. and Barbara G. Myerhoff, 1977, 'Introduction: Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings' in Moore, Sally F. and Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds.) *Secular Ritual*, Amsterdam, Van Gorcum

²¹ This is also the point that Agamben makes when he argues that the genealogy of governance and of biopolitics can be traced back to economic theology; op.cit.

ritual and gives us an answer about coherence of societies to which ritual is moot, but ultimately he reproduces the 'orientalist' substructures of power in the distinctions that he seeks to draw between societies through his study of ritual²².

Moore and Myerhoff assert that "Secular ceremony seems connected with specialized parts of the social/cultural background, rather than with the all-embracing ultimate universals to which religious rituals are attached" (ibid. p. 11). I don't find this a useful way of characterising secular ceremony, because as Crewe suggests, 'civilizational' conflict, not just specialised law making gets enacted through the ritualised engagements in parliamentary chambers²³. Civilizational claims are performed through parliamentary speeches that might evoke an historical past full of injury of colonialism, or of hopes of a new nation²⁴; through insistence upon the veracity of democratic politics in contrast to any other form; through supporting certain civilities more recognisable to the audience – both internal and external - than others²⁵. This also seems to imply that both religious and secular [traditionalising and modernising] rituals "both 'show' the unseen. Religious ritual 'shows' the existence of the other worlds...a secular ceremony 'shows' by enacting in terms of them existence of social relationships...or ideas or values which are inherently invisible most of the time...(Moore and Myerhoff , 1977 and Berger and Luckmann,1966 in ibid.: 14).

As we have moved away from the idea that rituals are religious, we can also examine whether rituals perform not only a function of cohering societies but also creating knowledges about them and through this moments of cultural recognition. So, for instance, in the context of India, what do secular rituals that have been created, evolved and are invoked in parliament say about the country, the nation, its ideals and aspirations? Rituals generate 'common knowledge' about these

²² Said, Edward, 1979, *Orientalism*,

²³ Crewe, 2007,

²⁴ "Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity..."

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/news/specials/parliament/Tryst%20with%20Destiny.pdf>;
Accessed 19 March 2008

²⁵ See below for an extended discussion about Audience, in section VI.

elements of nationalism (Crewe and Muller, 2006: 9) and this common knowledge then influences the performativity of parliamentarians and the viewing of parliamentary work by citizens. Parliamentarians use rituals to perform and in so doing they are able to ritualise and embellish their performance to enhance their position within parliament (Weatherford in Crewe and Muller, 2006:11). First speeches might be useful to study in this regard. Rituals also create symbolic knowledge, which is special to the context and therefore requires ‘learning’ by those wishing to use or interpret it – often this knowledge is implicit rather than explicit, layered in the levels of meaning to one or more symbols, which might be read singly or together, able to make connections between the past and the present and allow expression of or ‘discipline’ powerful emotions and relationships within secular, institutional contexts (Crewe and Muller: 13).

The insights developed through the study of the ways in which traditional societies use rituals then were used by Durkheim to illustrate the difference from ‘the modern’. The distinctions made by Durkheim and others between traditional or modern, developed or developing are in themselves discourses of power placing some societies at the centre and others at the periphery of our social vision reflecting the dominant social relations embedded in contemporary political economy²⁶. What we are attempting to do is to study how ceremony and ritual are important concerns of all societies and how these reflect the continuing need of ‘imagined communities’²⁷, wherever they are, to ‘invent tradition’²⁸.

V

In the context of India, nationalism is an important political trope through which to understand secular rituals and ritual and ceremony explain nationalism in turn²⁹. If the nation is an imaginary, then ritual is essential to create a sense of

²⁶ Escobar; Crush; Cowen and Shenton

²⁷ Benedict Anders *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, 2006 Partha Chatterjee in his 1993 book, *The Nation and its Fragments* has found the imaginaries of nationalism presented by Anderson in the context of colonialism as Euro-centric and argued instead that nationalism first found form in an inner social and domestic domain of language and culture and only then extended to the public and political domain.

²⁸ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.) 1992 *The Invention of Tradition* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

²⁹ We might also think through whether there are UK analogies here – for example, the English renaming their dominance via term British, etc.

common purpose, an identity that is inherited in the performance of ritual and is recognised as such by those who view ritualistic performance as well as by those who participate in it. If nationalism creates the Other it does so in part through the ritualisation of public life, through the evocation of music, art, colour and texts, through ceremonials of the everyday as well as that of dramatic events and in so doing 'traditionalising' new as well as old modes of being³⁰. Ceremony and ritual at times disguise or even conceal what is present – conflict, political differences, social tensions, disruptive moments – by creating a sense of ordered histories of institutions, appropriate modes of behaviour legitimised by performance and recognition over time; it reifies politics. While at times conflict over values that is depicted in and through ceremony and ritual can be a means of mutual recognition, a sense of exclusion from it can also be generated for those witnessing it, which can lead to alienation.

Ceremony and ritual are important to examine because their performance mark inclusion and exclusion within societies. Young focuses on three aspects of ceremony that signals these imagined communities to those who are members as well as to those who are not. Belonging is, Young argues underlined through different modes of public recognition – *greeting* or public acknowledgement which fosters trust between those involved; *rhetoric*, which allows the speaker to bring to specific points to public attention and 'situating speakers and audience in relation to one another'; and *narrative*, which could empower the marginalised to bring their experiences to bear upon public debate³¹. Without these being performed and participated in – as making or receiving greetings for example or speaking as well as listening, being spoken and listened to, internal exclusions can easily take root in even formally equal settings. Among the things we are attempting to do through our study of the three countries involved in this programme – the UK, South Africa and India – is to understand how ceremony and ritual are preserved, performed and presented in all societies in order to maintain social cohesion and how they leach across time and space, despite challenges, reforms and ruptures, to give new meanings and recognition as societies evolve.

³⁰ Apter, 1963, in Moore and Myerhoff, 1977: 7

³¹ Iris Marion Young, 2000, *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, p. 53

Nationalism, in creating the Other also creates danger – and it demands unity, order and ceremonial to achieve, its goals of stability of imagination, of territory and of recognition. For this reason, among others, feminists have always had an ambivalent relationship with the concept and nationalist movements and have pointed to how nationalist discourses and rituals reproduce gender based exclusions: "All nationalisms are gendered, all are invented and all are dangerous...in the sense of representing relations to political power and the technologies of violence"³². The fragility of the imagined community needs to be shored up through repeated 'fixed' moments of gendered ceremony which creates through ritualisation new traditions building on old. Just as the greatness of civilisations past is invoked to build a nationalist discourse³³, so in and through the performance of ceremony and ritual the shades of cosmic meanings of those civilisations are reflected. Those shades, never entirely fixed but ever present in the ceremonial repetitions, also stabilise the message – authoritatively through invocations of myth, history, culture and religion.

Ceremony and ritual thus tend to close off possible alternative frames of meaning, which at the same time remain challenged from the danger within – of indeterminacy, of plurality, of spontaneity and of opposition or even rejection³⁴. "Since ritual is a good form for conveying a message as if it were unquestionable, it often is used to communicate those very things which are most in doubt"³⁵. There is the affect of stability in a situation of inherent instability; there is an assumption of consensus in the context of alternative imaginaries; there is formality and repetition in the face of informal circulations of power and spontaneous eruptions of dissent. Of course, the extent of dissent is limited, often by the same or similar contexts that stabilise the ceremony and ritual making the internal contradictions of these work very near the surface – the danger is not only invoked through ceremony and ritual but is ever present to the performance and recognition of these. In the Indian context, for example, fasting and prayer, for Gandhi a ritual of nationalist opposition to the British, contained seeds of the disruption of that nationalism by invoking images of 'Hindu' rituals, as in the translation of rituals,

³² Jayawardena, 1986, Enloe, 1989, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989, Sangari and Vaid, 1990, Kandiyoti, 1991, Hall, 1993, and MacClintock, 1993, p. 61

³³ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1979,

³⁴ Moore and Myerhoff, 1977, p. 17-19;

³⁵ Ibid. p. 24

the witness/audience is as important as the performance/performer, which helped give organisational form to the Muslim League³⁶. This also points to the interconnectedness of the everyday with the ceremonial; though the latter is cast in order to impose order on the chaos of the everyday, the audience often translates the ritualised moments through the lens of the everyday. For example, in the context of the Indian nationalist movement, the recognition of elements of a ceremony as reflections of repeated rituals of everyday life – fasting and prayer for Hindus - that brought authority to Gandhi's casting of this spectacle of nationalist dissent, was also able to disrupt that authority – translating rituals as Hindu rather than Muslim, invoking Hindu rather than Muslim cultural recognition and authority. The form of protest and of 'asserting truth' through a recognised Hindu ritual led to an alienated audience among the Muslims, who were already feeling marginalised in the Congress dominated nationalist movement. The precarious nature of ceremony is thus underscored through its embeddedness, as much as its embeddedness in socio-cultural histories gives it its authority.

Ceremony and ritual cast spectacles that blind as well as routinise not just through 'traditionalising' but as they are deeply attached to the contemporary modes of being, producing, exchanging and governing. Our everyday lives are constitutive of and constituted by the 'spectacle' that brings together the political and the economic, while at the same time reproducing the mystery of governance – of how in our consciousness we remain free in our choices and action while at the same time being always framed by laws and execution of those laws. Guy Debord who in his *The Society of the Spectacle* argued that modern spectacle was "the autocratic reign of the market economy which had acceded to an irresponsible sovereignty and the totality of new techniques of government which accompanied this reign"³⁷. Global capitalism then depended on "the colonized social circuits that comprise spectacle – including confidence in the market and the state, and an identification with commodity culture – and that to disrupt spectacle may have great and

³⁶ For a discussion of the careful balancing act between the old and new nationalism see Mann, A, 2006, 'The Scottish Parliaments: the role of ritual and procession in the pre-1707 parliament and the new parliament of 1999' in Crewe and Muller, *ibid.* pp. 135-158

³⁷ Debord, Guy, 1967, *The Society of the Spectacle*, translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith New York : Zone Books, 1995 and Debord, Guy, 1998; *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, London: Verso; p. 2; Judith Butler, ...

unpredictable consequences”³⁸. Linking the casting of spells of capitalism with what these spells hide – the unequal social relations of production and exchange – Debord is able to focus on how the political economy, in which political institutions, such as parliaments, are embedded, and to suggest that rituals of production and consumption, the creation of taste and demand as well as the disciplinary discourses of what is acceptable in modern capitalist societies all come together in the ‘society of the spectacle’. Feminist work has always seen these social relations to be gendered. In her book *Gender Trouble* Butler has argued that gendered power is a fiction that needs to be sustained in the domain of political economy through social performativity. Through the enactment of dominant gender roles we recognise, circulate and reproduce the meanings of masculinity and femininity and thus perpetuate gendered social hierarchies. In Butler’s work we find how these social relations, mediated through gender and sexuality are enacted and performed and in so doing perpetuate gendered social hierarchies constituting and constitutive of political institutions and their workings. While she doesn’t explore the nature of ceremony and ritual, through an engagement with her ideas on gendered performativity we can begin to make linkages between everyday and structural power.

For our research, this performativity of politics comes live in the context of everyday parliamentary politics of a postcolonial state – through the work of elected members of parliament, through the internal and external audiences of ceremony and ritual, through political discourses that support, challenge or seek to transform these as well as the modes of political practice. What is argued above is that ceremony and ritual create as much as they are created through the exercise of power. Unwritten conventions, written procedures, manners and etiquettes, modes of behaviour and speech – all combine to present a formidable challenge to new members who need to socialize themselves in this new language, learn its grammar, grasp its nuances in order to use it effectively. Those who are conversant with these ceremonial and ritualistic performances and have a grasp of its political

³⁸ Stallabrass, J., 2006, ‘Spectacle and Terror’ *New Left Review*, 37 (January – February) p. 90

grammar and vocabulary can exercise institutional power not available to those who cannot³⁹.

VI

When we have discussed above the functions of ceremony and rituals we have examined coherence, power and powerlessness, recognition, conflict and exclusion, and we have focused on the internal dynamics of the processes of these social relations. One question we have not yet fully explored is who are the ceremony and ritual for? If one purpose of studying ceremony and ritual is to analyse why they are performed, we also need to analyse who they are performed for? Who is the audience of this spectacle? Who is being impressed by the invocation of order, pomp and show? Who witnesses ceremony and ritual and whether that tells us something about the nature of performance, the power play involved as well as the possibilities and limits of the spectacle?

Foucault wrote that power “is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms” (1976:86). Lukes formulates this in the following terms: “that if power is to be effective, those subject to it must be rendered susceptible to its effects” (2005, 91). Ceremony and ritual therefore perform on two levels – through their *hyper-visibility* they enthrall those who ‘must be rendered susceptible’ and through obscuring dominance through theatricality, ritualisation, and *routinisation* they mask the mechanisms through which dominance is exercised. The audience of ceremony and ritual, both internal and external, is then rendered susceptible – either by suggesting that what is performed is what politics is or by suggesting that the performance is of no consequence and therefore neither is the politics that it represents.

For most analysts, “ritual is best understood as an act internal to the category of group that celebrates it or celebrates itself through it” (Leach, 1976: 98). If ceremony and ritual are performed to bring about or maintain social cohesion then it could be argued that the audience is an internal one – one that recognises, is in

³⁹ Rosenblatt, Gemma, 2007, ‘From One of Us to One of Them: The Socialisation of New MPs’, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 60(3), pp. 510-517

awe of and is reassured by the markers of cultural recognition displayed in and through ceremony and ritual. For Durkheim, for example, it is through the interactions between the performers and this internal audience a social coherence becomes an achievable goal. In other words “the performers and the listeners are the same people. We engage in rituals in order to transmit collective messages to ourselves⁴⁰”. A second assumption about ceremony and ritual often made is that because of a focus on the internal audience, the spectacle is for those present. This leads to the focus on the dominant ceremony and ritual and the object of their performance – an internally undifferentiated audience.

There are several problems with this analysis for us. Parliaments as institutions have memberships which are complex – there is the internal membership of the MPs and then there is the representative (membership) of citizens who have elected them and the institution and its members therefore have to perform for both simultaneously. This dual audience might be looking for different accents in political performance as markers of success or failure; of inclusion and exclusion; of sovereignty and accountability. To satisfy this audience is then a difficult task, as can be seen in the way parliamentary ceremony and ritual is either conceived of or reformed. An example of this complexity can be seen in the way in which the ceremony for the opening of the first modern Scottish Parliament was discussed, choreographed and performed wherein a careful balance was sought between British symbolism that might upset Scottish nationalist and “too many strong Scottish references that could be interpreted with nationalist overtones”⁴¹

Baumann brings to our attention a different approach to audience, which suggests that rituals are addressed as much to ‘members’ as to ‘Others’, that “‘Others may be implicated not only as physically present addressees but, even in their absence, as categorical referents and that outsider participation in ritual is widespread and that it is possible and useful to distinguish different modes of participation in any ritual” (p. 99). The complexity of audience referred to above is made clearer for us in Baumann’s analysis. He distinguishes between the ‘Others’ as : 1) bystanders,

⁴⁰ Leach, E. 1976, *Culture and Communication: The Logic by which Symbols are Connected*, Cambridge: CUP, p. 45

⁴¹ Alistair J. Mann, ‘Ritual and procession in the Scottish Parliaments’ in Crewe and Muller op.cit. pp. 150-151. It would be useful to see what discussions were had in the Indian Constituent Assembly about the ceremony and ritual in the Indian parliament.

who might be disinterested; 2) spectators who might participate by showing either their approbation or disapprobation; 3) the invited guest, who might participate by providing a sense of occasion by her presence; 4) 'witness', which might confer validity on the ritual through recognition or legal, ritualistic participation and 5) 'the outsider beneficiary' – where groups might perform rituals for others (pp. 110-111) outside the group such as the *rudali* (professional mourners) in India. The relationship between the performers and the audience is in this framework a complex and layered one. The characterising of the self depends not only on the rituals performed but how this ritual would be viewed by 'the Other' – would it be seen as modern or traditional, inclusive or excluding, legitimate or illegitimate? 'The Other' is both outside the community or social group that performs the ritual – those who participate and those who do not – as well as inside the community – of it but not participating in rituals which define the community. Reading of religious texts, ordination of priests or segregation of congregations are within religious communities highly political performative acts, which mark one group as the 'internal Other' at the same moment as they are acknowledged as members of the broad religious group. The internal dissonance then also gets obscured through the performance of rituals – it is not resolved in the interests of all.

Finally, Bauman argues that the 'witnesses' don't have to be present to have affect – the presumption of an audience or spectators is built into the performance of ritual. This is important to understanding why ceremony and ritual are defended as important to the functioning of institutions such as parliaments as a means of 'ordering' performance. The recent debate in India about the 'quality of current MPs', the unseemliness of protest during parliamentary debate⁴² and the disruption of orderly parliamentary proceedings illustrates this aspect of Baumann's analysis.

⁴² Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee on Monday complained that the House was becoming a place of *tamasha*. "You are working over time to finish off democracy," a visibly angry Speaker Somnath Chatterjee castigated members in the Lok Sabha on Thursday. "It is a matter of great sorrow... that you are not willing to work," he observed when Opposition members stormed the well demanding a loan waiver for farmers leading to adjournment of the House.

Disapproving the members' action, Chatterjee said, "With great sorrow, sadness and resentment, I am forced to adjourn the House."

<http://www.rediff.com/news/2008/mar/03parl.htm>, accessed 12 April 2008

VII

In a parliamentary institution, where each individual formally carries an equal legitimate power – having been elected by individual citizens in free and fair elections – how do political agendas get represented? How is individual competition within parliament organised, played out in an effective way? What modes of working are normalised such that MPs self-discipline, are able to cooperate as well as compete and the public is able to view parliament as a functioning, worthwhile organisation, reflective of democratic practice? And do ceremony and ritual help in the self-regulation of political institutions such that they might function efficiently and effectively? The new institutionalist framework, diverse though it is - rational choice, historical or sociological institutionalism – has insisted upon viewing institutions as having an ‘inner life’, with its own logic, norms and rules that determine its actions, making these institutions ‘actors’ in their own right, displaying an internal coherence. While all the different strands of new institutionalism that institutions need to gain internal stability (structuring choice, framing choice and normalising or socialising choice-makers) in order to function efficiently, they do not pay attention to how this internal coherence comes about in the everyday life of institutions. The gap in the study of ceremony and ritual – of space, performance and representation – through which meanings are created, recognised and shared is what this research will seek to fill.