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**Title of the Book:** *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas*

**Author of the Book:** William S. Sax

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'God of Justice: Ritual healing and social justice in the Central Himalayas' is a unique piece of ethnographic work done by William S. Sax. The work is carried out in Chamoli District of upper Garhwal. The book has eight chapters which include as follows- Introduction: Fieldwork among the Harijans; God of Justice; Landscape, Memory and Ritual; Oracles, Gurus and distributed Agency; Rituals of Family Unity; Families and Their Ghosts; Sending the God Back; Postscript: Ritual Healing and Modernity

And the overall understanding of the book provides firstly, the Bhairaya a Hindu deity- cult from Garhwal region of India; secondly he talks about spiritual healings among the Hinduism at Chamoli district of upper Garhwal; thirdly he talks about social justice in the sphere of religious aspects in Hinduism; fourthly he talks about folklore which involves practice of ritual healings of Garhwal and lastly he talks about ritual which is practice in poly Hinduism.

In chapter one, Sax provides an introduction to his fieldwork among the Harijans at Central Himalayas in 1977. And this is an ethnographic work, where he puts forwards his experiences, shares his knowledge before and after fieldwork, how he went about, what are the problems and difficulties he came across during fieldwork, how he could understand the locality, people over there, their culture, their ritual practice, their foods, behavior pattern and living conditions, how

he become accustomed to them and gain their trust and faith in order to be with them and observed all social reality and gather data for his research. William draws a methodological part in doing ethnography study in social science research. Sax draws an attention about his work and makes clear understanding about fieldwork in which ethnologist should not hold a particular belief or idea of knowledge about something but rather they should go with the free empty mind; so that they will understand and eager to know and learn things. And in this chapter, he makes clear understanding between field view and book view, and in order to exemplify he shows how a field view supposed to be in the angle of ethnographic works in anthropology. However, he had lots of hurdles since he was an outsider and studying an unfamiliar and knowing little to the community through literature. And also inputs provided by him shows how he was bound by pre-conceived notion ("In this way, he realizes that in order to understand this local Bhairav, I had to set aside what I thought I knew, and listen instead to what local people said about him, and to the songs they sang about him." (p4). And for many ethnographers 'it is, by living with a particular group of people, adopting their diet and dress, speaking their language and participating in their way of life and so on' (p4) which is unique to ethnography study and it cannot be replicated to any other method of study. And it requires participant observation which most ethnologists would prefer to committed for ethnographic research in order to understand the particular culture and human beings. However, ethnographic has much criticism and there is lots of change and such changes as it discussed in the first chapter is post-modern and epistemological and postcolonial and moral critics from the field of literacy circle. And at the end, he provides three significant points in ethnographic studies for ethnologist.

Ethnographic fieldwork is the methodology par excellence of ethnologists

It is empirical, verifiable because informants can always dispute what you write

It is of moral value because through fieldwork you recognise the humanity of the 'other' even as he or she recognises yours. (p23)

In second chapter 'God of Justice' where William would discuss 'community suffering' of lower caste (Harijans) in the form of exploitation and powerlessness to show how there are lots of inner- conflict shown in the community or family; sometimes within families, classes, castes and with a neighbour as well. And Sax would draw lots of stuff from Austin, Bauman and Butler in



order to explain the performance of possession, affliction and healing where social identities reaffirm and reconfigure. He also touches upon the way of life, culture and physical structure of Harijan's household. And he puts forth the question of who is bhairav, how and when he appears and how worshipped takes place. And Bhairav is associated with the Harijan is Kachiya in the form of Savior, iconography, flesh who heals the afflicted and solves problems. Sax also brings lots of stories in order to substantiate the bhairav and ritual healings among the Harijan.

In third chapter 'Landscape, Memory and Ritual' author discusses in a new dimension of social healings rituals, that seen at modern day healing practices and he connects between landscape, memory and ritual. Then author gives an explanation by justifying the local definition of place in terms of human history and action as in this chapter demonstrates many examples. Further, he gives detailed descriptions of the key rituals associated with the cults which include like Kas puja, than ki puja, chal puja. And the study of this chapter gives hints about reflexive ethnographic on social researching of peoples' local rituals performance rather find reason or motivation. And he further interrogates on a local interpreter, agency, Hindu deity, local network of small shrines, ritual places, devtas and others to find out the role of human social agents in oracles and gurus. And through the case studies author makes known that devtas are superior agents and the performance of ritual healings as distributed among the social network. And also Sax emphasis on family unity in which he shows ritual as the therapeutic and moral principle. And the chapter gives the narrative of lands, familial ties, animal sacrifices, oracles, gurus and devtas which are essential for ritual healings for its truism in it.

In the fourth chapter, author interrogates on 'Oracles, Gurus and Distributed Agency' which comes up with the notion of an agency not limited to the individual but non-human entities. And the author, in this chapter talks about two concepts- collective intention and individual intention; and in which distributive cognition of complex system is distributed with an agent and not with the individual. And he criticises the euro-American ways of reducing agency into the property of individual like ethnocentrism and talks about the idea of agency in the context of variation. Sax also draws attention towards an agency-patency relationship in which he talks about two main ritual specialist Oracles and Gurus; Oracles considered as Gods' patients by embodying the particular god and Gurus are the master of spirits, who control supernatural power and his disciples are the patients. Through this Oracles and gurus, the author trying to stress how the

agency and patiency works. Sax claims that ritual healings are not confined to a single agent but it is spread to human and non-human, individual and collective. And healings is extended to therapeutic and biomedical healings as well. However, there is criticism about the modern social scientist in the context of therapeutic ritual healings and he advocates his own modern social scientific explanation, where he doesn't negate the beliefs, although other academia does. Having lots of criticism, Sax never minds to accept the fact of ritual healings, healers but he advocated the 'hermeneutics of the body' not just text rather as an intellectual rethinking notion of agency, rationality, knowledge and wellness.

In the fifth chapter, he would talk about 'Rituals of Family Unity' in relation to Oracles, Gurus, client and family unity through ritual healings at the therapeutic and moral principles. In this chapter authors specifically, talks about ritual healings in a group mostly the family unity. To reunite and brings the members of the family together. And also in ritual healings the Oracles and Gurus always emphasis on family unity during the course of different puja by asking family is united or not; and if members of the family tells no, then Oracles or Gurus tell that family has problem like affliction, curse and discord; then, they start to initiate ritual setting to have ritual healing to bring back family together from family disharmony.

In the sixth chapter, Sax talks about 'Families and Their Ghosts' where he deals with the notion of ghosts and practices pertaining to them at Garhwal of Harijan Society. Number of Ethnographies on rituals informs that death ritual and related practices are oriented towards living than dead. And he also talks about the re-organize social relationship which damaged the death of loved one; and shows how Garhwali beliefs and practices relating to death, ghosts and exorcism accomplish through social integration and reorganisation. He also discusses ghosts classifying into two types; such as the ghost of a person who dies with unfulfilled wishes and those who met with abrupt death like a young person. In both cases, it shows the unfulfilled desires that cause a person to become a ghost. And in the whole chapter, he would talk about fulfilling the desire of ghosts through attending family rituals and feasts and even without intent. And for him, the ghost afflicts the living in order to obtain its unfulfilled desires, and the living performs the ghost rituals to end the afflictions. Sax also observed many things in all the different pujas in which weeping and scabbling are common during the ritual healings in which an afflicted person is possessed by ghosts. Yet, he also talks about 'misrecognition'.



In seventh chapter Sax talks about 'Sending the God Back' where he deals with the subject of the ritual of transgression. In this how immoral or aggressive acts are reinterpreted as being moral or defensive in 'misrecognition' of ritual and practices based on one's relative position. He also tries to understand how action which is uncertain but appear to be morally acceptable in a way to transfer the blame or positioning one's victim rather offender of the wrongful deed. And for Sax, exploration of ritual cursing and counter-cursing remains a vital analysis of family rituals.

And in the last chapter, Sax discusses 'Postscript: Ritual healing and Modernity' in which he provides distinction on modern and primitive. He emphasis more on modernity and development where ritual healings play the minimum role and they term them as modern, educated and scientific by without falling under the primitive way of practising healing rather following the modern way which is called as biomedical healing practices or therapy. As in the words of Weber- "modernity was the phase of history characterised by secularisation, a capitalist mode of production, the professionalisation of work, the rising power of state bureaucracies, and the individualization of personhood" (p235). And other also have discusses the subject matter of modern and not- modern like Taylor, Bourdieu, Latour and others. And now times has come to contest in the pursuit of science and modernity. Although there is the point to make regardless of formal, external, meaningless, pointless and ineffective that ritual healings and biomedical healings somewhere down the line bring some similarities. However, ritual healing doesn't give the proper explanation like that of modern science in biomedical healing. Author, in this chapter, specially talks about three points as the efficacy of ritual healings those are "ritual physically alter the body of the patient, it alters the consciousness of the patient, it is often not an individual patient who is the object of the therapy, but rather a social field" (p245).

As I complete the book and understand better; I get a clear picture of methodological parts that Sax had carried out in this book. Firstly, it is not a book view rather field view – an ethnographic work – tool of data collection are observation methods, in-depth case studies, comparative methods, duration of work is documentation in terms of recording the sounds, pictures and others. Secondly, he makes clear about ethnographic studies and other forms of studies in social sciences. Thirdly, he is very particular about objectivity and subjectivity of ethnographic studies. Fourthly, he provides a normative understanding of anthropological work at ethnographic studies.

However, the book is mostly concentrated on field view from the perspective of the anthropological literature of ethnology. And throughout the reading, I find somewhere down the line Sax has negated the things mostly modernity and focus on primitive as he himself is the outsider. And the fact is how he has done the work is marvellous but he always generalisation the south Asia particularly India which is so diverse and difficult for an intellectual to do that. India, in particular, has a diverse culture, religion, foods, dress, and its observation of festival. He also compares things like us and them which are not at all fair; because we and they are altogether different in context and situation. However, he did the ethnographic studies efficiently but many times others will get confused by his approach and critics to the way of study knowing the norms and values neutrality he falls back to the not- scientific way of data collection. And it is nice to see that he acknowledge his mistake for failing as ethnology in some sense or the other. And he makes clear how ethnology has to be prepared to face lots of challenges and hurdles which will come in our way during the field work with people, atmosphere. The ethnographic work is not an easy job rather hard work, patience and persistence are needed. So, in order to be good ethnology, one should be ready to face many challenges and hurdle in their journey of work, without looking back to their comfort and luxury life.