RITUAL OF LIGHTING AND BURNING AT BARI IMAM SHRINE: DIYA AS A DOMINANT SYMBOL

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ABSTRACT
This article explores the ritual of burning and lighting at a shrine from a symbolic perspective. The study was based on Victor Turner’s theory of rituals and symbols with the objective of applying Turner’s definition and classification of a dominant symbol to the object being used: diya or lamp. The aim was to demonstrate that diya can be categorized as a dominant symbol within the religious rituals being practiced. The data analyzed was collected through participant observation and conversational interviews during ethnographic field work. The research was conducted in Bari Imam shrine, Islamabad, where people from all walks of life come to pay their respects and participate in the rituals, acting out their traditions and beliefs. The findings and their analysis validate Turner’s properties of religious symbol in a ritual, showcasing the fields and foundations of meanings attached to diya, and characteristics or attributes attached to it as a symbol. Theoretical analysis demonstrated the ratchet wheel effect of dominant symbol, highlighting the significance of sub-rituals. This led to the conclusion that rituals have a major function in the society, as they involve symbols which are carriers of meaning. As the smallest unit of analysis, these symbols may not be instantly recognizable, but still manifest the values of a given society.

Keywords: Ritual, symbol, diya, ethnography, participant observation, dominant symbol.

INTRODUCTION
Cognitive, linguistic and structural anthropology study tokens, symbols, signs, indexes and icons within social dynamics. Symbols are seen to be instrumental in various social relationships, operating within them and motivating the study of symbolic action (Turner, 1975). This symbolic action is a result of the conscious human struggle to understand the meaning inherent in the cultural symbols within a culture, rather than the formulaic reiteration of already existing social norms, as further clarified by Turner (Prueitt, 2003). Any symbol to be studied, the n, only has meaning in as much as the one interpreting it and in order to understand these meanings, one has to study what Turner calls ritual, or symbolic action. Ritual, is a particular type of tradition that is studied by anthropologists, linguists and folklorists, curating it as a domain of analysis, consisting of multiple meanings. These are habitual actions, but more purposeful than customs because they are more organized and controlled. Most rituals, especially religious rituals, are highly contextualized and deeply symbolic activities that allow groups to exemplify, acknowledge and act out particular traditional ideas, values and beliefs (Sims & Stephens, 2011). It is important to note that rituals frequently utilize symbols and metaphors to represent important concepts prevalent in that particular social group in that particular time period. In doing so, they are outward expressions or enactments of inwardly experienced attitudes, values and beliefs, which is why the symbols used in these rituals contain in themselves a multitude of meanings.

Though complex, when ritual has been made the subject of a cultural analysis, it has offered new insights into the dynamics of culture, religion and personhood. It shouldn’t be approached as a timeless object of scrutiny, rather, should be understood as shaping our world (Bell & Aslan, 1997). Since rituals are storehouses of valuable symbols through which information is revealed, dealing with crucial values of the community, transformative for human attitudes and behavior (Turner, 1968) this definition can be used to refer to ritual performances that involve the manipulation of symbols referring to religious beliefs.

Following this approach to understanding religious rituals, the primary aim of this paper is to draw attention to the meanings that actors attach to symbols within a ritual and the behaviors associated
with them. To do that, I have applied the theoretical approach to symbols of cultural anthropologist Victor Turner, (1968, 1970, 1975, 1973, 1977) who considered symbols to be the molecules, or basic building blocks of rituals. This smallest unit contains not only specific characteristics of ritual behavior, but within that ritual, is part of a specific structure (Turner, 1977b). He also distinguished between instrumental and dominant symbols; the latter appear in many different contexts and become the focus of interaction wherein groups mobilize around these dominant symbols and worship them. I wish to demonstrate that dominant symbols don’t only exist in the apparent religious objects, like that of a Cross in Christianity, they can also be quite literally the smallest unit of a ritual, like burning of a diya (lamp) by believers at a shrine.

In the present paper, I focus on the symbolism of diya (lamp) in its various forms. Based on the data gathered during ethnographic research, I will illustrate that diya can be interpreted as a dominant symbol in Turner’s theory, by showcasing the properties of this religious symbol being operationalized in the ritual of burning and lighting at the shrine of Bari Imam. The findings will be presented and subsequent discussion/theoretical analysis will be done in the context of Turner’s theory.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
Review of the literature will shed light on how various academics, authors and researchers have conceptualized symbols, and the understanding of rituals as symbolic action.

Symbolic Interactionism
Symbolic Interactionism is a perspective that was developed in the middle of the twentieth century and was derived from the work of George Herbert Mead and coined by Herbert Blumer. It emphasized on the premise that symbols emerge, are sustained and modified through social interactions, stressing upon the ‘actor’s perspective’ whose experiential based view is the reality of the symbolic world as he/she sees it (Grupp & Schmitt, 1979).

The act performed by the individual is not just how it is observed by others but rather, also entails an internal process of impulse, perception, manipulation and consummation. It becomes a ‘symbolic interaction’ because in order for people to take part in a social interaction, they have to first assign meanings and interpret them respectively (Hewitt, 2002). Humans are thought to be in control of the ongoing definition of their situation and organization of their action towards their own goals (Charon, 2011). This symbolic interaction can occur within a ritual because it acts outs, expresses and performs ideas, values and beliefs, which in itself is interchangeable with action.

Symbol
The word symbol comes from the Greek symballein, which means ‘throw together.’ In simple terms, it is defined as a sign which points towards or stands for something else due to attachment of meaning in a contexualized and interpretive practice (Fornas, 2012). Moreover, symbols and their meanings do not exist in isolation rather, they are complex, with multiple meanings (Grupp & Schmitt, 1979).

For Geertz, (1966) a symbol means any object, quality, act, event or relation that is able to serve as a conceptual vehicle for the symbol’s meaning. They code information and are culturally transmittable, serving as models for and of reality. Symbols enable us to make abstractions, but with an objective in mind: they are instruments of communication, expression, knowledge and control (Firth, 1973).

The intrumental value of symbols has also been talked about by Cohen, (1974) who stated that in terms of symbolic action and power relationships, symbols can be defined as objects, concepts, acts or linguistic formations that stand for multiple meanings, evoke sentiments and propel men to action, but in an ambiguous manner. This ambiguity has been highlighted to signify that as a symbol, the same thing may mean different things to different people.

While Ortner, (1973) concluded that anything, by definition, can be a symbol – it being a vehicle for cultural meaning, Turner, (1967) in a similar vein, suggested that symbols can be anything: words, objects, activities, events, relationships, gestures or spatial units. He specifically saw a religious, dominant symbol as having the following attributes; containing multiple meanings, unification of these meanings, condensation of many meanings simultaneously and polzarization of meanings at either normative or sensory poles (Turner, 1973). Turner’s conception of symbols will be further elabroated in the theoretical framework but the understanding is that operationalization of a symbol is attached to
the meanings, interpretations, attitudes and most importantly, action that makes it central to the social dynamics, power relationships and knowledge in the society.

**Ritual as Symbolic Action**

Rituals, working on so many different levels in so many different ways, are complicated to define. This complexity resides in their occurrence within a multitude of situations, in any group, whose beliefs, traditions and attitudes would be conveyed through this practice. If put simply, ritual is a particular type of action-driven tradition (Sims & Stephens, 2011) and if put broadly, it defines a portion of reality (Myerhoff, 1977) where the objective is to persuade, as behaviors precede emotions in a ritual and in doing so, train the participants to believe the values portrayed during the whole process. Rituals may be described as a ‘thoughtless’ action and a physical manifestation of prior ideas and conceptual orientations (Bell & Aslan, 1997). Where behavior precedes action, and beliefs emerge as conceptual blueprints, rituals themselves are not activities, they are a performance of concepts: this is where the importance of symbols emerges.

Human beings, in order to generate novelty and importance, create spaces and times that cannot be captured in their routine spheres of action: one of these is rituals (Turner, 1977). When a ritual is framed as a separate experience and time, participants enter a space that different from their everyday environment, where experiences are heightened. This transformative power of ritual space is most apparent in rituals that manifest sacred belief systems. Sacred rituals embody the principles of a religious group, illustrating their core beliefs. In some cases, belief may be the whole point of the ritual (Sims & Stephens, 2011).

Ritual and belief are intertwined and yet can be separated from the other. Existence of beliefs without rituals is possible, however, rituals cannot exist without beliefs (Schils, 1968). This brings us to the understanding of how rituals operationalize these beliefs in sacred rituals as symbolic action. Maintaining that religious beliefs, rituals and symbols are linked with each other, Turner defined ritual as prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, referring to belief in mystic power and beings (1967:19) and here, the symbol is the smallest unit of a ritual, a storage unit for the beliefs. He also stated that rituals are a stereotyped sequence of activities, with involvement of words, objects, gestures, in a secluded space and designed to influence preternatural entities to achieve some goals and interests (1977a:183). Rituals are also viewed as storehouses of symbols by which information that deals with critical values of the community, is revealed (1968: 2) where they are a vehicle for transformative human behaviour.

The significance of how Turner defines rituals is in his understanding of symbols as meaningful vehicles of ritual performances, where these symbols refer to religious beliefs. For the purpose of this paper, this literature sheds insights on how symbols and rituals are linked to meanings derived from values and traditions of a society, and how their understanding also stems from their relevance to each other; symbols being the carriers of the beliefs that the rituals act out. In this instance, then, it is important to study these symbols, especially in a sacred site, to determine the meaning possessed within a specific ritual context.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Within symbolic anthropology, cultural and symbolic anthropologists, like Geertz, have given utmost importance to symbols and their meanings. Symbols allow people to understand, make sense of and organize their physical and social world because cultures are essentially, a system of shared symbols (Eller, 2007). Meanwhile, the notion of ritual first emerged as a term of analysis on the nineteenth century to identify the universal category of human experience. Many theorists looked to ritual to describe religion, and the notion of ritual functioned much more than an analytical tool, it also became a method of analysis as a universal category of human life (Bell, 1992).

Victor Turner, with his research in the Ndembu society in Northern Rhodesia, provided a distinct innovative approach in anthropology of religion and ritual. From his findings in Africa, he provided a ritual and symbol analysis, where he approached symbols as meaningful vehicles of ritual (Deflem, 1991). Turner made a distinction between dominant and instrumental symbols: dominant symbols were seen to be possessing meaning with a degree of autonomy and consistency in the symbolic
system, whereas instrumental symbols were seen as means to achieve the specific goals of each ritual performance. The latter could not be studied without investigating the total system of symbols within a ritual (Turner, 1967).

Dominant symbols, according to Turner, have three levels or fields of meaning: exegetical, operational and positional. The exegetical meaning is obtained from questioning indigenous informants about observed ritual behaviour, operational meaning is obtained from not only listening to what has been said about the ritual but how the symbol is being used in the ritual. Finally, positional meaning is derived from its relationship with other symbols within the ritual complex (1967, 1968, 1969). Turner also elaborates on how dominant symbols have three foundations of meaning within exegesis: nominal (name assigned) substantial (physical properties) and artifactual (shape a symbol takes according to the interpretations) when understanding the symbol semantically (Turner, 1975).

Further, dominant symbols have three levels of empirical properties or characteristics: condensation, unification and polarization:

- Condensation: when one dominant symbol represents many different things and actions
- Unification: where meanings of the symbol are interconnected by association of thought

Turner’s theory of dominant symbols has been used as an analytical tool in understanding and analyzing the religious symbol (diya) in this paper. While Turner inferred the properties of dominant symbols from various types of data obtained during research, I applied the three levels of foundations, three fields of meaning and the three empirical properties, to a symbol within a religious ritual, investigating whether these properties hold true for a small object as a symbolic vehicle for multiple meanings.

**METHODOLOGY**

Similar to Turner, who obtained the data through observation and questioning, the methodology used in this research was within the qualitative paradigm, with an interpretivist epistemology. Qualitative data aids in understanding the concepts and puts emphasis on the voices of the participants and is suitable when trying to grasp meaning of a phenomenon and facts related to people’s lives and experiences (Creswell, 2012). As ethnographic research, the methods of data collection were primarily participant observation and conversational, semi-structured interviews, with non-probability, purposive sampling method used to identify respondents.

The field research took place from April 2016 to end of June 2016 in the shrine of Bari Imam, Islamabad, Pakistan. The Bari Imam or Shah Abdul Latif Kazmi is the patron saint of Islamabad and Potohar region and is resting in the shrine where believers go to pay their respects and perform religious rituals to make a connection with the saint and to get their desires fulfilled. Since the aim of my research to test whether the properties and characteristics of dominant symbol, as put forth by Turner, are applicable to smaller objects within a religious ritual, the interviews served to clarify the exegetical level of meanings while participant observation was used to pay attention to the behaviors, moods and practices in the symbol’s presence and its particular placement.

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1 See Appendix 1
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section will explore and demonstrate whether diya (lamp) used in the ritual of lighting and burning at the shrine of Bari Imam meets the criteria set by Victor Turner for dominant symbols.

**Fields of meaning of a dominant symbol**

First of all, the three fields of meaning or semantic dimensions of such a symbol that were put forth by Turner were used to identify the symbol within the different rituals that were taking place at the shrine.

**Exegetic Meaning:** This meaning is obtained by questioning the indigenous informants about observed ritual behavior so that its manifestation of the meaning can be made aware; these informants may be ritual specialists or laymen (Turner, 1967; 1968; 1969). This required asking explanations from the everyday participants of the ritual at the shrine (believers in this case) and professionals regarding the symbol and how they are used, which is what I did. I interviewed ten men, twelve women and two professionals over the course of research in order to reach the exegetic level of meaning, which has been further explained under foundations of meaning within exegesis.

**Operational Meaning:** This meaning is the one of which the subjects or believers are marginally aware, and is identified not only from observation, but also from what is done with it and how it is being used; handling of the symbol within the ritual activity (Turner, 1967; 1968; 1969). To derive this, I observed how diya operated in the ritual, observed the moods and practices in the symbol’s presence and also noted down the body movements involved when it was being used, for example, the subjects taking their shoes off before touching it and carrying out the ritual in complete silence. This was done by observing the acts and behavior of dozens of individuals at the shrine, when they were in the vicinity of the symbol.

**Positional Meaning:** Positional meaning refers to the symbol’s relationship with other symbols in the ritual complex, revealing the symbol’s hidden senses. This relates to how a symbol becomes meaningful only in relation to other ritual performances (Turner, 1967; 1968; 1969). To achieve this level of meaning, I observed how the diyas were positioned in the ritual and the area where they were kept.
They were situated right outside the main shrine and had a secluded place allocated to them. The *diyas* were placed in a circular manner, making the central area and then the surrounding outer layer made from more *diyas* placed a low stone wall.² It was also observed that it was on the way out of the shrine, so that the individuals could offer the mandatory prayers before lighting of *diya* as a symbol of their offering. Within the positional meaning is also the connection of *diya* with other ritual practices within the ritual complex, because if their prayer gets accepted, the individual can either light another *diya*, or they can distribute food to the needy (giving of a *daig*).

Appendix 2: *The placement of diyas in the place allocated to them at the shrine. Source: author’s photo*

The different connotations and interpretations attached to *diya* as a symbol i.e. having different meanings, will be further explored as I apply Viktor Turner’s theoretical framework to understand these multilayered meanings and their operationalization in the ritual.

**Exegetical Foundations of Meaning**

In exegetics, the symbol’s meaning depends on three semantic foundations, according to Turner, and I have used these foundations of meaning to extrapolate and understand the different connotations of *diya* as a dominant symbol, from my findings.

**Nominal basis**

This is the name of the symbol in the ritual. It’s called a *diya* or *charagh*, which literally means a burner, so within the ritual, it represents light and burning. *Diya* is also synonymous with a candle or a lamp, which are used for light in the darkness. According to an individual who works at the shrine, *diya* represents light of wisdom of Bari Imam, in the darkness of troubles faced by mankind. In addition, the burning element refers to the feeling of one’s troubles burning or vanishing, as flame or fire is associated with purity.

**Substantial basis**

These are the culturally selected physical characteristics of the symbolic object, inclusive of the natural properties and shape. The *diya* is made of clay (the oldest known ceramic material) and has a round structure with an opening/edge at the side for lighting it. It is usually small in size, but sizes vary. When looking at the culturally selected physical properties, it was observed that these are also of different types, with their own distinctive features and connotations.

One is the small circular *diya*, which is used by majority of the people and is quite commonly used in the ritual. Its body is made of clay, which signifies its potential to represent many different wishes because of its ability to be molded. Mustard oil is used to light this lamp. This oil is also applied by people on their bodies to cure physical ailments like hair fall, skin disease, body aches, headaches, lowering blood pressure, sore throat, paralysis or simply for the *barkat* (divine blessing of Bari Imam)

² See Appendix 2
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or aqeeda (respect for Bari Imam). By applying the oil, believers try to heal the spirit – providing them with the strength to overcome the disease. According to a respondent:

"Is tail o lagane se mera blood pressure neche ajata hai, isne (bari imam) ki barkat hai." (My blood pressure lowers when I apply this oil, it has the divine blessing of Bari Imam).

It should also be noted that the respondent’s belief in the divine blessing of Bari Imam is physically manifested in the oil of the lamp, which when he applies, becomes a channel for this blessing to be transferred to his body, curing his ailment. This natural property of the diya connotes a semantic subsystem, according to Turner framework, in the nonverbal language of the ritual symbols.

Another type of diya is the one that burns at the main bargah (grave) of Bari Imam lighted by the khalis ghee (clarified butter) instead of oil, and only by the experts (awqaf), not ordinary people. It’s never allowed to burn out as it symbolizes the light of Bari Imam’s knowledge and done as a reminder of the ritual performed by Bari Imam himself. Thousand of rupees are spent daily to keep this lamp burning. People are not allowed to go inside the bargah so they put their own diyas outside, to play their role in spreading the light of Bari Imam.

Artifactual basis

Third foundation of meaning is related to the shape a symbol takes according to the meaning attributed; molded and fashioned as a product of human activity. Here, the natural object’s appearance is changed artificially, signifying different meanings.

Another type of the diya that is used in the ritual is one that has been shaped with reference to certain religious beliefs. As compared to the common diya, which has one opening, it has five openings/edges (similar to a star) and is called ‘Panjtan’, more popular among the Shia sect than Sunni, but used by both. This particular diya is panjthani, thereby symbolizing the five sacred identities of Muhammad (SAW), Ayesha (RA), Ali (RA), Imam Hassan (RA) and Imam Hussain (RA). This concept is popular in all rituals at the shrine, connected to the concept of wilayat (power authority as representatives of God on earth) within Islam. Individuals light Panjtan diya in order to manifest the blessings of the five holy beings in the ritual of lighting and burning, believing this will lend more strength to their ritual.

Properties of a dominant symbol

Also central to Turner’s theory of dominant symbol within a ritual are the following characteristics or attributes that denote the symbol’s semantic structure. He said (and we have established) that a symbol is the smallest unit of a ritual and has properties of that ritual; there properties are highlighted within the symbol’s attributes.

Condensation or multivocality

One single dominant symbol has many meanings, representing many different things and actions simultaneously (signification). According to the findings, diya is also lighted so that the individual’s prayer gets accepted. First, they pray at the bargah, offer nafl (supernumerary prayer or worship) then they light the diya as a mannat (vow or promise). The believer vows (mannat mangna) to light another diya if their desire gets fulfilled. The belief in this reciprocity is very strong. According to a respondent:

‘Agar apne wa’ dah kya hai tou pura karain, warna Allah ki taraf se azaab hoga. Agar nai kar saktay tou na karain.’ (If you have promised, then fulfill it or else you will face the wrath of God. If you can’t do it (give back) then don’t promise).

One family consisted of a grandfather, the father, an old woman who was the mother (she was applying the oil from the diyas) and her daughter. The daughter informed:

‘Ammi mannat se paidda hain. Ab meri mannat puri hogi tou aa k diya jalaungi’ (My mother was born from a vow (from the ritual of lighting the lamp). Now when my prayer gets accepted, I will come back to light another lamp).

This is an example of how the ritual of lighting of the diya is synonymous with not only a vow, to be fulfilled on the acceptance of the prayer, but also the belief of reciprocity, when backed by substantial evidence, becomes inter-generational, making the ritual a mandatory part of people’s lives. People come and light the diyas as part of the ritual, but at other times, they pour oil into the existing diyas and take some oil away to their homes. This signifies how the physical (substantial) properties of the lamp i.e., its oil, are believed to retain its healing even when taken away from the ritual site. The
strength of the belief associated with the dominant symbol’s properties is strong enough to be sustained without the environment and atmosphere of the ritual site.

In the light of all the meanings simultaneously represented by diya as a symbolic vehicle in condensed, single formation, it is a symbol that has multivariate connotations which are as follows:

- Light of the wisdom of Bari Imam
- Reminder of practice performed by Bari Imam in the past
- A promise: acceptance of a prayer/desire fulfilled (mannat)
- Representation of Panjtan (sacredness)
- Cure: Having healing powers, both physical and spiritual by giving strength
- Burning to cure impure impulses and serving a higher purpose
- Blessing, love and respect for sarkar (Bari Imam)

This is how several meanings and associations are found within a single dominant symbol; condensation of meanings is a core characteristic of diya.

**Unification of meanings or significata**

For Turner, different meanings are interconnected by virtue of their common analogous qualities or association in thought. There is unification of different meanings as thought desires analogy. This was showcased by a simple activity being carried out by one of the respondents, as observed by the researcher. While others took oil from the Panjtan diya with one finger to apply to their bodies, one elderly man dipped each of the five fingers in the oil and massaged his head. When asked why he did this, he replied:

‘*Panjtan hai, khana paanch unglion se khana hota hai, sadka panch unglion se dena hota hai, tou tail bhi panch unglion se lo aur sar pe lagao*’ (It’s Panjtan, you eat with your five fingers, you give charity with five fingers, so also take oil with five fingers (for the blessing) and put all over your head (apply it).

Here, the healing, blessing, respect and representation of the Panjtan unified, by virtue of their association with the dominant symbol. Not only this, the respondent made a connection with act of charity in Islam (also practiced for goodwill and blessings) and the simple act of eating in everyday life, with the application of the blessed oil from the *diya*, which is a sign of respect and a cure. These seemingly different meanings were unified by the concept of Panjtan, five fingers representing the five holy beings, and driven from the Panjtan *diya*, whose five sides also represent the same attributes.

**Polarization of meanings or bipolarity**

Dominant symbols possess two distinct poles of meaning: sensory or or erectic pole and normative or ideological pole, where meanings are organized. These are as follows:

**Sensory:** Sight and touch is used to compare and substitute. It’s a reference to the processes that may stimulate desires and feelings (Bowen, 2017). *Diya* is made of clay because in old times, when Bari Imam used to light it, *diyas* were made of clay so it’s a physical substitute for his practice. It evokes the feeling of being closer to the Bari Imam, and the desire to walk in his footsteps. It also symbolizes blessing and love because its burning for Bari Sarkar. The physiological burning of the *diya* is associated with purity, which is also apparent in the practice of going bare foot to light it, and maintaining silence during the ritual. The processes stimulate the feeling of purity and burning of the negativity in one’s life. The oil from the *diya* is then applied on one’s body to cure physical and spiritual ailments (because the burning cured impure desires and germs), leaving one feeling void of negativity and illness.

**Ideological:** The normative pole is where the significata refer to components of moral and social order and the principles of social organization (Bowen, 2017). *Diya*, as a dominant symbol, is associated with the identity and belonging of the followers of Bari Imam, to a certain group. Burning of *diya* serves a higher purpose, as it signifies spreading light, wisdom and knowledge of the shrine. It also signifies devotion for the Bari Imam and is a conduit for his blessings. The believers are bounded together not only by their religious affiliation, but also with this ritual of lighting and burning, with the *diya* as a physical manifestation of the blessing and wisdom of Bari Imam. Their connection with each other is heightened with the concept of *teen salaam* (three greetings) where they visit the shrine three times on the fulfilment of a *mannat*, and in last salaam (visit) they light a new *diya* so someone else can use the
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oil – which contains divine blessings due to its positionality - for spiritual and physical healing. This way, the ritual continues and benefits them as a whole.

Secondly, the physical structure of Panjtan diya with the five edges means that the *diya* symbolizes the five identities, who are revered and respected especially within the *Shia* sect in Islam therefore, it is mainly used by believers of the *Shia* sect. The symbol, in lieu of its shape, possesses meanings for a certain group in the society, and not another, which is also a manifestation of the social order. In terms of morality, the individuals participating in the ritual believe the burning of *diya* to be a conduit for the goodwill, knowledge and blessing of Bari Imam, which cleanses them of their wrongdoing or illness. One respondent stated: ‘Ye hamare gunaah maaf honay ka wasilaah hai, Bari sarkar k fazal se’ (This (lamp) is a means of forgiveness of our sins, with the grace of Bari sarkar)

According to her, the lighting of the *diya* is a physical manifestation of the sins being forgiven by God, because Bari Imam, by virtue of his exalted position, solicited on her behalf. Therefore, as a dominant symbol, it meanings refer to components of moral and social order within the society.

It has been showcased how the different fields of meanings, exegetical foundations and properties of a dominant symbol reflect in *diya* as an object being used in the ritual of lighting and burning at Bari Imam shrine. In doing so, justifying how it meets the criteria set by Victor Turner for dominant symbols.

Theoretical Analysis

In the light of the above discussion, I am in agreement with the theory selected i.e., Victor Turner’s theoretical framework for identification and analysis of dominant symbols. For Turner, in addition to the meanings and properties identified above, the dominant symbol is constructed in the midst of other symbolic objects, activities, gestures, ritual roles and verbal behavior, like prayers. Therefore, only a part of the dominant symbol’s entire semantic wealth is deployed in a single kind of ritual. The semantic structure of the dominant symbol, for him, may be compared with a ratchet wheel, where each teeth represents a conception or a theme (Turner, 1973). The wheel is the symbol’s total meaning and can only be exposed when the whole cycle of rituals, with their respective themes, has been performed.

When analyzing *diya* as a dominant symbol, one can see the multiple themes or conceptions that curate the symbol’s total meaning. Dominant symbols stimulate the performance of activities with a symbolic meaning in a certain ritual context (Michal, 2020). Adding to Turner’s theory of the cycle of rituals, from my findings I have derived that every theme is represented by a *sub-ritual* and complete meaning is known when all the different sub-rituals are known, which create a symbolic whole. In this *ratchet wheel effect*, the symbol’s total meaning is denoted by the following:

- Ritual of applying oil from the lighted *diya*
- Ritual of lighting *diya* in courtyard
- Ritual of *diya* burning continuously at bargah
- Ritual of offering prayer before lighting the *diya*
- Ritual of three salaam, and in last salaam, lighting of a new *diya*

In all of these sub-rituals, the main ritual of lighting and burning at the Bari Imam shrine is accomplished and the meanings or significata of *diya* as a dominant symbol are manifested and operationalized.

The conception of dynamic affirmation by holy beings (Panjtan) and *diya* being a conduit for illumination and healing of spirit and body is achieved from the ritual of applying oil and ritual of lighting a *diya* in the courtyard. The latter is also connected to the theme of a vow or promise, which is connected to the ritual of offering prayer, as the desire is vocalized in the prayer and manifested in the lighting of the *diya* as a hope of it being fulfilled. As a symbolic representation of the light of wisdom of Bari Imam and following his lead, this is reflected in the ritual of diya burning at the bargah. And finally, the ritual of three visits or *salaams* refers to the theme of continuity and brotherhood. All of these themes contained within the sub-rituals are integrated with blessing, love and respect for Bari Sarkar: an acknowledgement of the divine and sacred.
CONCLUSION
The aim of the present paper was to describe the symbolism within a religious ritual at the shrine of Bari Imam in Islamabad, Pakistan. The two central analytical concepts that were used during the research were symbol and ritual, where the focus was on ritual as a symbolic action, containing dominant symbols (Turner, 1968; 1969; 1973). The research was an attempt to identify a dominant symbol in the sacred rituals carried out at the shrine, and applying Turner’s established theoretical approach to the interpretation of the dominant symbol identified, thereby categorizing the meanings associated with it.

Seeing rituals as outward interpretations of inwardly experienced values, attitudes and beliefs (Sims & Stephens, 2011), its importance is in its involvement of symbols, which possess meanings referring to the said values and beliefs. Being the carriers of multiple meanings, these play the role of a symbolic vehicle within the rituals. In this paper, one such symbol identified was diya or lamp, which is used in the lighting and burning ritual at the shrine.

With the help of Turner’s theoretical framework, the different connotations attached to diya were identified (in nominal, substantial and artifactual basis) and explored further with the properties of the dominant symbol, whereby the dominant themes or conceptions emerged: diya was seen to be symbolic for the light if wisdom of Bari Imam, a promise for acceptance of prayer, the sacredness of Panjtan, for a cure as a healing power physically and spiritually and finally, as a conduit for the blessing, love and respect for the Bari Imam. Using Turner’s analytical tool further, the findings indicated that for the creation of a symbolic whole, all the sub-rituals also needed to be studied for the understanding of the complete meaning of a dominant symbol.

This paper is an indication of the validity of Turner’s model for sacred symbols within religious rituals, and proves that the theory can be applied to even the smallest of objects within a ritual, to ascertain their symbolism. Dominant symbol need not have to be widely known within a religion, or used by a majority of the population: as unit of analysis, it still manifests a degree of autonomy and consistency within its ritual context, playing its role in outwardly expressing the values, traditions and beliefs of a given society.

REFERENCES


