

**SYMBOLISM IN XITSONGA CULTURAL RITUAL
CEREMONIES**

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DECLARATION

I **Khosa Maxangu Amos (9220540)** declare that the mini-dissertation **SYMBOLISM IN XITSONGA CULTURAL RITUAL CEREMONIES**, hereby submitted to the **University of Limpopo**, for the degree of **MA in African Languages** has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or other university; that it is my work in design and in execution, and that all material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

SIGNATURE

DATE

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C'jambaya xa Mavona Khoseni,Ka Magudu eNkanyini ekaya, ka misinya yo tswala maduku. Va ku Khosa.... Mavonaa!!!!

DEDICATIONS

- I would like to dedicate this mini-dissertation to my late grandmother **N'wa-Nkatini**, who in spite of all difficulties tried by all means to support and educate us. Your sweat will never go unnoticed.

- To my parents your parental guidance is worth mentioning.

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- To you my children: Tshepo, Nsuku, Pearl, Ntwanano and Ntiyiso, this is what made you miss your father during the times which you needed him most.

ABSTRACT

Most people feel not comfortable in taking part in ritual ceremonies thinking that they are barbaric, old fashioned and valueless. The aim of this study is to make this people change their perspective by bringing out their significance through thorough investigation on the symbolism which is used in their performances which hides their practical meaning and value.

Qualitative method was used to gather the information and data used in this research in which interviews were conducted. Thirty people, both males and females were visited at their homes from villages around Malamulele Township, although only few were quoted. Their responses made it clear that a lot of symbolism is used in Xitsonga ritual ceremonies which made it not clearly understood by the youth which led to their downfall.

It is recommended that in the performance and practice of these rituals, a sort of explanation should be given which will clear inquisitive minds. It is also recommended that the society at large be educated about their value and significance for them to practice them with pride and dignity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1

1.1	Introduction	
1.2	Background to the study	09
1.3	Aim of the research	15
1.4	Objectives of the study	15
1.5	Significance of the study	16
1.6	Scope of the study	17
1.7	Research Methodology	20
1.8	Literature review	22

Chapter 2

Symbolism in death and death related rituals and rites

2.1.	Introduction	25
2.2.	How the “Vatsonga” generally culturally view death	25
2.3.	Death communication	26
2.4.	Myth and rituals during the death and burial of a child and miscarriage.	28
2.5.	Untimely death of an initiate	31
2.6.	The end rituals of an unmarried man or woman	31
2.7.	Death of the head of the family	32
2.8.	Belief about the demise of a foreigner	33
2.9.	The passing away of a king/queen in “Vatsonga” Customs	35
2.10.	Carrying of a deceased person	35
2.11.	Burial rites and rituals	36
2.12.	Summary	39
2.13.	Conclusion	39

Chapter 3

Symbolism in male and female initiation

3.1	Introduction	40
3.2	Symbolism in female initiation (Vukhomba).	40
3.3	Symbolism in male initiations	51
3.4	Summary	55
3.5	Conclusion	55

Chapter 4

Symbolism in ancestral worship (Mphahlo)

4.1	Introduction	56
4.2	Symbolism in ancestral worship (Mphahlo)	56
4.3	Summary	59
4.4	Conclusion	59

Chapter 5

Symbolism in Traditional healing (vun'anga)

5.1	Introduction	61
5.2	Symbolism during the graduation of a “Sangoma” or (ku thwasa)	61
5.3	Symbolism in traditional consultation and healing.	63
5.4	Summary	65
5.5	Conclusion	65

Chapter 6

Symbolism in traditional marriages

6.1	Introduction	66
6.2	The “Xitsonga” marriage proposal	66

6.3	The “lobola” ritual.	68
6.4	The marriage ceremony	69
6.5	The birth of the first child.	70
6.6	The notification of the birth of the child to the bride’s parents and the ceremony of the child.	71
6.7	The ceremony of the immunization of the child (Ku thusa n’wana)	72
6.8	The “Rihojahoja” dance ceremony	72
6.9	The “Mbuti ya xidzwele” ceremony	72
6.9.1	Summary	73
6.9.2	Conclusion	74

Chapter 7

Symbolism in the ordinances of chiefs or kings

7.1	Introduction	75
7.2	Symbolism in the ordinance of chiefs and kings	75
7.3	Summary	77
7.4	conclusion	77

Chapter 8

8.1	Introduction	78
8.2	Findings	78
8.2.1	Death related rituals	78
8.2.2	Female and male initiations	80
8.2.3	Ancestral worship	83
8.2.4	The graduation of traditional healers and consultation	84
8.2.5	Marriage related rituals	85
8.2.6	The ordinance of kings and chiefs	87
8.3	Recommendations	88
8.4	Conclusion	88
8.5	List of references	90

Chapter 1

SYMBOLISM IN XITSONGA CULTURAL RITUAL CEREMONIES

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the study.

Many people are not comfortable when it comes to practicing cultural ritual or taking part in ritual ceremonies. Some of the rituals which were supposed to be performed or practiced during death, marriage, and initiations are no longer performed. This is prompted by the fact that these cultural rituals have been practiced by our forefathers for decades without giving any clear meaning or explanation. They were performed without any form of indication of their value and significance in our day to day living.

As a result, some people have decided to do away with it because, according to Ayisi O.E. (1972:02), since man first inhabited this planet, it has been one long struggle for survival between himself and nature. Man had to live and also to find his place in the universe. In the process man has left behind traces of his achievements at various levels of his development, and the accumulative knowledge of his various achievements constitutes what we refer to as culture.

In the struggle to come to terms with what is happening around him, man has taken only forward what he thinks is crucial to his survival and helps him find his space in the universe. It is only those practices which help him fulfil his needs which are carried forward and be regarded as his culture. Culture, according to Piddington (1950:106), may be defined as:

... the sum total of the material and intellectual
equipment whereby people satisfy their biological

and social needs and adapt themselves to their environment.

It is therefore those actions which help man to meet his basic needs which will be carried and be regarded as his culture. Roger Fowler (1980:226) defines culture as:

a body of values, especially those values transmitted from the past to the future through the imaginative works of men.

This definition of culture is supported by Kaplan A. (1969:42) who defines culture as:

The learned pattern of ideas, behaviour and products which is characteristic of a particular society; more specifically, the cognitive system of a people, composed of a people, composed of their own unique cosmology, cognitive style, temporality, etc.

Amongst these learned patterns of ideas and behaviour, is only those which are clearly understood by those who share them which are used and passed on to the next generation. Barker (1999:114) defines culture as:

the customs, habits, skills, technology, arts, values, ideology, science, and religious and political behaviour of a group of people in a specific time period.

The issue of specific time as brought forward by Barker, indicates to us that cultural and ritual practices come to pass with time but is only those which are seen as relevant to the present generation which is passed on to the next generation. The new generation will

also accept only those which they see fit and relevant to their lifestyle. This is supported by Harris (1997:88) where he states that:

culture refers to the learned socially acquired traditions of thought and behaviour found in human societies. In simple terms, culture refers to the people's way of living. Culture, therefore, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Culture, then, embraces everything which contributes to the survival of man, and this will comprise not only physical factors but also sociological factors. The psychological factors will comprise all the non-material interests such as religious institutions and ritual observances.

Ritual observances, involve ritual ceremonial performance, which according to Ayisi (Ibid) are symbolic expressions of deeper feelings or transcendental ideas of members of a social group. Rituals are the only means through which the profane world is brought into contact with the sacred.

From Helman (1994:2-3), a definition of culture which is quoted below gives us a clear understanding and indication that cultural aspects displays some symbolism.

... a set of guidelines (both explicit and implicit) which individuals inherit as members of a particular society, and which tells them how to view the world,

how to experience it emotionally, and how to behave in it in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods, and to the natural environment. It also provides them with a way of transmitting these guidelines to the next generation- by the use of symbols, language, art and ritual.

The use of symbols in the transmissions of culture rendered it to be more implicit to the people who had to inherit these cultural guidelines from their respective parents. These made cultural practices to have a more hidden meaning.

This indicates to us the fact that when in our cultural ceremonies a goat is brought to the sacred shrine when we want to praise or say something to our ancestors, that goat is a symbol which stand for our imaginary ancestors or grand-parents. According to Kaplan A, (1969:22), a symbol is:

a sign or representation, usually but not necessarily visual or oral, which stands for some mental image or impression.

This means that those acts which are practiced at various cultural ceremonies, even though not all can be seen or narrated, are symbols which represent a particular significant meaning or purpose. Fowler R (1980:220) defines a symbol as:

something that stand for, represents or denotes something else not by exact resemblance, but by vague suggestion or by accidental or conventional relation.

According to Gray M. (1984:203), symbol is something which represents something else by analogy or association.

Heese and Lawton, (1989:112) gives this as a definition of symbolism:

... a representation rather than a comparison.
A way of making the abstract concrete and is
based on correspondence but on more general association.

Culture as accumulated knowledge and achievements has through the passage of time been passed from one generation to another through performance. It was not explained by elders why was it necessary for a woman or girl child to be the first to dig his or her parent's grave. In this there is a hidden or symbolic meaning.

It was not explained why when a "Sangoma" graduates, has to search for a hidden gallbladder of a slaughtered beast which is a clear indication that this graduate will be able to detect even those hidden ills and performances of witchcraft which were performed at night, seen by nobody. In it the gallbladder represents evil doings. Mair L. (1965:24) gives us another example of these symbolic representations observed in African societies, where he says:

... the baby wears the placenta as a charm.
The placenta among other things is said to
be a symbol of fertility and that it possesses
a supernatural power that causes pregnancy.

Ritual activities and their infused meanings had to be communicated through action and were in most cases hidden in the use of symbols and imagery. Alfred .G. Smith (1966:76) defines this communication as:

a subtle and ingenious set of processes. It is
always thick with a thousand of ingredients-
signals, codes, and meanings.

These signals and codes or symbols were used through the passage of time to hide the actual meaning in their acts in order to dignify their culture and its included rituals. These signals and codes have to be researched to find their symbolic hidden meaning in order for the rituals to be performed with a wide understanding and dignity.

When in the olden times people who are carrying a deceased person arrives at a particular place and rest, to indicate that they had a rest there, a branch of a tree had to be placed there, anyone who will come across that place will definitely know that this was a resting place, then he will also cut a branch and place it on top of the other branches and pass to another place to take his rest.

To indicate that a girl child will begin her initiation school, a small branch was circulated around the village by elders. This was a symbol that in the afternoon there will be initiations at a particular household.

These are some of the rituals which had to be performed, and for a child to practice them with dignity and pride, he or she has to be clear about what it means to them and the whole society they are living with.

The fact that rituals are symbolic expressions, make it difficult for people to understand the real meanings embedded in them. It is crucial for one to look closely at these meanings. It is very accurate for one to look at this symbolic nature of ritual ceremonies to make it clear for personal and cultural cognisance.

As it is clearly demonstrated above, culture is not static, it is always changing. People prefer doing things they will be accountable. They will not like to do things which when asked about they will be found not to be answerable. This is what this study is all about. It is a search for meaning in cultural ritual ceremonies which will make the “Xitsonga” people perform and be able to carry on with their cultural ritual ceremonies.

1.2 Aim of the research.

Culture as a way of life has been passed from one generation to another through practice with no explanation given to clear inquisitive minds. It was regarded as being immoral to question cultural practices. Due to this people were forced to perform cultural activities without proper knowledge and understanding of their significance and value in their lives.

A study such as this would create a sense of awareness to the significance and meaning of cultural ceremonies. It is therefore the aim of this research, to make people interested in their cultural ceremonies and their significance. This could be done by unfolding the symbolic representation of these ritual ceremonies.

Therefore the aim of this study is to look at the role played by symbolism in Xitsonga cultural ritual ceremonies. This research will be conducted in order to find the symbolic meanings which are displayed in cultural ritual ceremonies and their significance and relevance in our daily lives.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This study seeks to look at the following objectives:

- (a) To determine the meaning hidden within these ritual ceremonies.
- (b) To investigate the likelihood of the survival of these ritual ceremonies in the “Vatsonga” culture.
- (c) To identify ways of securing their survival.

1.4 Significance of the study

The issue of culture has been neglected for so many years. African scholars have done many researches, but very few in their own culture. Those done were meant to blame culture or cultural practices on many social ills. Culture was not seen as something of value which requires to be maintained but was seen as a symbol of oppression and an act of evil which symbolised illiteracy and backwardness.

Research on culture was mostly done by non-Africans who were not the custodians of the culture they had to research. Henri A. Junod and Phillip Junod, who were foreigners, were some of the scholars who have researched about Xitsonga culture. Due to the fact that they are not speakers and practitioners of this culture, most of their works portrayed Xitsonga cultural activities from a Western perspective, which of course was biased and negative. This study will endeavour to reflect on Xitsonga cultural activities from the African perspective.

Another significance of the study will be that, the Xitsonga cultural aspects and their symbolic meanings will be recorded in writing unlike it used to be, where it was passed from one generation to another through the work of oratory. Having been written down will allow it to survive for many years still to come.

Having written down, in the academic arena, it will assist many students who will like to study the significance and symbolic meanings of our cultural ritual ceremonies and allow them to know their roots and have a clear understanding of their role in their daily activities and lives.

1.5 Scope of the study

This research will be conducted around Malamulele area, in Thulamela Municipality, Vhembe District, in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. It will cover different communities around Malamulele. Villages to be involved include Gandlanani, Greenfarm, Jerome, Madonsi, Mafanele, Mavambe, Mphambo, Roadhouse, Xigalo, and Xitlhelani.

The people to be interviewed will be approximately 30 in number. These respondents will be selected as follows:

- (a) 5 Traditional healers will be interviewed in connection with rituals related to “Inyanga’s” and “Sangomas”
- (b) 5 senior citizens (both male and female) will be interviewed in relation to cultural marriage ceremonies
- (c) 5 older women to be asked about female initiations
- (d) 5 older men to be interviewed in relation to male initiations
- (e) 5 people to be questioned about death and burial rites and ceremonies, and
- (f) 5 People to be interviewed in relation to the ordinance of chiefs and traditional leaders.

These respondents will be Xitsonga speaking people who are the custodians of the Xitsonga culture. These are the people who practice these rituals and live by their cultural ways and have clear background on them.

The interviews to be conducted in this research study will focus on among others, the following Xitsonga cultural ceremonies:

- (a) **Burial and death related rituals**

When there is death in the family, rituals are performed to symbolise “Vatsonga” cultural understanding about death. Gates are altered; the cap of the hut is removed, which is a traditional symbol that the head of the family has passed on.

The family of the deceased is expected to perform certain rituals to the men who dug the grave where they prepare food of which before eating they have to wash their hands with water mixed with cow dung or the grass from inside the stomach of a slaughtered goat. This is done to represent the fact that they are cleansed of the dead man spirit (ku hlamba tindhaka).

(b) Male and female initiation rituals

In female initiation, before the initiate is initiated, she has to be secluded from the rest as a symbol that she has to join the womanhood. She is no longer a teenager. For boys, in the day that they are welcomed back from the initiation school, they gather at the royal place and seeds are sprayed on them as a symbol that they are now men and can father a baby, which is a sign of fertility. Mair L. (1965:89) affirms this by saying that:

In most African societies, the changes which occur in the lives of individuals are marked by special initiation ceremonies. These ceremonies vary from one society to another and they are more dramatic in some societies than others.

(c) Ancestral worship and praises

When ancestors are worshiped, an animal is used to represent all the wealth and family of a particular family. This animal is also given a name of one of the fore-fathers, and is used to symbolize the ancestral family. Certain clothing is used to represent even those garments which were favoured by the person who is represented by the person who is possessed.

According to Mair (1965:89), to pour a drop of water or drink on the ground for the ancestors is a symbol which reaffirms the belief in the world of spirits as an integral part of cosmological belief.

(d) Traditional healing ceremonies

In traditional healing processes, bones symbolise ancestors and are believed to speak on behalf of ancestors. The removal of shoes at the entrance of the consultation hut or room is a symbol that one is entering a sacred place. A place where one communicates with his or her ancestors and is worth respect.

(e) Traditional healers' graduation ceremonies

In the graduation ceremony of an "Inyanga", a gallbladder as explained before is used, where the graduate will have to seek for this hidden gallbladder until they find it. If the search is successful it means that they are a true "Inyanga" but if it fails it means the graduation came soon before the initiate is ready to qualify as an "Inyanga".

(f) Ordinance of traditional leaders

A leopard skin is used during the ordinance of chiefs, which represent the fact that a chief is the defender of the whole tribe. Before he can be ordained it is said that he has to be given a "ndalama" stone which comes out from his predecessor before dying as is an indication that he is the chosen one.

(g) Traditional marriages

The use of a bead string called “Xizambhani”; a “musomi or sinda produced by the man’s delegation to the girl or woman who has accepted their proposal; the payment of “lobola”; the spending of the lobola money on the family shrine before it can be used; the coughing of girls at the gates of the bride or grooms family; and the payment of the pleading present, all have symbolic meanings which when looked at carefully can shed a light on their significance in traditional marriages. The language register which is used during the lobola proceedings, is also symbolic.

The popping out of the key fee; the use of warm and cold water before the sleeping together for the first time of the bride and groom; the hanging of the “risenga” on the wall; the stepping on the “xihlangwa’ leaves before entering the hut where the child is; the putting of the “risenga”, “msomi” or “sinda on the wrist of the child’s mother by her husband before seeing the child; the washing of eyes and hands by the father before taking the child from its mother; the ululation; and the performance of the “Rihojahoja’ ceremony by young children before the child could come out of seclusion, are some other forms of symbolism which when treated with great care can produce a meaningful significance of the rituals practiced during marriage and child developments.

1.6 Research Methodology

By research methods or methodology, we mean that range of approaches used in research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction, (Cohen L. 2000). Methods refer to techniques and procedures used in the process of data-gathering.

According to Robert E. Slavin (1992:11), qualitative research typically seeks to describe a given setting in its full richness and complexity. In his words, he says:

Qualitative research (also known as ethnographic or naturalistic research) is research intended to

explore important social phenomena by immersing the investigator in the situation for extended periods. It is intended to produce information on a given setting in its full richness and complexity.

Whereas according to Hakim Catherine (1987:26), qualitative research method is:

.. concerned with individual's own accounts of their attitudes, motivations and behaviour. It offers richly descriptive reports of individual's perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, views and feelings, the meanings and interpretations given to events and things, as well as their behaviour; ...

In this research, the researcher wants to describe a given setting which is cultural ritual ceremonies; a qualitative method is the most appropriate method of data gathering. When he proceeds, Slavin (Ibid), indicates that, qualitative research seeks primarily to describe a situation as it is, without formal testing of hypothesis. This statement is true to our intended study as the information which will be given by the respondents will be regarded as the sole truth without any formal testing of their reliability or any form of formal validation.

As this research will be a social research, which according to Cohen L. (2000:20), is used for the purpose of understanding social reality as different people see it and to demonstrate how their views shape the action which they take within that reality, and requires no statistical proof, a qualitative method of data collection and gathering will be applied.

The research will be conducted through an interview. Data to be collected will be from primary sources who are people who are the custodians of Xitsonga culture. Secondary sources such as dissertations, journals and newspapers will also be used where necessary.

Interviews to be conducted will be of open-ended type or what is called in-depth interview, which allows the respondent to give as much information as possible without any form of limitation. This form of interview is comprised of unstructured and semi-structured questions. The questions will give respondents latitude to answer in their own way and viewpoint. They will be free to tell their story or allowed to respond at length without any limit to the information sought.

In Catherine Hakim (1987:26)'s view, the great strength of qualitative research is the validity of the data obtained. The individuals are interviewed in sufficient detail for the results to be taken as true, correct, complete and believable reports of their views and experiences. Because of this, there is no need to test the validity and reliability of the data or information gathered. This is the main reason it will be the main method to be used in this research.

1.7 Literature review.

An essential step in any research project is the literature review. The function of the literature review is to provide background information on the research question, and to identify what others have said and/ or discovered about the question. This is supported by Robert G. Burgess (1993:169), where he quotes the Oxford English Dictionary, where they define research, by saying:

Research is 'study and investigation, esp. to discover new facts', 'to search into (a matter or subject) to investigate or study closely" aimed at discovery and interpretation of new facts' and "to search again".

For a research to be acceptable there must be searching or investigation again on the same work or a close study of it again. This is what this research is all about. The issue of culture has been researched many years ago. Many studies have been conducted in this topic but a search again as mentioned by the Oxford English Dictionary (1982:114) is vital in order for one to discover and interpret new facts about it.

Another aim of literature review is to identify if there exist a gap on the study done before which has been left by lack of interest or by lack of information which may assist scholars in the said study. And this too is the aim of this research, to try to close a gap left out by prior studies on the issue of culture.

The following scholars did some researches where culture was discussed in another way or another:

Cook D.S, (1987) based his research on differences between the cognitive systems of Christianity, International Business culture and culture of South African Blacks.

In his research the issue of culture is tackled from the psychological point of view which looked at the different ways in which people from different cultures perceive life in the universe. It indicated that people's perception mostly depend on their cultural background.

Junod A.H. (1912)'s research on culture was based on the life of southern African tribes. In his research he talked about the different cultures of many black tribes of Southern Africa. He talked about how these people live and their cultural activities and ceremonies. He did not get into too much detail on their lives as he had to talk about so many cultures. During his time some of the tribes were not yet fully developed like the "Shangaan-Tsonga" Tribe, which he referred to as the "Tsongas or Tongas".

This research will try to expand on what other authorities or researchers have already done, but it is going to look at the issue of culture from another angle. The research will focus on symbolic significance in “Xitsonga” cultural ceremonies.

Chapter 2

Symbolism in death related rites and rituals among the “Vatsonga” people

2.1 Introduction

The intention of undertaking this study was to find out how the Vatsonga people view death, the significance of symbols and signs relating to death rituals and to find ways of preserving these rituals. The meanings and uses which are attached to these symbolic gestures and their relevancy and sustainability in our daily lives in today’s generation will also be looked at.

This episode of the study will start by looking at how the Vatsonga people view and interpret death. Then it will focus on different rites and rituals performed during death and burial ceremonies. From there it will look at symbolism in death and death related rituals. Then the significance of these rituals to the Vatsonga people will also be highlighted. It will conclude by looking at the survival of these rituals in the lives of the Vatsonga people of today.

2.2 How the Vatsonga view death generally.

Death, to people signifies the end of life on earth and the attaining of eternal life. It is seen as a way of joining the ancestral family tribe. Ancestors play an integral part in the lives of the Vatsonga people. This is symbolized by the way their dead are treated and the rituals and rites which go with it. When death occurs, there are a number of rituals and rites which are performed. These rituals are symbolic gestures in the sense that they do not actually represent the actions which are performed but have a hidden significant meaning which is only communicated through performance or action without any form of proper explanation.

Because death is associated with bad things or is regarded as a curse, after mourning there are a number of rituals which has to be done to cleanse the family from the dark cloud which has befallen the family by the passing on of one of the family members.

Symbolism among the Vatsonga people's rites and ritual ceremonies can be well understood if one looks at death from a different perspective. To have a clear understanding in these, the study will focus on the following:

- (a) Communicating death among the Vatsonga people
- (b) Death of a child and miscarriage
- (c) Death of an initiate
- (d) Death of an unmarried man or woman
- (e) Death of a married man
- (f) Death of a foreigner
- (g) Death of a king
- (h) Carrying of a deceased person
- (i) Burial and burial rites

2.3 Death communication.

When death is about to occur in a family there are a number of signs which symbolise its coming. These signs includes amongst others the crying of a cat or an owl. They are said to be bad omen and say something that is about to happen. They say: "Swa hlola" which is a bad omen. In a case where there are doves at home, they are said to can also sign or indicate when death is about to happen in a family. As they are always noisy, if they do not cry for the whole day, where they just sit and be quiet without running or flying around, it is said that something bad especially death is to happen.

In Xitsonga culture, it is believed that when a star is seen moving from one place to another at night, it announces the death of a king or an important person. Death of a king is announced by a blow of a kudu horn. The message of a passing away of just an ordinary person is passed from one person to another by the way of mouth. When announcing death, a person does not look the other person in the eye. They look down to show shyness because what they have to tell is shameful.

Mr. Daniel Mbhiza said that it is believed that it is sinister for an adult person to die or pass on during the day. An adult male had to die in the morning or late evening. They believe that if this happens someone will die as soon as possible. This was seconded by Mr. Mapoxo who also indicated that even burial is only done in the morning or late in the afternoon or evening. In the olden days sand from a river was used as a refrigerator to keep the deceased in a cool place until they are buried in the evening

When one is told of someone's death, they have to spit their saliva. The saliva symbolizes the fact that something bad has been heard so as a result has to be spited out so as to forget about it. The saliva therefore symbolizes purity and cleanliness. According to Nwa-Hasani makhubele, saliva is used to settle one's heart or to clear one's conscious by saying:

(Marha ya pheriwa ku tshamisa timbilu. Leswaku
timbilu ta munhu loyi a byeriwaka ti nga handzuki.)

Mr. Mapoxo, our second respondent, put it this way:

(Munhu u lahela hi ku phela marhi ehansi. Leswaku
swi kota ku hundza munhu a swi amukela.)

According to Mrs. Leah Ntlhamu, Saliva is also used to prevent something bad from happening. Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani and Mr. Mbhiza Daniel are also familiar with this and said what was said by the others.

Although it is usually done after the funeral, the painting of the huts, where in some instances ash mixed with soil used for painting, as a symbol that death has occurred in that particular family. This ritual can also be used as a sign that death has occurred.

In a case where the deceased is a married woman, her in-laws have to send someone to her family with some money. The money will be used to buy some snuff which will be used to announce her death to the ancestors. We say they have to announce the fall of their head, as is said that the head belongs to her family not to her husband's. They say: "i ku vika nhloko."

To show respect to the dead, after the announcement of death, no working or tilling of soil, or any work which involves the use of soil or mud, has to be done. This in itself is symbolic in the sense that, as man was created out of soil, tilling the soil will be like trembling or stepping on the dead.

2.4 Myth and rituals during the death and burial of a child and miscarriage.

When a child is born into a family, that child is regarded as a symbol of fertility in the side of his/her parents. When this child dies it symbolizes bad luck, a certain ritual has to be performed to mourn the death of this child, and the parents have to be cleansed of all the "dirt" or bad luck related to the death. According to Mrs Leah Ntlhamu, the mother has to be tied some string from a "nala" plant which symbolizes her mourning period. Black clothes as used nowadays were not used in the Xitsonga people. A "nala" is used to symbolize mourning.

The burial duty is performed by old women with a clear knowledge of performing the burial ritual. This is done because of the fact that death of a child should be handled with great care as the bereaved child symbolizes the children still to be born to the parents. The grave is mostly dug just behind the parents' hut or in the "stoep" of the hut.

Mrs Hudula Maswoswani indicated that the child should be buried using the left hand lying with a right hand-side, which is the side of the father. This is done to make it a point that the mother can conceive again. If not so the mother may no longer be able to bear any children.

Mrs N'wa-Hasani Makhubele indicated that for a child, loan grass "ritlangi" is put on the feet and head of the child while in the grave before burial for the purpose of not binding or preventing rain, as it is believed that death and burial has a lot to do with rain. For a child no seeds are spread on top of the grave as the child is far from fertility. Seeds are only spread on the graves of adults as it symbolizes fertility and rebirth.

According to Mrs Hudula Maswoswani, after burial old women have to half-fill the grave and thereafter men may fill the grave. Men who dig the grave will be given some snuff and beer as a cleansing stuff. The old ladies also have to be given soft porridge which was cooked with water mixed with saliva and snuff. The mother has to bath them with warm water stretching their arm joints. It is believed that if this is not done, their limbs will be weak and may easily be attacked by illnesses.

Mr. Mapoxo said that the mother has to be cut "ku tlhavela tinhlga", by an inyanga and some "muti" be put on her cuts. This is done to remove bad luck which she is believed she has and to prevent it from happening again.

After spending a certain period, which has to be more than six months, the mother and her husband have to be cleansed. According to all our respondents, if the parents could meet sexually before the cleansing ritual, the man could become ill and die. The cleansing ritual is done by the wife who must bath her husband with hot water first and then cold water. An aloe is put in this water. Hot water symbolizes that she was hot and the cold water indicates that she is now cool and ready for going back to her feminine duties; that of child-bearing. The washing ritual of one's body is also symbolic in the sense that, by cleaning the outside, they are being cleansed within.

Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani said that, after taking a bath, the couple has to spend the night together. In the morning, the wife has to wake up very early in the morning and prepare water for the rest of the family. She has to wake them up one by one without talking to them to bath them. The bathing is done not looking at each other. They have to face in the East, and she has to bath them from behind. After bathing all of the family members, she prepares porridge mixed with her saliva as well as the husband's saliva. The saliva serves to cleanse the family of the impurities which are associated with death. Saliva is believed to have caught these impurities in it as it catches bad smell.

While bathing them, she also has to stretch the limb joints. This, according to Mrs. Hudula, is done so that when she cooks for them, her food must give them strength and not make them to be lazy. Saliva is also used in the branch or leaf which has to be put in a resting place of the people carrying a deceased person and in the cleansing of a mourning or grieving mother with the rest of the family. The spitting of saliva is therefore symbolic to the Xitsonga people.

When a woman miscarries, according to Mrs. Leah, that unborn foetus has to be treated with care as it symbolizes her other unborn children. If it is not done properly, the mother's fertility can be at stake. It may happen that she loses her ability to bear children. Her blood must not be left to be eaten by ants as it stands for her fertility. If eaten by ants she might not be able to fall pregnant again. Her blood represents her womb. It is believed that these ants would have eaten her womb.

To symbolize that something has happened to her, they make a small 'nala' for her to tie around her neck to indicate that she is mourning. The mourning does not last for a long time. The remains of the foetus have to be buried in a secret place in an ant or termites-hill.

2.5 Untimely death of an initiate.

While young men go to their initiation schools, sometimes it happens that one of them loses his life. His passing on is treated with great secrecy to avoid scarring the parents of the other inmates. The death is sometimes only announced after the burning or end of the school. Sometimes it may be done during the initiation where it is announced with a sign.

All of our respondents indicated that, the death of an initiate is announced by the breaking of the calabash or the container which is used to carry his food (Xivonelo). The plate may simply be partially broken or as a whole. This is an indication that its use has been terminated by the death of its owner. If the broken calabash is brought back to the family during the initiation period, the family who will immediately know what has happened has to keep quiet about it and continue cooking as if nothing has happened. According to Mrs. N'wa-Hasani Makhubele, no crying or mourning is permitted or allowed during and after the initiation. The initiate will also be buried at the initiation school not at home. The family will never see his burial. It is only done by the elders of the school, during the night and in a secret place.

2.6 The end rituals of an unmarried man or woman.

When an unmarried man or woman dies, although all of the respondents indicated that they had never experienced it, but they all indicated that, it is believed that a stick cut from a "Xitsalala" tree is nailed or plugged in on the head of the deceased or at their back. A "Xitsalala" tree is a tree which is believed to give fertility. It is believed that for a girl to get breasts, which is a sign of fertility, she has to go and cry under this tree. When a person dies without marrying and giving birth, it is believed that they have wasted the gift or what the "Xitsalala" has given them, so they deserve to be punished by it. This is symbolic in the sense that the nailing of the "xitsalala" at a back of a deceased person symbolizes that this person was unmarried.

2.7 Death of the head of the family.

When a married man or the head of the family dies, the cap of the hut is removed as a sign that the head of the family is late. According to Mr Mbhiza Daniel, the cap of the hut once removed, some of its grass is used as a mat for the wife or wives to sit on. This is used as a symbol that as the head of the family has passed on, she as the wife has to take over. In other words the crown of being the head of the family is now passed to her.

Mrs Leah Ntlhamu said that the grass from the entrance is also removed and be used as a mat. This grass is also put at the entrance of the hut where the widow sleeps. This is representing the fact that the entrance to her hut is now barred for public entrance. Only those whose husbands have passed on are allowed to enter this hut. This is seconded by Mr Mbhiza, who points out that the cap is only removed after the burial, and the grass used to sit on is that from the entrance.

According to Mrs. Ntlhamu Leah, the hardness and prinking of the grass which the widow sits on symbolizes the hardships which the wife of the bereaved man will have to go through and endure due to the loss of her husband. She is not allowed to use the same entrance or gate with the rest of the family. If no other gate is opened, she has to jump the small walls made around or between the huts (maguva), when going outside the yard.

Mr. Mapoxo indicated that, a fire is made and put at the gate and this fire will only be extinguished after the burial. Only those whose parents have passed on are allowed to sit around this fire. The fire represent the spirit of the deceased, and it is an indication that the spirit is still around, guarding the family and had not gone to join the ancestral group.

According to Mrs. N'wa-Hasani Makhubele, no cock is allowed to crow before the burial and cleansing is done. If this happens, the particular cock has to be slaughtered and be eaten by only old men whose parents have also passed on. The cock symbolizes masculinity, and as the man of the family has died, no other man is allowed to take over before the cleansing.

According to Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani and Mrs N’wa- Hasani, every member of the family’s hair has to be shaved. It is believed that, it brings bad luck to still remain with the hair which was seen by the deceased person. The hair is used to symbolise that they are new people who have never been seen by the deceased person.

After the burial every member of the family is given a rolled small porridge containing “muti” to swallow just after they have been sprinkled with “muti” water by an “Inyanga” in the ritual called “ku xuva”, derived from the use of a branch or leaves of a “Xuva” tree. For those who will be absent during the ritual, the rolled porridge and water will be put in a safe place until they come back and be given them. They will also be given water to drink which was prepared by the wife of the deceased during the cleansing ritual. Each member of the bereaved family is tied a “nala” string as an indication that they are mourning.

Mr. Mbhiza Daniel and Mrs. N’wa-Hasani, indicated that the gates are changed immediately after his burial. This is done to allow a new man to can get into the family of the bereaved to continue life with the wife but this is not done before the end of the mourning period which will be marked by the cleansing ceremony which will be performed by a special “Inyanga”. It is not allowed for a new man to step on the same area which was used by the late man, which symbolises the fact that it is not permissible for a man to sleep with another man’s wife while he is still alive.

2.8 Belief about the demise and burial of a foreigner.

Mr. Mapoxo, on the burial of a foreigner indicated that, when a foreigner dies, it was believed that when buried among the community he might bring bad luck to the community and prevents rain from falling. He has to be buried outside the village after consulting a “sangoma” to check how this person has to be buried. According to him, the burial of a foreigner in the village prevent rainfall, they say: “Swi vamba mpfula”.

This belief is also quoted by H.p. Junod in *Matimu Ya Vatsonga* (1977:55) who explains it thus:

... va lerisile ku susa vavabyi va vona hi ku hatlisa hikuva
Vantima a va nga lavi leswaku un'wana wa vona a fela
kwalaho, dyambu ri nga ti va hlundzukela, ri sivela mpfula
ku na emisaveni, kutani ku ta pfumaleka mihandzu ni
swakudya swin'wana lembe hinkwaro.

Because of this, a foreigner is therefore buried far from the community next to a river on the bank of the river.

For people who die due to stomach swelling, which is associated with “ku khuma”, which is believed to happen when one, has engaged himself sexually with someone whose husband has passed on or because of using a deceased person’s properties before the cleansing is done, they have to be buried outside the village next to a river. They believe that burying them in the community will prevent rain from falling.

When it does not rain for a long time, the community has to gather at a particular spot to do a ritual called “ku handza Nkelenkele”, where in the process graves of all those who passed away with swollen stomachs have to be stabbed with an assegai or spear, while an “inyanga” must be performing a certain ritual saying words that their curse must stop preventing rain. All old clothes thrown around should be collected and burned. They are believed to have collected the impurities which prevent rain as they might have been used by women or girls during their menstrual periods.

2.9 The passing away of a king/queen in Vatsonga customs

All respondents indicated that, the death of a king or queen is treated differently from the death of a common person. The death of a king is regarded as something which is sacred. When a king dies, no one is allowed to cry. He is buried secretly in his hut being wrapped with a cow-hide and only at night.

Before his death, it is believed that a small stone called “ndalama”, should come out which has to be stored in a safe place and to be given to his successor when the time is right for him to be ordained as the next king.

Death of a queen or an induna is either treated as that of a king or of an ordinary man, depending on the status accorded to her by her people.

2.10 Carrying of a deceased person

Carriage of the deceased is also full of symbolic gestures. It is not allowed for the pall-bearers to talk to each other when carrying a deceased person. This is symbolic in the sense that these people identify themselves as the dead.

Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani indicated that, when the people carrying a deceased person have to rest after travelling for a long period, it was allowed for them to rest, but had to cut a branch, spit on it, which is used to clear their consciousness, and put it in the spot where the corpse had been laid, to symbolize his resting place. This is referred to as a “Tshiawelo” in Venda or “Xiwiselo”.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani, the place is called “Xixangeni”. The branch will be an indication that this is a place where people carrying a deceased person have rested and it will be a reminder of what happened in that place. Everyone who will come to pass that area will recognize it with ease and has to do like wise. He has to put a branch with his saliva in the place and then pass and continues with his journey.

2.11 Burial rites and rituals.

According to Mr. Mapoxo, the selection of a burial place is not done without consulting with the ancestors through the bones of a Sangoma. Seeds and snuff are put on the chosen site before digging. According to Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani, the spreading of seeds on the grave is done to indicate that, on that grave a body has to be planted which has to regenerate again. This means that those who are left behind will still be in touch with the deceased.

Mrs. N'wa-Hasani Makhubele, indicates that this is also done as a token of showing that those who will be left behind will still continue to live and multiply to continue the deceased's generation. The third point is that, it is done as a plea from the remaining family to the deceased that he/she allows them to plant the seeds which he had planted and left behind and also bless the crops that they will cultivate and be able to plant crops and get food.

According to Mr. Mapoxo and Mr. Mbhiza Daniel, the first to dig the grave must be the first born daughter of the deceased, who will be representing the whole children and generations to come of the deceased. This means that the whole family has lent a hand in the digging of the grave. Only married men were allowed to dig a grave. It was believed that if one who is not yet married digs a grave, it will bring bad luck and dreadful diseases to them and they may end up not marrying at all.

All of our respondents indicated that, roots which are dug out of the grave must be collected and be put in a safe place. These roots will be used after burial where one of the family member especially, the aunt of the family, will throw them in the four main directions, i.e. East, West, North and South. While doing this she will be shouting and calling names of all members of their family who failed to attend the funeral due to different reasons, or who did not get the message that one of their family members or relative has passed on. This is said or believed to prevent bad luck in the family.

According to Mrs. Leah Ntlhamu, the deceased person is laid in the grave either in a sitting or sleeping position depending on the shape of the grave. A mat or a skin of a beast is used as a blanket. Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani said that a “Marula” branch or log is used as a pillow. This is the reason why a “marula” tree is used as a sacred shrine. That log used as a pillow will eventually grow into a big tree. Henri A Junod also explains this in “The life of a South African Tribe” (1912:138), where he says:

They have already put at the place of the head
a piece of wood, a piece of branch of a nkanye,
their sacred tree, one foot long and three inches
broad, to be used as a pillow.

Mrs N’wa-Hasani Makhubele, indicated that, a “nhlahli” or straw plant is put at the head and feet of the deceased. Water is poured on the straw to wet it before the grave is covered. The straw sometimes grows out or dies, but in most cases it will grow out, and will be used as a sign post of where the grave is.

Junod H.A (1912:136) also explains this, where he says:

...they also put one reed besides the corpse,
and grass, which grew in water, is spread at
the bottom of the grave.

Plants used during burial are said to be carrying the spirit of the deceased. After filling the grave, a branch of a “cencenyi” tree is placed on top of the grave. This branch represents the branch of the same tree which is used during the ceremony of taking or bringing the deceased home.

Mrs. Hudula Maswoswani indicated that in a case where an old woman has passed on leaving her seed of maize, peanuts, pumpkins, etc, which were put aside to be used during plough and sowing, or she passes away living crops which she has ploughed

herself, they have to be brought out and an “inyanga” has to cleanse them in the ritual called enlightening “ku voningela”, as put by Mrs. Hudula. They must not be used before this is done. Even when it is done, no member of the family may use it as seeds. They have to exchange them with someone else and use seed from someone to plant. After enlightening, the elders have to cook some of these seeds and be eaten by only those old men and women whose parents have also passed on.

When someone who is believed to have died after disappearing for a long time comes home, he has to be smeared with ash because he is believed to have risen from the “ashes”. This is done also to a person who has been unconscious for a long period, when he recovers he is regarded as someone who has risen from the dead, so he has to be poured with ash.

The use of saliva in death notice, the use of money in the reporting of the death of a married woman, The use of “nhlahli” , “ritlangi”, marula log, in burial, the use of a “nala”, the use of porridge, the shaving of hair, the closing of the gate, the making and extinguishing of fire, the breaking of the calabash of an initiate, the nailing of the “xitsalala” pin or stick, the removal of the cap of the hut, the sitting on the grass from the front or cap, the burial of the foreigner outside the village, and the burial of the king at night, are symbolic gestures in death related rituals which carries a lot of significance through their practice..

Other symbolic gestures in death related rituals are: the putting of the branch on the resting place of the people carrying a deceased person, the spreading of seeds on the grave site, and the use of the “swanyo” that is the grass from the stomach of a slaughtered beast, during the cleansing of the hand of the people who dug the grave before drinking the beer for the pinks or “hyenas” or “timhisi” as they are called.

2.12 Summary

In this study it is apparent that in death and death related ritual exists a lot of symbolism which was used to convey a certain message but this symbolism as it was used, was used to hide some of the intentions in the performance of some of these rituals.

The use of these symbolic gestures therefore, in death ritual denotes that, these rituals had a very useful duty to perform in our daily lives, as it was used to convey a message which is of important value in our lives which renders them to have a special value even in our new or present generation.

The survival of these valuable activities and ceremonies therefore rest on our honours. If we know their importance, it is therefore up to us to value and honour them. By so doing these rituals and ceremonies will last forever.

2.13 Conclusion

In the research done on death and burial rituals, it was apparent that the myth and rituals performed, all bear a certain symbolic significance and meaning which is embedded in the performance and activities performed during and after death.

Chapter 3

Symbolism in male and female initiation

3.1 Introduction

Male and female initiations reflect a lot of symbolism in many instances like the drinking of beer, the holding of lashes, the “mhakarhiso” ceremony, the dances, the wearing of certain clothes, the moving of the branch and the giving of names. It can be recognised in the following instances which are reflected below.

3.2 Symbolism in female initiation (Vukhomba).

Symbolism in female initiation is found in the use of beer, snuff, the moving of a small branch, the opening and closure of the drum, the giving of the bracelet or “sindza”, the “xipfune” beads, the dances, the drinking of beer from the kudu horn (mhalamhala), The hitting of the initiate by her mother by the baby’s “abba” which is a skin of a goat used to carry a child at the back of her mother, and the slaughtering of the goat for the ceremony of “muhakarhiso” or “mgantliso”, which is performed for a first born girl child after her initiation ceremony.

According to Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi, the initiation itself is symbolic in the sense that it shows that a girl has matured. By this they mean that due to the fact that she has seen her first menstruation she is now a woman or an adult as she can now conceive if she may happen to meet sexual with a man. This ceremony is a ceremony which prepares a girl child for adulthood and makes her ready for her near future husband. It was also used as a ceremony to announce that at a particular household a lady who is ready for marriage is available, by so doing invite men who are ready for marriage, to can come to ask her hand in marriage.

When a girl reaches maturity, which according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, is after seeing her first menstruation, she has to call her aunt or grandmother to show her what

has happened to her. The aunt or grandmother will be her “murileli”, meaning the one who will cry on her behalf during the initiation period.

According to Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi, after confirming that it is indeed her first period, she must get a stump at the middle of a foot-path. Dig and cut it, come back with it and make fire to prepare soft porridge for the girl with a small clay-pot (ximbitana).

After eating the porridge the small pot is put upside-down or closed and be hidden in a very secretive place. This is done to stop the menstrual process for a while to give the family time to prepare for the initiation ceremony. This pot will be opened only when the family is ready to stage the initiation for their child, which could be three to four month time.

According to Mrs. N’wa-Risimati Shivambu, the cloth which was used during her periods has to be also kept in a hidden place. This is done to make it a point that nobody who will be interested in doing something bad about it, to prevent the girl from getting her own children in future, by which-craft cannot get hold of her feminine bloods. This is also symbolic in the sense that that blood represents her fertility.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Mafemani Shirinda, the aunt or “murileli” will then summon the other family members, especially the girl’s parent, to pass the news about the maturity of their child. After this, they have to brew some beer, which will be used during the formal appointment of the “murileli” and will also be taken to the chief or “induna” to announce the initiation. This beer will be a token of appreciation to the royal family who has allowed them to host the ceremony.

According to Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Chauke-Phirhwani, the beer will be taken to the chief with a container of snuff and money which is not more than R0-20c. The chief will then grant the family permission to host the initiation. It is symbolic in the sense that the beer used will be drunk by the elders at the chief’s place and the people who drank it will go

around telling people that they drank beer from Mr. So and So, whereby announcing or spreading the initiation news.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Mafemani Shirinda, when the permission is granted, the elders of the family will prepare two branches, the first one for the middle aged and young adults, and the second one will be for the senior citizens. These two branches have to be circulated around the village from one person to another to announce the initiation ceremony.

To make sure that all members of the community pass the branch to the next, Mrs. N'wa-Phelani Shivambu indicated that, it was punishable to stay with the branch without passing it. A hen or chicken has to be paid after failing to pass it, which was eaten by the elder women during the ceremony.

The moving of the branch is a way of sending a message to all community members as an indication that at particular household an initiation ceremony is underway. The branch or "xitluka" is symbolic because it is used to convey a message or to announce that in the evening there will be an initiation ceremony in a particular household.

Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi indicated that, early in the morning the girl has to be taken to the bush where she will be hidden for the whole day. The elders around the community will gather and be given snuff, which will be circulated amongst them. This is symbolic in the sense that by snuffing it they are symbolical checking if the girl is really mature. At the evening, all initiated girls and adult women have to assemble at the girls place. They will have to take her to a "Xikayi" thorn tree for her initiation. The "Xikayi" tree, according to Mrs. Nwa-Maxawu Mhlongo, is where the essence of the initiation is because it is here where she will have to suffer and feel the hardship of the initiation.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani Chauke-Phirhwani, the climbing of the "Xikayi" tree is symbolic in the sense that, she will be made to climb it and as she has to endure the pain

of its thorns. It is believed the pain will prepare her for the challenges of marriage. This will be the beginning of her lessons about hardships she might endure in a marriage.

Mrs. Nwa-Hasani, also indicated that after climbing the tree; they will have to go home singing songs which are practically announcing the beginning of the ceremony to the leaders of the community and the rest of the community members. When they arrive they will sing and dance beating the drums for a short while. Here is where they say she has to be “xanguriwa”, which means she has to be undressed and be given only a shawl which she will cover herself only when going out. The shawl also is symbolic in the sense that, it gives a clear distinction between her as an initiate and the other girls who might have been initiated and those who haven’t. For the rest of the period she has to remain naked. This will be the beginning of her seclusion period.

After this the Kudu horn (mhalamhala), and the drum (xingomana), will be closed, meaning that they will no longer be in use until they come back for the opening of the drum ceremony, which is termed “ku pfula xingomana”.

The drum and the horn will be opened after some few days, after which it will be allowed to be blown any time when the girl is to leave the hut and when she comes back. The use of the drum and kudu horn is symbolic because the horn is blown only when the initiate and her senior called “mudzabi” goes out to the bush or when they come back home. It is also blown when they realise that someone is nearing the side at which the initiate is hiding, to announce the presence, as it is not allowed for them to be seen during her initiation period.

Another factor which according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, displays symbolism in female initiation, is the fire which is made in the hut which will be a seclusion place of the initiate. This fire will have to be kept burning for the whole period of the initiation without being extinguished. This fire symbolises the initiation and seclusion period. Fire is regarded as light and wisdom, so this symbolises the importance of the initiation which is to give guidance and wisdom to deal with the challenges of adulthood.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Phelani Shivambu, a guard woman is appointed who will have to monitor any wrong doings during the initiation period, like when the fire stops burning, when there is a quarrel at home or the initiate does something which is not allowed to do like talking to any other people who are not permitted. This is also symbolic in the sense that quarrels are not permitted within families, communities and the society at large. The banning of quarrels is a lesson to the initiate together with the whole family that quarrels are not good for society, therefore they must be punishable. When one of the family members have done something wrong or quarrelled, the drum will be closed or will not be allowed to be beaten until such time when something has been popped out as fine for the wrong doing.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Phelani, the initiate also has to choose a small boy from one of her relatives who will be her husband for the rest of her initiation period, which is referred to as “ku ganga” who will be represented by his mother. This act is also symbolic because the boy who is chosen will be representing her future husband and it gives the essence of this ceremony which is to prepare her for marriage and his family will be treated as the real in-laws and they will have to give her a present upon the end of the ceremony.

After some days, according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, the drum and the kudu horn or “mhalamhala” will be opened and there will be dances for days, where the initiate will have to dance and make some jokes with her relatives or someone who is known in the community who is funny. This activity is called “ku gandla swigandlu”. There will also be time for crying, which is done to assimilate what she will do when beaten by her husband. This is done to prepare her to act as if she is in great pain for the husband to feel for her and leave beating her. This will go on for some few days and they refer to it as “swixuxelo”, meaning to pass out or while away time.

Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi indicated that, when the beer is ready, a day before the end of the ritual, old men are allowed to taste the beer in the ceremony called “miringiso”. Some beer will also be taken to the chief’s kraal to announce that the initiation will end the

following day. The beer here is again used symbolical as it is used to announce the culmination of the initiation.

The following evening, according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, a dance called “geregere” will be held. At this ceremony, is where the initiate will be smeared with white ochre or ash and be dressed with tree leaves to create a funny person. She will dance accompanied by her friend and her senior (mudzabi). This dance is also symbolic as it is used to cut the sufferings which were endured by the initiate for the past days or weeks. Here people are entertained. People will be entertained to celebrate the culmination of the initiation

At night, as indicated by Mrs Maxawu Mhlongo, a ceremony called “vujelejele” is held where they will sing and dance for the whole night, drinking beer and “mvhanya” and “madleke”. This celebration and feast marks the culmination of the initiation. That girl is no longer a girl but a matured woman.

Mrs Maxawu Mhlongo, further indicated that the next morning, chickens will be slaughtered for the chief’s wives. A dance called “rigogo” or “xitamba-kofeni”, which is a word for washing the face or eyes, will be done to entertain people while food is being prepared. The initiate will be taken to the bush, where she will be bathed, dressed with the traditional regalia made from of old rags called “tinguvu ta mkhupula”.

Accompanied by other matured girls who has already been initiated and her senior or “mudzabi”, Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi, indicated that, they will carry the initiated girl at their back and when they approach the gates of the homestead, sit down, and she will be given some beer to drink in a kudu horn. This beer is said to be a remedy for any infertilities which could happen to the initiate which might have been inflicted to her during her initiation. It is believed that if the initiate does not drink this she might be in danger of being not able to bear children.

The initiate with her senior will sleep there at the gate. Here a dance called “mselesele” which is done in pairs with folded arms will be performed by older women. They will move from the gate to the homestead, to and fro. After receiving money by the parents of the girl, which is referred to as “ku lula”, they will then wake up, carry their initiate and enter the gate. This dance is also symbolic in the sense that it is used as a broom to sweep the feet of all the people who came to the homestead during the initiation period. It is done to wash away all footprints of this people. According to Mrs. Nwa-Phelani Shivambu, They say it is “mselesele” because, “ku seleteriswa mikondzo ya vanhu”.

At home they will sing and dance in a circle around the initiate and her “mudzabi”. This is a way of saying to the parents: “Here we are. We have brought back your child sound and safe.” After this, it will be time for the “murileli” to dance in celebration to the end of her ordeal. The “mudzabi” will follow suit, and thereafter it will be time for the mother to dance in celebration of her achievement. She will dance while hitting her girl with an “abba” which is a skin of a goat used to carry a child at her back (dzovo), singing the song:

(Huma ndzi ku kandziya n’wananga ndzi ku kanya.

huma ndzi ku kandziya n’wananga ndzi ku kanya.

Leswi swa mani leswi?

Swa manghovo a swi ku fanelangi.

Kasi swa mani leswi?

Swa manghovo a swi ku fanelangi.

Thimbyalimbya thimbyalimbya.

Ku veleka vokosi.

Huma ndzi ku kandziya n’wananga ndzi ku kanya)

According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani Phirhwani, she will do this stepping and hitting her child. The hitting with the “abba”, itself is symbolic because it reflects the fact that now that her

child has undergone initiation, she is ready to be given the “abba”, which means she can be a mother herself.

According to Mrs N’wa-George Machavi, after the dance the initiate will be given food in her hands. This food is called “Xipinya”, which is porridge with “Muroho wa Xipunge”, which is a mixture of bean vegetables and grinded peanuts. Her grand mother will then come and take the food away from her. This is itself symbolic because the old lady has completed her feminine duties; she is now free of all female temptations. So she has graduated to take any “dirt” which symbolises the problems which one is faced with while still young and fertile. This means that if she happens to encounter any problem in life, she does not have to tell them to any other person but her grand mother or aunt. The initiation will be culminated by a great feast of dances, beer drinking and food. People are given a chance to present their gifts.

According to Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi and N’wa-Mafemani Shirinda, the next day a ceremony where a goat is slaughtered for “muhakarhiso” ritual. Her father must select a goat which will be slaughtered and its hide is cut into some strings which will be given to the initiate to wear across her body. This is done only when she is a first born child. These strings will be taken out and be put somewhere to dry. When dry, it will be taken and be thrown in the river so that it will be carried away by water. This is done in order for the girl to can be able to bear children. These goat-hide strings therefore represent her fertility.

According to all our respondents, the following bead strings are given to the initiate as a symbol of her graduation to adulthood. The “xipfhune” beads, which is beads which is given to an initiate when she is to sing the choruses of initiation, which are called “milawu”, where she will sing by counting the number of binds or folds made around it. Another set of beads called “rikhotlo” and “tshutshu”, where a “sinda” should be hooked will also be tied around her waist.

The “Tshutshu”, according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, symbolizes her fertility. It said that this is done for her to be fertile. She won’t be able to conceive and bear children if she does not have these beads. According to Mrs Maxawu Mhlongo, these beads are given to her first born child after giving birth. By so doing she will be passing the gift of child bearing to her first born child who will be representing the rest of her children.

Beads and “masinda” or money will be given to her as gifts when she sleeps on the ground when meeting someone which will be a sign that she is a newly graduated initiate and has to be given something as a token of acknowledgement or when one wants to know her new name which is the name given to her after her initiation.

Symbolism in female initiation is found in the use of beer, snuff, the moving of a small branch, the opening and closure of the drum, the giving of the bracelet or “sinda”, the “xipfhune” and “rikhotlo” beads, the dances, the drinking of beer from the kudu horn (mhalamhala), The hitting of the initiate by her mother by the goatskin used to carry a child at the back of her mother and the slaughtering of the goat for the ceremony of “muhakarhiso” or “mgantliso” plays an important part in the growth and development of a girl.

The initiation itself is symbolic in the sense that it shows that a girl child has matured. The use of a stump from the middle of a foot-path which is used to cook the porridge which stops the menstrual blood of the girl who is to become an initiate, plays an important role in the preparation of the initiation ritual.

The putting of the pot upside-down which was used to cook the porridge also plays an important role to stop the menstruation. The giving of a new name is symbolic in the sense that the girl is now a new matured person. The tying of a “ntshutshu” bead string is also symbolic of the girl’s fertility.

The eating of the “Xipinya” porridge is also symbolic in the sense that as this food is taken away the girl’s grandmother which is an indication that she is the one who will

always come to her rescue during the times of trouble. The hitting of the initiate by her mother with an “abba” which is a skin of a goat used to carry a child at her back (dzovo), is another symbolism which is of great value to the Vatsonga people. It symbolises the passing of parenthood from mother to her daughter.

The dances of “geregere”, “vujelejele”, and the “mselesele” dances, are also symbols of the beginning and culmination of the initiation ceremony. They are dances of celebration and entertainment which announces a certain stage in the ceremony. The drinking of beer and the snuffing of snuff also plays symbolic roles in this ritual ceremony. They are used to announce and to pass a certain message which might be the beginning or end of the ceremony.

The drinking of beer from a kudu horn which is done at the gate on the final day of the initiation is also symbolic as it represents a medicine which is used to cure infertility diseases which may have been acquired during the initiation ceremony. This is done symbolical to hide the fact that during the puberty stage which is marked by the physical and hormonal changes in the girls developmental stages, is where a girl is more susceptible to all diseases which may render her infertile.

The choosing of a small boy in the act of the “ku ganga”, who will be a replica of her future husband is also symbolic due to the fact that the boy represent or stand for her future husband which serves to see whether she is capable of choosing a good, caring and responsible husband.

The availability of the ever burning fire in the house of the initiate is also symbolic as our elders knows that witch-craft is there and to avoid or to protect the initiate from being attacked by the evil spirits, a fire must be kept burning, to prevent these evil spirits to gain access to the house. The opening and closing of the drum during the ceremony is also symbolic in the sense that it is a sign to tell all the elderly women that a certain wrong doing has been done and a fine is needed.

The putting on of a shawl also is symbolic in the sense that it is used to distinguish an initiate from the others. The climbing of the “xikayi” tree is another symbolic gesture of all sufferings which a woman as a wife has to endure in her life. It is used to educate a girl that in marriage she will encounter a lot of sufferings but the initiation serves to prepare her to deal with those sufferings by way of endurance and not abandoning her marriage.

The moving of the branch, which is used to announce the beginning of the initiation is also symbolic in the sense that a branch which is circled is broken from the tip of the branch of a tree, which is a symbol that a young and tender girl has grown up to be a matured woman. The presence of the “murileli” in the initiation who stands in the position of the girl’s mother, who is not allowed to be present during the initiation ceremony and all its proceedings, is also symbolic because this is the person who will bear the sufferings of the girl during her initiation. All the cruel things which will be performed on the girl as part of the initiation rituals, will be seen by this person who will bear with her all her feelings and sufferings as a parent.

The hiding away of the cloth which was used during her periods is another symbolism as the blood in it represents her fertility. Playing with the cloth is regarded as playing with her womb. For her to be safe and remain fertile, being in a position to can conceive and bear children, she should take care of her things, including her sacred blood. Nobody must see her menstruation blood as evil people may use it to bewitch her and make her barren.

The giving of the bracelet (sindza), the “xipfunu” beads, at the end of the ceremony symbolises her graduation as an adult person or woman who is now ready to be married, and to can mother a child. The “muhakarhiso” or “mgantliso” strings also symbolise the fact that she is now a matured woman who can now be married and be able to have her own children.

3.3 Symbolism in male initiations

Symbolism in male initiations is observed in the holding and use of a lashes, the fire, the wearing of red and white cloth, the breaking of the food calabash or container, the songs, the names, the putting of chicken feathers, the putting of “tiharhi”, at the gates or “mayikhweni”, the spread of seeds on the initiates at the chief’s kraal and “mayiwani” dance during the alterations period and ceremony.

From the day of the inception of the initiation school which is marked by the initiation of the first son of the royal family who will be known as “Xitlhangoma” meaning the one who has opened the initiation, lashes are held by the old boys and men who have been to the school. This is a symbol that an initiation school is in progress. No one is allowed to carry a lash unless he has undergone the ceremony. Mr. Mapoxo put this thus:

(Maxuvuru a ya khomi mikhavi. Yi khomiwa
hi lava nga yimba ntsena. Leswi swi kombisa
ku ri hi va hi lava nga yimba eka lava nga
yimbangiki. Loko wo kumeka u khome nkxavi
u nga yimbangi ,wu tshwa nyameni, kasi na
oko u kumeka u nga wu khomangi u yimbele, xa ntshwa.)

The fire which is made at the beginning of the initiation at the initiation school has to burn and must be kept burning until the end of the ceremony. It plays a significant role as the initiation is said to be the process of jumping of fire but it is not allowed to skip this fire. Mr. Mahuntsi Samuel confirms this by saying:

(Swa yila ku tlula ndzilo wa ka hogo,
hi swona swi endlaka leswaku loko u
wu tlula u twisiwa ku vava.)

The area where women stay in order to prepare food for the initiates is referred to as “mayikhweni”, meaning the place of pots. “yinkho” is a big clay-pot used for cooking. It represents the pots which are used for cooking during the initiation period, meaning that it is a cooking place.

The area where women exchange food with the older boys who carry it to the initiates is called “tiharhini”, due to the fact that is where they will put their “tihari”, which are crowns used to carry porridge on their heads to prevent being burned by this hot porridge. Mr. Harry Vhukeya says this about it:

(Vavasati a va hundzi etiharini, laha hi
laha va pfumeleriwaka ku fika kona,
ku hundza kona wa penga.)

Before the end of the ceremony, a dance called “Mayiwani” is performed. A man is dressed in grass and to hide his identity. His head is also covered. He will dance in the morning and afternoon to entertain women and girls who brings food to the initiate. This dance is symbolic in the sense that it marks the end of the hard times of the ceremony where everything was tense and very hostile.

In a case where one’s porridge is not well cooked, according to Mr Mapoxo, they will say it is “mbodza”, chicken feathers will be put on top of them to represent that a chicken has to be brought out as a dowry for the wrong done. This porridge also has to be used to brew “Magewu” or “Madleke” for the older men of the initiation school to drink.

To mark the end of the ceremony, according to Mr. Mabasa Hasani Daniel, the initiator called “Mayine” has to burn all the shacks used as a dwelling place. In the morning all the initiates should bath, smeared with red soil called “tsumani”, and be dressed in white and red clothes which are tied in their hips. The attire symbolises that they are now changed people. The red cloth represents their initial stage of being boy, who were

irresponsible, with no sense of knowing good or bad. The white cloth, now stand for their present stage, as adult males who are responsible and who are now pure and mature.

They are given small sticks which are bound together in two's or three's which according to Mr. Harry Vukeya, depends on the number of siblings each initiate has. These sticks are symbolic in the sense that they represent the number of boys who are left who are to go the same route as their brothers. In an event where it is not known whether there are siblings or in a case where there is none, two sticks are used. A long stick is also carried which is used to lash all those who will like to know their new names.

Beads are also worn in which a ring called "sinda" will be put which will hook all the gifts which will be given to the initiate in exchange of knowing his new name. Each initiate, will have to give himself a new name to indicate that he has to the initiation school. This name is symbolic in the sense that it reflects the fact that he is now a new person, and is now an adult, as initiation marks maturity. Women sing songs such as:

(Vuyani; vuyani ve vuyan-
Vuyani majaha ve vuyani
Vuyani madla xirhami, u fela ngomo
Vuyani majaha ve vuyani
Vuyani madla xirhami, u fela ngomo
Vuyani majaha ve vuyani, ngomo...)

And the one that goes:

(He xihlambetwana xa manana ho lele
Xilo ngerengerengere ho lele
He xihlambetwana xa manana ho lele
Xilo ngerengerengere ho lele...)

Mbhonjhana ehe ha!
Wa chavo!
Mbhonjhana ua chava ntsumane).

These songs announce the jubilations of the mothers as their children or sons come home safely. Before these initiates can go to their respective homes they have to go to the chief's place where old women will spread seeds of different crops on them. These seeds represent the fact that they have undergone the initiation ritual; they are now men and are ready to produce. These seeds represent the fact that they are now fertile and can be able to impregnate a girl or woman.

In male initiations or circumcision, symbolism is observed in the holding and use of lashes which indicates to us that an initiation school is underway. It is also used to distinguish those who have been to the initiation school and those who are still to be initiated, who are referred to as "maxuvurhu". The fire which is used to symbolise the initiation is also symbolic as it is used to disguise what is performed there, which is called "ku tlula ndzilo", meaning that the circumcision is performed by just jumping over the fire.

The wearing of red and white cloth is also symbolic in the sense that red represent blood which is the blood that comes out during the initiation. The white cloth represent purity which is seen by the fact that that blood which was there before has resulted into bringing out a mature and responsible person who has overcome teenage years.

The breaking of the food calabash or container which was used to put food for a deceased initiate is used symbolically to indicate that the owner is dead. The songs which are sung the day the initiates come back home also are symbolic as they announce the joy of the parents as their children have come back home safely.

The giving and choosing of new names is symbolic in the sense that is an indication that a new being is born out of the old body. The putting of chicken feathers on the food

which was not properly cooked, which symbolises that a chicken is needed as a fine, the putting of “tiharhi” at the gates which indicates the area where women ends near the initiation school and the “mayikhweni” area, all these are symbolic gestures or names are crucial in the initiation of men. The “mayiwani” dance during the alterations period and ceremony is also symbolic as it marks the end of the period where things were tough for the boys and indicates that now is the time for jubilations as the time to go home has arrived.

The spread of seeds on the initiates at the chief’s kraal is symbolic in the sense that it symbolises that the newly graduated initiates are no longer boys but men who are now ready to be responsible fathers.

3.4 Summary

In this research, it is very clear that in female and male initiation, there exist a lot of symbolism which when fully understood one can get a lot of meanings and the significance of their performances. It is this symbolism which makes the meaning and significance of initiation rituals not to be apparent to any layman. It needs a close look and a great mind to understand these symbolic gestures and to find its significance in society. After getting hold of these symbolic gestures one may easily understand that they play a very big role in the maturity and by following practising them properly, with pride and confidence our society can grow and have responsible adults.

3.5 Conclusion

Female and male initiation, according to the above mentioned respondents, plays an important role in the society. It is used to inform, to encourage, educating and to discipline the youth within the society. It is only that in its performance, rituals are done without giving a clear meaning and their significance in the people who have to undertake these performances. The performance and the ritual celebration conducted during the initiation period are of great importance in our day to day lives.

Chapter 4

Symbolism in ancestral worship (Mphahlo)

4.1 Introduction

Like in any ritual ceremony conducted by the Vatsonga people, ancestral worship also display some symbolic characters. The items used during performances, their significance, representation of the ancestral group and the songs sung during performances, denote symbolism.

4.2 Symbolism in ancestral worship

According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani Phirhwani, it is a way of life for the Vatsonga people to hold ancestral worship ceremonies. In a year, three crucial ancestral worship ceremonies are usually held. The first one is that of when the crops at the fields are ripe and ready for harvest. The second one is for the well being of the family which is usually held towards the end of the year or at the beginning of the year, and the third is performed before going to plant crops during the ploughing season. In the Vatsonga culture it is believed that anything which is done in a family, their ancestors must be the first to be notified and be part of the occasion and also bless it.

According to Mr. Mbhiza Daniel, before harvest time, it is not allowed to eat or to taste the products before the worshipping ceremony. For this ceremony, ripe sorghum has to be harvested and be used to brew some beer for the ceremony. To perform the ceremony, some crops have to be gathered from the fields in a representative or proportional manner, e.g. some mealies, some few sugar canes, a bowl of cooked veggies, pumpkins, nuts, etc. Portions of the harvest have to be brought to the family shrine.

The family is supposed to gather at the family's sacred shrine, which according to Mr. Mapoxo, in most cases is a "marula" tree. The use of the "marula" tree is symbolic in the sense that, it represents the "marula" log which was used when the people who are now

regarded as family ancestors were buried. A pot of beer called “byala vutshila”, and some snuff will be placed before the shrine. According to Mr. Risimati Samuel Hobyani, the family’s ancestral garments or regalia must also be put on the tree or be worn by the designated person or animal. These garments will differ in relation to the type and colour depending on the type of ancestors which are worshiped at a particular household. They can be “mapalu” or “njeti” garment.

According to Mr. Mapoxo, an animal which can be a chicken, goat or a bull, is used during ancestral worship ceremony. This animal can be slaughtered or can be tied to the shrine. Some animals know their role and will always come by themselves to the shrine and just stand there on their own. During the ceremony beer is poured on them and they may also be given to drink.

An elderly person in the family or the aunt of the family has to perform the ritual with the others saying “sika!” after each sentence said. He or she will give renditions to their ancestors mentioning their name one by one and thereafter tell them the purpose of their gathering, which is to ask blessings and to notify them that their crops are ready for harvest and seek their blessings for the whole family to use this food and acquire no illnesses by consuming them. After this she will put some beer in her mouth and spit all over the shrine and thereafter put some snuff on the shrine.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Mafemani Matlhava, he or she also has to eat a portion of the food. They will then leave the shrine to eat the food which is prepared for this function as well drinking the beer. Then the ceremony is over they may eat what so ever they want without any problems. According to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, this ceremony is also performed during the “marula” season. Before the ceremony is performed it is known that a person who eats these food products will be sick with a fever.

Mr. Risimati Hobyani indicated that it is also performed when a member in the family is sick. When one is sick an “Inyanga” will be consulted, who will throw his divine bones to

see who is bordering this person. After that he will tell them if a ceremony is to be held or not and how it will be performed.

According to Mrs. N'wa-George Machavi, when a child cries non-stop, it may happen that he or she is crying for a name. In this case, an "Inyanga" has to be consulted and a ritual has to be performed. When things are not going well within the family, according to Mr. Mapoxo, a worship ceremony has to be performed. Beasts or cattle may be slaughtered for this ceremony. After the ceremony, according to Mr Mapoxo, each member of the family will be given a piece of string made from the slaughtered animal's skin to tie on their wrists. The leather string will be tied on the left hand if the ancestors causing problems are from their mother's family and on the right if it is their father's ancestors.

When it is time for cultivation, according to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, the ancestors have to be told or else it won't go well. The oxen used for ploughing will always fight each other. No progress will be made and it might happen that even the seeds don't come out or grow.

According to Mr. Hobyani Risimati Samuel, any family has its own sacred animal or plant which they worship and are attached to it in any way and has a specific value to their lives. There are those who do not eat fish. There are those who do not eat a hind leg of a slaughtered beast. Some families worship certain snakes or creatures like snails, tortoises, or frogs.

The use of traditional beer and snuff during the ancestral worship ceremony is symbolic in the sense that they represent all the food which is eaten at home which was also eaten by these late people.

Symbolism can also be realised in the bringing of the selected animal to the shrine. The selected animal is also given a name of one of the late grandfathers or ancestors of the family. The animal either represents that named person or the whole wealth of the family.

Performing of rituals for the first crops or fresh produce from the family fields is also symbolic. When a certain proportion or portion of the ploughed crops is presented to the ancestors on the shrine, that presented portion will represent the rest of the crops even those which are not yet ready or ripe. By performing rituals to the food presented to them on the shrine, the ancestors will have blessed and purified the whole produce.

Symbolism can also be realised in the gear or clothes worn or present during the ceremony. The type of gear is an indication of the type of the ritual performed at a particular household. A “Mngoni”, will be identified by the gear used during worship. A “Mundawu” will also be seen by the cloth used during the ritual. Utensils used many years ago by these people will be presented, like a calabash (Ntundzwani), a spear or a plate (Ndyelo) symbolises or represent all the utensils used and loved by these people.

The use or honour of certain things such as animals or creatures in a family is another form of symbolism within traditional worship ceremonies. These animals will have played an important role in the lives of these people, so they are supposed to be respected and be honoured

4.3 Summary

Symbolism in ancestral worship can be seen in the use of beer and snuff, the bringing of the selected animal to the shrine, the praying over of the crops, the gear worn or present during the ceremony, and the used and honour of certain things, animals or creatures in a family.

4.4 Conclusion

Symbolism in traditional worship is realised in the use of a variety of things such as the use of traditional beer and snuff, the bringing of the selected animal to the shrine, the performing of rituals over of the crops, the gear worn or presented during the ceremony,

and the use or honour of things such as, animals or creatures in a family, play a very important role in our lives. Because of this, we have to practice them and continue the legacy which was passed to us by our forefathers.

Chapter 5

Symbolism in Traditional healing (vun'anga)

5.1 Introduction

During the initiation of a “sangoma”, a lot of symbolism is used. Here is where a person who is to become a “sangoma”, demonstrate her acquired abilities and skills to the public for the first time. In this ceremony, the entire family members gather to witness one of their own perform and demonstrate to the whole community her capabilities as an “Inyanga”.

5.2 Symbolism during the graduation of a Sangoma or “ku thwasa”.

Initiation of a “Sangoma”, according to Mr. Mapoxo, starts from a point where one is sick or taken by the river spirits called “dzudza”. The family will have to go out to consult the bones to see what is bothering him or her. After this a traditional worship is held. Here they will consult with the bones to find out which ancestral spirit he/she is possessed with. An Inyanga is chosen to perform the initiation.

According to Miss. Violet Shirinda, a set of drums will be beaten testing which one incite the ancestors and to determine the ethnicity or type of a “Ndhlozi” that has possessed that particular person. Then the official hand-over “ku simekela/ ku nyiketa”, will be performed and drums will be beaten until the ancestors or “ndlhozi” comes out.

According to Mr. Hobyani Samuel Risimati, some herbs will be given to him/her to drink and to smear on his/her body. Some will be burned and made to inhale their smoke which will incite the ancestors. The ancestors will come out or reveal themselves. They will be asked to identify themselves and if it is alone or there are others. If more ancestral spirits want to reveal themselves, they will be given chance to come out by beating the drums and singing songs. They will be given chance to express their needs.

According to Mr. Ngomani Mackson, after this, a day for the initiation will be announced. The family of the possessed person will have to pay the inyanga all his dues before a person can be graduated. During the day of the graduation, Mr. Mbhiza Daniel indicated that a goat and chicken will be slaughtered. A beast if available can also be slaughtered. The graduate will be made to drink blood from this slaughtered animal. Traditional beer is also served.

According to Mr. Vukeya Harry, after beating of the drums and a lot of singing the initiate will be dressed in clothes that are demanded by the ancestral spirits. A gall-bladder of the slaughtered beast or goat will be hidden in a secretive place. The sacred bones “tinhlolo” and the strings made out of the skin of the slaughtered beast, which is smeared with blood and red soil or ochre, “tsumani” is also hidden.

For those who have been taken by “dzudza”, according to Mr. Mapoxo, drums will be beaten until they reappear again. They will be carrying a basket full of all their belongings which will be used for their practice. Mats will be laid on the initiate’s path from the river to his/her home. It is said that a reed would have grown out of his/her body at his/her back depending on the time spent in water. It is believed that they will become powerful “Inyangas” that will cure many diseases.

For the initiate to graduate, he has to find all the hidden articles. According to Mr. Hobyani Samuel Risimati, if he happens to find them all, he has graduated. He will be then given his “vun’anga”, and he has now qualified to can begin curing people. He is now an “Inyanga”.

5.3 Symbolism in traditional consultation and healing.

In consultation, according to Mr. Hobyani Samuel Risimati, when one arrives at the entrance of the sacred or consulting hut, shoes must be removed. The person who is consulting will indicate if he wants to be cured or want the “inyanga” to throw down the divine bones. If he knows what is bothering him, according to Mr. Mapoxo, there is no need for consulting with the bones. He will tell the sangoma what is bothering him or what the problem is and what he wants the “Sangoma” to do for him. But if he is not sure of what the problem is he will ask the “sangoma” to throw down the bones.

According to Miss Shirinda Violet, if bones have to be thrown, a certain amount of money will be put down, named “xitshunxa thevele”, meaning the key to the sack of the bones. After throwing the bones down, the person who came to consult will be told to pick them and say something or just blow some air on the bones, then throw them down again.

According to Mr. Vukea Harry, the sangoma using his/her tail of a Wildebeest, “hongonyi”, he will read what the bones are saying, and tossing and turning them, he/she will tell what is bothering her patient. He/she will also tell what should be done and what is not supposed to be done.

When a group or a family need to consult on something which is happening within their family, Mr. Hobyani Risimati and Mr. Mapoxo indicated that the “sangoma” will first determine through his/her bones on their behalf. In a case where someone is involved in witchcraft and the community or family want the sangoma to show them who the culprit is, the “mngoma” person will be consulted where a witchcraft quest “ku huma mngoma”, should be done. The sangoma will throw his/her bones. When the culprit is caught, he/she will be shaved ways or paths on his/her head as an indication that he/she was found to be the person who bewitches others.

In traditional healing, symbolism can be realised in the use of bones to identify what the problem is. The use of the specific clothes for different ancestral spirits is also symbolic because these clothes are used to show the type of ancestors that has possessed a certain

person. The name of the ancestor is another symbolism because the name will represent all the deeds of that particular person and this name will be given to the possessed person during her possession.

The drinking of blood from a slaughtered goat or chicken by the initiate is also symbolic in the sense that it shows that this person is no longer the same. This is a new person who is now possessed and is able to do things which a normal person can not do.

The hiding and finding of the gall-bladder is also symbolic because the gall-bladder is used to represent all the secrets which will be revealed by this person while practicing her/his healing as a traditional healer. The finding of the hidden gall-bladder symbolises that he/she will be able to reveal to causes of all diseases of her patients without any difficulty.

The removal of shoes at the entrance of the sacred hut or consultation-room is symbolic in the sense that, it indicates that the place which a person is about to enter is pure or “holy” and does not want all the impurities which a person may have stepped on during his/her walks of life.

The paying or putting down of the “xitshunxa thevele” money before the throwing down of the bones is also symbolic. The word means something which unties the bag or sack. The payment of this money therefore is a key to the opening of the ancestral hut which is needed by the healer to cure his/her patients.

The blowing of some air on the bones is also symbolic because it is this spirit which helps the bones to tell a person what the problem is. The shaving of ways or paths on the head of a person, who is suspected to be a witch, is the symbolic gesture which is used in traditional healing and traditional healing graduation ritual ceremonies.

5.4 Summary

Symbolism in traditional healing can be realised in the use of bones, the use of specific clothes, the name of the ancestor which is given to the possessed person, the drinking of blood, the search of a gall-bladder, the removal of shoes at the entrance of the consulting room, the paying of the consulting fees, the blowing of air on the bones and the shaving of the hair to make ways on the head of a person who is found by the bones or “sangoma” to be a witch.

The presence of the above mentioned symbolic gestures in traditional healing indicates the fact that these symbolic gestures play an important role in the lives of the “Vatsonga” people through their cultural practice and therefore has to be preserved for future generations.

5.5 Conclusion

The use of bones, use of the specific clothes, the slaughtering of a goats and chickens, the drinking of blood by the initiate, the hiding and finding of the gall-bladder, the removal of shoes at the entrance of the sacred hut or consultation-room, the paying or putting down of the “xitshunxa tshevele” money before bones are thrown, the blowing of some air on the bones and the shaving of ways or paths on the head of a person, are all symbolic gestures which are used during traditional healing practices and its ritual ceremonies.

Chapter 6

Symbolism in traditional marriages

6.1 Introduction

Marriage is one of the practices which bonded the Vatsonga people together. It is full of special ritual performances which have symbolic meanings. In Vatsonga tribe it is not encouraged to marry from other tribes. Marriages were arranged by adults who will choose a wife for their son who they think will be suitable to meet the needs of that of her husband and the family at large.

6.2 The Xitsonga marriage proposal

Amongst the Vatsonga people, it is not permitted for a man to find or propose to a woman himself. According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani Phirhwani, when a man feels ready to marry and after when he has collected enough money to can marry a wife, he has to send some elders to go and propose a wife for him. They will immediately go to a place where they have seen a girl who has recently been initiated.

According to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, this delegation will tell the members of that family that they are looking for girls for marriage proposal. They will immediately summon all the girls of the neighbourhood. When all the girls have arrived, they will talk to them starting with the preferred one. If she agrees, according to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, a bead string or “vuhlalu” called “xizambhani” will be given to the husband to be 's delegates by the girl. The delegates will give her a “musomi or sinda” and a 0,25c for what is called “ku qoma”.

Mrs. Nwa-Mafemani Matlhava indicated that, after this, the man will send another delegation to initiate a “lobola” process. According to Mrs. Nwa-Hasani Phirhwani, before they leave, he has to invite his aunt who has to perform the ancestral ceremony “mphahlo”, where the ancestors will be told of what is to be done and the money will be

shown to them in order to bless the marriage. This money has to spend a night at the family shrine before it can be used.

The following day, according to Mrs. N'wa-Phelani Shivambu, the delegation of young girls will be sent to the bride's family. Upon arrival, which will be late in the afternoon, they will sit at the gate until it is dark.

When it is dark they will cough so that the family could hear them. They will send a girl to fetch them, they, according to Mrs. N'wa-Hasani Phirhwani, will not leave the gate until a 0,10c coin is given to them as a pleading present. Holding a lamp, they will now enter the bride's home. Arriving at the centre of the houses, they will sit down to be bought by a 0,10c again, is then that they will enter the house, where a 0,10c again has to be given to them for them to sit on the mat. According to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, even when given food, they will not eat until money is given to them. They have to be bought for any activity they have to perform.

After when the greetings have been exchanged, according to Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi, they will tell them that they have been sent to say:

(Hi nga lumiwi hi timbyana)

This means that there will be visitors tomorrow and they wish to be accepted with open hands. This will mark the end of the activities to be done during the first day of the marriage ceremony.

6.3 The "lobola" ritual.

In the morning, according to Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani, the girls who came the previous night will be given water to bath then food will be served. The delegation will then arrive. After when the whole family has gathered, they will send a messenger to the visitors to say:

(Timbyana hi chuchile, vonakani)

This means they are now ready for the negotiation to begin. According to Mrs..N’wa-Risimati Shivambu, the groom’s delegates will send their own messenger with a cloth or a mat or money for the foundation called “mandlalelo”, two snuff containers which are accompanied by a 0,25c, for the father and 0,20c for the mother. A certain amount will be asked by the bride’s family for “ku landza mhani masin’wini and mbava timbalelweni”. According to Mrs. N’wa-Mafemani Matlhava, money for “vhula xifuva” which is the money which will open the chest or memory of the parents to indicate how much the lobola is. Money called “matlhomanyangweni” which according to Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani, which represents the “knobkerrie” which is used by the father to guard the house, will also be requested. This money plays an important role of protecting the rest of the “lobola” money from thieves and any evil doings.

After when the whole amount has been asked by the family, Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi indicated that, an amount of 0,20c or less is asked as a wallet for the mother. A blanket for the mother and a jacket for the father is requested. When all the requested money has been paid, Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu indicated that, the “lobola” ceremony is over. When this is over, then, according to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, it will be time to eat slaughter goats and drink to celebrate.

According to Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani, the “lobola” money has to be showed to the ancestors through the worship ritual and has to spend a night at the shrine again. The ancestors of the family of the bride have to be told or alerted of the fact that their granddaughter is getting married. A “mphahlo” ceremony has to be held on her behalf.

This according to Mrs N’wa-Risimati, is the how the “lobola” is done according to the Vatsonga customs.

6.4 The marriage ceremony

After the payment of lobola, according to Mrs. N’wa-phelani Shivambu, the bride’s family has to brew some beer to accompany their child to her husband. People will be called to take the bride to-be to her husband’s place. This is called “Ku rhwala mthimbhu”. On arrival Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi, ladies or young girls will have to do what is called “ku korhoka” which is to clean, cook, prepare or grind mealies, fetch firewood and smear the floors and hut with cow dungs.

According to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, a goat will be slaughtered for the pilgrimage. Mrs. N’wa-Phelani Shivambu confirmed by saying that, the beer which will be drunk during this ceremony is referred to as “byalwa bya mati” from the saying that: Hi vuyisa mati, where a bride is referred to as water as she will be responsible with fetching water for the whole family and be the one to prepare them warm water for bathing.

From the goat slaughtered for the pilgrimage, Mrs. N’wa-Risimati Shivambu indicated that, a hind-leg, the head and the skin, are not supposed to be used. They have to be carried back to the bride’s place as “Msumu”. After this ceremony the others may go back leaving only one girl who is known as “Xangwani” who should stay behind helping the bride with household chores and to settle in.

This person, according to N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani, will be accompanied with a cloth, “nceka”, and money after a month or so. The bride will have all this time hidden herself by putting a cloth called “nturhu”, over her head. This will only be removed after when the members of her new family including her husband would have paid her some money to reveal herself which is called “ku lula”.

According to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, after a month, the husband must take his wife to visit her parents. This is done by giving them an amount of R10-00. This symbolizes the fact that he is now giving her permission to visit her parent when ever necessary. According to Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani, when this man is given food, the whole chicken is brought before him. He has to eat all the meat except the legs, wings, gizzard, and the head which are reserved for the head of the family, and must not be eaten by any person but him.

6.5 The birth of the first child.

In Xitsonga culture, according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, it is not permitted for the husband to sleep with his newly wed wife. The bride was to sleep with her in-laws until such time that they see it fit which is usually not less than three month. The husband, according to Mrs. N’wa-Mafemani Matlhava, will have to give her wife some money for her to talk to him which is referred to as “mali ya xikhiya”. His parents, according to Mrs. Nwa-Risimati Shivambu, will then tell the bride to prepare warm water and cold water, and put it at the gates. The bride will have to bath her mother-in-law, first with warm water then with cold water. Thereafter, she will have to bath her also. The father and his son will exchange bathing each other. After this ritual the pot used will be left at the gate and the husband and wife will now be shown their house where they will have to sleep from now on-wards.

This ritual, according to Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi, is performed without saying a word to each other and it is believed that if this is not done, the woman will not conceive. When the woman becomes pregnant, according to Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi, she will have to inform her mother-in-law who will ask her the duration of her pregnancy, if it is only one month, she will take out one of her “vusenga” from her feet, and hang it on the wall; this was their way of counting the delivery period or month. She will continue hanging these “vusenga” in correlation with the number of the month of the pregnancy until the ninth month.

When a child is born, Mrs. N'wa-Risimati Shivambu indicated that, the wife will again be separated from her husband. According to Mrs. N'wa-Mafemani Matlhava, if the child is born in the absence of the father, on coming back, the elders have to prepare "xihlangwa" barks and leaves which are to be grinded. This grinded "xihlangwa" will be spread on the way to the house where the wife and the child are. He will have to step on those leaves until he enters the house.

According to Mrs. Nwa-George Machavi, the wife will put some water in a bowl wherein she has put a "risenga" or "msomi" or "sinda". The man will have to wash his eyes and hands. Take the "risenga" out of the water and put it on the hand or wrist of his wife and say "Hi vuyisile". He will therefore ask the gender of the child. He will sprinkle the child with water and then he will be given the child to hold by his wife. From now onwards he will be allowed to see or hold the child without any restrictions.

6.6 The notification of the birth of the child to the bride's parents and the ceremony of the child.

After the birth of the child, Mrs. N'wa-Hasani Phirhwani, indicated that a messenger will be sent to the family of the bride with some money which can be a R10-00 note. Upon arrival, she will have to ululate as a sign of the good news which she is bringing and the parents and some of their neighbours will join in ululation. After getting the news, they will have to prepare themselves to go and see the new born child. They will have to brew some beer, which may be ten clay-pots or calabashes. Mrs. N'wa-Risimati Shivambu, also said that they will have to buy clothes for the child, the mother and the child's grandmother. A goat is slaughtered and the skin used to carry the child.

Upon arrival they will have to ululate to announce the purpose of their coming. A great feast will be held where the he-goat will be slaughtered. According to Mrs. N'wa-Mafemani Matlhava, the two grandmothers will join hands in preparing the skin for the child. The skin is prepared by smearing red ochre or red soil after being softened with a sedimentary rock known as "muhuthu".

6.7 The ceremony of the immunization of the child (Ku thusa n'wana).

Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo indicated that, when the child is born in a family, it is a tradition that the child and the mother should stay in the house for some few days before coming out. When it is time for the mother and the baby to come out, an “inyanga” will be called to perform the immunization process. He will, according to Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi, make small cuts on the forehead, the back and the centre of the head of the child. He will then put some herbs and medicine on those cuts.

According to Mrs. N’wa-Phelani Shivambu, the “inyanga” will make a band with some strings, “xitshungulu”, which will be tied on the waist of the child. Another one will be tied across the body of the child. This is done to prevent some different types of diseases from infecting the child, especially “milombyani” .Mrs. N’wa-George indicated also that, when the child is not well, the mother will simple take out one of the bands, put it in boiled water, sprinkle or bath the child with it or give the child to drink.

6.8 The “Rihojahoja” dance ceremony.

When the child is old enough to can come out, Mrs. N’wa-Hasani Phirhwani indicated that, some mealies mixed with pumpkin seeds and nuts will be cooked. Some young children will be given these mealies. They will have to sing a song, “Rihojahoja tshika n’wananga” circulating the house and on reaching where the mother and child are, they will have to hit the child on the stomach with the mealies while eating some of them. After this ceremony, according to Mrs. Maxawu Mhlongo, the child will be able to go out with his or her mother.

6.9 The “Mbuti ya xidzwele” ceremony.

For a first-born child, a ceremony called “mbuti ya xidzwele” is performed. According to Mrs. N’wa-Risimati Shivambu, the grand parents or the father of the child will have to provide a goat to be slaughtered for this ceremony. Beer will be served. Mrs. N’wa-

Hasani Phirhwani, indicated that the skin of the goat will also be prepared by both grandmothers for the mother to carry her child with. The skin, according to Mrs. N’wa-George Machavi, will be smeared with red ochre “tsumani” and oil from a “Nhlampfurha” plant. This goatskin will be used to carry the child until he is old enough to walk on his/her own. It will also be used for the other children. It may also be passed to her.

6.10 Summary

Symbolism in cultural marriages is seen in the use of a bead string or “vuhlalu” called “xizambhani”; a “musomi or sinda produced by the man’s delegation to the girl or woman who has accepted their proposal; the payment of “lobola”; the spending of the lobola money on the family shrine before it can be used; the coughing of the girls at the gates of the bride or grooms family; and the payment of the pleading present (ku lula).

The use of the saying, “Hi nga lumiwi hi timbyana” and “timbyana hi chuchile, vonakani”; the money for “vhula xifuva”, “matlhomanyangweni” and “ku landza mhani na mbava”; the blanket for the mother and a jacket for the father; the carrying of beer to the groom’s place (Ku rhwala mthimbhu/ byalwa bya mati); to work at the groom’s relatives’s places (ku korhoka); the slaughtering of the goat “mbuti ya xidzele” and “mhakarhiso”; the leaving of some designated parts of meat (msumu); and the covering of the head by the bride (nturhu).

The popping out of the key fee (mali ya xikhiya); the use of warm and cold water before the sleeping together for the first time of the bride and groom; the hanging of the “risenga” on the wall; the stepping on the “xihlangwa’ leaves before entering the hut where the child is; the putting of the “risenga”, “msomi” or “sinda on the wrist of the child’s mother by her husband before seeing the child; the washing of eyes and hands by the father before taking the child from its mother; the ululation; and the performance of the “rihojahoja’ ceremony by young children before the child could come out of seclusion.

6.11 Conclusion

It is clear from the above that traditional marriage is full of symbolism and when understood can be practiced with dignity and pride as this symbolism hide the real meaning and when fully understood bears a useful meaning.

Chapter 7

Symbolism in the ordinance of chiefs and kings

7.1 Introduction

In the ordinance of a chief or a king, a lot of symbolism is observed. When a chief dies, if he was a real chief who inherited his chieftaincy from his predecessor, he will have to spit out a “ndalama”, which is a bunch of rolled fur from different animals eaten by a lion. It is believed that this bunch of fur is a selection of a special fur which is removed by a lion before eating its prey.

7.2 Symbolism in the ordinance of “Vatsonga” chiefs and kings.

According to Mr. Maboko Samuel, a “ndalama” is a collection of all the animals which a lion has killed. This fur is rolled with mucus and stored in a special pouch in the mouth of the lion. Before a lion dies, this fur which is usually coated with blood and mucus is spilt out of its mouth. It is this special fur which gives the lion its boldness and that hollow-bully voice which can travel for a very long distance and frightens its preys.

The spitting out of this “ndalama” by a dying lion, according to Mr. Shirinda M.D, is equated with the fact that if a chief is a rightful owner of his chieftaincy, he is supposed to have swallowed a “ndalama” as it is a custom which would have given him his dignity and made him a respectable chief. When he dies the “ndalama” has to come out like it happens to the lion. The lion is regarded to be the king of the jungle, so whatever is done by the lion, is likely to be emulated by humans.

According to Mr. Hlungwani Samuel, before the death of a ruling chief or king, this special fur called “Ndalama” is given to the rightful heir who has to swallow it. If the one who has to sit on the throne is not the rightful one, the “ndalama” will not pass down his throat. This is symbolic in the sense that it indicates who the rightful chief is.

Mr. Shirinda M.D, also indicated that in a case where someone has to sit on the throne for a short while, to hold the position of the chieftaincy for a while, where the rightful owner is still under age or is absent from home, the one to sit must be given the “ndalama” to keep it. He will not have to swallow it. This will give him that respect which the people had to give to their king.

During ordinances of chiefs or kings, a “ndalama” is used symbolically to indicate that a chief or king who is ordained is like a lion. He will be as frightening as a lion. All his people will fear him as the animals of the jungle are frightened by a lion, their king.

In the ordinance of the chief, according to Mr Harry Vukeya, a leopard skin has to be put on the shoulders of the newly crowned chief. This is symbolic in the sense that a leopard is a very dangerous animal which always protect its young ones. When one happens to come across a leopard which has cubs, you have to know that if it can see you, you are in great danger. The chief as the custodian of his people is entrusted with a nation which he has to take care of. He must be a fearless defender of his subjects.

To indicate that this person is a chief, he has to wear a special headgear made from a leopard or cheetah skin. This gives him the dignity of being a leader and this differentiates him from the rest of his subjects. It also serves as a crown as he as the chief of a tribe, has fought and defeated many armies of his enemies. Mr. Mapoxo said that, this is because of the fact that a chief was chosen from those brave warriors who had fought many battles and emerged victoriously. People needed protection, so they chose to be led by these brave soldiers.

Mr. Harry Vukeya indicated that during the ordinance of a chief, the new chief is given a shield and a spear or assegai which is also symbolic in the sense that he is given power to defend his people without any fear as he possess the strength and power of the shield to protect his people with and an assegai or spear to kill all his enemies.

7.3 Summary

Symbolism in the ordinance of a chief or a king is indicated by the coming out of a “ndalama”, the swallowing of the “ndalama”, the “ndalama” not being able to pass down the throat of the chief who is not the rightful owner of the chieftaincy. The leopard skin which is worn on the shoulders of the king or chief, the special headgear made from a leopard or cheetah skin which the chief or king wear on his head and the shield and spear which is given to the chief when ordained.

7.4 Conclusion

The performance of the above mentioned ritual practices is the key to the respect and honour bestowed upon our traditional kings and chiefs. Their practice is the only way in which they can be maintained. They can only be preserved when people understand their symbolic meanings and practice them with dignity and pride.

8.1 Introduction

It is very clear that in the performance of the “Xitsonga” cultural ritual ceremonies, a lot of symbolism are used. It is due to the use of this symbolism which led to the neglect of their practice and performance. Many people come to loose the understanding of their importance through lack of understanding of their real meaning, so they decided to do away with them.

8.2 Findings

Many people saw it not fit to practice these rituals as they regarded them as a waste of time and a lack of knowledge. The rendering of them to be useless to their everyday due to the fact that they didn’t know their meanings and value made it difficult for the elders to reinstate it. After this research, it is apparent that traditional ritual ceremonies played a certain practical and useful role in the “Xitsonga” culture. The ritual performances are critical in the following ways:

8.2.1 Death related rituals

The use of saliva in death notice, played a vital role to indicate that the occurrence of death is something which is not welcomed, so they have to spit to show that they do not support it but despise it. The use of money in the reporting of the death of a married woman, is done to indicate that although she was married, she still belong to her paternal family.

The use of “nhlahli” or “ritlangi” also plays an important role as it is known that these plants do not die with easy, they are used to indicate the direction where the head of the buried person is facing. The “marula” log used as a pillow in burial is used due to the fact that a “marula” tree germinates easy when its branch is put under the soil. It is used to mark the position of the grave.

The use of a “nala” which is tied around the necks of the family members of the deceased is used as a sign to identify those who are mourning so as not to say something which might bring back the hurt they are trying to forget. They must also be respected because they are still mourning. No one is allowed to propose a widow who is still mourning, so the “nala” made it easier for anyone to recognise her.

The use of the rolled porridge, also play an imported role during death. It is used as a medium through which the medicine which is used to make the bereaved strong during the mourning period and cleansed them of all the impurities and diseases associated with death. The shaving of hair is also used as a sign which is used to identify a man or woman whose partner has passed on. The shaving of all the family members is done in order for the whole family to identify themselves with the one who is left behind.

The closing of the gate is just an indication that the head of the family is late therefore a new man may be able to come in and continue with the wife of the deceased, which was not permissible while he was still around. It serves the same purpose as the removal of the cap of the hut. The burial of the foreigner outside the village was done because as it was not known what killed him, they were trying to prevent the diseases from spreading with the whole community or village. The burial of the king at night served to show the respect that a leader deserves. His burial during such an odd time served to indicate that he is different from any ordinary community member as he is their leader.

The putting of the branch on the resting place of the people carrying a deceased person is used to mark the spot where these people have rested. As we usually respect the dead, it is not good for a person to sit on top of a grave, that resting place must also be respected. The branch is used to mark this place.

The survival of these valuable activities and ceremonies therefore rest on our honours. If we know their importance, it is therefore up to us to value and honour them. By so doing these rituals and ceremonies will last forever.

8.2.2 Female and male initiations

The use of a stump from the middle of a foot-path which is used to cook the porridge which stops the menstrual blood of the girl, who is to become an initiate, is important because this gives time for the family to can prepare for the ceremony. It gives time to notify even some relatives who are far away so that they may be able to attend the function. The putting of the pot upside-down which was used to cook the porridge also plays an important role to stop the menstruation.

The eating of the “Xipinya” porridge also play an important role in the sense that as this food is taken away by the girl’s grandmother which is an indication that she is the one whole will always come to the rescue in any time of trouble. The hitting of the initiate by her mother with an “abba” which is a skin of a goat used to carry a child at her back (dzovo) is another is of great value to the “Vatsonga” people. It is a passing of parental hood from the mother to her child, which is a blessing for her future motherhood.

The dances of “geregere”, “vujelejele”, and the “mselesele” dances, mark the beginning and culmination of the initiation ceremony. They are dances of celebration and entertainment which announce a certain stage in the ceremony. The drinking of beer and the snuffing of snuff are used to announce and to pass a certain message which might be the beginning or end of the ceremony.

The drinking of beer from a kudu horn which is done at the gate in the final day of the initiation is a medicine which is used to cure the infertility diseases which may have been acquired during the initiation ceremony. This is done symbolical to hide the fact that during the puberty stage which is marked by the physical and hormonal changes in the girls developmental stages, is the one in which a girl is more susceptible to all diseases which may render her infertile.

The choosing of a small boy in the act of the “ku ganga” is vital due to the fact that the boy represent or stand for her future husband which serves to see whether she is capable of choosing a good, caring and responsible husband.

The availability of the ever burning fire in the house of the initiate serves to protect the initiate from being attacked by the evil doers, a fire must be kept burning, by so doing preventing them to gain access to the house as they are afraid of light and to be seen. The opening and closure of the drum during the ceremony is a sign to tell all the elderly women that certain have been done and a fine is needed.

The putting on of a shawl is used to distinguish an initiate from the others. The climbing of the “xikayi” tree is used to educate a girl that in marriage she will encounter a lot of sufferings but the initiation serves to prepare her to deal with those sufferings by way of endurance and not by running away. The moving of the branch is used to announce the beginning of the initiation. The “murileli” in the initiation is the person who stands in the position of the mother and is the person who will bear the sufferings of the girl during her initiation. All the cruel things which will be performed on the girl as part of the initiation rituals, will be seen by this person who will bear with her all her feeling and sufferings as a parent.

The hiding away of the cloth which was used during her periods is very crucial as the playing with the cloth will be like playing with her womb. For her to be safe and remain fertile, being in a position to can conceive and bear children, she should take care of her things, including her sacred blood. Nobody must see her menstruation blood as evil people may use it to bewitch her and make her barren.

The giving of the bracelet (sindza), the “xipfune” beads, at the end of the ceremony is like giving her a graduation certificate which symbolises the fact that she is now an adult person or woman who is now ready to be married, and to can mother a child. The “muhakarhiso” or “mgantliso” strings also signifies the fact that she is now a matured woman who can now be married and be able to have her own children.

The holding and use of lashes during the initiation period indicates to us that an initiation school is underway. It is also used to distinguish those who have been to the initiation school and those who are still to be initiated, who are referred to as “maxuvuru”.

The white cloth worn at the end of the initiation represents the purity which is seen by the fact that that blood which was there before has resulted into bringing out a mature and responsible person who is free of all boyish or childish naughtiness and lack of sense of being responsible.

The breaking of the food calabash or container which was used to put food for a deceased initiate is a sign to indicate that the owner is dead and serve to announce the death to the bereaved family. The songs which are sung the day the initiates come back home announce the jubilation of the parents as their children have come back home safely.

The giving and choosing of new names is an indication that a new being is born out of the old body by the initiation. The putting of chicken feathers on the food which was not properly cooked, which symbolises that a chicken is needed as a fine is a means of communication. The putting of “tiharhi” at the gates indicates the area where women end near the initiation school and the “mayikhweni” area. The “mayiwani” dance during the alterations period and ceremony marks the end of the period where things were tough for the boys and indicates that now is the time for jubilation as the time to go home has arrived.

The spreading of seeds on the initiates at the chief’s kraal symbolises that these newly graduated initiates are no longer boys but men who are now ready to be responsible fathers and who are now matured adults who can be able to impregnate a woman and be able to be a responsible husband or father.

8.2.3 Ancestral worship

The use of beer and snuff during the ancestral worship ceremony is used to represent all the food which is eaten at home which was also eaten by these late people. By giving them beer is equivalent to giving them beer as wash down to quench their thirst after a meal.

The bringing of the selected animal to the shrine plays an important role of presenting the whole family and their belongings before their ancestors which will serve to connect the living and the dead. The selected animal has also been given a name of one of the late grandfathers or ancestors of the family; either represents that named person or the whole wealth of the family. The praying over of the crops or fresh produce from the family fields serves to stand for the rest of the crops even those which are not yet ready or ripe. By blessing or purifying the food presented to them on the shrine, the ancestors will have blessed and purified the whole produce.

The clothes worn or presented during the worship ceremony is an indication of the type of the ancestors worshipped at a particular household. A “Mngoni”, will be identified by the gear used during worship. A “Mundawu” will also be seen by the cloth used during the ritual. Utensils used many years ago by these people will be present, like a calabash (ntundzwani), a spear or a plate (Ndyelo) represents all the utensils used and loved by these people.

The use and honour of certain things, animals or creatures in a family, is another form of symbolism within traditional worship ceremonies. These animals would have played an important role in the life of these people, so they are supposed to be respected and be honoured, preserved and conserved.

8.2.4 The graduation of traditional healers and consultation

The slaughtering of a goat and chicken, from which blood will be drunk by the initiate and the drinking of blood, shows that this person is no longer the same. This is a new person who is now possessed and is able to do things which a normal person can not do.

The hiding and finding of the gall-bladder is used to represent all the secrets which will be revealed by this person while practicing her healing as a traditional healer. The finding of the hidden gall-bladder symbolises that she will be able to reveal to causes of all diseases on her patients without any difficulty.

The removal of shoes at the entrance of the sacred hut or consultation-room is used to display respect for the elders by respecting the ancestors who are believed to have been housed in that particular hut or room. It also indicates that the place which a person is about to enter is pure or “holy” and does not must want all the impurities which a person may have trampled during her walks of life.

The paying or putting down of the “xitshunxa ntshevele” money before the throwing down of the bones is a key to the opening of the house of information which is needed by the healer to cure his/her patient. It is also pleading money for the ancestors to come up with the necessary help for the sick or troubled one.

The blowing of some air on the bones is like blowing life to those dead bones so as to make them alive in order for them to give the required information. It also serves as a recitative spirit which gives the voice to the bones which will tell the person what is bordering him/her. The shaving of ways or paths on the head of a person, who is suspected to be a witch or trouble maker, is used as a sign to show that this person has been found or detected by a “sangoma” to be practicing witchcraft.

8.2.5 Marriage related rituals

The giving of the “xizambhani” beads string by the proposed girl as a token of her acceptance of marriage proposal and the giving of the “msomi” or “sinda” by the man, also serves the same purpose. The payment of the “lobola” to the bride’s parents serves as a token of appreciation from the man to the girl’s parents for raising for him a good wife.

The spending of the “lobola” money on the family shrine before and after payment serves to submit the two to the ancestors to be blessed. The coughing of the girls is a sign that somebody is at the gates and needs to be given permission to enter the yard.

The payment of the money to plead with the girls to perform a certain action is the means of communication between the girls and the family members. The saying “Hi nga lumiwi hi timbyana” and “timbyana hi ntshunxile” are used to indicate that the visitors are welcomed.

The money for “Vhula xifuva” is used to open the chest of the girl’s parents in order for them to can charge the appropriate amount for their girl’s “lobola”. The Money called “matlhomanyangweni” is used symbolically as it plays an important role of protecting the rest of the “lobola” money from thieves and any evil doings like is done by the “knobkerrie.

The presentation with a blanket for the mother and a jacket for the father represents the fact that as the man is now marrying their daughter, he is now becoming one of their sons, so he has to show then the fact that as their son-in-law he will be able to take good care of them.

The carrying of beer to the groom’s place (Ku rhwala mthimbhu), is used to represent the bride who is taken to her new husband and in-laws. To work at the groom’s relative’s places (ku korhoka) is used to send a message and a lesson to their child that when she is left along at her new family, she has to be able to serve her in-laws and their relatives. To be a good wife to her husband, she must be able to service his parents and the family at large.

The slaughtering of the goat for “mbuti ya xidzele” and “mhakarhiso” which is only done for the first born children is used to celebrate the fact that their daughter has achieved maturity and she will soon be a mother herself.

The leaving of some designated parts of meat (Msumu), like the hind-leg, the head, the gizzard, serve to indicate to those who are left behind that we have been fed appropriately at the bride or groom’s place. The covering of the head of the bride (nturhu) with a cloth which prohibit people from seen her face before paying her something, is symbolic because was used to indicate that these lady is untouched, she is still a virgin or does not have a child with another man. In appreciation for the way she has behaved, she has to be crowned by being bought with money to see or talk to her.

The popping out of the key fee (mali ya xikhiya) by the husband to her new wife, is similar to the unveiling of the head gear explained above. The husband has to pay something in order for him to break her virginity. The use of warm and cold water before the sleeping together for the first time of the bride and groom is used symbolical to indicate that the woman was warm because she would not allow any person to touch her while waiting or preparing herself for her future husband. Now that she has met hi, she has to be cooled down, and be ready to meet her husband who will have the authority to deflower her. The same is done for the man.

The hanging of the “risenga” on the wall was used as a mechanism of counting the number of month during pregnancy as they were not literate and could not use numbers to count. It was used to count the month of the pregnancy so as to know the exact month when the baby would be due. This was also used to check whether their son was indeed the real father of the child because if the child is born before the expected time it will mean that she came to the marriage being pregnant, and their son is not the father of the child.

The stepping on the “xihlangwa’ leaves before entering the hut where the child is was used to check whether the husband has slept with someone else during the seclusion period of the mother and her child and was also used as the remedy to wash his feet in order to cleanse himself, and he would not have any negative effect on the health of the child.

The putting of the “risenga”, “msomi” or “sinda” on the wrist of the child’s mother by her husband before seeing the child is a gesture to say thank you to the wife for bearing him a child. The washing of eyes and hands by the father before taking the child from its mother was used to cleanse himself in order to touch the new creature that is free from all impurities of the world.

The ululation announces the jubilation that has been brought to the two families by the birth of the child. The performance of the “Rihojahoja” ceremony by young children before the child could come out of seclusion serves to introduce the child to all the worldly things which some of them might make the child sick and some would the child well and healthy.

8.2.6 The ordinance of kings and chiefs

The “ndalama” is used to make the king bold and be respected and feared in order for him to perform his duties. The leopard skin which is worn on the shoulders of the king or chief, the special headgear made from a leopard or cheetah skin which the chief or king wear on his head and the shield and spear which is given to the chief when ordained serves to distinguish the king from the rest of his subjects.

8.3 Recommendations

The Zulu's and Swati's practice their traditional rituals with pride and dignity. The reed dance which is criticised world wide due to the fact that it goes hand in hand with the testing of virginity and the choosing of a wife by the monarchy does not stop to be performed. This is the result of the fact that they are proud of their culture and they know what they are doing because they explain its essence to their younger generations.

The Vhavenda people practice the "domba" dance ritual, which they are very proud of. Their dances and their traditional gear are performed and worn with pride and dignity because they know their essence and vitality in their cultural and social well being. The Tswana's perform their initiation rituals and ceremonies with pride.

For people to practice these rituals, it goes without saying that they have to be educated about the meaning and importance of these rituals. Books and oral interpretations have to be given to those who want to have more knowledge on these issues. This will limit its criticism where people saw its renditions as a waste of time and money, and be aware of its importance and value through their symbolic meanings.

That era where people just follow their leaders without asking where they were going is gone. People have to be told about the essence of their actions. The era of "swa yila", and do not explain that why is it so, is long gone. For our cultural rituals to be performed with pride and dignity, the "Vatsonga" people must explain to their children the importance and the role played by these ritual ceremonies in their day to day lives.

8.4 Conclusion

The role played by ritual ceremonies in the "Xitsonga" culture will only be well understood when in their performance the symbolism which is used can be well understood. This can be done if while performing these rituals their essence and value can be explained. It can also be a good idea if good records of this performances and their

value can be kept in libraries where they will be safe and accessible to allow anybody who wants to know anything about to be able to read and study them.

This is because the role played by ritual ceremonies owe their survival to the recording and explanation of their symbolic meanings and value in writing and recordings unlike it used to be before writing, where it was passed from one generation to another through the work of orator. Having been written down will allow them to survive for many years to come.

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