

The Body ritual among the Nacirema

The Nacirema are a group of people living in North America in a territory bordering the Canadian Cree and Arawak (Linton, 1936). There is no clear information on their origin though most of the historians say that they came from the east. Nacirema believe that their culture originated from Notgnihsaw who is well known for chopping down a cherry tree and throwing of wampum across Pa-To-Mac River. It is therefore believed that the spirit of truth resided in that river. Their body ritual is conducted on a regular basis based on their beliefs. The main focus in the ritual is the human body where they perform unique ceremonial aspects (Miner 1956). The Nacirema community has a strong belief that the human body is unworthy, ugly and easily affected with disease. So the only hope to revert back this state is by invoking spiritual powers through unique rituals and ceremonies. In every household, there are at least one or more shrines that are dedicated for this function. A society is considered powerful based on the number of shrines available in their houses for this purpose. The shrines are considered sacred and approached with a lot of respect. The rich in the society use stone to construct their shrines whereas the poor try their best and use pottery while making their shrines. Every day, one member of the family enters the shrine, bows their head and uses holy waters that are sourced from water temple where priests make them spiritually clean. The review of Nacirema ritual life in this text appears totally magical and beyond human comprehension. It is so difficult to understand how these people have lived such a complex life of daily rituals since inception. Looking with a keen eye where civilization has advanced, it's easy to consider the ritual irrelevant and unworthy. (Malinowski,1948).

References

1. Linton, R. (1936). *The study of Man*. New York, D. Appleton-Century Co.
2. Malinowski, B.(1948) *Magic, Science, and Religion*. Glencoe, The Free Press.
3. Miner, H. (1956). *Body Ritual among the Nacirema*. *American Anthropologist*, 58 (3)