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Medicine Magic And Religion Of The Lovedu

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to the spirits. In its preparation, which is in the hands of old women or girls under puberty, care must be taken that the eleusine is stamped, not ground on the grindstone, and that none of it is tasted before the gods have been given. Ordinary beer is tasted to see if it is ready, but munhaba has to be smelt or tested by stirring with a twirler. Though the married women of the village play no part other than being present at the religious rites on such occasions, it is the duty of the chief wife in whose courtyard the ceremony will take place, to smear with dung the spot where they will pour and to carry the beer in the khirodwana basket used in honour of the gods. The occasion is one of joy. The women have already in all likelihood sung lesugu songs special to the occasion amid joyous trillings while preparing the beer and, since in addition to the special beer of the gods, much ordinary beer will have been prepared, a wide circle of relatives, including those of the wives, will have been invited.

When the queen held her thugula ceremony in August, 1938, Didi was despatched at 8 o'clock in the morning to fetch home Magovo, the cow dedicated to the queen's mother, for the harvest giving should take place fairly early in the day, though in practice the rule is often observed in the breach and we have seen ceremonies take place after midday. As it is not easy to drive home one cow of a herd, all were driven and put into the khoro (village courtyard) where everyone had gathered. When Magovo's hind legs had been tied, the chief wife of Mulogwane, deceased brother of the chief to whose family the queen is khadi, appeared

carrying in a basket a calabash of beer and the queen's mother's beads (a string of mudfish, the well-known 'beads of the water'). Pouring some of the beer in a wooden platter, she handed it to the queen who, holding the beads in her hands, placed it before Magovo with the words, 'Here is beer, Magovo of Muhale (one of the earliest kings), beer of the new corn. We say stop this epidemic (wind) to which you have exposed us. Here, too, are your beads. We see neither people (subjects) nor riches; we see only that poverty which you have left for us' (Su-vo vyalwa Magovo a Muhale, mavele a maswa a muphaba. Re re ri thivelene diphefo je. Ge lena le re vulelaho. Le vutho a re va vone. Lekhumo a re le vone. Le muruga wenu su-wo. Rena moonu re vone vona thaiu ya ne'e le re sieqeho yona fala). The cow sipped a little of the beer which had mealie leaves placed on it, whereupon all prostrated themselves in greeting (hu losha) while one or two women rent the air with their joyous trillings. Sometimes (but it was omitted on this occasion) the beads are placed round the neck of the cow and left there for the whole day.

The dedicated cow having been tied, all now repaired to the courtyard of the chief wife of Mulogwane where they sat round the shrine, the queen and sons and daughters near by, wives further away, while the small children were made to kneel on the slope on the lower side of the shrine (a mound of earth) hands together and palms up. Pouring out beer on the ground, the queen said a prayer similar to the previous one, adding that the gods must tell one another and not leave anyone out. Then, drinking a little herself, she placed the calabash on the ground

for the next person to take up and drink. Each one in turn placed the gourd on the ground for the next to take up, till all the relatives (excluding wives) had drunk, when it was returned to the queen. She drank once more saying, 'He who gives the gods must not remain hungry' (Mo-fa vadimo ha a lele le dala) and laid the calabash upside down on the mound. The small children lapped up the beer from the ground, and trilling and hu lasha marked the end of the ceremony.

Now pots of beer for the crowd that had gathered were brought out and general drinking began. After a while the men took out the drums and began dancing an old dance, the matagwa. Thereafter the women began the sacred lesugu songs to which men and women danced in a ring in the courtyard of the chief wife. The queen herself beat the big drum. It was now near sunset. Suddenly a wail like the bleating of a shee was heard; another, then another, in the direction of the bush behind the village. It was the zwidajane, ancestral spirits, come to join in the joy and revelry of the living.(Their part is played by one or two old men from a different village who, secreted in the bush, whistle out commands and songs on special instruments). They opened (hu suma)the next song and joined in the singing of the women, all in the whistling language which people make out by its tone. Later more beer was brought out and when the zwidajane began a new song no one took any notice. 'If you are drinking beer, what are we to drink', came the wails of the zwidajaneand a pot of beer was brought to the bush by a few older men. Dancing and singing continued till the small hours of the morning

when the sounds of the zwidajane disappeared in the direction of Maulwe, the burial grove of the dead queens, and the revellers, happy and drunk from beer of the thugula, retired to bed. The spirits visit only important members of the royal group and a few other families, but beyond this there are no differences between the harvest giving of the queen and that of other people. Some people pour first on the shrine, only later giving the dedicated animal to drink and where there is no sacred animal, only the shrine will receive a libation.

In moving to a new village people do not always trouble to remove the shrine (if there is one) till as a result of illness the doctor advises them to do so. The setting up of a new shrine in a small family consisting of a widow, her son and his wife and two children was a simple affair. We set out early in the morning with the khadi, a friend of ours, who had been called to perform the ceremony and on arrival found that no preparations had as yet been made. Cooking was in progress and it was not until two hours later, when all had eaten, that the ceremony began. The khadi had in the meanwhile repaired to the old village which was not far, to fetch a piece of soil out of the old shrine. This together with a river stone, and a piece of khithendi antheap she placed on a flat basket with certain charms that had been given by the doctor. These were: a piece of baboon skin with long hairs, skin of a wild pig and of a red buck, some vulevaja (which looked like yellow cotton wool) and mufera bark. A goat had been bought for dedication to the father's mother of the

village head as the family had no goats of its own, and the difficulty of driving it home was a cause of further delay. At about 2 o'clock when it had been tied to the verandah post, the ceremony began. But no one took much notice of what the khadi was doing; the family merely sat talking and joking and eating a bird they had roasted. No relatives had been called to the ceremony.

Chewing a piece of root, the khadi spat on two spots on the left-hand side of the entrance where shrines were to be set up. Having dug a hole she inserted a tititgwane bulb, the river pebble, khithoni, half the lump of earth from the old shrine and half the charms (diphaba)given by the doctor. This was the shrine of her father, grandfather of the young village head. In the second hole, the shrine of the mother (grandmother to the village head) were put only some of the lump of earth and charms. The holes were covered over with neat mounds of earth.

Dithugula of the deceased, a battle-axe and spear and two pieces of cloth (the grandmother had been possessed) were placed near the shrines and matagwa leselo brought in a calabash placed in a small flat basket (tsana). Into a wooden dish the khadi poured beer, added a little medicine, placed it in a flat basket and offered it without a word to the goat. When it drank, they trilled and expressed surprise that so wild a goat should drink without having to be coaxed. (It was thirsty from the walk home in the hot sun). This was, they thought, a clear indication of acceptance by the spirit. No word of prayer was uttered. At other similar ceremonies we have heard prayers telling the spirit about the dedicated goat (Re le dzosa ga pudi ye, they sometimes

say) and the beer left by the goat may be smeared all over its body.

After an argument about which shrine should be 'given' first the khadi poured on the shrine of her mother, telling her that here was her thughula ,also her cloths. Then addressing her father, she told him here was his wife's dedicated goat adding 'Do not expect us in the old village but protect us here.' After placing a pinch of snuff on each mound she gave the calabash to the young village head to pour. He obviously had not done it before and did not know how to sit. Wriggling awkwardly he eventually sat on his knees and had to be told what to say. He poured, drank a little himself and ended up baldly, 'We've finished. That's all!' The khadi trilled, she and the children drank of the mixture (the mother of the head did not partake) and the goat was untied.

Ritual killings.

Ritual killings of all kinds are insignificant by contrast with the beer offering and vary considerably one from the other. There are, firstly, killings specially for the ancestors but they are so rare that many people have never seen them. Secondly, there are occasions when the killings, clearly ritual, are not thought of as an offering or sacrifice because nothing is given to the ancestors. And thirdly, there are killings, not associated with ancestors or religion, in which small pieces of meat may nevertheless be set aside to 'tell' (hu suma) the gods of some event or to propitiate them. Hu suma is a conception somewhat different from our 'offer' or 'give'; it has two connota-

tions as used in ordinary life: it is either merely to inform, as when one *sumas* the purpose of beer to be drunk or the nature of a case at court or, by extension of this idea, to send a superior a share of something good one has, such as the leg of an animal slaughtered or a calabash of the beer one has brewed. In approaching the gods, sometimes one, sometimes the other, conception is uppermost. It will be of interest to glance at some of these different types of ritual killing.

The killing which most clearly contains the conception of an offering and the primary purpose of which is propitiation of the gods is the slaughter of a black sheep for rain at the grave of a royal ancestor. In this killing, described in detail in a later chapter, the victim is immolated, small pieces of meat cut from all parts of the victim are set aside for the gods, and all the bones are collected and buried in the grave, together with the stomach contents of the victim. Equally stressed, however, is the eating of the meat without salt by the assembled crowd. At the installation of a district headd when a beast is killed for the ancestors the ritual is more attenuated. The beast is referred to as a *thugula* and in as far as it is killed in a special manner and morsels of meat set aside for the gods to be cooked and later eaten without salt by children under puberty, it is the vicatious submission of a gift to the ancestors. But the major portion of meat is not ritually eaten nor are the bones collected, for a hind leg is sent to the queen. In an installation we witnessed, the bull (not a dedicated bull) was held by the horns and its legs tied. When someone came forward to kill it with a chopper, he was stopped by an old man who said, 'Don't you know

you can't kill a thugula beast with a chopper?! Someone then tried unsuccessfully to kill it with a large knife aiming through the back of the neck at the spine. At last the doctor in charge fetched an old barbed spear of Sotho-worked iron and the beast was stabbed in the proper manner under the right foreleg. It should be mentioned in explanation of all this mismanagement that on the rare occasions that a beast is killed, it is nowadays generally shot and that the only assegais to be found in the tribe are thugula objects of Sotho iron. As the beast fell down, the onlookers were asked to sit down till it was dead. The doctor with a knife dipped in red powder from his medicine bags, performed the first act in skinning the beast, namely, cutting a line from the end of the front leg up to the top. Then three old men delegated to the task did the skinning, no one else being allowed near. When it had been skinned, small pieces of meat were cut from all parts, placed in a white enamel dish and taken to the mother of the deceased headman who sat outside the chief hut. Not satisfied to use a European utensil for so sacred a purpose, she transferred the meat to a clay dish before taking it into the hut to offer to the gods. No one was allowed to accompany her but it was said she no doubt prayed and phasa'd.(This is the only instance of a prayer being offered in a hut that we ever came upon). A few minutes later, she came out with the meat, called the chief wife of the deceased headman to roast it and when it was cooked it was given to a group of small girls to eat. When a little boy standing near asked the girls for some they refused, saying, they were not allowed to give any of the meat away; but a woman took a piece and gave it to him. All the meat of the beast was

brought into the chief hut and later eaten in an ordinary manner by the inmates of the village and their friends.

So little is the 'goat of killing' (khivulao) in marriage ceremonial regarded as an offering or sacrifice that in vain did we seek for it in the context of a killing for the ancestors. Yet pieces of meat are laid on the shrine and a prayer offered, though the rest of the meat is not ritually eaten nor are the bones kept. This goat does not pass in all marriages; generally the boy persuades the bridal party to leave surreptitiously (hu tala)before this goat has been asked for by her parents. But a marriage in which the khivulao has passed is considered the better, completer and more conventional form. The khivulao is, as its name denotes, killed, and its skin is used to provide a skirt for the girl. On the day the khivulao goat arrived at Ramatiti's, the khadé suma'd the gods (on beads placed by the shrine) with grain and water to tell them of the impending departure of the girl. 'Here is the girl. She is leaving to be married. Let her be well and happy; let her build for us (found a hut whence we shall in future draw husbands for our daughters). Let her be smeared with fat (have children)' (Su-wo mutho wa doha o ya Vuhadi. A y'athakhale a re hahale a dole makhura. Lena vadima gamoga). As she prayed, the bride and her attendants sat in the courtyard, hands together, palms facing up. The goat was then killed without formality, small pieces of meat cut from front and back legs, the hips, chest, neck, tongue, ear, heart, liver, stomach, intestines and placed on some broad mukhoba leaves (Dombeya rotundifolia) on the shrine and a second prayer was offered both by the khadi and father of the girl. After a short

while these pieces were roasted and eaten by children under puberty. One hind leg of the goat was given to the bridegroom to take home, another to the khadi; the chest was the special portion of the bride and her companions, the rest being eaten by visitors and relatives who were present. When asked whether it was legitimate to eat the meat with salt, they replied, 'It is not a thugula; it's only a khiwulae.'

Still further removed from an offering is the goat killed on a death to provide a skin for covering the body. It is variously called khisete (lion-covering) or phiri (hyena). It's meat is eaten after the burial without salt by the closest relatives and grave-diggers and all who partake of it must sleep that night in deceased's hut; but nothing is given to the ancestors and no prayer is offered. The eating of this meat is greatly disliked by most people. On the other hand though a lelope doctor when killing a goat to treat a patient, sets aside pieces of meat for his ancestors with a prayer, these pieces being later eaten without salt by children, this killing, primarily medical in purpose, is not to propitiate and has no religious significance.

An interesting though somewhat uncommon killing among the Lovedu is the 'bringing home' of a spirit. Maboromo, an uninherited widow living with her three children in a village of relatives, had had much illness in the family which, after consultation with many doctors, was attributed to her husband's brother, Phedule. Phedule had been stabbed to death in a Johannesburg compound and was now complaining, 'I want to be brought back home with a head of cattle' (Ge nyaga hu voswa hae ga khomo). All his relatives were asked to be present and

contribute their share of corn for the beer, because, 'They are placing a beast to be Phedule' (Va vea khomo hore e ve ena Phedule). On the day of the ceremony a young black and white bull-calf was caught and held while the khadi approached with a calabash of specially prepared ancestral beer (muphaba), placed in a flat basket. Kneeling before the calf, she prayed to Phedule mentioning that this was his worn, that all the family had gathered to see him 'given' corn and begging him not to cause further illness. When she had finished they opened the mouth of the goat and poured down the beer while the khadi said, 'Drink and tell all the other spirits these matters.' The company then trilled as is customary when offering to the gods. It is interesting to note that no mention was made to the spirit that the goat was being 'placed' for him or that he should enter the goat. It was clearly taken for granted that the spirit must know.

Next, they repaired with the same calabash to the courtyard where all the children were called to sit near. The khadi prayed to the offending spirit, again asking for health as she poured the beer on the ground where a spear, battle-axe and horn, which had belonged to Phedule had been placed; and the children drank what was left in the calabash, each one placing it in turn on the ground. The doctor who, supervising his side of the ceremony, had been busy in a hut preparing his medicines, now came out and asked that the dedicated calf again be caught. Mixing a powder, said to consist of mufara and other medicines to make the spirits 'forget', he told the khadi to smear it on some of the tail hairs at the end of the tail and to tie a knot.

Then he himself smeared first the whole tail, later the whole body of the calf as well. The people trilled again and the calf was allowed to go. Returning to the courtyard where the thugula objects still lay, the doctor took out a bag of powder which he shook up to !smoke! (hu dupisa ja) the objects in its dust. Then he dug a hole where the beer had been poured.

Meanwhile the meat of a goat which had been killed was cooking in a pot. Before the killing (which we did not witness) medicine, we were told, had been smeared on the goat while the doctor uttered the words, 'Sleep, sleep here and look after your people.' (Lalane, lala hana mo o lade vatho vaho). The meat was eaten without salt by all the relatives, as well as a few outsiders who had helped catch the calf and the bones and the bones were carefully collected. A dog seized hold of one and was chased by all till the bone was retrieved. Having placed the bones in the hole, the doctor enquired, !In which direction do the Lovedu look when buried?! The khadi pointed to the north Then taking the head of the goat, he placed it facing north on top of the bones and said, 'We people all look in that direction! (Vatho gamoga re lovelede mo). Then he took medicine which he gave to the khadi to pour on the bones, 'smoked' them himself with his powders and ordered that the hole be filled with the stomach contents mixed with earth. The khadi beat down to earth and made a small mound.

Towards sunset they began dancing and singing lesugu songs continuing all night till at dawn the khadi took some water and squirted (hu phasa) thrice saying, !As for us, we are going, we are returning home. And you, may you remain in peace! (Nna rea

doha, vosle mahae; le lena le sale ga voya). In the beer that was provided for this festive occasion was put some medicine 'the powder of death' (tshidi ya lefu) generally used after a death lest people khuma. For the burial of the goat symbolises the burial and bringing home of their ancestor, just as the dedicated goat symbolises the immortality of his spirit.

Spirits that are appeased.

The immortality of Lovedu spirits is of practical importance only for two or three generations back; beyond this they are hardly remembered. The spirits that cause most trouble are one's grandparents and people that have died far from home and in religious practices these tend to be the most important. Both sides of the family, that of one's father and that of one's mother are equally important; both cause trouble and both must be placated; and this is an accurate reflection of the social structure, of relationship reckoned bilaterally and of cattle links between intermarrying families.

The configuration of the ancestral world is no different from that of the ordinary world. It is thus not surprising that all four lines of grandparents are recognised. Even when a spirit in the line of the father's father is being placated, the line of the father's mother may also be mentioned: thus we have heard an officiator in a phasa ceremony calling not only upon his father's younger brother, the spirit troubling its granddaughter, but also upon his father, father's father, elder brother, elder sister and mother. Dedicated goats to male ancestors tend to, but do not always, run in the male line, for it is possible for anyone through illness to be ordered to set up a shrine or dedi-

cate an animal. As in social or political arrangements, the male line may recede before the female; it may even, as far as ancestors are concerned, become almost completely obliterated. In the Matsui family, for instance, the father's father's line is neglected except for hw phase when they cause illness, but the father's mother's line is all-important. It is to the latter that the beast, Mamujaji, is dedicated and it is to this beast that the new corn is given every year. This emphasis reflects the links with the queen which the family wishes to emphasize, for Mamujaji, the ancestor of the father's mother, was the mother of Mujaji 1.

It is interesting, too, to see how blood relationship is emphasized even in the case of the present queen who is not in the direct line of kings and queens. The last queen, Mujaji II (Masalanavo) died childless, her successor being the daughter of her chief wife Leakhale who happened also to be a far-off sister. In the worship directed to the royal ancestors one would expect to find the old kings and queens being placated. In actual fact, however, their names are hardly ever mentioned and Masalanavo, the last queen has never been known to cause trouble. It is the immediate family of the present queen who occupy the centre of the stage. The royal dedicated cow is Leakhale or Magovo, mother of the queen, and it is thequeen's own dead relatives that withhold rain.

The coherence of the social and the ancestral worlds is seen even in regard to the implications of the bride-price (munywalo) system. Biological relationship not socially recognised is of

no importance in religion, and not only can the biological father of an illegitimate child or his relatives never cause illness for the 'gods follow the cattle' (medimo e tovela dikhomo) or 'The child follows the tracks of the cattle of its mother' (muyana o muthalene wa dikhomo ja vomma-hwe), but the queen's ancestors cause illness in children of any of her 'wives' whoever their father may be. The queen is often required to phasa for them. In the gathering together in worship of all relatives on certain occasions, the social system is similarly reflected. When, after many deaths or much illness in a family the dice order a mukhowo, a religious gathering of all relatives, not only the lineage but relatives on both sides (mulogo) including those by marriage, meet. Each brings a basket of corn as a contribution towards the beer for the occasion.

Though in religious matters the precedence of the chief house is recognised and it occasionally happens that a younger brother who has quarrelled with an elder brother has in all humiliation to ask him to perform religious office, there is a constant tendency for the individual family to assert itself as against the extended family. After a quarrel a younger brother may, when there is trouble, get his uterine sister to officiate and set up his own shrines. Sometimes when the elder brother neglects his religious offices, a younger one is told by the doctor to have a shrine and in this case khithoni (called 'orphan of the country') is often used as a lesser shrine.

General character of Lovedu religion.

Not only the scheme of institutionalized social relations

but the nature of those relations in ordinary life is reflected in religion. The fact that the gods were known in life is largely responsible for many of the outstanding characteristics of Lovedu worship. We must not expect a behaviour pattern of humble worshipper to omnipotent god. Indeed one of the most remarkable characteristics of Lovedu religion is the complete absence of awe towards the ancestors. People pray to the spirits as man to man, scolding them or reminding them of their duties to their children. The following prayer uttered when Phedule was 'brought home' is typical: 'We say, here is your corn, Phedule. What sort of a person are you who do not live happily with your people?. Today all your children have gathered here. They have come to see you given corn. And tomorrow, when they depart, don't let there be a single one who remains troubled. Watch them; they are your children.' (Re re mavele sea, Phedube. Naa lena ge lena mugho dai wa ho saa thakhala le vatho va hwe? mumusi moonu vana vonu gamoga va khovagane va dile hu vona ha le khi fiwa mavele. Le ga matso he va khi doha hu khi voye hu va le yo a duguho ga tswenyeha. Le va tswarese; ge vana vonu).

Even the powers and attributes of the gods are not so far removed from those of the living. An aged person is sometimes referred to as 'our god' (mudimo wesu) and his displeasure during life may be 'seen in the dice' as the cause of illness or, after his death, may be avenged upon those who have angered him. An old wife of the queen, who had long been ailing, sent her a message saying, 'Unless you give me ox liver, I'll never die byt keep on troubling people.' The queen, notoriously averse to slaugh-

tering cattle for meat, nevertheless complied with this request because it came from so old a woman.

Living relatives (more particularly the father's sister but also father and mother), even if not old but because of the social implications of their close relationship, may by conscious or even unconscious (repressed) displeasure in their hearts cause illness (mahava). When Ramatiti's daughter was about to set out for her new home, her mother, quite unexpectedly and without the previous knowledge of anyone, took some water and squirted (hu phasa) it on the ground near the shrine, saying, 'You people of ours, I myself, mother of the girl, phasa lest they say I remained with a dissatisfied heart.' By intimating that she had no grievance, she tried to safeguard herself from being, at some future date, found in the dice as the cause of her daughter's barrenness. Unconscious grievances are recognised as working like our so-called repressed complexes. If the dice assign an illness, say barrenness, to a person who has no conscious complaint, he must nevertheless phasa, but his prayer will be, 'Don't say when you (the ancestors) seize her womb that it is I' (meaning, do not attribute your being 'stirred up' to dissatisfaction in my heart); or he may say, 'If it is I, let the child be well' (meaning, as I am unaware that I am the cause and do not wish to be, let the child recover). Hu phasa in these circumstances recognises psychological principles that have been clearly formulated only in the 20th century. If one has a grievance one prays, 'Why is it that you rise up on my account? If it is I, I say, let them give me such and such a thing (e.g., beer of reconciliation) and

you gods do not 'be after it' (cause further trouble about it).

As the gods have human attributes, 'worship' is not characterised by humility or formality. Indeed the word worship as applied to the Lovedu should be understood in a secular sense of honouring rather than in our religious sense of reverence, veneration or devotion. Even at the most important offerings you may find it difficult to catch the words of the officiator amid the talking and laughter of the onlookers. But you will probably hear him say, 'It is not water, truly it is beer,' or 'It is not just mabodo (light beer) it is real beer,' when he pours out grain and water; and you may see, as we once did, how he winks at his friends who smile at the deception. If snuff is placed for the gods in a ceremony, the onlookers will lose no time in begging some for themselves from the officiator.

The asking of a favour from the gods with beer is patterned on everyday conceptions of reciprocity. You sometimes definitely state in your prayer, 'We give you that you may give her(the patient) life' (Re le fa thugula hore le va fe vuphelo) Just as in real life when asking a favour you approach a person with a gift, so in an offering you may say, as did the chief councillor in a rain sacrifice, 'Ge le suma ga ngu ve' (I approach you with this sheep). The idea of prayer as solemn communion with the gods for the upliftment of the soul, found in higher religions is absent. Bantu religion, moreover, is cheerful; at the harvest offering even the gods themselves in the form of zwidajane come to drink and be merry with you.

Another outstanding characteristic of Lovedu religion is the

almost entire absence of any speculative element. The Lovedu are not concerned with such things as the life hereafter or the mode of life of the gods; theirs is essentially a practical religion in which rites are of far greater importance than attitude of mind, action than belief, and its rites are directed to practical ends such as recovery from illness and the procuring of rain. Indeed there is hardly room in this society for the speculative man, the man who asks himself or others the reasons for things. When, for example, Simeon, prompted by our questions on this matter, asked the old people whether each month had its own moon or whether it was the same moon that appeared month after month, the first reply was, 'I thought you were going to ask me a true matter. Those things you speak of are childish.' Another was, 'I certainly don't spend my time thinking of such things' and a third was, 'You'll become mad if you don't take care,' with the addition as an afterthought, 'Don't ask me. Ask people that know. I don't think about the moon!' In vain does one enquire into the meaning or reason of a rite, for the reply always is, 'The bones tell us to do these things' and the practical end is phrased as determined by the bones. In fact the dice do play a dominating role in determining the nature of religious rites and it is only by quietly watching diviners at work and personally attending religious rites that one can learn anything about Lovedu religious theory.

There are considerable differences from one family to another in the conduct of religious rites and the nature of shrines and, since religion is primarily a family concern, few people know

what their neighbours do. Not uncommonly one finds a practice said to be impossible by some people accepted as normal by their neighbours.

The relation between religion and morality is a subject full of difficulties, for both conceptions are different from ours. Their relation is not immediate and usually not consciously phrased, yet they are interconnected, albeit in ways that are not easy to see clearly. The gods help good and bad men alike, they send illness whether one is careful or neglectful of the observances due to them, and the after-life is the same for all. But we should be careful not to deduce too much from this. The position of a sister and her privileges are sanctioned by the gods, as is also the respect due to old people. And at one religious ceremony where a quarrel broke out before the rites began, people hastened to quieten the parties, saying, 'If you are not careful you will dzusa-(wake up)the gods. The gods do not like quarrels. In general the gods are not upholders of custom, yet on one occasion in 1937, two zwidajane cried all day in the bush at Maulwe because some women had broken the taboo against cutting wood there. The chief concern of the gods appears to be to look after their own interests. They complain when they dislike the manner of their burial, but they are undisturbed when twins are not buried in wet soil, even though this has a disastrous effect on the whole country. If they were disturbed about custom in general, instead of things directly affecting them, they would complain of many disturbing changes in these days of culture contact; instead, one only finds that possessing spirits dislike European things and that at offerings European utensils are generally not used.

Chapter 5

SPIRIT POSSESSION

The cult of spirit possession which came some thirty years ago with the Thovele from the east and north-east, has been readily incorporated into Lovedu religion and since its inception has gained considerable popularity. The form in which it is found is somewhat different from that among Shangana-Thonga, where the possessing spirit is regarded as a foreign spirit from some outside tribe. Among the Lovedu the possessing spirit is an ancestor and may, like any ancestor, demand the usual shrine or dedicated animal. The cult is not accepted by all; the royal family deprecate it as foreign and as detracting from their prestige and many other people dislike it. But its noisiness and showiness though incongrous with traditional Lovedu reserve and lack of display, nevertheless makes a popular appeal in these more insecure days.

A spirit entering a person causes illness and the first object if the cult is directed at curing the illness, so that initiation is regarded as therapeutic. Long continued illness of a patient, which will yield to no curative treatment, will be diagnosed as due to an ancestral spirit "pressing him down", because it wants to manifest itself in him. The symptoms are never very definite: Mashishimali was "ill all over the body" and suffered from swollen legs which five different doctors had tried unsuccessfully to cure; Mamolatela was weak and ailing after the birth of her first child. The symptoms are neither violent like the running amok which accompanies ukuthwasa among the Nguni nor of a specifically nervous nature. Epilepsy, which is common, bears no relation to possession, and any peculiar

behaviour is more liable to be attributed to witchcraft than to the spirits. It is believed that a possessed person after death likes in turn to manifest itself in some descendant and there is a tendency for possession to run in families. In one family three sisters and their mother were all possessed. Sometimes, especially where others in the family are possessed, a person does not even get ill; he just becomes possessed when people are singing or dancing in the manner of the cult. Contact with certain localities or people associated with possession is often sufficient. Thus it is said that, should one be among the Sekhwasha in Portuguese East Africa, who become possessed in a manner different from the Lovedu, one risks becoming possessed by merely picking up something dropped by a member of that tribe or eating the fruit of the fig, mudomma (Biospyros mespiliformis) or munebenebe (Cassia petersiana).

Once it is known that a person is being "pressed down" by some spirit wishing to manifest itself, a lepopo doctor, himself possessed and skilled in dealing with the possessed, is called to cure the patient. This is done, not by exorcism, but by rites designed to enable the spirit to come and make known its wishes along legitimate channels, known in the cult. For the spirits that possess people are not evil spirits to be expelled; they are the ancestors whom one worships and their desire occasionally to manifest themselves through some living relative is comparable to that impulse towards life that makes them desire shrines, dedicated animals and the perpetuation of their names in their descendants. The method by which a spirit is enabled to "come out" and disclose its identity and the possessed person to become the host (ledala) of the spirit

without being ill consists largely of dancing; and on all subsequent occasions when the spirits manifest themselves they signify their desire to dance.

Dancing is the central feature of the cult. The spirits are thought to enjoy this dancing; when manifesting themselves at festivities of the possessed, they often say they have come to "play" with the others and may even cause slight ill-health on this account. Hence quite often when a possessed person does not feel well, he will ask for the drums, saying he must dance. Lelopo dancing consists of fast movements of the foot to the accompaniment of drums or tambourines and rattles. At a seance of malopo a zwikwe, those who speak Thevhda, the large hemispherical goma drum is used in addition to the conical drums. All are, however beaten with the hands, the elbows being placed on the drumskin in a peculiar manner. Malopo who speak Sotho or Lovedu use only the conical drums in the ordinary manner.

If the dance has a great fascination - after a seance one finds even small children practising the steps - the dress worn by the possessed adds to the attraction. Cloths of different colours are worn round the waist and tied at the back; round the legs are usually leggings of the outer shell of the dituzi (Oncoba spinosa) fruit filled with pebbles to rattle as one dances; on the head is a cap of fur or brightly coloured wool or a head-gear of black feathers, while very often a spear, battle-axe or stick is brandished in the hand. These are the zwithamo of the spirit, worn only during possession. The nature of the dress of each possessed person has been indicated by the spirit itself and people do their best to comply lest the possessed person dies. Once at a seance the spirit of a woman asked that

a beast or failing that a goat be "placed" for him. "We'll do our best", the relatives replied, "but remember we are poor and it is a matter that will take time." The spirit, angry at this unwillingness, retorted, "if you don't comply, I'll take away my person (in whom I manifest myself) and go and sleep with her. Tell Makhadé (elder brother of the possessed who learnt the profession of doctor from the spirit) I'll take away my profession from him".(Hɛ le khé diye vyalo, ge do doha le lezana la ga, ga yo lala valo. Le ye le voye Makhadi ge do jea vuyaga vys ga ga isa mulaboni). "We'll do our best", urged the relatives, "but don't go away in anger." In spite of this power, possessing spirits have nevertheless to take cognizance of public opinion and the desires of royalty. The spirit of the wife of a royal relative asked for a man's loin cloth which women possessed by male spirits occasionally wear, but he refused to allow it on the grounds that for a woman to wear man's attire is unbecoming. An old woman therefore addressed the spirit , saying, "People here don't like it" and the spirit was satisfied.

Initiation into the cult.

A short description of an initiation, which contains all the elements of an ordinary seance, will illustrate some of the main features of the cult. When the doctor, called to conduct the initiation, has arrived with his or her attendants, drums are fetched from the district head, and other disciples of the doctor invited to be present. Nothing can, however, be done before the spirit of the doctor descends upon her. To allow this, they retire to a hut and lie down as if to sleep, while an old woman puts down some pinches of snuff on the ground and calls upon the

spirits to come. In a few minutes the doctor groans and quivers and the spirit signifies its arrival by a song of greeting. It calls for its lelopo clothes and the doctor is dressed. Soon the spirits of her attendants also arrive and treatment, which consists in making the novitiate dance, is begun.

When Betty was being initiated we arrived early one Saturday evening attracted by the noise, to find a picturesque scene. It was winter and five little fires had been lit in the vicinity of the courtyard of Betty's hut. In the centre were three women dancing to the music of drums and rattles. We sat down by the nearest fire and found ourselves with a group of old women. For people had arranged themselves, naturally as is their manner, in age-groups round the various fires, young married women at one, small boys at another, girls over puberty at a third. The dust rose high; what had sounded pleasant enough at a distance became, as one sat in its midst, an almost unbearable din; while in the flickering and uncertain light of the fires the dancing took on a frenzied effect that lent to the scene a wildness and weirdness seldom met with except in travellers' tales of darkest Africa. Never again in our frequent attendances at malopo dancing did we recapture that first sense of weirdness so largely due to its novelty and our own ignorance. That night the dancing stopped at 1.30 a.m. but by dawn it had begun again, continuing with intarvals of rest during the whole of Sunday and Sunday night. Betty danced most of the time; if she rested too long the women urged her on saying, "How do you expect the spirit to come out if you don't dance?" All this time she was being treated with medicines; black powder mixed with butter fat was smeared on her legs, white froth of medicine churned with a porridge stirrer was

applied on various parts of the body, some being administered also internally, and infusions were given her to drink. No food was eaten either by Betty or by the women whose spirits were upon them; the very sight of porridge makes some malapa vomit and the only sustenance allowed while dancing is beer, if there happens to be any.

Late on Sunday afternoon they called her mother's brother to try and induce the spirit to manifest itself, for doctors had indicated that the troubling spirit was on the mother's side. Taking a calabash of water in his hand, the mother's brother knelt near the dancing girl and spat mouthfuls of water out on the ground, saying, "Come out, spirit, that this person also may be well. She remains ailing and when we go to doctors they tell us it is a spirit. Come outside that this person can be well (cool)". (mudimo a u ḓa, mutho le ena a thakhale o dula a khe lwala. Re re ge ya dinagene va re ge mudimo, a u gwele nḓe mutho yo a diwa ge phafo) Sometimes, instead of hu phasa with water, mixed grains of all kinds are thrown over the dancer and the words used are, "We are giving you everything to come " It may even be that something, which can be overcome only by magical means, is holding back the spirit, as when, on one occasion, the spirit was said to be bewildered at the cross-roads not knowing which to take. All the roads except that leading into the village were magically "barred" and the spirit, thus guided, came straight in and manifested itself . Difficult as it is for a spirit to come on the first occasion, once initiation has taken place, it becomes a simple matter. To make a spirit manifest itself a person has only to dance in the manner of the cult or to lie down while someone calls on it to come. The spirit may also come of its own

accord at any time without being induced.

Early on the Monday morning Betty, showing signs of exhaustion, began to stagger in her dancing and people knew the spirit must be near. Her movements became more frenzied, she put up her hands to her head and dragged her feet uncertainly and then fell to the ground. Several women who had been expecting this, caught and carried her, still quivering and groaning, into the hut. "Goodday grandparent, come nicely grandparent", they kept saying. After a few moments Betty began a song, one usually sung on the arrival of a spirit, giving the name of the spirit upon her, namely Mamaile, her mother's mother. Those present sang the refrain to the accompaniment of rattles. Staggerings and fallings groanings or growlings, are always signs of an approaching spirit; sometimes the possessed person runs away for a short distance. A goat was now brought into the hut. Its body was smeared with medicine, some was poured down its throat and, after the patient had breathed hard into its mouth, it was taken out and killed. Under supervision of the doctor small pieces were cut from all parts and placed in a bowl while the stomach contents and portion of the liver were set aside to be used in curing the patient. The experts say that the sickness, from which the ancestor suffered before its death and which presumably causes the patient to suffer goes into the goat. Before proceeding further the doctor took the bowl of meat to the hut entrance where, after setting aside half of it, she placed it with a little snuff on the ground praying to her spirit. Later this meat was roasted and eaten by small boys. The stomach contents were smeared on various parts of the body of the patient; the small pieces of meat were roasted, mixed with a black powder, and administered on the end

of a stick to all four the possessed people present.

The doctor now busied herself charring chips of various kinds of bark in a basin in which some of the goat's liver had also been put. With this the patient was smoked three times under a blanket till she coughed and spluttered. This took a considerable time during which the other possessed women sang songs in turn. Mabelowa, who is possessed by a man, called for her pipe in which some hemp was put, and evinced great astonishment when her fellow-wife, her attendant when she is possessed, struck a match to light it. This was a European innovation unknown in the days of her spirit. Similarly when a potato was brought, all the possessed women examined it with wonder, asking each other whether it was edible. While the meat of the goat was being cooked with medicine in three pots for those present, the possessed women sat outside on a mat, an honour accorded to their spirits They sat, silent and dignified, saying nothing. A fowl was killed in order that its leg might afford a medicine bag for the patient and the chips of bark used in smoking were ground to a powder to be used by the patient when eating of the first fruits. It might be mentioned that the doctor carried home with her the hind leg, shoulder and breast of the goat as her share, while the other meat was regarded as a reward to the crowd for its share in dancing and singing.

For some time people sat and talked to their friends while the doctor worked with her medicines and the possessed women sat quietly in the shade. Suddenly we became aware of a kind of pantomime in which the initiate, directed in song by the doctor, was made to play-act all the work of women. She went to fetch water and wood about twenty yards from home, swept the courtyard

imitated hoeing, the stamping and winnowing of mealies, cooking and dishing up, finally serving food in the correct manner to the small boy whose mother she had married (Betty had married her father's sister). Last of all she was taken to the drums and shownhow to dance in possessed fashion, all it was said, lest when her spirit left her she would be lazy and not know how to work. Betty walked as in a dream with a wooden expressionless look and at times appeared so exhausted that we feared she would not be able to lift the stamper when imitating stamping. This mime-show is not performed in all initiations, nor is a goat always killed, for the methods of doctors differ considerably and the patient's relatives may have no goat. Often the patient is set to dance and treated with medicines till she falls down with the spirit upon her.

It was now 3 o'clock in the afternoon, and, the initiation being complete, the doctor thought it time that the spirits departed. She ushered the possessed into the hut, where they all sat down, offered them each a pinch of snuff, took a rattle and began her farewell song, the whole company (for the hut had filled with spectators) joining in the refrain. Next the initiate sang her farewell song, mentioning that she wanted as her accessories - several white cloths, a woollen cap and a spear to hold when dancing. When all had finished singing, they took off their zwithamo (clothes), which their attendants (for each possessed person has someone to help him when his spirit appears) put into bundles to take away, and lay down to sleep. After three minutes the doctor grunted and groaned as departing spirits are apt to do, sat up and began dressing in everyday clothes. The others followed her example and went outside. The patient, but

a short while before so exhausted , came smiling out of the hut and scolded the people for letting her oversleep in this shocking manner (appearing to have no knowledge of her initiation). Then all washed their faces and urinated in the hedge as women do on rising in the mornings.

Initiation into the cult is said to make the person well again and all into whose history one enquires claim to have been cured. Betty herself had no further trouble. If, however, they become ill again, it may be a second spirit, for many people have three or four. There is, however, no further initiation; the second spirit is merely called upon to manifest itself. A second or third spirit may take possession without causing any illness, merely announcing its arrival and making known its wants when the person is possessed. After initiation the spirit manifests itself when it has some complaint or desire, when the person has broken some taboo, or when specially induced by dancing or prayer.

A possessing spirit always comes on a visit of sympathy (hu emela) after a death in the family. On the evening of the ceremony for removal of the defilement of death (khitshila), the possessed person and friends in the cult who have been invited lie down in a hut, while an old woman calls upon the spirit to "come nicely" without harming its host. A few pinches of snuff may be placed on the ground. Within a short time the spirits manifest themselves and dance in the courtyard till late in the evening.

A possessed person has to keep certain taboos; he may never eat such first-fruits as pumpkin leaves or green mealies, mŏrula fruits or beer made of the newly-harvested corn without medicine given him at his initiation and renewable every year or every two years; any new thing undertaken, as when a possessed woman

becomes pregnant, must be reported to the spirit. Some malopo may not be beaten with a green stick lest the spirit descend upon them; others may not touch European medicine. Many of them run away from Europeans even when not actually possessed and one man had to keep his books securely locked in a suit-case lest his wife should see them and become troubled by her spirit. The very mention of the word lelopo in the presence of some may cause the spirit to come. Observances are not the same for all and taboos to be observed depend largely on the doctor who does the initiation. There are no special burial rites associated with the cult. There is, however, a vague belief that injury to a snake in the village may in some cases harm a possessed person, an interesting belief in view of the fact that there is so little trace in Lovedu religion of the Zulu idea that ancestral spirits manifest themselves in snakes.

There is a special relationship between a possessed person and the doctor who initiated him: every year when the medicine needs renewal, beer or morula cider is prepared, the doctor, who comes with a number of disciples and attendants, is called and there is a great dance of the possessed often lasting several days. This is "dancing for medicine" (hu dinela tshidi). Some possessed people have to be specially doctored before drinking the first morula cider and the morula season is always a time of lelopo gatherings; others are required to contribute corn at harvest time for a large lelopo dance at the home of the doctor. These gatherings, at which a goat may be slaughtered in addition to the beer provided, add greatly to the prestige of the doctor.

At one such gathering in March, 1938 the doctor, who had been invited by the family of a girl she had initiated the

previous year, arrived in the evening with three disciples. Much beer and morula cider had been prepared. That night on retiring to bed they all placed some snuff near the head in order that when they awoke their spirits would be upon them. At midnight they began dancing; but it was raining too much so they went back to bed till dawn when the doctor smeared medicine on the legs of her followers, who dressed in le|bpo clothes and began again. As the possessed cannot eat while the spirit is upon them, a large pot of water was placed for them to drink from and into this the doctor put a powder. Sometimes, as in another case we witnessed, the medicine is administered in morula fruits; the possessed person sucks one fruit and thereafter another into which powder has been inserted. The same medicine is put in a pot of cider for their use.

They danced two or three at a time, each possessed person beginning in turn (hu suma) the special song she wished to dance to. At midday one of the dancers fell down on the ground and was carried into the hut by old women . Then she said, "I am a second spirit. I want to play with the others". They took off the cloths of the first spirit and donned others. The second spirit danced for a while; then, when in a farewell song while dancing it announced its departure, the old woman had to dress the woman again in her original cloths. In the afternoon many other possessed people arrived to join in the dancing. They would dance a long time, then one by one begin to stagger to show the approach of the spirit. The drums would beat faster, the singing become louder; soon the person would fall to the ground to be carried into the hut by the woman, who would fetch its swithamo and ask it to "come gently". One woman on beginning to stagger

could not wait for her things to be fetched, but herself ran straight home for them. Some possessed people's spirits did not come in spite of their dancing; Majie sang in a high falsetto when she began to stagger and everyone expected her spirit to descend upon her, but in the end she merely ran away home.

A great crowd gathered and the dancing went on for two days during which the possessed ate nothing, but drank medicated water and a little cider and sucked many murula fruits. On the afternoon of the second day the spirits took their leave in the hut and the possessed were able to eat of the feast that had been prepared for them. They drank beer and ate porridge; then a goat was killed in their honour.

There is sometimes considerable jealousy between malopo doctors who with those initiated by them may form rival schools. Some doctors refuse to allow their followers to dance with those initiated by other doctors without special permission. At one seance, at which there had been some unpleasantness, the doctor smeared some powder into incisions on the neck, tongue, crown and sides of the heads of her disciples. Then taking some medicated water in her mouth she squirted (hu phasa) saying, "I 'place' you. Don't you dance anymore. I don't like dancing every day without my special permission. Any lelopo who dances where you are dancing will break her leg or be badly hurt." (Gea le wea. Le khi thwe le kha vina. Nna khi nyage goska ya ho vina ga majaji. Ge do raga ga le laola. Le mo le vinaho lelopo le le daho le re gea vina, le do roveha hova la hovala kudu). The remainder of the water was given them to drink.

A lelopo doctor often takes advantage of large gatherings to further her practice. When her spirit is upon her and the hut is

full of people, she will, divining "by the heart", address one after another of the audience making statements about their troubles on health calculated to waken their interest. Sometimes she is put off but as often as not she is specially called in next day by that family to throw the dice about the matter.

An interesting feature of the cult of possession is that many people when the spirit is upon them, speak in a foreign tongue said to be Thovelo or Kharanga. Investigation into this matter, however, shows that this is not as startling a phenomenon as it might appear. When possessed, a person for the most part sits silent unless he is a doctor. If he speaks at all this is in monosyllables, for all his wants and messages are conveyed in song. Lelepo songs are stereotyped and known to many, because the uninitiated have to join in the refrain when rattling the accompaniment. In these songs there is usually a number of foreign words though many consist purely of meaningless sounds, such as "We le we eya o wee wee wee wana wee". Often peculiarities in the pronunciation of vowels are interpreted as Thovelo. When the refrain begun (hu fuma) by the possessed person has been taken up by the chorus, he continues with the song or interpolates his own words, usually Sotho with a few foreign words interspersed till he wishes to stop. In this way he makes known his wishes. It quite frequently happens that no one understands the gibberish of the possessed person and doctors generally have an attendant who interprets what they wish to convey. There are, however, numerous well-known words in general use by people when their spirit is upon them, for instance, mofoto or movoto for lefola (snuff); bula or mvula for meetse (water); ya ga mbaya for ya ga ntiya (they may beat me); kaya for hae (home), matshiba

or mevombo for Sotho muswane (stomach contents), hu dadaza for hulema (to hoe), khitsumbu for museha (skin bag for snuff). But many possessed people speak pure Sotho and it is recognized that a newly-initiated person may not know Thovolo. The Lovedu themselves are not critical and the usual reply when one expresses any doubt about the genuineness of the possessed or the possibility of fraud is "If they were not really possessed how could they speak a strange tongue?"

Attitude to Spirits.

The attitude of people in the presence of the spirits of the possessed accords well with the absence of awe in religion. Although people losha (greet respectfully) these spirits, welcoming their arrival and humbly begging them not to harm the person whose body they have entered, it is clear that it is the form here that is important rather than the spirit. One often finds drunken men joining in while the possessed are dancing, imitating their actions to the merriment of the crowd. On one occasion when a possessed woman, tired from the strenuous dancing, asked someone for water he playfully pushed her face with the palm of his hand as he consented to fetch some. This complete lack of respect drew a laugh from several onlookers.

To laugh at or scold a possessing spirit is quite in order. The following illustrative case will show how people sometimes treat spirits. At a dance for medicine in the morula season Manthata's second spirit came upon her while she was already possessed by the first. The old women took her into the hut, greeted the spirit and began dressing her in the right cloths. She asked for her gun, for a pipe of dagga (hemp), which she lit

and smoked. Then she began a song which the drummers and the crowd took up. But when she began to dance she looked like one who could not do the steps properly, going this way and that in a peculiar manner. People roared with laughter, saying "That lelopo can't dance", When the lelopo heard this she was furious; she stopped and, chin in hand, began to cry. The women pacified her and coaxed her till she stopped. Then, however, she went straight to a nearby field and picked green mealies and sugar cane which she handed to the drummers. Thereupon the women scolde her in loud voices, saying "We don't like a person who steals. Go away. We want Madumi (the first spirit) who came long ago". The possessed woman took out the pipe, filled it again, smoked and then she began another song. When, however, she tried to dance, people nearly died with laughter at her. Again she began to cry loudly in anger till her eyes were red. Her relatives now began to chase the spirit, bidding it depart. The woman took off the clothes of the second spirit and there remained only Madumi. She made no further trouble.

Though a possessing spirit has power to kill the person in whom he manifests himself if people do not carry out his wishes, he nevertheless has to take cognizance of the wishes of royalty and such practical considerations as poverty of the family or accepted ideas of propriety. But all spirits do not complacently accept the flouting of their wishes.

Once on noticing a man who was most attentive to his possessed wife keeping close to her and greeting her respectfully like the old women, we enquired where he had learnt to mubela (address the spirits). He replied that this had been forced upon him against his wishes. One day when he was at beer his wife's spirit had

descended on her and asked for him but he refused to go home and the spirit departed. Next day as he was walking in the fields he put his hand in his pocket and a snake slithered out! Similarly that night he woke up to find a snake beside him; but when his wife lit the candle they could find nothing. Next morning on feeling a wriggle inside his shirt he looked in and saw a snake. He took such a fright that he jumped and fell to the ground, but when he looked again there was nothing. His people at home decided it must be the possessing spirit of his wife thus troubling him. They called up the spirit who said,"What is this? How is it that you treat my wishes with such contempt?" The man pleaded that he'd been drunk, but all the spirit said was,"Don't ever do it again". From that day he has been assiduous in his attentions to his wife when she is possessed.

Gatherings and seeances of the possessed attract large crowds of watchers; even when a seeance takes place in a hut one finds anything from thirty to forty people squeezing themselves inside, while so many block up the doorway that the air becomes foul and heavy. Though the society phrases the cult as a purely therapeutic measure for safeguarding the health of the individual, there is no doubt that it enhances his importance and power, making it possible for him to demand a number of things. This prominence is usually at the expense of the family who may have to sit for hours singing and shaking rattles, often having to go supperless because a spirit has chosen to manifest itself.

Though few Lovedu will admit that fraud is possible, we were nevertheless told of a well-known case in which a possessed woman publicly admitted having deceived people. Mudalo, who lived near us was jealous of her co-wife. It is said that she began crying

loudly one day in her hut saying, "Something catches my body" and when this happened several times a day people said it must be a spirit. She was duly initiated. Some months passed. One day when her quarrelsomeness made her co-wife say "it must be your lelopo that makes you so wild", Mudale replied in the presence of a number of people, "I have no spirit. I only saw my husband give cloths to you (her co-wife was possessed), so I pretended also to have a spirit, for why should you be thus favoured?" From that day she has never again danced or become possessed.

A case of spirit manifestation which seemed to us to have been staged with an eye to personal gain was that of Anna Setemane, who lived close to where we had our tent. Late one afternoon Anna, who had lost her voice and could speak only in whispers came to ask for medicine, so we gave her a teaspoonful of Chamberlain's cough mixture. She swallowed the medicine with a gulf as though she had difficulty in getting it down and sat down with her eyes shut. Puzzled by her behaviour, we asked whether she found the medicine unpleasant to take. "No", she replied, "it is nice. Give me some more" We did not, however, comply with this request and she remained immobile with eyes shut, not replying to any further questions. We became more and more anxious but at sunset when her husband passed by he was not at all perturbed. Had we given her medicine, he asked, and then went on to explain that she was possessed and her spirit disliked everything European.

Her husband told her to go home but she only limped a few yards and then lay down. Several neighbours passed on their way home and though they all addressed the spirit, calling it "makhulu" - grandmother, and telling it to go home, nothing

happened till an old woman from her village brought her a stick. Then after much coaxing she dragged herself home, walking as though her right leg were hurt.

On arriving home she asked for water to wash her legs, but this request was not acceded to as someone said malopa die from having water on their legs. She then began vomiting. Her mother-in-law addressed the spirit in her, explaining that the European woman was a friend of the district head and that nowadays everyone was using European medicine. "Don't trouble her like that", she added, "If you want to come, come and we'll sing for you so you can tell us what you want." They took Anna into her hut, took off some of her clothes, made her lie down and again asked the spirit to come. After a few minutes Anna sat up, began singing a song announcing the arrival of her spirit and the family, taking up rattles, began singing the refrain. Anna sang with eyes shut. After she had asked for snuff and enquired in song what was this white face among them, another spirit, that of her mother's brother, suddenly and without any sign of change announced itself, saying it did not fear Europeans having fought in a war against them. Many songs were sung and at the end of each the women gave appreciative ululations.

Next the spirit enquired in song what the European was going to give him. After consultation as to the nature of the gift required, we replied that we had a pink cloth at our tent. Here followed a discussion with the old woman attempt at as to the exact shade and it was interesting to notice how Anna's expression changed from one of apathy to one of interest. She even opened her eyes. Then relapsing into her old expression she sang a song, "I thank you, Malefogana, my friend".

Someone now made a joke and Anna, whom we were watching closely, smiled, restraining laughter with difficulty. The interest of the family now began to flag; the women had come home at sunset, tired from their lands and had as yet not eaten anything. When, at the end of a song one of the children ululated, she was scolded for being so encouraging. "If you show such appreciation," they said, "the spirit will never go". At last at 9.30 p.m. after a special farewell song, again directed towards the European, Anna lay down to sleep, saying her spirit would depart at sunrise, as he was not a witch to go out at night. The general behaviour of the possessed woman, her concentration on the European present and perhaps also the fact that she was able to sing when her voice had been completely lost, seemed to indicate that the whole affair had been staged in order to get a new cloth. But the natives believed in her. Next morning her voice was husky and she showed no remembrance of what had occurred.

It is not our purpose here to discuss the psychology of possession among the Lovedu. This would require not only special study but a specially trained investigator. We should, however, point out that possession is in no way associated with abnormalities of character or with crises in the life of the individual. Its symptoms are not of a nervous nature such as indicate ukuthwasa among Nguni; there are, except when the spirit descends upon them, no twitchings; uncontrollable hiccups are unknown; members of the cult are not hysterical or mentally unbalanced, nor can they be distinguished in their daily activities from others. There is no dual personality, no dissociation and no change in the personality of the individual when his spirit is

upon him, although some of them sing in a low voice when possessed by a man, are masculine in their movements and smoke hemp. Some possessed people dance in a peculiar fashion: Mabelowa when her second spirit was upon her wore a cap and pouch of rockrabbit skin and danced with left hand on her hip, right hand holding a long staff; Musivudi halflimped and was said to be possessed by a madman. Some people do peculiar things, such as trying to frighten people while dancing and running away when their spirit descends upon them, but on the whole there is no real change in personality. Nor is there much difference, except in the cloths and accessories, between one possessing spirit and another in the same individual.

When a second spirit comes upon an individual it often continues the conversation where the first spirit left off and the only indication of its arrival may be its own announcement in a song or perhaps gulfing movements and a gentle falling of the patient.

Of interest psychologically was the farewell dance of all malopo just before the vyali initiation for girls in September, 1938. Their songs and dances are taboo during the period of the 'school' just as are all marriages, as they are not allowed to compete with those of the vyali which ended only in November, 1939. We heard of no case in which the taboo against possession was broken, though it was said a woman did one day look as though the spirit was about to come. We must not conclude from this and from the fact that Christians do not become malopo that possession is imposture. There are wide avenues for fraud as we have seen, but most malopo are genuine, victims of mass-suggestion. The cult is not associated with gifts of prophecy,

the finding of lost objects or with phenomena , such as noises in the hut. Nor are there revelations concerning the beyond; indeed when we questioned people during possession about the life hereafter they could say nothing more than that they would on departure from the possessed person go to Thavaloland, and generally evaded giving any direct answers.

The bearing of the possessed when not dancing is quite dignified and detached, in contrast to the diabolical manifestations of the possessed in Europe in the Middle Ages. Usually they remain sitting apart on a special mat spread in their honour, neither speaking nor showing interest in things about them . There is no use of abusive language and the spirits do not show any desire to break the rules of society. Possession among the Lovedu appears to be neither a paranoic nor a compensatory phenomenon We dare not relate trance experience with neuroses and psychoses, for we need to orientate ourselves, not from our, but from a wide relativistic psychology and psychopathology; the mental reflects. the cultural configuration and the disposition of drives in the mind must be viewed relatively to the disposition of forces in the culture. The whole cult among the Lovedu is remarkably stereotyped; behaviour under the influence of the spirit, the songs, the things demanded by spirits, conform to a type. Even the possessing spirits themselves are stereotyped, being almost always grandparents.

It is our impression that if anyone in the least degree susceptible, were made to dance without sustenance for several days in the noise and excitement of seances, he would be liable to fall down exhausted and respond in the traditional manner to the attentions of the women. But not all initiations are

successful. In one case witnessed by us the young woman quite obviously did not want to become possessed; she danced in a half-hearted manner and under the pretext of tending her baby, kept away as much as possible from the doctor. In another the patient began to stagger towards the end of the second day but, though everyone expected the spirit to arrive, nothing happened and so the doctor left. The reason for failure in this case may have been (but we are not sure) the loud complaints of her brother that no one in the family had ever been possessed before.

The cult, though open to men, is confined largely to women. In one area with a total population of over 500 where we took a census, 15% of the women over 15 years of age were possessed. But we came across only two cases of possessed men. We have no ready explanation for this discrepancy between possession among men and women. The suggestion sometimes put forward, that it is a form of compensation to women for an inferior position relative to men, can hardly hold in a society where women play so important a part in social, political and religious life. Further, it would be difficult to explain on these grounds how it is that the introduction and growth of the cult has corresponded to a period in which, owing to the absence of many men in the towns, the position and influence of women has tended to become even higher than before; or why the cult is absent on the high veld where the position of women is not nearly as high as among the Lovedu. The Lovedu themselves usually attribute it to present day working conditions of men. "Who", they say, "will sing and drum for a possessed man in town when his spirit descends upon him?" But this is probably pure rationalization.

CHAPTER 6.

LOVEDU MYSTERIES.

As important as ancester worship in Lovedu religion is a cult associated with rain and fertility. It has been said that the Greeks approached the divine in two ways: the one intellectual, the way of the philosophers, the other mystic, the way of the mysteries. Indeed the Lovedu fertility cult has much in common with the old Eleusinian mysteries with their dramatic rites, their secrecy, the showing of sacred objects to initiates, and according to some, a sacred marriage, symbolic union of Zeus and Demeter. Like mystery cults the world over, the Lovedu fertility cult is bound up with the concept of initiation, more especially the vyali or girls' initiation which is simultaneous with the vuhwera for men and the gomana, a sacred drum cult and an initiation. Circumcision and the khoba or girls' puberty initiation do not belong to the complex although they have certain elements in common with it. The Lovedu fertility cult unlike ancestor worship, has partly fallen into desuetude, but the rivival in 1938-9 of the vyali initiation ceremonial which had not been held for thirty-five years, makes one chary of drawing premature conclusions concerning the effects of contact with European culture. Moreover, many elements of the cult have become merged in ancestor worship and thus form part of everyday tribal life.

One of these, common to both mystery cult and ancestor worship, is the zwidajana, who, as we have seen, are ancestors

supposed to come after sunset on occasions such as the harvest, offering to whistle in the bush surrounding the village. Zwiḓajane are ancestors; they sometimes even call out what lineage they belong to, yet they areconceived of as only half-man, with one arm, one leg, half a face and body. The sound they make between the crying of a baby and the bleating of a lamb, but the language being tone-bound, messages and songs can be wistled out and understood. The Zwiḓajane join in the singing, themselves indicating (hu suma) by singing out the first line, which songs they want, and when beer is drunk, some has to be taken to the bush for them. They have even been known to finish all the beer in the storage enclosure so, very often, the precaution is taken of putting into beer not intended for their use, a piece of coal. Zwiḓajane do not touch beer that has had fire in it.

Women and the uninitiated are very much afraid of the Zwiḓajane and while they are present no uninitiated may move out of the village. If anyone comes near, the Zwiḓajane throw stones at him and may even hurt him badly. Sometimes if a child cries they will scold and swear at it or ..sher by means of their whistles and sometimes they even swear at a dog that barks at them.

Their part is played by old men that have been through the gamana initiation, usually people from some other village than the one in which the festivities are taking place. But it is not all families that are visited by such spirits; only Lovedu people and certain people of a few other groups such as Khaha and Narani have this privilege. The instrument used for whistling consists of two pieces of wood or ivory (murele-acacia sp.-

is usually used). These are triangular in form, about one and a half inches in length, con ave on the inner side, convex on the outer. Between them is inserted a vibrating membrane consisting of the tube-like 'stomach' of cattle (khivudulela) which is wound also round and round the outside to hold the two pieces together. It is said that often a human tibia with membrane or feather inserted is used.

Lesugu songs which are associated with the vadaja or zwidajane, accompany the dancing not only at the harvest offering but also on the day a new district head is installed; when people come on a visit of condolence on the death of an important royal relative and as a measure for procuring rain. These songs are more particularly associated with women, though men also dance in the circle to the drumming of lesugu songs and they are closely related to musevhetho singing of the vyali initiation which may be referred to also as lesugu. It is the women who dance to lesugu songs for rain and among the Nareni this is looked upon as an annual women's counterpart of the gomana drumming by men for rain Lesugu songs are thought of as somewhat sad and are specially pleasing to the spirits whose demise they are thought to mourn. Their wording associates them with death and with rain but does not otherwise throw much light on their function. The opening lesugu song, after which the others follow in any order, refers to the death of deceased spirits: 'The killers of our father have taken each other and crossed two rivers (vavolavi va rare va isane va ngla noga-bedi). Another consists of unintelligible sounds:

Kva a va va na va la oo wa o va va na va la. One is definitely

associated with asking for rain: 'The fountain is dry, O spirits we go to draw water at Rasodi of Muhale (khidiba khi pyele vadaja re yo kha ha Rasodi a Mohalè) while the following 'The bird is here in the forest of Ḓaja; it sings falsetto like a person' (Nonyana e mo sodini la Ḓaja e eba digodu ge ga mutho) refers to the whistling of Zwiḓajane and significantly associates them with the great bird, Manoni, the ruling spirit of the vyali initiation. Lesugu songs are always the same, whether the occasion be connected with a visit of condolence, the joyful offering at harvest time or dancing for rain.

THE SACRED DRUM CULT.

The zwiḓajane belong, par excellence, to the sacred drum cult or gowana. Drums are much used in Lovedu life; they are played in the gosha dance to the accompaniment of reed pipes, they are important in all initiations except circumcision, they are beaten for days at the dancing of possessed people, and it is significant that the public recognition by the queen of a new district head at his installation consists in the handing over of a drumstick (khioba kha goma). Drums are of two types: the long cylindrical drum played with the hands as it lies on its side and the goma, a rounded drum with handles, played by means of a stick as it stands in an upright position. The sacred drums (digomana) of the tribe are of the goma type, but unlike ordinary drums are played by hand, not with a drumstick. They are four in number, each with its special name, and are kept at present in a village at Maulwe beside the bush in which the last three rulers lie buried. Their keeper is a descendant of Malegudu, eldest son of the last male ruler who fought with his sister, Mujaji, for

the throne. These drums are not to be seen by the public nor are people other than inmates of the royal district allowed to pass anywhere near there. In appearance and decoration they are no different from ordinary drums, but they are made in a special way and it is said that the maker 'will see them with his eyes but never hear them with his ears' (i.e., he will be put to death when his work is done).

The largest is phatate which stands about four feet high; next in size is tanga; then comes pekahare while the smallest and most important of all is ran'wedi to which is attributed powers even of locomotion because in 1890, when Albasini set fire to the royal village it was the only one of the gomana drums that was not burnt. While all four gomana drums are said to contain a human skull instead of the river stone that one always finds inside this type of drum, ran'wedi, the smallest, has the facial skin of a human being placed (in strips, it is said) under the resonator of ox hide and has, smeared on the outside, the body dirt of the person (said to be always a chief councillor or other important person of royal blood) killed for its manufacture. This drum is thought to be closely associated with the welfare of the tribe. Should the chief have occasion to escape from enemies she should take with her this drum, and it is said that, when the heir to the throne receives instructions in the use of rain medicine just prior to the death of the ruling chief, she must sit upon this drum. In some neighbouring tribes the sacred drums are pierced on the death of the chief. Care of these drums, involving periodic smearing with fat and ochre to keep out weevils

and moths, renewal of the skin resonators, building and repair of the hut in which they are kept, is the work of a special section of people, those of Ravothata, whose totem is dou (elephant) of Vulebye. Vulebye is in Phalavorwa, on the western border of the Kruger National Park where this drum cult is much stronger than among the Lovedu. These Ravothata also have a very special costume in their vuhwera initiation and come to dance at the closing of the vyali at the capital with these weird-costumed dancing performers, the magogobya.

The sounding of gomana drums is not only pleasing to the Zwidajane who always are present to whistle their accompaniment, but it also brings rain. The drums have been consecrated by the killing and use of a human victim and their power of effecting rain, so essential for fertilizing of the crops, brings them into line with the countless examples collected by Frazer of the killing of human beings for similar ends in every portion of the globe. The gomana drums are looked upon as gods (mudimo) just as ancestral spirits are gods. This is well illustrated in the praise of phatate, the largest of them: 'Leg of phatate of Muhale (the first chief); if it is not a god we can throw it away rattling to the pool' (Goto la phatate a Muhale he nga ve a se mudimo re ga lata re khogolosa ra isa madiveni). The Thavina and Nareni who live to the south of the Lovedu offer the first fruits to the sacred drums and everywhere their beating is associated with rain and the agricultural year.

Among the Lovedu the cult consisted in the beating of the sacred drums in the afternoon and evening of six successive

days twice every year; in the Spring just before the sowing and in winter after the reaping of the harvest. In other tribes however there are drummings associated also with the first fruits and 'cutting' or ending the year after the drummingas a harvest thanksgiving. The Spring drumming among the Lovedu was preceded, it is said, by propitiation of the royal ancestors by means of a libation on their graves in Daja forest where the earlier chiefs lie buried. There was a special procession which no one was to see on pain of death. The Mulodazi river had to be crossed at a special spot called Khitaba vakololo (washing place of great people) and it is maintained by some that a black ox was also slaughtered. The district head at Daja, who was responsible for clearing a way to the graves, had to plant near the royal graves a little of every seed cultivated. The people would then see, it is said, which grew best and would plant much of that. The harvest drumming was a thanksgiving.

As the gomana is a secret cult open only to duly initiated men, there is associated with it also an initiation into its secrets. The first harvest gomana after the holding of a circumcision 'school' took the form of an initiation in which the neophytes were shown the secret of the zwidajane, saw the sacred drums and received cuts on their faces as a sign that they had passed through the rite.

Though the sacred drums are still kept and the Ravothala people are still called to repair the hut in which they are placed, the regular beating of gomana drums has fallen into disuse. The last gomana initiation held officially by the queen

in the tribe was in 1892 just before the accession of the present queen. It is difficult to account for this lapse when among neighbouring tribes the cult is still fully carried out. Some say the reason lies in the ritual murders that are associated with the drums, but since it is an accepted fact that a sheep may satisfactorily take the place of a human being and moreover this difficulty must somehow have been overcome by other tribes, this reason is not a good enough explanation. Possibly the cult was introduced from the south or east and had not become sufficiently assimilated or taken deep enough root to survive the lethargy induced by European contact. It may even spring back to life as did the vyali initiation in 1938-9.

Though the queen herself now holds no gomana the institution is not dead. Elements such as zwidajani have taken permanent root and the queen has allowed a stranger, Rasekwalo, a rain doctor of the crocodile (gwena) totem who came to live on European-owned land under her jurisdiction, to hold a gomana with, of course, his own drums. In 1929, when he came to ask that boys and men from the royal village be allowed to attend the initiation, the queen gave her consent. Rasekwalo holds one gomana a year, receiving special permission from the queen on each occasion, and initiates circumcised and uncircumcised alike. But this gomana is not a sacred thing and has not the power of the old Maulwe ceremony. It is looked upon rather as a 'business' and source of revenue to Rasekwalo who receives 5/- per initiate.

Initiation into the gomana cult today by Rasekwalo does not differ from accounts of the ceremonial in the queen's own gomana

of old. For our present purpose it will not be necessary to do more than indicate a few of the main features of such initiation. It lasts one day only, after which the novitiates return home where, until the cuts have healed, they spend their time in a special enclosure near their village. After being ceremonially beaten with medicated sticks which are thought to strengthen them, the boys on the day of initiation are conducted to the enclosure where gomana drums and zwidajane instruments are being played. Here, for the first time, they see that the zwidajane are men with whistles and here they have four semicircular cuts made on either cheek from mouth to ear by means of an awl and knife. After the operation, the song 'Whoever reveals an initiation secret (goma) brings about his own death (mavula goma o vula lefu la hwe) is whistled and carefully interpreted for the benefit of those who find the whistling difficult to follow, and shortly after, the initiates set out for home, accompanied by 'shepherds' or attendants. They wear a cloth over the face in order to hide their wounds from the uninitiated, who are told the boys have been 'bitten' by the goma.

For the next few weeks the initiates spend most of the day in an enclosure near their home where certain formulae or passwords of the gomana are taught them. Late in the evening they go into a hut set aside for them in the village to sleep. Some herd cattle, but when outside the lodge they are to speak only by whistling. When the cuts have healed all go to the river to wash and thereafter take part in everyday life once more. Initiates of the royal village wash nowadays at the old spot

near Maulwe called Vutaba mavoha, where gomana initiates always used to wash, and while they do so Zwidajane cry in the surrounding bush and the big sacred drum is beaten a few times. All boys today do not undergo gomana initiation; only those who wish to go to Rasekwalo.

Gomana initiation is quite clearly initiation into the secret of the drum cult. There are no tests of endurance and no special teachings, for the 'laws' that are learnt are merely passwords of the gomana. Gomana ritual is linked to the vyali-vuhwera complex by the use of the whistling language, common to both. The instrument used by the Bird of the vyali is of the same type as that used by Zwidajane, while in both cults, the people of Ravothata occupy an important position. Before, however, discussing the vyali-vuhwera fertility cult it is essential to understand the significance of digoma which play so important a part in it.

DIGOMA MYSTERIES.

As in all mysteries the showing of secret objects plays an important part in the Lovedu fertility cult. Such secret objects, found also in initiations unconnected with the fertility cult, are known as digoma, but this word has a very wide connotation. A goma is something secret and wonderful, something which it is a privilege to see and which is usually shown to initiates during an initiation. Though made by men and women, there is something almost supernatural about a goma; its manufacture is called 'giving birth to' (ku dzwala digoma), and though for example, in the case of a dancing goma everyone knows that some masked person is playing the part, this in no way detracts from its

importance. It is usually said of digɔma that they 'bite' and at girls' initiations the women generally shout 'it bites' (ea luma, ea luma) as a warning to uninitiated to keep their distance.

Digɔma are not confined to secret objects. Laws and formulae taught during an initiation are also digɔma. Even the initiation itself may be, and very often is, referred to as a gɔma. Sometimes a gɔma is a sound or an action. In the girls' puberty ceremonial, especially in areas where Shangana-Tonga influence is marked, one gɔma, called lion (dau) consists of a sound made by passing the hand down a stick or a piece of hide held over a pot.

Many digɔma are masked figures dancing or running in costumes made of grass, reeds or leaves. Muxowela in the girls' puberty ceremonial is a woman dressed in tall reeds reaching to twice her height and surmounted by a cloth or flag. Maile, a gɔma with the praise, 'Darkness of the lowlands, when it darkens, rain falls.' (tswifi la vuroga la ifala bula ea ng) is a woman whose whole body is smeared with soot and water. Muphego is a woman, naked except for a cloth between the legs, painted all over the body with white clay, who represents a madman and runs about wildly. Mujelejele consists of several masked figures dancing, stamper in hand, in a row; they are followed by others winnowing pebbles in winnowing fans. Many of these digɔma are displayed on special occasions called nu thegisa digɔma (causing digɔma to dance), when women from several areas may gather in one spot and sometimes men may be allowed to watch from a distance. Others are too secret ever to be shown in public.

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