

SOCIAL VALUES OF NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN RELIGIONS

Dragoslav Kočović

Faculty of Political Science, University of Belgrade; Belgrade, Serbia

Abstract

American Indian religions are not technological. They are not the philosophy of civilization, but the philosophy of the society's final revelation. Everything is created in a time that cannot be measured, all of creation is the final and perfect, order of things and relationships exists: the forces of the universe, the spirits of plants, animals, nature and people. Perfection is in the man's respect for the laws of nature, i.e. the world of spirits and the universe which is finite in balance and harmony. This is the philosophy of the power of nature and the universe, helping a helpless man through gifts given to him: rain, sun, fruits, plants, animals and others, provided that he shows gratitude and respect. Here, man is not above nature, and based on this philosophy the world is not created in honor of a man or a man is over nature and everything in it. In the best case, man is equal to all forms in nature and must respect them and show gratitude, thus maintaining harmony and balance. For Indians, the world is not only a physical but also a spiritual space. In that duality, man is walking on a daily basis, shapes and directs his own life. Importance of this religious philosophy is undoubted, especially today when the world faces a series of consequences that are unsolvable because they are the result of gross and severe violation of natural laws. Unscrupulous race for profits visibly destroys the natural clock and the natural laws being adjusted for millions of years, resulting in endangered wildlife, endangered eco-systems, seriously questioning the survival of man and organized societies on the planet.

Keywords

Indians, tribe, Great Power, Great Spirit, Great Mystery, ghosts, universe, rituals, ceremonies, sacred places, sacred objects, sacrifice

Main features and characteristics

Before the arrival of Europeans to the present-day North America, there were about one million Indians. Social life, rituals, customs and mutual relationships, views of the nature and others, proceeded through the social form of tribal organizations and tribal way of life. Almost all the tribes had their own special language and symbols. There were around 2 thousand and 200 American Indian languages in the period before the arrival of European sailors and adventurers on the North-American continent. In interactions between the tribes, a superficial way of communication by signs, by which they communicated, was developed. Each tribe had its own customs, ceremonies and its religion. Religion, in essence in itself, united customs and ceremonies and expressed spirituality of American Indian

tribes. Of course, there were similarities in some things, but the differences were evident, that is why there is no unique Indian religion /1/. These religions have no clergy or hierarchy, they have no built constructions for practicing religion, there is no organizational structure. They do not have the creator or founder, such as were: Moses, Lao Tse, K'ung tzu, Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak. They do not have like it is the case with other religions known to us, a beginning bound to given moment or miraculous events of appearances or the birth of the messenger of the divine nature. They do not have their own written books, but everything is based on oral tradition and passing on from generation to generation. All rules, ceremonies, ethical code and others were passed from generation to generation without any records and written information. There are no scriptures and holy books

such as Old Testament, New Testament, Quran, Guru Granth and others. However, like all other religions, Indian religions also derive their spiritual authenticity from distant, ancient times and distant roots of its people (see Taoism, Confucianism /2/. Thus, the written rules and written instructions do not exist, but there are clear rules of conduct and ethical values which are carefully preserved through oral tradition and continuous practice among the Indian people. From an early age children participate in such an organization of life and shape themselves in the culture of a given tribe. Despite tribal differences and peculiarities, however, for a variety of American Indian religions there is something common in the basis: *the Great Power (Vakan Tanka), the Great Spirit (Manitou), Great Mystery (Orenda)* are some of the names for one and the same thing, and that is what is the origin of everything (see similarities with Asian religions). *This power is one thing, just called by different names, is the basis of the nature, the man and the universe. The power that can not be defined, is the basis of all, everyone are aware of it, is viewed as a universal power outside them (American Indians) and which connects all there is, all shapes, forms, i.e. the creations of this universal force.*

A man, his environment and all the creations of Great Power, i.e. universal power contain in themselves a spirit and are very much alive. Given that everything is alive and has a spirit, nature and the world around them should be respected, because the spirit acts in positive and negative way. The earth gives life because it has a strong spirit for American Indians and should be continuously shown respect. It gives life to all that exists on earth, and to the man who after death returns to the earth because it previously gave him life.

Each individual should respect holly universal rules that govern nature, "to walk in the sacred way" to live in harmony with the nature that surrounds it. Correctness and accuracy of the sacred way of life and existence, every individual should find in their visions and dreams.

Connecting and mutual incorporating of Indians is performed through rituals, ceremonies and oral traditions. In this way, are shaped, stored and passed on beliefs and ethics. Ri-

tuals and Ceremonies have their insignia: a meeting place and performance of rituals followed by singing, dancing and feasting. In the tradition of American Indians there are rites for healing, cycles of nature, the renewal of the earth, fertility and others. The ultimate goal of all the rituals and ceremonies is connecting the man with the universal force.

The ceremonies are performed by tribal medicine men (shamans, singers) who through rituals and the ordination connect with the supernatural, i.e. the universal force for the good of their people, or tribe.

The origin and philosophy of American Indian religions

If the theories are correct and scientific claims that the ancient ancestors of the Indians were natives of Asia, and that more than 12 thousand years ago they moved to the North America by mainland, which then linked Siberia and Alaska, then you can without a doubt say that the American Indians and their way life, beliefs and respect for the universe is best preserved original spiritual life of Asian cultures. Namely, American Indian customs are preserved archetype of the man and the spirit from the time of ancient Asians from which have evolved present nations of Asia and their religion. "Scientists point out the similarity of religion of Siberian tribes in Asia and American Indian tribes in Canada and Alaska. Parallels that are found indicate that these religions have a common origin. For American Indians and Asian religions, such as Taoism and Confucianism, which developed in ancient China from the same religious roots and Shinto religion, religion of Japan, which undergone the same Asian influence - also have the common idea of the importance of maintaining balance and harmony with the universe" /3/. The essence and meaning of this philosophy, its philosophical system will be reviewed through learning about the *creator of the world, ghosts, holy places, holy things and shamans.*

The creator of the world is supernatural being, the culture hero, it could be in human form, which according to belief of some American Indian tribes, is the *First Man and First Woman, the Creator of the World, the Creator of*

the Earth. With other Indian tribes in the world the creator of the world is in human-animal form. Despite the different names, in the minds of American Indians the Creator of the world: created the world, inhabited it by people and also gave them rituals and ceremonies that they need to practice, respect and uphold. The created world is fully alive and every thing has its own spirit or breath. Everything is alive: water, rocks, hills, everything comes from the earth because for American Indians it is the mother. The breath of life is felt in everything: murmur of water, blowing of wind, the rustle of leaves, soil moisture. This breath can not be seen but it is real and is an important factor that affects every environmental contents. When a man dies he can also be reborn in the form of animal. Ghosts of the dead cause unrest among American Indians because the spirits of the dead are considered dangerous and can cause discomfort or some evil.

The Spirits of the sky, some Indians believe that the first people on earth, after the duties they performed together with their families went to heaven (*Luisenjo Indians*). For others, the Milky Way in the sky was the way the human souls, and the starry sky for a number of American Indian tribes is friendly being, because it lightens sky for American Indians, helps in determining the weather and the change of seasons (*Navajo Indians*). *Pawni* Indians believe to be descendants from stars, since the Morning Star married the *Evening Star*, and their daughter came down to the earth where she married a child of *the Sun* and *Moon*. From this marriage on earth members of *the tribe Pawni* were created. In southwestern Indian tribes *the Sun* is considered the father of life because it helps soil fertility. It is greeted every morning by the symbolic pouring of flour on the ground. It is regarded as the greatest supernatural being which illuminates the world, brings warmth, life and death.

Animal Spirits, Native Americans mythology tells that once humans and animals lived together, communicated in the same language and had special powers. In this mythic lore people were the weakest creatures, while the animals were also people only

of other species (*bear, deer, mouse, ...*). Birds are considered special beings since they pass messages to the sky, where the Eagles are the most powerful, that is why their feather is a symbol of many Indians and an expression of power and strength. There are beings who under this belief can transform from animals to humans, from humans to animals. Hunters hunt only what is necessary for life and each animal they caught is shown gratitude for giving life and thus enabling the Indians to survive. It is believed that in case of disrespect of the catch (*deer, bison, salmon, ...*) animal spirits would interfere with future hunting. Some tribes like *the Cherokee Indians* believe that disrespect for the catch causes diseases like rheumatism, arthritis for hunters.

Ghosts of plants, plants possess spirits by which they, among other things, react to external influences of environment in which they are located. Many plants do not survive if they are not shown necessary attention, they are considered friends of people and very usable in nutrition, healing, rituals and ceremonies. For the Indians, a special place as divine plants have *corn, squash, beans, tobacco, and others*. Undoubtedly, American Indians practiced a moderate diet where meals were proportionately of animal and herbal origin. Large portion of plants in the diet provided strength, health and stamina for Indian people. Tobacco is especially important. Many tribes grown it, and exchanged it for other craft and agricultural products. It occupies a special place in the rituals as tobacco smoke, as considered by Native American people, passes the prayer to heaven. The leader and holy men of the tribe must have smoked tobacco wrapped in a cigarette or pipe. For Indians, the earth was holly, and all the fruits that it provided, because of that they respected all these gifts of God and developed awareness to take from nature just a bit in order to avoid spoiling the natural balance and harmony that rules in it. *They thought they would lose all if they uncontrollably killed animals and harvested plants without measure. In this manner they developed personal and family responsibility, saving and keeping everything in its own environment.* If there is no respect for wildlife, ghosts can react to it and leave some space, which

would cause accident, drought, famine, reduction or loss of yield, disease and others. In essence, Native Americans through respect for spirits gained their grace and in such a manner held sacred path of nature and harmony with it.

Ghosts of place for the Indians are of the great sacred, significance, such as *high mountains, cliffs, waterfalls, springs, lakes, dense forests, rivers, etc.* (compare with Shinto beliefs of Japan about the holy places) /4/. These places, as said by Indian tradition, have exceptional power because the tribe members who have visited these places were carried by the inspiration and desire for union with the Great Spirit (compare the similarities with the believers of other religions for whom sacred places are cathedrals, synagogues, churches, mosques, Buddhist temples, who visited and visit them with the same goal as Indians did their holy places). *In the sacred places were held the rituals and ceremonies with the intention of good personal health, healing and good, fortune and safety of the entire tribe. Such sacred places may be: those that were mentioned in the sacred stories, the places where the supernatural miraculous events happened, place where you could find medicinal plants, water, minerals, where it was possible to establish communication with spirits (Navajo tradition), also Holy Places were those where members of the tribe were buried and the places where people experienced visions.*

Sacred objects, each tribe had its sacred objects, so tribes of *Lakota* people had a Sacred pipe, which was a gift from *Buffalo women*. In tribes of *Pueblo* people sacred objects were *Sticks (Paco)* used for prayer. These items were carved and decorated with stones, shells and feathers. Feathers had a role to convey messages from spirits and were left in places for which it was believed that spirits would visit them and in such a manner hear prayers for good health, fertility, rain, peace of souls of the dead and so on. *Masks* are also considered sacred objects because they possess Spirit of Life in them. During the ritual dance masks are believed to help the dancer transform into a creature represented by the mask. Therefore, the masks are valued and shown the respect and kept with great care. *What is common to all tribes of Indians is that they had (they received as a*

legacy or made it as directed) bundle of leather or canoas. Similarly, we find this in the religious beliefs of the ancient Egyptians, extracted and preserved to this day we have it with our nations known as a talisman. This bundle has the sacred importance and possess spiritual power. Bundle can be owned by an individual, family, clan and tribe. Much attention is devoted to it in terms of responsible keeping, expressing attention and devotion. Proper behavior towards the bundle should ensure good health, healing, successful hunt, predicting the future and others. In the case of disrespect towards sacred bundles (talismans) can cause great misfortune to the individual, tribe and the whole nation /5/.

Shamans, medicine men and spirits guides

Shamans, what the prophecies are for classical religions (*Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Nanak, etc.*), for Indians those are shamans, i.e. holy men, spiritual leaders, as the Indians perceived and considered them. Shamans for Indians had the spiritual power and were in connection with the forces of the universe, they were able to invoke the powers to help resolve the problem or, to grant wishes and prayers of spiritual person. In the northern part of the globe there is a belief that shamans (medicine men) with the help of the spirit could leave their body and their spirits could float away into the world of spirits. This path is very difficult to control, it can have good or bad purpose. It is interesting that with Indians women could be shamans, but only after they lost the ability to give birth. Tribes of *Lacota* people called women shamans "women who are calling ghosts," because in the culture of Indians it is believed that these woman are in connection with the spirit world and they receive advice, guidance and directions. *Shamans gather herbs, make diagnosis, determine treatment, cure, find lost, influence atmospheric changes, predicts future and evaluate the outcome of the intentions and planned objectives. They interpret dreams, tell stories and important events from history of their people and occurrence in nature.* Quite often among the shamans are shared responsibilities and duties, so some are prophets, others interpret dreams, the third cure, some are in

charge of conducting rituals, ceremonies and others. Becoming a shaman happens in several ways: they are visited by the ghosts since childhood or appear only at the time of illness, one can become a shaman by inheriting the role of shaman in the family, acquisition of knowledge of the shamans of those who become their students. In any case, desire of the individual to become a shaman is not enough, but some predestination is needed. Which means that the spirits in some way communicate with prospective student of shamanism and his visions occur, "the most powerful shamans are those who are called by spirits to serve their tribe, sometimes against their will." /6/ The student of shamanism goes through a symbolic death and resurrection, in that act he gets spiritual guides or assistants who are responsible to provide the student of shamanism with help in establishing contact with the forces of the universe. *The process involves learning how through the vision to enter the spirit world in order to solve arisen problem, and to come up with the answer for the difficulties that have afflicted individual, group, tribe, or people as a whole. For example, for resolving the failure in the hunt, how to use drums and other percussion instruments in rituals and ceremonies, manner of treatment, exorcism of evil spirits and others. In this learning process the self discipline and denial is very much relied on.*

American Indian tradition says that every person has its spirit guide that comes with the person at the time of birth and remains with the person all its life. Another way is for an individual to search for spirit guide. It occurs as he is isolated from the tribe, usually at one of earlier mentioned sacred places, the top of the rock, hill, near the source, in thick forests and similar. To the chosen place he is brought by oldest people in the tribe with fasting and prayer "novice" is looking for vision. Of course, if the ghosts want he receives a vision of the future of their way of life, conduct, status in the tribe, success, etc. Then, according to belief, spirit guide appears in the form of animal, fire or wind. Spirit which appeared by itself says how it will live: *the spirit of the eagle means accuracy and ferocity, the spirit of the butterfly ability to escape from danger, the spirit of tortoise long and peaceful life, the spirit of*

the bear strength and security, the spirit of Buffalo safety of existence, food, tools for work, clothing and footwear. Spirit guide says how the individual should make sacred bundle. The person who receives spirit guide through the vision gets new name, and may always address the spirit guide for help. It is interesting that in addition to men in some American Indian tribes, girls can also seek visions and their spirit guide. In some tribes (the tribes in Alaska) there is a belief that the spirit guides should be received only by those who want to become holy men: disease healers, singers of prayers, performers of rituals and ceremonies. American Indians believe that man is helpless without the aid of spirits because it absolutely depends on what nature gives him, it is the condition of his survival. Therefore, we should respect the spirits of animals, plants and other nature spirits for the benefit of mankind. Otherwise, if there is no indication of respect for the spirits, it can cause their anger, wrath and rage, causing great hardship for man in way of flood, drought, famine, disease, death, pestilence, etc. Hence, the daily content and the way of life of Indians is essentially a prayer for benefits which the spirits are graciously giving man.

Oral traditions and their importance in shaping the culture of the Indians

The oral tradition, i.e. stories are key source for shaping awareness and the primary way to create and foster the culture of the Indians. Oral tradition in the form of a story does not only have a role to mentor and teach the listeners as is the case with other religions which have their own written books and scriptures (Bible, Quran, Guru Granth) but these stories shape awareness of listeners who have a task to surpass passive learning and simple practicing of rituals and ceremonies through the beliefs and deep essential knowledge of the universal force and spirits of nature. American Indian stories set in the center of things their tribe as a micro cosmos, where the tribe is, that place, and that part of the country is considered sacred, "on it they were fed on fruits and game, it provided clothing and shelter, and they returned to it after death, thus becoming a part of life cycle. Each tribe will also have sa-

cred places within their territory, in which they experience vision and where encounters with a ghost world occur, and where sacred rituals are carried out". /7/

Stories and oral tradition can be classified into four cycles: *stories* telling about *the beginning of the world*, where there was no time and where the universe always existed. It is a time when the world was completely under water. Later, the water receded and the dry land was formed, an area in which people would live. *Stories from the earliest period*, the earliest occurrence when people and animals lived together and mutually communicated in same common language. *Period of cultural heroes*, including stories about divine beings from the sky and from the earth, and their creation of the world according to the man's needs in which are also described customs, rituals and ceremonies for the man with the obligation to comply with them. *Present time* which in the stories is passed specifically to young members of the tribe about the necessity to respect the nature spirits and to unconditionally accept the will of the spirits.

What is common to all the oral traditions and stories is the fact that their original idea was the same, and that in time orally with a vivid imagination different versions are created. /8/ For some tribes the earth was created when a *toad* brought it from the bottom of the sea and put it on the back of a tortoise, in time the earth grew to the final surface of land. *Cheyenne* narrate that the swan tried to find the land in the water but failed, but one little duck succeeded in the depths of the sea to find and bring on the surface in its beak a bit of land from which *some being* made a small ball that has increased and over time created an entire land. Similarly the *Maidu Indians* from Californian coast believe that their *hero* (the Originator of the earth) created the earth by coming from the sky. The Creator sent the tortoise which from the bottom of the sea brought the earth, and he turned it into a ball of which the Earth was created. The earth was lighted by ordering the turtle to look to the east and there the sun came out in the form of the woman who, when invited to come closer, proceeded and disappeared to the west. To remove the darkness from the earth Originator

of the earth created the stars in the sky, on the ground an oak for shade, out of the land the coyote and rattlesnake came, the birds came down from the sky. The Creator, i.e. Originator created the earth's other plants and animals, made the first humans: the first man and woman, the morning star, and their children settled the world. Over time, the Originator of the earth got old and with him for walk along the lake took the first man. Incidentally, the old man fell into the lake and disappeared. He came back later young. He explained that would also be the case with people, "they will always get old and go down, but will re-emerge reborn; the Originator of the earth returned to heaven, leaving the people of the earth" /9/. According to another tradition, *people came on the earth from Underworld*. In some stories there were several underworlds. While in the underworlds the people were bickering and created turmoil where the other beings lived. While traveling through the underworld they finally came to the earth where, according to some traditions, they saw their father the Sun. On earth they realized that they had to live in harmony with nature. According to other stories, people descended from *Heavenly woman* who accidentally fell into the sea. Marine animals have realized that for her survival the earth has to be created. From her twins all other people were created. This story lives among the *Iroquois* with numerous versions from their neighboring tribes. *Navajos* have similar oral tradition with the *changeable women* of the divine origin who gave to the Indians sacred plant corn and gave birth to two twin sons. "After creating the world with the first woman, the first man started walking in the mountains. In a dark and stormy night, he heard a baby crying. He followed the sound of weeping and found the baby who was lying in the cradle of the rainbow, with its head turned to the west and the feet to the east. It was wrapped in four blankets, blue, black, white and yellow, and they were held together by the beam of sunlight. The first man held the baby and took it to the first women. In their home, they removed the blankets and saw that the baby was female. Each day that followed was like a year. During the four days, the girl has grown up. The parents gave her the name

of White Shell, but she is commonly referred to as *changeable women*. *Changeable women* gave birth to twins. Their father was the Sun. The twins, Monstrous murderer and Born Leader, quickly grew up and went to live with their father. He gave them special knowledge and powerful weapons with which they killed dangerous monsters that threatened the Holy men. Changeable women used a medical bundle that she received from the first man to create corn, which represented the basis of Navajo Indians diet. Finally, from the parts of her skin she made human beings and put them on the earth" /10/. The contents of this story determined the character of customs, rituals and ceremonies of the Navajo Indians. The ultimate goal is to establish a balance in the society and harmony between a man and nature. In some stories it is said that the *raven created the earth* by throwing seeds into the sea. So *Haida* people from the northwestern coast believed that the raven going by coast have found the shell in which there were humans, with its abilities of a trickster forced them to exit into and from them Haide Indians tribes were created. A similar story with the raven also exists with the *Inuits*. Namely, the raven has planted vines, and from grape grain the first man appeared. When the raven spotted him, it made another character of clay and breathed life into it and created the first woman, from them people in the world were created. In the stories of *Shoshones* and *Paiutes* from the Great Basin, the *coyote* is the father of the first people on earth. In California, where there still are remains of ancient twenty tribes of Indians it is believed that the coyote produced death for people because it estimated that there were too many people on earth. For the burial of deceased, it created and also gave people proper rituals.

Self-criticism and moral teaching

Often the stories of Native Americans are about cheaters. Cheaters in the human and animal form, possess unique powers in terms of strengths and weaknesses, so that with their actions they bring men good and bad. Stories of cheaters are more entertaining, but basically speak about man's faults, imperfections, which

among other things include: *greed, avarice, naïvete, envy, lust, and similar*. In this context through these stories are illuminated morale and moral dimension that exists among the people. Their aim is to warn, especially young people, to behave in accordance with the canons of the life of the tribe: *responsible behavior, solidary attitude, maintaining confidentiality, respect for the norms and rules of life of the tribe*. On the other side the stories warn about great difficulties in interpersonal relationships and the consequences: *quarrels, animosity and conflicts, and at the same time point towards the peace, tolerance, release of greed, fairness, honesty, respect of spirits, etc*. The stories warn that bad deeds cause suffering to individuals, tribes and nations as a whole. Because of that oral tradition (stories) recommends the generosity and kindness so that the balance and harmony could prevail in the world. In addition to other features that man possesses, he is also characterized by the fact that he is very often *foolish*. Namely, the Indians considered foolish people those who behave in an inappropriate manner, exaggerate and err in actions. Indians believe that the foolish people have the power and that is why they are called *the Holy Fools*. This type of people is presented in the rituals through those participants who are late in dance, song and prayer and are wrong in the steps, words and prayers, pushing, pinching, or otherwise provoking the other dancers, wearing masks much larger than parts of his body, his actions provoke the laughter and show frivolity. They do everything others are ashamed of, and can also do what others are afraid of, underrate decency in treatment, work, behavior. *Through role of Holy Fool in the rituals the American Indians in fact show a difficult path of human development, the obstacles that people encounter, dramatic moments and human destinies*. In this way man is reminded of his faults, but he has not forgotten the virtues, all in order to create non-conflictive interpersonal relationships and make a person reject from the Holy Fools what's wrong, and take what should be cherished such as courage, creativity and humor because it produces laughter because for the Indians laughter is "sacred and spiritual gift."

The importance of sacred objects, purifying and spiritual power of dance

Sacred objects are carefully preserved and used in accurately determined conditions, for the Indians they represent the direct relationship with the forces of the universe. At the same time *arrangements and agreements which were made with the ritual of sacred objects were considered sacred, unbreakable and durable. Such agreements were respected by all. With sacred objects also came obligations that Indians obeyed: the sacred objects were only used for good purposes; to lead a clean and honest life; to respect the fruits of the earth; for men to respect women; to love their children and help in raising children, for spouses, men and women, to share joint grief.*

With Seminole Indians of Oklahoma, there is a tradition that precedes the dance. Namely, before *corn dance*, or as it is called *stepping dance*, the men of the tribe forgive one another the sins done and peacefully resolve disputes from the previous year, banished of the tribe can come back to the tribe and under its wing. In addition to resolving interpersonal relationships, the special role of women and men is recognized and emphasized in the community, the children are given names and purification is carried before entering the rites and rituals. By tradition, the purification of these Indians is achieved by using potions for vomiting and scratching the body with nails and needles until bleeding, and thus freeing the body of evil, while the good remains in the body, thus preparing to participate in the dance.

All Indian religions used dance as a way of communicating with universe. Dancing is not a simple step and easy movement of the body, but a religious ritual and prayer in motion. American Indians believe that in the dancers who dance wearing masks the appropriate spirit enters and dancer thus becomes a spirit and thus connects the human world and the spirit world, this is the fastest way to pass the prayer of people to the forces of the universe, which will, as believed by Indians, be fulfilled. The manner of performing dance varies from tribe to tribe. So in some tribes they dance in group, in the others in a circle, some dance in a line or dance individually. Both men and women participate in dancing, sometimes they dance together, but more of-

ten separately and at different times. *With all Indians it is common for every dance that they all dance for the common good: invoking rain, a good crop of corn, a successful hunt, renewal of earth, good health, healing, a better life, happiness, etc. Dancing invokes the appropriate spirits to help with part of its jurisdiction.*

Dancing is done by some tribes in the open, usually it is a sacred place. In rainy areas Indians erect special houses for dances and ceremonies. With them all, the dance is accompanied by music which for the Indians has supernatural power. The drum is, as considered by the Indians, "heart of the mother earth", besides it the magic also belongs to the other instruments such as flutes, pipes, rattles, etc. Prayer with quietly uttered word reaches the spirits, but the song of prayer is more effective because it is faster and sooner heard by universal force (Great Power, Great Spirit, Great Mystery). Songs can be chanted independently from the ritual, such as a women's song while shelling corn, putting baby to sleep, for healing, good health, etc. American Indians believe that the song scares off evil spirits, and that the area where the singing takes place is not threatened by any harm to anyone. The songs are usually common and they can all be sung in chorus or individually, they represent the common property. However, the songs received by individuals through the vision are personal property of the individual, and only the one can sing them and no one else, and these songs are personal good.

Health, disease, treatment and education

Indian beliefs suggest that human *health* depends on the proper relationship of individuals, tribes and people with the world of spirits and forces of the universe. Good health is possible only if harmony and balance with nature, the spirit world and the Great Spirit or Great Mystery is maintained. Disturbance of balance and proper harmony is expressed through illness of any individual or mass diseases that affects large number of people. Thus, the occurrence of *the disease* is a sign that the balance is lost, and this happens because of behavior and actions of an individual or a number of members of tribe that are

not in accordance with the will of the spirits. Undoubtedly, the disease, as believed by Indians, is coming from higher or supernatural forces. The tribes which live mainly by hunting believe that disrespect towards killed animals brings disease to hunters and even the whole tribe. Others believe that the disease is being caused by unsaved taboos or doing bad deeds. In one group of Indians, disease is the result not fulfilled hopes and dreams (compare with the suffering and longing in Buddhist philosophy), With some again, the disease is the result of sin that has been made by the ancestors. Indians believe that the disease can be transmitted to humans also by evil spirits through spells cast by a witch, medicine man (shaman), or a person who wants to harm another. Evil spirits especially evil spirits of the dead person's soul can catch a person and thus cause severe illness.

Therefore, there are rituals and ceremonies through which a balance and harmony is established between the individual and the higher forces, when establishing equilibrium then recovery happens. *Treatment* of patients is done through the ritual designed only for the sick. However, every ritual and ceremony to be held during the year, within themselves include, among other things, healing contents for the sick. For example, during the Sun Dance, the dancers devote their dance for curing some people, sick people also enter the sacred circle of dancers and receive the healing (in this is particularly evident suggestion and autosuggestion through the influence of the mind on the body). In addition to the rituals and ceremonies of collective character, the treatment is performed by one person (medicine men, shamans) who are chosen by spirits and possess the ability to heal. Specifically, in addition to the traditional role of the shaman and medicine man to treat people this ability may be held by herbalists or other persons, without distinction, men and women, but the women can treat only after the end of birth cycle. The treatment is carried out at a special healing places where they use natural resources. For the purpose of diagnosis and treatment shamans use visions, dreams and other ways. To heal someone shamans perform preparations which include fasting, prayer,

singing and drumming. Then they go into a trance and then Shaman's guardian spirits speak and communicate the cause of the disease and how to treat it. *The most common way of treatment is prayer, song, sacred objects, and the use of talismans, blessed water and herbs. For Lakota and Shoshone tribes, for the purpose of treatment they also go through Sweat lodge, a Navajo Indians also offer gifts for healing. Healers give the patient instructions about spiritual matters, advice for a change of life and find the necessary prescribe herbs.* Shamans treated numerous diseases, fixed broken bones, they were experts on healing from snakebite, they knew many treatment techniques and others. Obviously, shamans (medicine men), herbalists and other by spirits endowed and determined persons were well acquainted with herbs, plants (compared with alchemists in Taoism), the anatomical structure of man, connoisseurs of important influence of the mind on the body (an obvious example are rituals) /11/. The issue of the impact of the mind on the body is a matter of self-control, self-development and self-responsibility and is subject to modern medical science and its helping sciences and methods (psychology, social work) where space for exploration, discovery and explanation is still wide open. However, despite centuries of collected experience, acquired knowledge and skills of treatment, many diseases and injuries of all kinds could not be cured by healers.

Education with the Indians came down to oral tradition, practical acquisition of skills: hunting, warfare, healing, rituals, storytelling and retelling history and customs of their ancestors. According to the cultural and educational level they were very much different from one another, from very backward to some very advanced tribes. The famous writer Mark Twain in the year 1861, described the Indians at the west of America as "the type of most miserable people he had ever seen". However, the tribes that were pushed from the East towards the West were well developed. They were preceded by the five tribes where *Cherokee* Indians were the most advanced and counted in the year 1839 about 19 thousand members of the tribe. Then they overcame mutual strifes, had established a system of public education, they started printing their

own newspaper, opened two seminars for higher education and passed its own constitution /12/.

Children, Marriage and Family

Indian way of life is cyclic circuit where the start of life consists of accepting life in harmony with the spirit of nature and embracing the rules of life in the tribe. In this natural (nature) and social (tribe) environment constant stream of birth, growth, marriage, work, old age, death, etc. takes place. Arrangement of way of life of Indians is always physical and spiritual, where the spirituality can be separated from the physical only provisionally in the study of American Indian way of life. Thus, all stages in the growth and development of members of the tribe are marked with the appropriate rituals and ceremonies, and great importance is given to them.

Children for all Indian tribes are gift which provides the future, life and duration of the tribe. Health of the future increment (children) is the main concern of potential mothers, because they consistently observe rituals and taboos all for the purpose of good health of future babies. Newborn children are carefully and responsibly raised, occupying the attention of parents and families. Life story of a child (*Poeh, Tewa*) is preceded by a ritual which for *Tewa* Indians consists in that a woman who assisted at the birth four days after the event, for the first time in the morning carries the child out, symbolically cleans the area where the child is lowered to so that the ghosts come to the child, then rises it towards the east, west, north, south, toward the sky and the earth. In this act at the same time she is praying to the forces of the universe, and speaks the name of the child. It is similar with the *Zuni* Indians, except that the women on father's side on the eighth day after birth wash child's head and take it out at the time of sunrise, thereby ritually throw corn flour in the wind and pray to the spirits for the health and long life of the child. Indians from the *Hopi* tribe practiced the same ritual, only it takes place twenty days after the birth of the child. *Haida, Kwakiutl, Ejja, Quileute* and other tribes from the northwest practiced family feast organized on the occasion of nam-

ing a child. This ceremony includes *dancing of the tribe members, telling and retelling family history, a feast and giving presents to all invited guests by the family*. This ceremony takes place twice a year when tribal elders individually receive mothers with newborn children and give them names. Depending on in which half of the year the children are born, accordingly they get the appropriate attribute of *summer or winter person* that determines their role in their future life, rituals and ceremonies on life's journey (*Poeh, Tewa*). These ceremonies are also practiced for *coming of age, weddings and funerals*. Harsh climate conditions in the Arctic and Subarctic with the *Inuit* Indians caused the widespread adoption of children, and their sacrifice.

Name for Indians means predestination to something, future way, style of life, the characteristics that parents and families want their child to have in the future, social status, etc. Through name it is desired for the child to be diligent, strong, brave, good, responsible, hardworking, to respect restrictions and taboos, that is why it has great importance. Choosing names is usually responsibility of the elderly in the family and the tribe. It is interesting how much the content and way of life (*Poeh, Tewa*) as we (in the lexicon and the culture of the Serbs) would say "fate", in Indian tradition causes the change of name. The boys get a different name according to the developmental stages and ways of life. As opposed to men, girls retain the name they received at the ceremony until the end of life. The only exception are those girls who are gentle in health or unlucky in life. Indians believed by changing names, it is what they do, they can change a child's life and with new name the girl, in fact, begins life anew. After obtaining the names rituals follow the childhood of children. At this stage of development the families show they raise children properly, that they are developed in accordance with the canons of the tribe, their ears are pierced for earrings, they are told stories of the past, given new names (*mature status*) and it ends with gifts given by children's families to the guests (*Lakota*). Indians of *Hopi* tribe, consider children aged six to eight years mature enough to understand the meaning of the holy places, masks (*Kachina*) and dance. When a

child turns ten *Tewa* Indians practice pouring water on its head, the child cleans a sacred place where ancestors of this tribe first appeared, they choose who among the adults will instruct them in the content, manner and life of the tribe. In this ritual, which lasts four days, boys as a sign of maturity are given the task to cut wood, and girls to prepare food. It ends with the ritual of bathing children, by which they enter the *phase of adulthood*. Also, the Indian tribes in the practice ceremonial *celebration of puberty for boys and girls*. In these ceremonies, the boys and girls are expected to behave desirably, because their future life will also be in accordance with such a behavior. There is a reference to the responsibility, humility, kindness, and everything else that adults find useful and desirable for girls, as well as boys. *These rituals are followed by: dancing, prayers for the happiness of children, harmony and balance in nature.*

Marriage is a sacred institution for the Indians, the foundation of the family, maintaining or expanding tribe. Therefore, in this culture, great attention is paid to the marriage ceremony. In the choice of the bride and groom families had a crucial role as it was in accordance with the accepted morality of the tribe. The wedding meant feast, dancing and gifts. Traditional wedding ceremony of the *Hopi* Indians requires that young couple who wants to get married to pour corn flour at sunrise on the east side of the village, then the bride goes to the family of her beloved where she fasts and shells corn. She obtains two uniforms from the family. One she wears on her wedding day, and in the other she will be buried after her death. This symbolizes the absolute belonging and loyalty to the family and this home. On the day of the wedding at the groom's home prayer is performed, and then the bride leads the procession with gifts to the home of her parents, who welcome them where they remain to live until they build their own house. Within *Inuit* tribe marriage is contracted in childhood between cousins and other relatives. Inuit tradition has allowed prominent hunters and respected leaders to have more than one wife, such right was not allowed to other members of this nation. There are also variants of marriage, levirate (after

death of the husband marriage of sister-in-law to her brother-in-law, or husband's brother) and sororate (after the death of the wife the marriage between sister-in-law and brother-in-law, or sister's husband).

Death for the Indians is a part of the cycle of life and the act of returning to the earth which gave them life, a moment of relocation to another world. Death is not the end of life of the individual, according to the chief Seattle "Death does not exist. There is only a change of worlds." Indian beliefs suggest that people after death go to another world and live there in a similar way as in this world. Therefore, with the dead are laid the objects they used in life and that signified their status: *arms, jewelry, dishes, clothes, food, etc.* By burying the dead begins his journey to the other world. So *Ojibwe* Indians buried the dead in a sitting position facing towards the west, i.e. towards sunset. They believe that journey of the dead takes four days in the dark, difficult trails and with many obstacles, and then they reach beautiful places: meadows, forests, lakes and clean waters. There they are greeted with joyous song. At the funeral, by saying goodbye speakers explain to the deceased about the way to the other world, warning him not to turn around and to ignore life of living people and show no desire and not to delay and immediately go into the spirit world (*Winnebago Indians*). After the death of the deceased *Navajo Indians* destroy clothing and belongings of the deceased and never utter his/her names. While *Lakota* Indians practice to give all assets of the deceased to the tribesmen believing that in this way the spirit of the deceased would quickly precede to the other world. *Cheyenne* valued and respected the old very much, their knowledge and experience were considered real wealth. They were buried with their favorite objects, and besides their grave their horses were killed or just left there. After their death, they were grieved after for a long time. Grief was expressed when the mothers and wives shortened their hair, wound their body or cut off a finger and shed blood for the loved and respected ones. *Cheyenne* believed that the spirit of the deceased through milky way across the sky reached their ancestors. With tribes from the plains there is a custom that

those who died from the disease were not buried but lifted high in the tree branches and left believing that they would reach the sky faster /13/. Some tribes left their dead warriors unburied in the plains. Under the influence of Christianity, the custom of burying is largely mixed, and the funeral is followed by a meal after the funeral, family and friends sit and talk about the deceased's life, women are crying, with drums they pronounce both Indian and Christian prayer. The period of mourning ends with the ceremony on the anniversary of the death of the deceased.

Human sacrifice was known practice among some Indian tribes. Despite the brilliant ability of the Indians to adapt to geographic area in which they lived, their general biological origin and survival were generally uncertain. Natural, i.e. climatic factors were very often dictated by harsh winters, drought, reducing of wildlife, lack of fruit, loss of grain yield, which resulted in famine, disease and death. The researchers noted that some Indian tribes had practice in conditions of food shortages to leave older persons to die of hunger. To appease the spirits of nature and the powers of the universe to give them good health, sufficient food and prosperity, some tribes had a custom to offer sacrifices to the forces of nature in food, skins of wildlife and other products. Indians from the North of America and the plains, from Central and South America, also offered human sacrifices. *Inuit* Indians in the northern Arctic, due to food shortages and famine, killed their female children, and elderly persons carried out suicide. A very brutal approach of sacrifices was found with Pony tribe. From the ranks of prisoners they sacrificed the youngest and strongest to the spirits of the tribe. A man chosen for sacrificing (not rarely, it was a young and beautiful girl) was well fed for a year, the women of the tribe dined with him, came to him with wishes and requests to pass to the forces of heaven. After a year in the morning in the west of the village

the sacrificed man was crucified and tied to the columns prepared in advance, beneath they would light a fire and one of the present would shoot through him, and after him it would be done by all the other men of the tribe including children. One of the attendees would come up to the sacrificed man and cut his chest, rip the heart out, then smear his face with blood. The fire would be incited until the victim's body burnt, and attendees would grab smoke with hands and rub it on their body. Whoever first shot through the body of the sacrificed man, mourned for four days and asked for mercy from the spirits because of killing a human being /14/.

Notes

- /1/ Will Durant, *Eastern Civilization*, Narodna knjiga- Alfa, Belgrade 1995, p. 67.
- /2/ Dragoslav Kočović, *Religious teachings, social values of religious teachings*, Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade, 2010.
- /3/ Paula R. Hartz, *Native American religions*, Čigoja, Belgrade, 2002, p. 16.
- /4/ Dragoslav Kočović, *Religious teachings, social values of religious teachings*, Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade, 2010, p. 127-139.
- /5/ Paula R. Hartz, *Native American religions*, Čigoja, Belgrade, 2002, p. 21-27.
- /6/ *Ibid*, p.30.
- /7/ *Ibid*, p. 37.
- /8/ Dragoslav Kočović, *Religious teachings, social values of religious teachings*, Faculty of Political Sciences, Belgrade, 2010, p. 260.
- /9/ Paula R. Hartz, *Native American religions*, Čigoja, Belgrade, 2002, p. 41.
- /10/ *Ibid*, p. 40.
- /11/ The U.S. pharmaceutical industry and pharmacological sciences took from the American Indian practice 170 medicinal plants. Slobodan M. Radošević, *Monastic civilization*, Volume II, Center for geopoetics, Belgrade 1994, p. 421-422.
- /12/ *Ibid*.p. 418.
- /13/ *Ibid*.p. 420.
- /14/ *Ibid*, p.422-423.

DRUŠTVENE VRIJEDNOSTI INDIJANSKIH RELIGIJA SJEVERNE AMERIKE

*Dragoslav Kočović**Fakultet političkih znanosti, Sveučilište u Beogradu, Beograd, Srbija**Sažetak*

Indijanske religije nisu tehnološke, one nisu filozofija civilizacije, već je filozofija društva konačnog otkrivenja. Sve je nastalo u vremenu koje se ne može izmjeriti, sve što je stvoreno je konačno i savršeno, red stvari i odnosa savršeno postoji: sile svemira, duhovi biljaka, životinja, prirode i ljudi. Savršenstvo je u čovjekovom poštovanju zakona prirode, odnosno svijeta duhova i svemira čija je konačnost u ravnoteži i harmoniji. Ovo je filozofija moći svemira i prirode koje pomažu nemoćnom čovjeku kroz darove koje mu pružaju: kiša, sunce, plodovi, biljke, životinje i dr., s tim da pokazuje zahvalnost i poštovanje. Ovdje čovjek nije iznad prirode, i svijet po ovoj filozofiji nije stvoren u slavu čovjeka niti je čovjek iznad prirode i svega onoga što u njoj postoji. U najboljem slučaju ravnopravan je sa svim pojavnim oblicima u prirodi i mora ih poštovati, pokazuje zahvalnost i tako održava sklad, ravnotežu i harmoniju. Za Indijance svijet nije samo fizičko mjesto već je i duhovni prostor u tom dvojstvu i prostoru čovjek svakodnevno hoda, oblikuje i usmjerava vlastiti život. Nesumnjiva je važnost ove religijske filozofije, posebno danas kada se svijet suočava sa nizom posljedica koje su nerješive jer su nastale kao rezultat grubog i bezobzirnog kršenja prirodnih zakona. Bespoštedna trka za profitom vidno razara milijunima godina podešavani i podešeni prirodni raspored i prirodne zakone i za posljedicu imamo ugrožen biljni i životinjski svijet, ugrožene eko sustave, a time je ozbiljno doveden u pitanje opstanak čovjeka i organiziranih društvenih zajednica na planeti.

Ključne riječi

Indijanci, pleme, Velika Moć, Veliki duh, Velika misterija, duhovi, svemir, rituali, ceremonije, sveta mjesta, sveti predmeti, žrtvovanje