

## Liminality: A Close Study of Historical Roots and Theoretical Structure

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### Abstract

**Liminality** is an interesting but neglected theory. It helps us in understanding the mental process during a lethal condition like life threatening disease. The present study is an attempt to revisit and explore the wider implications of liminality. The main contributors in this field were Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner. Voluminous research has been produced on the basis of theory of liminality. Liminality is applied in the management studies, in Mathematics, in research process, in teaching and even in glass making. In psychology, social sciences, folk studies, in academia, in understanding the condition of the Diaspora, the refugees, the migrants, the immigrants, in terms of buildings, landscapes, modern life, pregnancy, adulthood, even in bungee jumping and adventure sports, etc., liminality has added a new lease of understanding. Liminality has played a pivotal role in understanding the phases of development of a society

**Keywords:** Liminality, in-betweenness, pre-liminal, limen, post-liminality, Arnold Van Gennep, Victor Turner

### Introduction

The term, 'Liminality,' was first used in Anthropology. It's a noun and it means the transitional period or phase of a rite of passage and during this period the participant lacks social status or rank, remains anonymous, shows obedience and humility, and follows prescribed forms of conduct, dress etc. This term was first used by Arnold Van Gennep to describe the in-between condition of human beings based on his study of various tribes. Turner had taken the theory of liminality to great heights. He called it the "betwixt and in-between," (Turner, 138) space. The pioneer in this field was Arnold Van Gennep. His seminal work *Rites of Passage* (1909) brought a new wave of thought. Van Gennep observed that life is full of liminal changes. He was primarily an anthropologist. He observed the lifestyle of various tribes in France very closely. He studied the different ceremonies performed by the tribes and concluded that the purpose of these

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ceremonies was to make an individual pass through one stage to another clearly defined stage. He laid emphasis on the importance of the entire process during rituals.

Van Gennep also included in his theory the importance of passing through the territorial passage that is from one physical sacred space to another. He also revealed that, “upon this passing, there was a middle neutral zone between the sacred spaces.” (Paul, 24) He also divided the entire process into three stages viz. Rites of Separation, Rites of Transitional Stage and Rites of Incorporation. In simpler terms these stages are now called as Pre-Liminal, Liminal and Post-Liminal Stages. He was more curious about the middle stage that is the liminal stage. Gennep pointed out that the rituals that are performed during the liminal state, or threshold, make the participants feel that they are in in-between spaces and identities. In this phase, the participant didn't belong to his/her past condition nor was he in a positive future condition.

The theory of liminality has generated wider interest in research area not only in anthropology but in every possible field since its inception. Owing to its wider applicability, it has been applied in various disciplines. The multidisciplinary character of theory of liminality has helped the researchers in looking at the things with a different perspective. The theory of Liminality has its origin in the field of anthropology and due its relevance its tenets are being applied to other disciplines as well. In order to understand the state of mind of the characters

When Gennep had given this theory, it was not given importance due to the dominance of Durkheim in the academic circle. Van Gennep's work saw the light of the day in terms of publicity when Turner worked upon it. Turner paid attention to Gennep's work when he himself along with his wife was waiting to go to America. “In that time of waiting by the English Channel, of being no longer quite British, not yet quite American, the Turners could feel sympathy with the liminars.” (Taylor, 13) Liminality has become an immensely important part of literature because many post-structural theorists like Derrida have challenged the authoritative role of the texts. He encourages readers, “to abandon the comfort zone which could be described as servility to text. (Taylor, 177) The liminal and the fluid, the decidable and the undecidable, the meaningful and the meaningless, has entered into the critical circle of study of literature in recent times. Taylor finds out that the study of literature these days has come to a point where, “cohabitation of decision and the undecidable – a liminal double bind,” (177) has taken a centre stage. In the post structural period literary theory has challenged the accepted rigid structure of literature, “by acting as an anti-structure which has become a force strong enough to move literature into a kind of liminality with respect to it.” (174) Thus, liminality has helped us in accepting the liminal nature of literature itself.

In psychology also, imagination is considered as a condition that is transcendental in nature or something that is a result of liminal- flexible consciousness. Poetry also is a result of such

transcendental state of mind. The phenomenon of death is also explored with the help of liminality because in most of the communities' death is considered as a threshold of life and after life. Death is an act of separation, "the person, the passenger, leaves behind their previous identity, serving any and all ties to the community that were created under that identity." (Boyacioglu, 12)

Arnold van Gennep is credited for the term, "Liminality." In 1902, he gave the theoretical framework of liminality in his canonical work, "Rites de passage." It was for first time that some social scientist from the field of Anthropology studied and applied the different aspects of liminality on the rituals performed by various tribes. Van Gennep, closely analyzed the social behavior and individual's transformation through rituals, change of place, season, stages, social status and change in age. He was the first social scientist to see the significance of the deep transformative role of rituals in an individual's life. He carefully divided the stages into three stages viz. separation, liminality, and incorporation. The first stage involves the separation of an individual from the day-to-day routine and from the rest of the individuals of the community. The second phase is liminality that denotes the transitional phase. This phase generated the curiosity of later theoreticians. The final phase was that of incorporation or bringing back the individual as a member of higher social status.

According to Gennep's theory liminality signifies the transitional, fluid, in-between condition that is transformative in nature; that is temporary; that is there for a while in the given time and space. (Kertzer, 26) The original title of the *Rites of Passage* was *Les rites de passage* and it were Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L Caffee who first brought its translation in English. They brought to bring out, "the significance of his (Gennep's) theoretical formulations." (Kimball, v)

Arnold Van Gennep was one of the most neglected anthropologists of his times. In the middle of the nineteenth century, it was Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that generated a lot of euphoria among the social scientists of those times. Herbert Spencer and Lewis H Morgan laid the foundation of theory of human institutions. (Vizedom & Caffee, vi) Adolph Bastan and E B Taylor added lot of new dimensions to this field. Auguste Comte added objective study of societies. The expansion of European imperial powers helped missionaries, travellers and colonial administrators in studying different tribes across the globe. The basis of Gennep's study was examining the rituals, "in their entirety and in the social setting in which they were found" (Kimball, vii). Solon also recognizes the fact that, "the analysis of ceremonies accompanying an individual's life crisis which Van Gennep called rites de passage is usually considered to be his unique contribution." (Vizedom & Caffee, vii) The three major phases, "separation (*se'paration*), transition (*marge'*) and incorporation (*agre'gation*)," (vii) has since then laid the foundation of voluminous research in all the possible disciplines right from the glass making (<https://ujdigispace.ac.za>) to Neutrosophy (Bianca Teodorescu, Univ. of Carriova 13-15, NSS,

Vol.10, 2015) to Liminality in PhD Scholars ([www.ses.library.usyd.edu.au](http://www.ses.library.usyd.edu.au)). Gennep called the three stages as, “*sche’ma* of rites de passage.” (vii, Solon)

Van Gennep didn’t do just monochromatic study of rituals. He, in fact, did a deep analysis of the periodic changes based on the natural cycle. He paid particular attention to changes of year, seasons and how it was in turn associated with economic activities of the society under study. He also discarded the notions associated with puberty ceremonies. He called it the rites of separation from an asexual world to incorporation into a sexual world. (Solon, ix) It’s quite strange that such a prominent book published in 1909 in French could become popular only after the 1960’s when it was translated into English by University of Chicago Press. Van Gennep is popularly called as a Belgian Ethnographer whereas he was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1873 in Ludwigsburg, Germany. His father was a Frenchman, but he settled in Germany while his mother was a Dutch. When Gennep was six years old he moved to France again. He did his graduation from Grenoble and in Arabic and history from Paris. Anthropology as a separate discipline had not developed till then. After this, Gennep was engaged in teaching French for a while in school and later he happened to work as a translator. He also continued his studies while working. His thesis was published in two parts as, “*Tabon’el totemisme a’ Madagascar* (1904) and *Mythes et legends d’ Australie* in 1906.” (Kertzer, viii) He wanted to get into University Professorship but somehow, he could not get it. He kept on doing research in, “the field of anthropology and folklore studies.” (Kertzer, ix) He founded a journal, *Revue destudes ethnographiques et sociologiques i.e.,* Journal of Ethnographic and Sociological Studies in the year 1908. He was quite close to the intellectuals like James G Frazer and Andrew Lang. he also got prominence in French academic circle through regular contributions for about over thirty years in *Mercure de France*.

Gennep also wrote a collection of different folklores as *Le Manuel de Folklore Francais Contemporarin*, a book based on the then folklores of France (1937-1958). Since he was not meant for a regular job, he left it after some time, so as to completely focus on research and exploration. The drawback of it was that he had to face financial hardships throughout his life. He had a small stint as a University Professor in Switzerland but too went out of his hands because of him being vocal about Swiss Government’s role in World War II (Kertzer, ix). After many tests and trials of life, he finally settled at Bourg-la-Reine on the borders of Paris. He did chicken farming to support his family. Despite all the difficulties, he published fifteen books and over 160 research papers. (Kertzer, x) Rodney Needham, a prominent British Anthropologist had severely criticized the deliberate attempt of French academia to neglect a man of great stature, Arnold Van Gennep. He called it, “an academic disgrace.” (Kertzer, x) Although Gennep did not get the recognition that he deserved during his lifetime, as it has happened with many other great geniuses in history, he was studied in detail by later social scientists.

Alfred M. Tozzer, an anthropologist from America, studied Gennep's theories extensively and published his works in 1925. Another anthropologist, Paul Radin devoted an entire chapter on Gennep's theory in his seminal work, *Primitive Religion*, 1937. Famous sociologist Emile Durkheim established his theories in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912) on the basis of Gennep's study of Australian Totemism. Not only this, the theories in anthropology helped psychologists also like Sigmund Freud because his work *Totem and Taboo* (1914) talks about the "totemic rites," (xv) that help in regulating the son's jealousy against the father.

Now the question arises that if these rituals were so important then why did they lose its importance in the modern period? The meaningful rituals lost credibility in the modern industrialized urban settings because these gave rise to new social order that was more conducive for individual centric life rather than looking at one's life as a part of a community or a society. Besides secular and scientific education discarded anything that was based on some supernatural belief or the rites that could not be explained through visible, practical logic.

Arnold van Gennep cites the purpose of writing *Rites of Passage* as, "several types of rites are already well known, and it seemed to me that a large number of other rites could also be classed in a special category. As I propose to show, these rites may be found in many ceremonies. Until the present times, however, neither their close relationship nor its cause has been perceived, and the reason for the resemblances among them has not been understood. And above all, no one has shown why such rites are performed in a specific order." (Vizedom & Caffee, xxv) Thus Arnold was a way ahead from his contemporaries in his attempt to study the rituals of different communities. His reasons however were not well comprehended by most of his contemporaries. It was only in 1960, that another social scientist Victor Turner rediscovered Gennep's works, explored these, and brought Gennep's theory to limelight but by then Arnold had left the world. He died on 7<sup>th</sup> May 1957 in Bourg-la-Reine, Paris.

In the very first chapter of *Rites de Passage*, Gennep presents the classification of rites. He says, "For a layman to enter the priesthood or for a priest to be unfrocked calls for ceremonies, acts of a special kind, derived from a particular feeling and a particular frame of mind. So great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred worlds that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage." (Vizedom & Caffee, 1) So the very first chapter begins with the announcement of some process with classification of the three stages. He also believes that though the modern secular societies are not that ritualistic but in the less urban cultures magico-religious practices are followed right from, "being born, giving birth, and hunting, to cite a few examples are all acts of whose major aspects fall within the sacred sphere." (Vizedom & Caffee, 2)

In fact, the life of an individual is filled with series of passages from one distinctive stage to another. Every stage involves various ceremonies to mark the difference from the previous stage, it includes death also. Death is simply a physical phenomenon, but every community disposes off the dead body only after performing some ceremonies and rituals during funerals and they are all considered sacred. Gennep equates human life with nature. The universe follows some principles so does the periodicity of seasonal changes as well as the celestial changes like the full moon and the ceremonies associated with it in some culture besides celebration of some festivals on new year or on equinoxes. He divides all the rites into two categories, “sympathetic and contagious.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 4) For defining sympathetic rites he refers to all the major research done by social scientists of his times, viz. Tyler, Lang, Clodd, Hartland and others. Sympathetic rites refer to the rites that are complimentary to each other. It included all kinds of rites that were considered as holy, pure, or impure. Many schools of thoughts had emerged in the late nineteenth century Europe regarding the studies of folk rituals. Some focused on, ‘animistic rites,’ while some other theoreticians were interested in, ‘dynamistic rites.’ (Vizedom & Caffee, 7) Contagious rites were based on material and transmissible characteristics.

Besides these rites several other terms were also popular to define different kinds of rites like, direct rites (like a curse or spell), indirect rites (like prayers or sending powers through jinns), positive rites, negative rites (includes taboos etc.) All these rituals are mutually dependent on each other. Arnold claims, based on his study, that the other social scientists were not able to detect this mutual dependence. He lays emphasis on the classification of the rituals because then it becomes easy to understand the underlying pattern or order of these ceremonies. He also regrets that social scientists have ignored the analysis of the undercurrent pattern of many rituals. That is why he claims in his book, “I have tried to assemble here all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 10) It is because of this fact that Gennep has focused on rites of passage. He gives examples of all the three categories’ rites of separation (preliminal rites), “as in funeral rites, rites of transition (liminal rites) as in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation, rites of incorporation (post-liminal) as in marriage ceremonies.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 11) All these rites bear special purposes. They are largely sacred and may involve magical and religious features also. All these rituals are not merely meaningless rituals; they involve purposeful ceremonies like marriage rites are based on fertility rites, pregnancy rituals are based on those rites that are meant for the protection and well-being of the mother and the baby; funeral rites involve divine rites.

Most of the rituals involve purification rites which were basically meant for removing contamination. He gives the example of a Brahman. He says, “A Brahman belongs to the sacred world by birth; but within that world there is a hierarchy of Brahman families some of whom are sacred in relation to others.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 12) The Brahman boy is initiated into the community after going through various sacred rituals. Similarly, a pregnant woman is a sacred

thing for every community but immediately after the birth of the baby she has to undergo purification rituals after the passage of some particular days of childbirth. The baby and the mother are incorporated in the family and community after some special ceremonies. It may involve purification rituals, magical or sacred rituals. The social status of the person also changes. The importance of these rituals can be gauged from the fact that they are passed on to from generation to generation. Some of the rituals are even centuries old but they are still followed as it is with lot of fervours.

Though Van Gennep's book *The Rites of Passage* is a small book, yet each chapter of this book generated voluminous research in different disciplines. Not only research numerous books were written based on the study of this one book only. The testimony of this claim is that only the second chapter of this book titled as, *The Territorial Passage* has influenced many intellectuals like Bjorn Thomassen, Les Roberts and others. Bjorn Thomassen is known for his seminal book *Liminality and the Modern* (it shall be explored in detail later in the same chapter), Les Roberts talked about *Spatial Anthropology* and Jack Parsons highlights the importance of boundaries in his book *Liminal States*. Similarly books like *Landscapes of Liminality: Between Space & Place* by Dora Downey, *Walling Boundaries and Liminality: A Political Anthropology of Transformation* by Agnes Horvath, Marius Ion Benta, Joan Davison, *Beyond the Threshold* by Hein Viljoen & Chris Nvan der Merwe, *Liminal Landscapes Travel, Experience and Space In-Between* by Hazel Andrews & Les Roberts, *Living in the Borderland* by Jerome Bernstein, *Mapping Liminalities: Threshold in Cultural and Literary Texts* by Alan Roughley, Terry Phillips Lucy Kay & Zoe Kinsley. Texts like, *Border-Crossing Spirituality: Transformation in the Borderland* by Jung Eiu & Sophia Park, *Breaking boundaries: Varieties of Liminality* by Agnes Horvath, Bjorn Thomassen and Harald Wydra, discuss liminality keeping in mind, the potential of liminality, "to be a leading paradigm for understanding transformation in a globalizing world."(<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/HorvathBreaking>) The writers have tried to explore the possibility of observing liminality and human experience in terms of, "cultural practices, codes, rituals, and meanings in situations that fall between defined structures and have uncertain outcomes." (<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/HovarthBreaking>) Many of the research works are based on case studies and different methodologies. The books mentioned are largely focused on the importance of liminal physical spaces and its impact on the individuals and the society.

A territorial passage is in itself a concrete passage, but it has its own effects. The borders, although an imaginary physical space is quite visible on political maps and for crossing over these spaces one has to undergo various legal formalities like, the passport. According to Arnold van Gennep, the formalities were, "political, legal, and economic but magico-religious," (Vizedom & Caffee, 15) in nature. Gennep was more interested in the study of magico-religious sanctions because, the naturally formed boundaries like, "sacred rocks, tree, river, or lakes," (Vizedom & Caffee, 15) could not be crossed over without the fear of some supernatural punishment. In ancient

times, the borders were marked by objects like an upright rock which Gennep associates with the phallus. Different countries/territories had different symbols and beliefs about marking their territories like the Chinese believed that earth is divided into plots and for each district that roughly included 25 families had a separate God protecting it. Besides walls, temples, statues, posts, even some herbs or shrubs or even a strip of no man's land, deserts, ponds, marshy land, or the crossroads also defined the separation of claimed territory. In the chapter, *The Territorial Passage*, Gennep claims that he focused on these neutral spaces because, "whoever passes from one to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds." (Vizedom & Caffee, 18) This can be called as the transition period.

He observes that there are many ceremonies that represent the transition from one space to another. This claim follows various examples of magico-religious practices across the countries that are related to crossing borders. For example, when the Greek kings used to enter some territory, they used to sacrifice a bull on the frontier, the head used to be kept on this side and the body on the other side. Some used to carry a torch bearer, if the signs were auspicious then only the army used to enter the new territory after the torch bearer. James G Frazer mentions several varieties of such rituals in his book *The Golden Bough*. H Clay Trumbull, Gaidoz and Rolland, Gennep's contemporaries mention such rituals based on their explorations. The purpose of these rites was to acknowledge one's passage through one world to another unknown world. It also meant giving sacrifice to the unknown spirits that might be guarding that unknown territory. Similarly, the same principle is applied when one enters a village, a town, a temple or a house. However, "the neutral zone shrinks progressively till it ceases to exist as a simple stone, a beam or a threshold," (Vizedom & Caffee, 20). It also includes the main door of a house. Often when one enters a temple it is accompanied by prostrating, kissing, or touching one's head at the steps or at the altar. Gennep says, "The rituals pertaining to the door form a unit, and differences among particular ceremonies lie in technicalities: the threshold is sprinkled with blood or with purifying water; doorsteps are bathed with blood or with perfumes; sacred objects are hung (like a horseshoe) or nailed onto them, as on the architrave." (Vizedom & Caffee, 20)

This reminds us of the north Indian ceremonies that are held at the main door of Hindu families in north India like spilling of oil on both the corners of the main door to ward off any evil when the new bride and groom enter the house for the first time, some brides sprinkle rice grains while leaving their house for groom's family. In some cultures, the women of the house place a lit lamp on a big plate filled with flowers and little bit of vermilion and circles it in front of the newlywed couple and then only allows them to enter the house. This is perhaps done to purify or make the couple feel like divine entities entering in the house as one unit. The door acts as border between the outer world and the inner pure world. Not only during marriage ceremonies but also during the adoption or bringing back the newborn baby from the hospital or bringing an idol or

during religious ceremonies and even in funerals also several sacred ceremonies are held at the main door.

Gennep distinguishes the rituals performed at the threshold as, “The rites of separation from the previous world, preliminary rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (threshold) rite, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world post-liminal rites.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 21) It is interesting to note that the entrance of any well-developed city in the ancient times used to show grandeur in the form of big gates, arch and some figures that were considered to be protecting it from evil eye of the enemy. Winged dragons, big birds, figures of big snakes or roaring lions on both side of the gate symbolized as the guardians. In India we often see big elephants placed on both sides of entrance of fort to perhaps signify the opulence of the kingdom. The rites of passage were not only practiced at the gates or while crossing the borders but also while crossing some river, crossing of mountains, or embarking on a voyage or while mounting on a horse before leaving for a war are marked by various ceremonies symbolizing separation and later incorporation on return from the above-mentioned places.

Gennep also lays emphasis on ceremonies associated with construction of a new house. While laying foundation of a house several sacred ceremonies are performed in various culture and before settling in that house some housewarming party is performed to receive blessings for a happy life in that new house. Before the party, the priests perform some religious ceremonies to purify it with sacred chants and prayers. Sharing of meals, feasting and merry making with near and dear ones is also common after the religious ceremonies to mark the beginning of a new phase. After passing through several stages of liminality the individual is incorporated in the new settings. It is only the main door that meant for rites of entrance and rites of exit while other doors are not considered for this purpose. The main door only acts as a contact between the outside world and inside personal world. Gennep calls the main door as the “point of transition between the familial world and the external world.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 25) He also says that “In order to understand rites pertaining to the threshold, one should always remember that the threshold is only a part of the door and that most of these rites should be understood as direct and physical rites of entrance, of waiting and of departure- that is as rites of passage.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 25)

Moving on from the territorial passage Gennep talks about Individuals and Groups in terms of liminal stages. Talking about the ancient tribes, Gennep observes that whenever a group or a tribe meets a stranger or a group of strangers it also involves many rituals, and a common pattern can be filtered out from these patterns across different tribes. The first pattern is that whenever two groups meet it is only the chiefs, or the intermediaries or the selected representatives meet with each other. The same pattern is followed even in the post-modern global world today. It is the Presidents, prime ministers or ambassadors who meet with each other on behalf of the entire

nation. Special arrangements are made for the welcome of a head of a state. The entire stay is well planned, and it includes formal and informal ceremonies.

The strengthening of bond between two countries still depends on the principle of what you give us will determine what we give in return. In those times, the transitional period was usually marked by grand welcome with sprinkling of water or sacrificing an animal, anointing, etc. (in present day world, offering a bouquet, or parade by soldiers) exchange of gifts (meetings and signing of policies in the present context), a common meal or feasting and comfortable stay. The time of stay varies from culture to culture. A variety of ceremonies signify the meeting of groups from different communities. Some of the common patterns reported by various anthropologists and folklorists are, handshakes, embracing, kissing, sitting together on a raised platform for the public view, exchange of precious metals, or each other's ring, dresses, gifts, exchange of sacred objects like a cross, a candle, taking of some grand oath together, exchange of slaves, children, women, and wives also. In some ceremonies of Rites of incorporation, the two chiefs of different clans were supposed to perform sacred ceremonies that sometimes-included exchange of blood, taking an oath in front of a deity or going for a pilgrimage together. The incorporation of the stranger was also done by offering the women of the tribe.

Since the stranger/s that has been incorporated into the tribe holds a special status needs to be kept in a special place like a special tent or a place equivalent to the place of the chief. In modern terms like we make an important official stay in a guest house or a five-star hotel depending on the social status of the visitor in his/her own country. Since the stranger has to leave after a certain period of time so a different set of rites are performed under rites of separation. Like again a last grand meal together, exchange of gifts, accompanying the person up to some distance, sprinkling of holy water. Like in Arab world when the guest leaves the hosts throw water under his feet to ward off anything evil that might come on his way. Overall, it is about wishing the best for the guest who is leaving. Thus, all the ceremonies from meeting to departure follow the process of three phases of liminality.

In the similar vein, Gennep describes the process of liminality related to pregnant women and childbirth. He cites the examples of various communities that follow some rituals, and it includes the Todas from south India, the tribes in Kota of Nilgiri Hills, the Lushae tribe of Assam, Punjabi Hindus and Muslims, North Americans like Hpoi of Oraibi in Arizona, Bontoks of Philippines, Minhow of China, etc. The three common phases that is followed by almost all the tribes in the world during pregnancy and up to childbirth is, "separation, a transitional period with gradual removal of barriers and re-integration into ordinary life." (Vizedom & Caffee, 44) The basics of these rites normally deal with issues like diet of the mother, purification, isolation or seclusion from entire clan, restricted movement, first time mother's special care, protection of mother and foetus from evil spirits. Different tribes follow unique ways of even cutting of the

umbilical cord and bathing of mother with herbal water after certain days of delivery. Besides, prayers to the deities for the protection of the new member of the clan are also held. The mother and the child are incorporated in the community by following certain rites that ends with sharing of meal with all the community members. The mother is allowed to follow normal life after performing certain sacred rituals and after a passage of certain number of days which may vary from 11 days to 40 days according to different norms of a particular community.

Not only pregnancy but also birth and childhood follow the same pattern of separation, transition, and incorporation. As the child transits from childhood to teenage he or she is subjected to different ceremonies to make him/her a responsible member of the community. Such rites may start with the onset of puberty or even later in certain communities. It is pertinent to note that before the onset of modern period most of the communities followed the custom of early marriages. In fact, in some cultures children were married as early as when they reached the age of seven. Gennep distinguishes between, “physiological puberty” and “social puberty.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 65) One of the most common rituals among various tribes is circumcision. Before the advent of modern science people treated their bodies as if it is wood that could be cut or pierced from anywhere and can be adorned with different objects for gaining special powers. This chapter is full of surprising customs across the world. No continent is left unmentioned in the chapter titled as **initiation rite**. The findings show that the three phases that are followed with the help of some rituals aim at making girls and boys as an important member of the community. Sometimes many initiation ceremonies are performed to initiate neophytes into sacred and secret societies. Religious initiation also encompasses many new as well as age old rituals. Like when young girls take an oath to become a nun they are subjected to many rituals when they take the oath of becoming the spouse of Jesus.

Gennep cites various examples from India also like the Brahmans also have to undergo certain ceremonies to be called as a Brahman. He says, “One is born a Brahman but one must learn to act like a Brahman...within the sacred world which the Brahman inhabits from birth there are three compartments: preliminal one until the *upanayana* (beginning of a relation with the teacher), liminal one (novitiate) and a postliminal one (priesthood).” (Vizedom & Caffee, 105) Thus Gennep give several examples like baptism, naming ceremonies, etc., from across the world that are meant for bringing transition from one stage to another. Similarly, a common motif is found at the time of one’s death also. Right from the birth till death and even after a few years of death some rituals keep on going. Funeral rites also bear the same testimony. Gennep describes the rites of funeral as, “the rites of separation are few in number and very simple, while the transition rites have a duration and complexity sometimes so great that they must be granted a sort of autonomy. Those funeral rites which incorporate the deceased into the world of the dead are extensively elaborated and assigned the greatest importance.” (Vizedom & Caffee, 146) Not only the dead but the survivors also go through a transitional period which we normally know by the term mourning

period. Gennep divides it into, “the living mourners and the deceased constitute a special group, situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead, and how soon living individuals leave that group depends on the closeness of their relationship with the dead.” (147)

It is interesting to note here that all the communities consider that the world that we enter after death would be similar to the one that we leave. It can also be better, and it can also be worse based on our deeds in this world. But largely agree that it is a kind of journey and hence most of the rituals offer some kind of material support in terms of food, grains, clothes and precious metal, ‘amulets, passwords, signs,’ (Vizedom & Caffee, 154) also to the dead and for moral support of the dead prayers are held for several days even months. It is also done to ward off evil spirits for taking possession of the dead body. Thus, human body is the centre of all the rites right from conception in a mother’s womb till death and in many communities even after death also. The parts of human body from head to toe are subjected to various ceremonies to distinguish between the previous world, the present world and the world after death. The rites offer an opportunity to separate the impure and the pure, the sacred and the profane, the good and the evil.

Gennep has provided a plethora of rituals across continents in his foundational work *The Rites of Passage*, but he says that he has, “given a rough sketch of an immense picture, whose every detail merits careful study.” (189) Study of rituals opened a new vista of understanding about the identical rites for identical purpose and the common pattern among different civilizations. The studies also helped in destroying old theories. A recurrent pattern indicates that under the garb of multiple ceremonies lies a common pattern of the rites of passage. The transition period or the liminal stage was more focused upon by Gennep during the rites of passage. Gennep comes to a conclusion that, “the series of human transitions has, among some peoples, been linked to the celestial passages, the revolutions of the planets and the phases of the moon. It is indeed a cosmic conception that relates the stages of human existence to those of plant and animal life and by a sort of pre-scientific divination, joins them to the great rhythms of universe.” (194)

In the select fictional cancer narratives also, it is found that the characters also realize that they are a part of the great rhythms of the universe but only after going through the painful transition period. Like in *The Fault of Stars*, the protagonist Augustus Waters dies due to cancer but his beloved Hazel Grace, again a cancer sufferer claims, “We live in a universe devoted to the creation, and eradication, of awareness. Augustus Waters did not die of a lengthy battle with cancer. He died after a lengthy battle with human consciousness, a victim- as you will be-of the universe’s need to make and unmake all that is possible.” (*The Fault in Our Stars*, 266) Similarly in the text, *How to Climb an Eiffel Tower* when Lara Blaine goes through successive radiation therapies she finally comes to a point where she says, “That’s it! ... I can see the radiation as burning all the traces of them out of me forever. I lay on the table for the next hour feeling filled with light. Instead of being burned, I chose to see it as my wounds being cauterized, healed by the

fire.” (*How to Climb an Eiffel Tower*, 311) Thus the findings of Gennep help us in focusing on the nuances and intricacies of the transition period and how it finally shapes our position with ourselves and the people around us.

Gennep’s theory was further explored by Victor Turner. He was an explorer par excellence. He furthered this theory by studying the Ndembu tribe of Northwestern Zambia. He found that a paradigm shift occurs in a person’s life during the phases of transition of his life. As compared to Gennep, Turner was more focused on the middle stage that is the transitional stage when an individual finds himself in “betwixt and between stage” (John Faust) or liminal stage. Turner developed the theory of Liminality based on his close observation of Nkang tribe’s rites. Turner found out that the rules, expectations, and behaviour seem to be different from what it was expected in pre-liminal and post-liminal state. He called it as the seat of, “cultural creativity,” (John Faust) The male and females undergoing such rituals often remain in a state of ambiguity, a state of neutrality, a state of invisibility. But however attractive this state may seem to be, it will not remain for long; it’s a temporary state. Turner studied the process of this transitional phase in minute detail. When the participant is undergoing the rituals, he is subjected to remain in some sacred space and time away from the non-participants of his own community. In this phase the participants experience withdrawal from general public, a status of untouchability, a status of social and cultural profanity. After the transition is over the participant is re- incorporate in his community with a new and elevated state.

Victor Turner brought Gennep’s canonical work to limelight. Victor Turner is the main theorist of Liminality. He devoted his lifetime in developing the principles of this theory. Turner brought the theory of Liminality with his sheer dint of hard work and wide publication. Besides by his time the academia was more conducive in accepting diverse ideas unlike in the times of Gennep. Victor Turner was born in Glasgow, Scotland in the year 1920. He did his graduation from University College London. He served his country in World War II also but for a brief period. Since his bent of mind was towards research and exploration, he joined the university and became a research officer and embarked on a journey to Zambia where he studied the Ndembu tribe closely. Now the world knows him as a great ethnographer who established the principles of theory of liminality. His published work acts as a referral point for scholars from different disciplines. Some of his famous books are *The Forest of Symbols* (1967), *Schism and Continuity in African Society* (1968), *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia* (1968), *The Rituals Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), *Dramas, Fields and Metaphor: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974), *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture-co-authored by Edith L B Turner also* (1978), *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (1982), *Liminality, Kabbah and the Media* (1985), *The Anthropology of Performance* (1986), *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986) and several research papers.

The most famous book by Victor Turner was *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. This book was written after two and a half years of field study of Ndembu tribe. The difference between Gennep's study and Victor Turner's study is that Turner focused on the middle phase that is the transition phase, he particularly studied the "complex initiation rites with long periods of seclusion." (Turner, 4) The value of rituals can't be ignored because they carry the value of the entire group. Most of the anthropologists studied the rituals as an outsider, as an on-looker while Victor was dissatisfied with this approach. He was uneasy with this kind of approach. He admits, "For I was constantly aware of the thudding of ritual drums in the vicinity of my camp, and the people I knew would often take their leave of me to spend days at a time attending such exotically named rites as *Nkula*, *Wubwang's* and *Wubinda*. Eventually I was forced to recognize that if I wanted to know what even a segment of Ndembu culture was really about, I would have to overcome my prejudice against ritual and start to investigate it." (*The Ritual Process*, 7) Here lies the difference between the study of rituals by Turner and others. While other anthropologists have reported the rituals, Turner has tried, "to reach an adequate understanding," (Turner, 7) of each and every movement. He had also learned Ndembu vernacular. Unlike other British officers he had befriended Ndembu Chief Ikelenge and because he had shown respect for their culture, he was more than happy in involving him in their rituals.

Turner believed that every community performs rituals of transitions. Some rituals may be visible while some other may not be so obviously visible, but they bring transformation. Another interesting fact about a person going through social rituals is that in the liminal state they are considered as unclean and polluted. So, the community normally keeps them a little separate from rest of the people. The signs of pre-liminal state are erased during the liminal phase and when the individual is at the threshold of such practices, he/she enters into post-liminal state with enhanced status. Turner also gave a unique term for these concerted efforts of the society for bringing this transformation, he calls it *Communitas*. *Communitas* is an effort of the society to initiate an individual into the cultural and social practices of that particular, "family, clan, tribe, nation etc." (John Faust) It may also be some particular class, gender, or caste. Turner also claims that the ritual process can also be called as an event that tries, "to reinterpret cultural symbols like the natural surroundings, paintings, images or even dance etc." (Faust)

The early studies in Liminality were based on the rituals undergone by neophytes of the tribal society. The entire process was divided into three main phases, viz. separation, transition and incorporation. The first phase was also named as pre-liminal phase. In this phase the participants were kept aloof from the rest of the community. In the second phase the neophytes or participants had to undergo certain special rituals that had some elements of the previous stages or the approaching stages. It also included some sanctity of the ritual. This was an ambiguous stage where the person belonged neither to the previous stage nor to the advanced stage. Thus, the participant finds himself in an in-between stage. Turner compares this state with, "the condition of

an unborn baby or with an eclipse of the sun and the moon.” (Thabang, Monoa, 19) Turner went a step further than Gennep. He divided liminal into two different types, liminality that is irreversible as in the case of the rituals and liminality in which the community or a group undergoes cyclical rituals and attains higher status.

Turner quotes Nadal in breaking old theories, “Facts change with theories and new facts make new theories.” (9) So, in this book Turner comes up with new observable facts that turned Liminality, into an established theory. In fact, the new terms coined by Turner like, in-between, betwixt, communitas, etc. gave a fresh lease of life in research in other disciplines also. Turner particularly focused on the middle stage that is the *Liminal* stage or transitional stage. He proved his point through keen observation of recurrent patterns in different rituals. Turner explored the stage of limen to prove that liminality referred to a state of that does not correspond to ordinary stable condition of everyday life. The participant who goes through the rituals remains in a state of Limbo. He says, “The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (“threshold people”) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space.” (*The Ritual Process*, 104) Turner assigns liminal entities some new terms like, “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial.” (104) The uncertain and ambiguous condition is expressed through a number of symbols during rituals. He compares liminality with death, to a condition that makes one realize that he/she is invisible. Just like during eclipse the sun and the moon are there but they are invisible despite being there. Turner calls the neophytes and the initiands as entities that are almost invisible, equivalent to nothingness. Liminal beings are supposed to be passive, humble and obedient. The ceremonies that concur in liminal stages include near nakedness state as if one the initiands is in a womb or in a grave.

Turner gives us the concept of Communitas also on the basis of his study of liminal rituals. During these rituals not only the individual but also the community gets involved and creates a social bond and experience, “moment in and out of time, and in and out of secular social structure.” (96) The social bonds that are created are out of the rigid structural pattern of the society form a new pattern. The common social structure designates a position to the men of the society which can be high or low, in the present context we have proper names for different ranks in the official place, and at home also the rank is well defined. Whereas during liminal period, the society loosens the rigid structure and the individuals irrespective of their high or low status accept and follow the orders of the elders performing rituals.

Communitas is a Latin term and Turner preferred this term instead of community because the communitas helps in distinguishing, “the modality of social relationship from an area of common living.” (96) Every society possesses some sacred attributes and the individuals in a

community acquire those attributes after passing through certain prescribed rituals. The purpose of these rituals is to ingrain a sense of humility in individuals of all classes, thus helping in creating a healthy social bond within the society. Turner claims, “Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low.” (97) That is why usually the royal families also send their heir apparent to places where they can experience all shades of life. Turner also detects dialecticism in these processes. “The high and the low, *communitas* and structure, homogeneity and differentiation, equality and inequality,” (97) are an integral part of rites of passage. The passage between these two opposite poles takes the individual through a limbo that is, “statuslessness,” (97) for that particular brief period. Turner supplements his concepts with the help of *Isoma* customs and *Kafwana* rituals of selecting a chief for the tribe. The pedagogic of liminality involves two kinds of separation, one that is conferred to the position by the community and the second that satisfies the psycho- biological urges of an individual.

Turner takes the help of binaries suggested by Levi Strauss like, “Homogeneity and heterogeneity, silence vs. speech, humility vs. pride, sacredness vs. secularity, and foolishness vs. sagacity,” (105) and the list is exhaustive. Victor Turner believes that with the passage of time the simple tribal societies that celebrated the transitions phases with much fanfare and the permanence of the “betwixt and between,” (107) in these rituals became institutionalized but still in the modern societies the passage ritual exists in majority of the world religions right from naming ceremony till death. He gives the example of the St. Franciscan group of Christian saints who lived in utter poverty deliberately. Their notion of self-discipline, prayers, fasting, vegetarianism, celibacy and not touching money was followed strictly. Most of the liminal phases are filled rituals that are supernatural in nature. The purpose the liminal passage is to make the impure, pure; to make the unholy as sacred. Not only this within a *communitas* the people at the weaker position are also assigned important role during rituals. Even in royal courts the jesters played this role only. They acted as bridge between the serious and the comic, between sense and non-sense.

Historically, ritual phases were also performed to bring equality. Measures like, “wearing uniform apparel, sexual continence.... abolition of rank, total obedience to the prophet or the leader, simplicity of speech and manners,” (*The Ritual Process*, 112) Turner gives a thorough detail of various liminal communities like the Hippies of the 70’s of America, Nuer of the Sudan, Ashanti of Ghana. About the relation of liminality and *communitas*, Turner comes to a conclusion that *communitas* is existential in nature while its structure is classified on the basis of its culture and nature. “*Communitas* breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority.” (128) The liminal phase involves the holy and during this stage, the *communitas* allows to disband the rigid norms which are otherwise rigid in a structured society. What is the role of rituals in an individual’s life? Why should one go through the stages of rituals? Victor Turner claims that these rituals, symbols,

philosophical systems, art etc act a, “set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodical reclassifications of reality and man’s relationship to society, nature and culture.” (129) In fact, they are not just classifications, “they incite men to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multi vocal character, having many meanings and each is capable of moving people at many psycho-biological levels simultaneously.” (129) The same function of liminality has been applied to the texts based on fictional cancer narratives in the present study.

Turner’s contribution to theory of liminality is based the deep analysis of *communitas* also. Turner looks at the *communitas* from a different angle. His concept is different from Martin Buber’s, “segmentalized community that works on the difference of I and thou,” (132) so is it different from Durkheim’s concept of solidarity within the community. Turner classified *Communitas* into different categories:

- (a) existential or spontaneous *communitas*, e.g., the hippies,
- (b) normative *communitas*, e.g., social control to organize *communitas*,
- (c) ideological *communitas* - utopian model of society based on existential *communitas*, e.g., Gandhi’s Harijans, Tolstoy’s peasants, Holy poor of St. Franciscans group, Gonzalo’s ideal commonwealth in Shakespeare’s *Tempest*.

Turner calls for a close analysis of life of these groups. The kind of *communitas* wished by these communities is not only for seeking sympathy or pleasure but to achieve “an effortless comradeship that can arise between friends, co-workers or professional colleagues any day. What they seek is a transformative experience that goes to the root of each person’s being and finds in that root something profoundly communal and shared.” (Turner 138) Human being’s desire is primarily to exist in a state of ecstasy. Such desire is also seen in cancer sufferers in the select texts of the present study that shall be elaborated in our subsequent articles. He gives a thorough review of various *communitas* around the world like the Chaitanyas community in Bengal, Bob Dylan and the Bauls, the Shamans, etc.

According to Turner, the rituals that are performed externally or that are visible are not just physical rituals instead they are a part of our genomic evolutionary process. As a researcher he integrated the idea of liminality, the threshold, the betwixt and the between. For him all these processes were designed to restore behavior in the society, in the garb of rituals. He categorized liminality into Liminal and the Liminoid. In technologically simpler societies people undergo liminal process whereas in technologically complex societies they undergo the process of Liminoid. Under this category he cites the example of archaic, mythical, and quasi ritual performances like gospel, drama, and dances like *kathakali*. Through such refined rituals, the re-aggregation or cooling down of ritualized behaviour is reinforced. Turner emphasized that performance, play, rituals, arts, sports all form the

foundation of how individuals think and organize their lives. He had also tried to study the connection of body, brain, and culture, but unfortunately, he did not live long enough to explore it extensively.

Rituals can be looked at from different angles, viz., they are part of our evolutionary process, they have a defined structure, they can be performed or acted, they can be experienced by an individual and they may operate our social and religious life. In the present study, the focus shall be on the experience, and how it operates our social life and how it helps in the evolution of a person. Turner also proposed the notion that the human brain is a liminal organ that operates between the genetically fixed and the radically free state. The technique of co-adaptation helps us to evolve out of our genetically engineered brain. Turner's idea of liminality is something that is fluid, dynamic and anti-structural in nature.

Gennep wrote around thirty books, but he considered *Rites of Passage* book as part of his flesh, it's quoted by Belmont in 1979 in her article on Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. He also studied the French folklore extensively. His seminal work influenced the works of Joseph Campbell. Victor Turner was also inspired by his findings.

Turner was keen on understanding the liminal stage, the state where an individual doesn't belong to the previous condition, nor he/she is part of the reincorporation. *Liminal* has originated from the Greek/Hebrew word *limen* that means harbour, a place between the land and the sea. The word has various meanings in different cultures like in Latin, limes used to be known as borders or confines of the Roman Empire. Similarly, limen meant threshold or passage. According to Christianity the word *limbo* that is similar to *limn* meant, half-way station, i.e., place between Heaven and Hell, where the souls of those who died in the friendship of God wait for their salvation by Jesus Christ. The concept of liminality is visible in ancient religions also like Pythagorean view of metempsychosis, which is also referred by Socrates in the myth of Er in Plato's Republic. Er was allowed to come back to the world of the living and recount what he saw in the land of the dead, the souls of recently departed people meet at a middle station, where they are allowed to select their next destination. A similar concept is in Tibetan Buddhism, by the name of *bardo*, which signifies "gap" or a space in-between. Zoroastrian religion calls it *hamistagan*, a transitional state in which the soul of a believer who was neither good nor bad waits for the Judgment Day. In Islam, Barzakh means a transitional state between the moment of death and the day of resurrection, during which sinners are punished while the righteous are rewarded. So, it is a universal idea that is present in major cultures and religions of the world.

Another important feature of Victor Turner's idea is how to understand experience, especially, the lived experience. The post-modern societies are trying to experience out-of-

the-ordinary experience like through bungee jumping and adventure sports. Some sports even offer near death like experience. Victor has also introduced the concept of social drama in his PhD thesis titled *Schism and Continuity in an African society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*. He was worried about conflict, and he tried to understand social conflict through the close study of this tribe. He observed that through social life many disciplinary actions are taken to maintain desirable behavior. He divided the stages of social drama into four categories viz: breach, crisis, regressive actions, and reintegration. While the first stage dealt with break from the rules the second dealt with the increase in the intensity of that breaking of rules, the third process meant for resolution of those actions and the last stage denoted by the irreparable loss of the structure. Turner was offered the assignment to study Mambwe tribe and, later on in 1950 he was assigned the study of Ndembu tribe that resided in Northern Rhodesia now known as Zambia. His wife Edith Turner records in her biography that while their stay with the Ndembu the beating of drums was so often that it forced him to understand the social role of beating of drums. For him rituals were the elaborations of social order. Turner adopted the Gennep's analytical approach to understand the core of rituals. The three phased processual form of rites could be applied to Ndembu rituals as - (a) separation – Ilembi or Kulemba, i.e., the treatment of dance to make the subjects sacred (b) margins-a period of seclusion that may involve partial or complete separation of the subjects from everyday existence and (c) re-aggregation, i.e., kutumbuka- a further dancing and celebration to mark the end of separation.

Turner is considered as one of the most important anthropologist of the modern century. His perception towards the threshold experience has generated voluminous research in this area.

The major concepts that Turner explored are:

**Spatial Liminality:** Victor elaborated upon Van Gennep's concept of territorial passage. The territorial passages can be border lines, thresholds, portals, or even neutral zones between countries. Bjorn Thomassen further classifies the spatial dimensions of liminality as:

- Specific spaces, thresholds, doorway in a house, some line that separates the holy from the rest, specific objects, parts, or openings of human body.
- Areas, prisons, monasteries, seaports, zones
- Continents, countries, etc.

After Victor Turner, sociologists like Arpad Szokolczai elaborated and modified the concept of liminality. Szokolczai observed that the process of liminality brings permanent change. He calls it permanent liminality. In terms of permanent spatial liminality, he gives

the example of creation of America that is a sort of separated homeland from Europe or the condition of a monk who is permanently separated from his community through certain rituals for the preparation of study of some higher order. Liminal situations may lead to positive results or negative results. The experience may even lead to emotional instability also. Stenner, Greco and Motzkau call it the liminal hotspot (2017).

Richard Schechner, in the book *The Ritual of Performance*, stated the difference between rituals of animals and human beings. He critiques Jerome Robbins when he considers the bees waggle dance as a ritual. According to Richard Schechner, the dance of the bees is genetically programmed; they don't make any change in that on their own or make any modifications whereas the human beings have the capacity to evolve, improvise and to add to the existing rituals. The artists, the painters, or the dancers even if they are practicing classical dance can bring changes or improvise because of their intellectual or creative capacity to do so. He reaffirms Turner's belief that ritualization is genetically fixed in insects and fish, in birds and mammals it is to great extent fixed and to some extent free, in non-human primates some signs of social rituals are there whereas in humans, rituals are broadly categorized into Social rituals (everyday life, sports), Religious rituals (observances, celebrations, rites of passage) and Aesthetic ritual (codified forms, ad hoc forms), (*The Anthropology of Performance*, 10)

Another critic, Paul Stenner, made an exhaustive study on liminality in his book, *Liminality and Experience: A Trans disciplinary Approach to the Psychosocial*. He raises some valid questions about the beginning of experience of liminality, "Where and when, for example, does our sense of inner and outer dissolve and come undone leaving us perplexed as to what we know to be 'ourselves' and what we know to be 'the others'?" This question gave a new significance to the concept of liminality" (p 261). He believes that liminality helps in the transformation from within, it should be considered beyond rituals. A liminal occasion is when the person is in the stage of sensitive threshold, or in a volatile state, or in a state of becoming. The term limen was already in use in the field of early psychology. Stenner claims that it was first used by Herbart (1824-25) and then by Fechner (1860) to describe the mysterious transitional threshold of intensity.

Stenner differentiates experience on the basis of three values, viz: things are defined by their relevance to other things; hence it is relational. He gives example of Magritte's famous painting titled as, *This is not a Pipe*, although just above the quote is the drawing of a Pipe. Magritte was known for his art of surprising quotes along with paintings. Once a journalist insisted that it is a pipe to which Magritte replied then try to fill it with tobacco. Basically, we can't call it a pipe because it is the image of a pipe. Michel Foucault also appreciates the deep empiricism of Magritte (111). Another criterion which Stenner sets is

the temporal relation of things with their past thus giving rise to future. Things are basically processual. The last criterion that is set by Stenner is that thought and experience lead to the emergence of new forms of reality.

Mihai Spairosu has applied the theory of liminality on the experiences of people living in exile. His book *Modernism and Exile: Play, Liminality and the Exilic-Utopian Imagination*, propound the theoretical discussions of the phenomena of modernity in the light of liminality. In the modern societies within cultures appear sub-cultures and the sub-cultures do not appear in vacuum rather they appear in the form of interfaces. He calls liminality as a neutral relation that is neither at the center nor at the margins. He supports his claim with the example of no-man's land between two countries. He also studied the possibility of play as a form of liminality. For him the liminal is boundless, it is freedom, it is a luminous void as it is described in Zen Buddhism.

Bjorn Thomassen in his book *Liminality and the Modern: Living through the In-Between* explores the dimensions of liminality in the case of Thomas Hobbes and Rene Descartes. Hobbes and Descartes were antagonists and both of them had a very low opinion about each other's views, but Thomassen draws a similarity in their ideas through the concept of liminality. Thomassen says that the transformation of the Western Christianity as a representative of unity and order collapsed due to the reformation movement resulting in civil wars and internal strife. It took a long time to restore order. Thomassen compares this condition with the betwixt and the between position. He also explores the liminal experience that the modern games and sports offer like Bungee Jumping. He also reveals the origins of bungee jumping. This modern sport is basically copied by the westerners from Pentecost Island of former New Hebrides now known as Vanatau; it is located in south-western area of the Pacific Ocean. Bungee jumping is a true copy of Gol ritual of early societies of Africa, more specifically Vanatau (Thomassen171). It is performed in the spring season, and it is meant for young men. They jump from a tall tree with the help of strong branches tied around them. It is supposed to be daring game that pumps up the blood and gives a near death like of experience.

The extreme experiences that affect the physical as well as the mental aspect also come under liminal experience. Since ages, young men whether modern or primitive have been into such practices that can give them that thrilling, adventures or this is the limit kind of feeling. After Gol ritual the successful jumpers are accepted into manhood. The ritual here does not bring any permanent change as is proposed by different liminal experience as proposed by Victor Turner hence Bjorn Thomassen adds the term limivoid to refer to this kind of liminal experience (Thomassen187). Before the jumping ritual young men of the tribe are required to stay away from women and attain a pure state before performing the

dangerous jumping ritual. So social order and social control is also involved for the liminal experience. The ritual also marks the harvesting season of yam. Szokolczai (2009) suggests the postmodern society to take these rituals seriously for their universal undertones because they contain fundamental, formative and liminal experiences.

## Conclusion

The theory of Liminality has brought the attention of the academia towards the importance of the transformative, in – between liminal stage and how it impacts an individual and the community. Another important contribution of liminality is that it has made us realize that society is not a thing it is rather always in a process with successive phases and so is the individual. In the desire to exist in ecstasy men and women are engaged in discovering new ideas, modes, and methods of achieving that state. The popularity of Social media can be attributed to this desire. It is observed that men and women are more interested in meeting virtual friends rather than meeting the same people face to face. Whether such behavior comes under structurally inferior *communitas* or superior *communitas* is immaterial to virtual *communitas*. Human need and desire to seek some refuge from structured society compels them to pass through rituals of various kinds. This evolutionary process continues and will continue because humans are always in a state of liminality. Turner emphasizes the fact that the tribal's ritual processes were far better than the modern day corporate *communitas* because their rituals were based on a structure capable of bringing harmony and social order within the *communitas*. It was in sync with the nature, cyclical changes and the movement of the planets thus keeping the social order in sync with the natural order of the cosmos.

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