

RELIGIOUS BELIEF SYSTEM AND HUMANITY: A CASE STUDY OF BHOKSA TRIBAL GROUP OF UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Bhoksa, a tribe of India inhabiting the Bhabar and Tarai area of Uttarakhand in the Himalayan foothills is a unique ethnic group with their own idea of the supernatural world. The Bhoksas though identify themselves with Hinduism, their religiosity involves the ancestor worship. Their religiosity and its inter-relationship with the human world is highly reflected during their ritualism as seen in their agricultural practice. For them humanity can be served better if they invoke their ancestors. The person expert in holding such rituals known as 'Bharara' or medicine man in term of the ability. Their magical practices and belief is not highly esteemed but believed not less than doctor cum healer. The proposed paper deals with this phenomenon of religion and humanity

Key: Words; Religion, Beliefs, Medicine

INTRODUCTION

Tribal India presents a colorful panorama of religious beliefs and practices which is manifestation of adjustment with their cultural and ecological conditions. Tribal religion is a conglomeration of animistic beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, superstitions and magical practice, witchcraft, rituals and festivals. There are special functionaries amongst the tribals who take care of their religious and incorporeal requirements. [Amir Hasan; 1971]

AREA & PEOPLE

Bhoksa are residing in the tarai and Bhabar area of Nainital, Pauri Garwal and Bijnore and Dehraduan .They acquired the status of schedule tribe in June 1967.Earlier they were placed in scheduled caste category in 1950.In the year 1956 this tribal group was deleted from the category of scheduled caste and placed under backward class. Bhoksa are supposed to be an immigrant group. They can not give any exact

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time of their original habitat.

Traditionally Bhoksa are forest dwelling community. Their primary occupation are agriculture and animal husbandry the secondry occupation includes services likes wage labour, basketry etc.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The present study is based on Bhoksa tribal group of Utrakhand. It's an empirical study and also use the questionnaire, interview schedule and observation techniques for data collection on five villages of Bhoksas tribal group.

THE MAIN RELIGION OF BHOKSA

Bhoksa society is broad based and socialistic in as much, as there is no caste hierarchy system and little economic disparity Bhoksa are one of the most Hindu tribe. They call themselves "Hindu". [Hasan: 1979]. The Bhoksa are one of the most Hindu tribe in India they call themselves Hindu and to support this they claim that originally belong to various Hindu caste and sub-caste from Kshtriya to sudras i.e they had a caste hierararchy but later decided to merge in to one class.

They workship Hindu Gods and Goddess like 'Shiva, Ganesh, Kali, Durga etc. Rama Sita & Krishna is extremely popular amongst the women & youth. We see a distinct impact of Hinduism on Bhoksa religious beliefs. Another thing that we find among them is their religion is based on animism and spritism. They workship a number of local deities like "Jwala Devi", " Hulka Devi", " Mansa Devi", " Kashipur ki Devi", " Basundari Devi" etc. who are worshiped by them on different occasions [Bhist S.D: 1999:219] There is a rationale in worshipping the respective deities. As wild elephants abound in the foothill, Ganesh is worshipped to keep them at bay. Similarly " Goradevi" is a favourite with those desirous of having a wish fulfilled. Every Bhoksa habitation has a village deity called "Khere-ka Bhumia" or protector of the village, when a newlywed bride comes to the village, she along with her groom is taken to the deity to offer prayers.

THE OTHER RELIGIONS

Bhoksa is also inspired by Muslim "fakirs" and "sufis". It has been observed that the Bhoksa have been in contact by Muslim saints

for more than 400 years. The existance of "Muswani Gotra" amongst the Bhoksa proved this[Hasan 1982:46] The two muslim saints "Sarwar Lakhi"and" Kalu Sayed" are worshipped by the Bhoksas. The Bhoksas of Tarai area worship "Zahir Aulia Peer" and believe the "peer" was originally a Kshatriya who later embraced Islam.

Some Bhoksa also consider "Guru Nanak" the founder of Sikhism, a great religious leader and preacher and worship him (Hasan 1928:46). At present time many Bhoksa families are attached with "Satsang". A slogan "Baba Ghan Ghan Satguru Teara hi Asra hai" written on the front wall of their cottage.

Despite Brahamin influence and satsang, the Bhoksa remain non- vegetarian, although a few elderly people are giving up meat-eating under reformist impact and they also take intoxicating drink.

ROLE OF SPITITUAL HEALER: SAYANA

Bhoksa also believe in the magical practices. The Sayana or the wise one operates among them. As all religious and spiritual matters of this tribe are managed by the "Sayana", the 'Sayana' is merely their witch- doctor[Rawatj1998;60]As the witch-doctor, he can trace out the cause of disease ,spell out name of the spirit responsible for and suggest its cure. He can ward off epidemics by taking preventive spiritual measures. He protects the village from bad evils by mantras. His main instrument to accomplish these deeds, is the Mantra. There are different mantras for different occasions. [Amir Hasan; 1971]

The "Sayana" treats various disease by reciting 'mantras'. The word related to their rituals. Illness and epidemics are attributed to malevolent spirits, so the sayana who prescribe charm, amulets and mantras, to neutralize or destroy the evil influence. The 'Sayana' are quite versalite; they have a solution to practically any situation of life. Another reason is that as medical facilities are still inadequate and the Bhoksa have periodic visitations of epidemics like small pox and cholera, and malaria, the sayana is still very much in demands. Besides curing disease by appeasing or expelling evil spirits. The sayana not only communicates with Hindus and tribal deties but freely invokes Muslim Saints and Faquirs.

CONCLUSION

They also worshiped Hindu Gods apart from their own. They influenced by Hinduism. They believe superstition and magic, the sayanas have a extensive knowledge of herbs which they have gained by bitter and successful experiences.

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