

Religious Beliefs among Tribal of Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT The tribal adolescents in the age group of 15-20 years were selected for the study to know their religious beliefs. A total of 300 respondents were selected from Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh. The findings indicated that almost all the respondents still had faith in supernatural powers. Regarding participation of respondents in religious activities, half of the both male and female respondents observed religious activities daily in the form of prayer and the remaining performed it sometimes.

INTRODUCTION

The form of society that we see today has not emerged all of a sudden. It has taken long time to reach up to this level from the primitive form of society. The primitive society which was living in jungles, eating raw food and depending upon natural forces and calamities, has now grown to socialized, cultured and civilized society because of certain technological developments. Today, the rate of development is much faster than what it was century ago. Those who migrated to cities were benefited more by the technological development and those who continued to live in old patterns and in remote areas could not attain the benefits of technological development and hence remained much behind the others. These were the people who had apprehensions in adopting new socio-cultural and economic changes and remained confined to their own systems, thoughts and various practices. Gradually, the gap widened and those were left behind. Ultimately, they suffered from poverty and various health hazards. For the total development of human society, it was essential that all segments of human society be benefited to grow and to enjoy. Among such sufferers were mainly the tribal people found in almost in every country. In India, they are found in almost every state including the state of Himachal Pradesh.

Religion is an integral part of our culture. It plays various roles for the person and for the community in the form of sustaining culture, uniting people and healing through faith. The traditional societies have high affiliation with religion. The tribals remained upto themselves and lived in seclusion. They have maintained and

glued to their culture, values and religion for centuries. The religion in tribal areas, centres entirely around the principal village deity who commanded the God's position. The principal village deity is a divinity, a doctor, a magistrate, a judge, the chief executive, an astrologer, the village hero, the cynosure of all eyes etc. rolled into one. The description, the histories, the tradition, the songs and the origin of these village deities make a fascinating study.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The state of Himachal Pradesh was selected to study the religious beliefs. The Three districts of HP representing tribal population namely Kinnaur, Lahaul-Spiti and Bharmaur subdivision of Chamba district was selected for the study. The respondents were 300 adolescents in the age group of 15-20 years belonging to three different tribal communities namely Kinnauras, Bhots and Gaddis, out of which 150 were males and 150 females. The respondents were administered self-structured interview schedule. The data were tabulated and frequency and percentages were calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Personal Profile of Tribal Respondents

Age of the Respondents: The table 1 shows the respondents were selected from the three districts of Himachal Pradesh. The three communities selected for the present study were Gaddis, Kinnauras and Bhots. Table 1 shows that majority of the Gaddi respondents (99%) were

Table 1: Personal profile of respondents communitywise

S.No.	Variable	Category	Communities			
			Gaddis (n=100)	Kinnauras (n=130)	Bhots (n=70)	Total (N=300)
1.	Age (yrs)	< 17	1 (1.00)	67 (51.54)	19 (27.54)	87 (29.00)
		> 17	99 (99.00)	63 (48.46)	51 (72.86)	213 (71.00)
2.	Grade	8 th	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	3 (4.29)	3 (1.00)
		9 th	0 (0.00)	9 (6.92)	7 (10.00)	16 (5.33)
		10 th	11 (11.00)	61 (46.92)	6 (8.57)	78 (26.00)
		11 th	17 (17.00)	23 (17.69)	33 (47.14)	73 (24.33)
		12 th	72 (72.00)	37 (28.46)	21 (31.00)	130 (43.33)
3.	Formal schooling age	Less than 5	27 (27.00)	31 (23.08)	30 (42.86)	88 (29.33)
		6yrs	70 (70.00)	89 (68.46)	31 (44.29)	190 (63.33)
		7 yrs	3 (3.00)	10 (8.46)	9 (12.86)	22 (7.33)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

above 17 years followed by Bhots (72.86%) and Kinnauras (48.46%) whereas 51.54 per cent Kinnauras, 27.54 per cent Bhots and only 1% Gaddis were in the age cohort of 15-17 years.

Grade: Majority of Gaddi respondents (72%) were studying in class twelfth followed by Bhots (31%) and Kinnauras (28.46%). Nearly half of Bhots (47.14%) and similar percentage of Gaddis and Kinnauras (17% each) were in the eleventh class. Nearly half of Kinnauras (46.92%) and 8-11 per cent Bhots and Gaddis were studying in the tenth class. One-tenth Bhots (10%) and 6.92 per cent Kinnauras were in class ninth and only 4.29 per cent Bhots were in eighth class.

Formal Schooling Age: Majority of Gaddis (70%) and Kinnauras (68.46%) and less than half Bhots (44.29%) entered the formal class at the age of 6 years. Less than half (42.86%) Bhot respondents and one-fourth Kinnauras (23.08%) and Gaddis (27%) started going to school at the age of five years or earlier. There were 12.86 per cent Bhots, 8.46 per cent Kinnauras and only 3 per cent Gaddis who started going to school at the age of 7 years or later.

Religious beliefs of respondents

Table 2 shows that almost all of the respon-

dents had faith in Kuldevta with a negligible exception. The study finds support from Debbarman (1991) who reported that all customs and beliefs of Santal tribes were centered around their religion.

Faith in Supernatural Powers: Since the inception of human civilization people believed in magic, primitive men were not so wise as to explain the entire natural phenomenon. And to live with nature and in the struggle for existence, they resorted to magic, which they thought would tame nature.

According to Mitchell (1967), "Magic is the employment of substances, rites and spells to achieve aims by means not under sensory observation and control". As a result some systems of animism, animation and totemism developed (Das, 1994). These once common to all primitive men are diminishing in today's scientifically and industrially advanced societies. Among the tribals, they are still prevalent. Magic, sorcery and witchcraft like phenomena form an interdependent complex of beliefs and practices in many tribal societies who believed that misfortune occurs because their moral relations with their fellows have been disturbed. In some tribes, it is believed that these disturbances provoke Gods or ancestral ghosts to send misfortunes.

Table 2: Religious beliefs in tribal communities

S.No.	Variable	Category	Male(n=150)	Female(n=150)	Total(N=300)
1.	Faith in				
	a) Kuldevta	Yes	150(100.00)	148 (98.67)	298 (99.33)
		No	0 (0.00)	2 (1.33)	2 (0.67)
	b) Supernatural powers	Yes	62 (41.33)	76 (50.67)	138 (46.50)
		No	88 (58.67)	74 (49.33)	162 (54.00)
2.	Participation in religious activities	Daily	80 (53.33)	80 (53.33)	160 (53.33)
		Sometimes	56 (37.33)	64 (38.67)	120 (40.00)
		Never	10 (6.67)	10 (6.67)	20 (6.67)

Figures in parentheses indicate percentages

Table 2 further shows that nearly half of the both male and female respondents still had faith in supernatural powers which may be detrimental in their development on scientific lines.

Participation in Religious Activities: The results in Table 2 show that 53.33 per cent of male and female respondents observed religious activities daily in the form of prayer mainly. Around 40 per cent did it sometimes whereas negligible proportion did it never.

The similar findings were observed by Jena (1994) and Ghosh and Bandyopadhyay (1995) who found beliefs in witchcraft was too deep rooted among tribals.

CONCLUSION

The tribals are the people who migrated to far-off places in the high hills in difficult terrains

and lived for centuries together in isolation. There are all efforts made by the government or NGOs to bring them into mainstream. They have their own religious beliefs which they have maintained since long. Although these people are in transition phase and are coming to the mainstream, still they maintain their beliefs and customs.

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