

**BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND SUPERSTITIONS IN KUWANKHERA:
A STUDY ON MULTI CASTE VILLAGE OF UTTAR PRADESH**

Neha Singh

Research Scholar (SRF)

Department of Anthropology

University of Allahabad

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to draw an insight on the belief system and superstitious activities which are taking place in the village Kuwankhera of Kanpur District. Belief and practices both are the two aspects of life, associated with each other. Faith and fear are their outcomes. Superstitions are centered on a belief of mankind that the future events are influenced by specific behaviors, without having causal relationship in it. In anthropology, in the path of study of religion and associated discourse and also in the development of anthropological theories 'belief' has been playing a vital role in the life of human beings, which is an integral part of the society. Tylor has given the definition of religion in his book, Primitive Culture (1871) as "Belief in supernatural beings" or 'Animisms' i.e. Belief in soul. Beliefs and practices vary from place to place, for example using a kind of iron rod to pierce the mouth to propitiate deity or some evil activities which causes ailment to children. The study also attempts to analyze many more superstitious activities which are the outcome of fear and faiths in the field of study i.e.

Keywords- superstition, belief, faith and fear, animism, soul, etc.

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Introduction

The present paper expresses the religious trends of village India. Many traditions are bound to perform respectively every year at a specific time. Superstitious beliefs are varying from place to place and time. Beliefs and practices are the two main aspects of religious rituals. Superstition is the word running frequently worldwide, no one left without being affected it. In village, researcher found that there are a number of evil activities prominent and are being performed by few people, to harm others and children to fulfill their own desire. Superstition is derived from Latin word 'superstitio' which means 'standing in awe'. In Latin, it expresses an act of unreasonable or an excessive belief in fear or magic. Therefore, it is understood that superstition is used for irrational beliefs of people and it is believed that it is inconsistent with the known laws of science or with that is considered true and rational.

In village, if any incidence happens, having certain faith and fear, that became tradition with advancement of time. These terms are associated with the concept 'sacred', propounded by Emile Durkheimi. The paper will contemplate some of the magico-religious aspects of Kuwankhera village, which can be seen in village often. Villagers are very superstitious; the beliefs influence their everyday saga of life. In village, the traditional practices are deeply rooted with superstitious beliefs. As we know, superstition in India is a widespread social problem. Superstition refers to any belief or practices which is supposed to be a supernatural causality and contradict the modern science.

The anthropology of religion is a scientific investigation of the diversity of human religions. In the society, values and meanings are intimately bound to express in its cultural activity, which is much more than a set of names for things and especially in the religious content. Human beings always seek to explore their surroundings and interpret the life by that understanding. Superstition is just one more method of understanding life, although unscientific and unreasonable. Somewhere superstition is a belief or notion on reason or knowledge that may be a system or collection of such beliefs.

Superstitions play an important role in affecting not only minds of the people but also the social structure in a society, the main effects of superstitions are psychological effects, social, and religious effects. Religions fulfill the psychological needs, religions help to ease the stress during personal life crises such as birth, marriage, serious illness, and death. It is not a coincidence that in most of the societies, rites of passage are performed to help people for adjusting the highly emotional transitions which are strongly religious often. In the same way, religions also play an important role in social control by defining the right or wrong behavior

Methodology- The study is based on primary and secondary data. Researcher collected the primary data using an interview schedule; certain sampling techniques are used like random and purposive sampling for data collection in the field.

Objectives of the study-

- To explore, the different practices affecting the life of people, in the name of superstition.
- To analyze the superstitious activities from empirical lens.
- To explore whether there is any reality behind such superstitions or its mere misconception.

Field Area-

The field area of the doctoral research is *Kuwankhera* village, located in the district of Kanpur of Uttar Pradesh. Kanpur city has been divided in to two zones Kanpur Nagar and Kanpur Dehat. The Field area is located in Kanpur Nagar of Uttar Pradesh. The entire data collected from *Kuwan khera* having 203 household and 2452 as a total population. The interviews were conducted among villagers (individual and group) and data was collected for the analyses.

Insights from the Field-

Case study 1:- In village, I have found that, there was a man, who has lots of knowledge of mantras, and he has some power to help people from curing from evil eye and *banhaa*. He used to perform all the religious rituals in village and treated as a village priest. However, after his death people buried his body in the *varanda* of his house (*chautari*) to save his mantras and power because it was his last wish. Presently, if a child is suffering with any evil act then after giving bath to the baby and laying down on *chautri*, baby gets cure from the evil things. People believe that the powers of his mantras are still working but only for small children. He belongs to the *Turraiyan* caste (sweeper), and he was having knowledge

of mantas during his time and he was the main priest of the village and he had responsibility to perform all the village worship, sacrifice, any other rituals, but after his death no one was in the village who can perform such activity. The villagers said that, before his death he had a wish that when he dies his dead body should be buried in front of his house to save the power of his mantras.

Case study 2:- In village researcher has seen a lady named Madhu, (not real) 48 years old was not well, people told that she was affected from the curse of Goddess of her in-laws family, but some of her family members believed that she was affected by the evil activity. Villagers said that she was suffering along with her mother and sisters. Mainly Her health was totally down; she was mentally, physically ill not a single work she could able to do. Whole family was taking care but no improvement; even medication was not working properly. Her husband took her neither to the doctor nor to shaman. Only she was chanting “Hey Maa”. The villagers believed that she may die because her condition was extremely bad.

One day suddenly, her elder-sister- in- law possessed by the spiritual deity of her family and the deity told that she punished the entire family, because the family was not praying and offered the sacrificial things from last three generations and that is the reason deity has punished Madhu and her mother and sisters. After this, family members had worshiped that deity and after fulfillment of her wish now, everything is normal. She has three sons, out of them; middle and youngest sons were not normal and possessed by any other evil spirit but after this incident, now all are became normal. Some circumstances our ear hears sometimes extra sounds or a shadow appears in our vision. Many physically, and psychologically feeble persons interpret such phenomena as the acts of the supernatural, either spirit (malevolent or benevolent) or of any deity. These interpretations are always cultural bound.ⁱ

Many things, I have seen in Village, which is related either with specific day or with specific time. Some people know about the knowledge of *Mantas* and *Tantras*. The people from upper caste are believe that the person who is suffering from evil storms and other evil activity, affect the people belong to lower caste. It is because of all the ceremonies of people of lower caste only performed by the family members, not by any the spiritual leaders or any priest.

Beliefs and their related practices are the outcome of fear.-

Temple beliefs

- Auspicious days- eg. Amavasya and Purnima
- Evil beliefs- Banhaa lena- process to harm children infant or may be new born.
- Belief of spirit possession or possessed by any deity (may be Isthadevta or Devi)
- In village, some people of village are possessed by evil spirit, like Khabhish, Jinna etc.

Researcher has pointed the above, traditional beliefs, religious restrictions, prohibitions and prejudices, which make a pattern of consumption of certain foods and food products. Due to wrong and unscientific belief, people hailing from many religions and societies exclude a number of foods from the list of their food items. Pregnant women avoid specific foods due to several reasons. Some pregnant women avoid foods as a result of a strong dislike (aversion) developed following pregnancy. Other women avoid on medical grounds. In developing countries, however, a substantial number of pregnant women avoid specific foods due to cultural beliefs or impositions. The practice of avoidance of foods due to cultural food beliefs referred to as food taboos, this is also a kind of superstitious belief practices in village.

Majority of people, especially small children and women are merely affected with the problem of superstition and evil activity, which is related with black magic or somewhere the activity of a witch practitioner. According the villagers children get affected from *Chakkar*, *Hawabayar* (evil spirits), *Darudh Baba* (an evil air blowing in the month of June) etc. are believed spirits by which Small children's are predominantly affected. According to Deutsche Welleⁱ the Black magic practices in India recent incidents of killing in the name of superstition show the dark side of India's progressive society. In addition, all has been done in the name of bringing peace, harmony and prosperity to those involved. Folklorist Alan Dundesⁱ, in his edited volume "The Evil eye: A case book" quotes that "The victims good fortune, good health, or good looks or unguarded comments about them invite or provoke an attack by someone with an evil eye. If the object attacked is animate, it may fall ill.

The person not only harm children rather than he/ she may affect the life of animals especially buffalo and goats, who having good condition of mammary gland to feeding the babies and also affects a healthy fruit giving plant become died and dry after affecting with the mantras of *Banha*. Not only living things even any ceremony happens he or she may try

to spoil the whole things by using their mantras. People believe that this is a new way to earn money and to feel good by harming other people. Presently in village, no one knows about the cure of mantras that is the reason people going to another village to get contact with medicine man (ojha) and he provides amulet to cure the baby. After wearing the amulet the baby and the family members get relief from such evil tension. After wearing amulet to child, people can take anywhere or in front of any one without fear. The curator known as *tantric* or *baba* (occult), they claim to resolve the issue of health and other related family problems. Not only the poor person come in contact with the *baba* as victim to their claims but the educated and the elite society do as well.

Singh, explains that “Banha lena” is an evil-cum magical act, whose victims are infants and babies, especially girl child. It’s believed in village, everyone take care of their babies from the people who do such evil act. Banha lena and Najar (evil eye), are very similar having symptoms, like the babies eyelids get straighten, fecal matter smells very intolerable, body temperature increases leads to high fever, the milk (mammary gland) of mother gets jam (dry) and baby can’t digest the milk properly, vomiting and dysentery are frequent. Villagers believe that man, who is responsible for such act is a layman, may be male or female and he or she will be engaged in tantric work. He or she especially chooses the jhalraha baby (a baby whose Mundan Sanskar has not been done after birth) either boy or girl but mainly under five years. He or she passes especially during the time of breast feeding and due to his or her presence and mantra the child becomes ill. ⁱ Frazer’s interpretation of magic, religion and science still holds true in explaining such phenomena.

Superstition in Nature

Villagers believed that this happens in the month of *jaistha* and *baishakh* (June-July), a kind of air blows after midday, villagers believe that it is a kind of evil air that looks like a short typhoon and affects the child and old person of the village. They get the problem like headache, stomachache, a heavy pain in entire body, vomiting, diarrhea, fever are the common symptoms of this problem. Without having proper cure, the person dies. During these days the Fire becomes more dangerous a phrase says the old woman that “During these days the Fire in her parents’ house,” that is the reason fire easily struck at any place.

Numerous superstitions are associated with solar as well as lunar eclipse, that the pregnant woman has not to come outside during eclipse and they apply *geru* (kind red paint) on her abdomen and it is for the animal as well, and also applied red paint on their horn also. Solar and lunar eclipse considered to the cause and effect of *rahu* and *ketu*. During the time of eclipse, people believe that during the time of eclipse Gods is also

worried, and this time they avoid to touch and seen by any people, the time is darker, and there is a mythical story that " if a lady belongs from the sweeper caste, if touches the god or with the jhadu (broom) the god gets impure". At the time of ceremonial pollution, any cooked food are kept in out of light and water kept covered with utensils and put some leaves of Plant *Tulsi* or using dry cow dung having belief that water remains pure during eclipse. During eclipse older person every time took the name of god and never sleeps at this time. In eclipse, lady from Turraiyan come to every house and took the grains, rice, wheat or flour in *soop* (a kind of cleaning element made up of wooden to clean rice and wheat grains) to believing that after giving these items the impurities and affect of eclipse are go from the house.

For precipitation, villagers have many of beliefs and perform rituals like,- they stole the wheels of Kumhar's (potter) and throw it the well and believe that by doing this rain fall occurs. Except this the people from nut community are also visit the village and sing song in front of every house and the member of the house throw water outside the house and the nut people lay down on the water and dance, and believes the rainfall occur. The people of *Kuwan khera* village especially the ladies play a very important role for rainfall. they play drama in an agricultural field specially the lady who is the wife of the pradhan of the village, she wear the clothes of her husband to play a role of man, than a lady play a role of her wife and they both plough the field at the dark, when the lady do such role, she may be naked to make feel the god pity, that they do such things for rain, it is believes that The King of *Mithila* name King Janak, who ploughs the field for rain and that time they found Sita in a pot. Another belief related with rain that the *Brahman* and *kurmi* ladies of the village cooks a kind of chapatti (bauriyan) using cow-dung and new grain and after praying to goddess they eat and believe that this ritual is also helpful for rain. Especially these things are celebrated by Kurmi, and Pandit ladies. They are the main peoples of the village (*karta-dharta*).

Findings and Conclusion-

Superstition exists not only in India but also everywhere all over the world. Every culture and country has their personal beliefs. Some reason which researcher found in village of being superstitious people and researcher tried to categories the belief system like our ancestors, illiteracy, folktales, fear, paranormal activities. If the incident related with religious incident or any causal health problem than as an outcome of fear it became tradition. Illiteracy and ignorance are the major cause that made us superstitious. People

believe in superstitions are generally illiterate. They have false beliefs and mostly prefer to solve their problems, due to this reason these people simply trapped by these undefined quacks. In the village, most of the women are illiterate and they are more superstitious as compared to men. Things, which are related with rituals, are the outcome of fear and faith than certainly gave rise to a new tradition, which is followed by the villagers, commonly termed as the "Aan" (tradition). 'Aan' means old religious practices that do not die; they become new or lively traditions that are followed by majority of masses. Some individuals opine that various aspects of belief or ritual can serve as prime generators, expressions, more or less solutions to emotional problems. Origins of myths are perhaps the most common of the stories told about the gods. They have their own typical explanations for the origins of the gods. They may describe the origins of the god themselves.

A superstition is also caused by some folktales of a particular area. These folktales are deeply effects our mind, which we heard from our parents and grandparents. This become the first initial step of being superstitious because stories are myths without having foundations but the most important thing is that these create an interest that makes us to believe in superstitions. The psychological effects of Superstitions are the main effects, it changes the mind of the people and their minds can be changed due to effects of superstitions. Perceiving superstitions to be true of false always cause thinking in our minds that superstitions may be the something that may exist.

We have discussed much about the effects, causes and types of the superstitions. Most of the people are unaware of the superstitions they possess. These superstitions told earlier are passed to the people by their ancestors or from some paranormal phenomenon's that take place in their life. These superstitions are basically the outcomes of fears. Living in the modern era, we still having fear of an unknown, are afraid of the bad omens, frightened of the misfortunes, and are uncertain and thus looking towards symbols and miracles that can give us relief from bad luck. No matter how sophisticated our society becomes, superstitions persist in having an impact on success or failure. Normally we associate the idea of superstition with the supernatural. Mostly superstitious beliefs are passed from one generation to another, on purely a process of evolution can change the validity. With the progress of science and popular awakening, many of the superstitions have already lost their grip on the thought of the people. However, many of them are so deeply rooted that no amount of knowledge or science loosen the grip fully swipe them away.

The current example of superstition very popular in these days i.e. the cutting of braid (*Choti katna*), which is somewhere become hazardous for the life of women, and might she die due to fear. This incident not only happen in particular area or place, but it run all over the country especially in rural areas, where people mostly illiterate. This incident becomes very popular in social media. In addition, different kinds of views came in front of us that it may be a man who become monkey, or in form of cat or insect and cut the hair especially the ponytails. To get relief from this problem people, used turmeric paste in front of the gate to mark the fingerprints and uses the branch of *Neem* plant as the protective charm. But lastly the result came in front of us that it is a kind of Insect, which has sharp teeth that cut the hairs. Many of other such incidents are also popular like *Moohnuchwa*, Monkey man, the Nandi God Milk drinking etc. are some of well-known superstition.

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