ARTICLE ON DOCTRINES OF RELIGION AND THE FAITH OF CHILDREN

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Abstract

This article focuses on how the development of religious situations affects children, how a set of religious rules and customs regulate children’s mind and how symbolic interactions guide their relations with others. Such symbolic interactionism emphasises how religion affects the children’s thinking and making them believe in unscientific symbolic actions. Even this article argues that the religion keeps people involved in amusement activities so people, especially children enjoy being part of it. Such cultural forms are used strongly to impart the information of god and religion to children and children believe them blindly. The regional festivals are rooted into the minds of children and they help children to imbibe religious values through them. The article also argues that religious beliefs play a crucial role in making children’s minds superstitious and have faith in religious figures blindly. This study has been conducted in the village of Konkan region of Maharashtra. The qualitative interview method has been carried out to understand the doctrines of religion and the faith of children. The in-depth semi structured interview and participant observation have been employed as tools for data collection.

Key Words: Doctrines of religion, faith of children, religious beliefs

INTRODUCTION

Religion has regularly been the subject of extraordinary interest in understanding Indian culture for it warrants, however valorises chain of importance. Functionalists have completely praised the excellencies of jajmani framework, an institution of Hindu caste system, and the focal role it played in village society. Be that as it may, discussing physical reality, as B. R. Ambedkar argued that Hinduism has been the reason behind the Indian society to be predominantly a caste driven society. Villages are the primary preposition for comprehending the role of religion in a village’s functioning, however it is a significant aspect but not limited to the villages. Dumont (1970) too argued on religion and hierarchy and articulated that hierarchy nearly rendered Indian social structure to be an expansion of its strict religious beliefs and the hierarchy it proliferates by means of Hinduism. Hinduism, while has been practiced in its own specific manner in various parts of India, the one thing that has been widespread is the idea of hierarchy. No one would be surprised that religious hierarchy and its connotations in the form
of purity and pollution and its implications as virtue and contamination exist in the Indian villages (Choragudi 2016). Borooah and Iyer (2005) argued in their paper that Vidya (education), Veda (religion) and Varna (caste) are interlinked in India. Since the focus of this study is children’s engagement with caste, the focus has been given how children imbibe the ideas of purity and pollution through religion as caste and religion are interlinked with each other.

On entering study village, what was visible was a flex banner of Hindu religious guru Narendra Maharaj, having god Rama’s picture on it and welcoming the followers of god. Out of all hamlets, on entering Bhuvadwadi, Nalawadewadi, Badadewadi and Ramwadi one could see temples of different gods such as Ganesha, Vitthal, Datta and Rama respectively. Other than that, Ganeshwadi had a temple in its centre. Mohalla had a mosque in its centre. Bouddhawadi had Buddha Vihara which was under construction and awaiting donation from local politicians to complete it. Shetyewadi, Katkariwadi and Gopalwadi did not have temples in their hamlets but people from Shetyewadi controlled the village’s Kanhoba temple by holding the post of President on temple trust whereas Katkari people did not play any role in Kanhoba temple. Parallel line can be drawn with Jaspal’s (2011) argument related to lower caste that the stigma attached to Katkari, the essence of social interactions between Katkari and upper caste is strictly controlled, which extends to the use of communal spaces, such as places of worship (Jaspal 2011).

Cohen (1985) provides an explanation of how people construct a sense of themselves and their fellow ‘community’ members in belonging in a particular locality or with each other. He argues that a sense of ‘community’ is constructed symbolically through cultural symbols such as shared rituals that generate a sense of belonging. Furthermore, for Cohen (1985), membership in a community means sharing with other community members a similar ‘sense of things’, participation in a common symbolic domain. The temples in Dalvatne village have been sites for various forms of community activities such as the celebration of festivals or the observance of significant days such as Jatra and Utsav as a significant part of religion. With adult children too take active part in celebrating such festivals and imbibe all the rituals.

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1 *Jatra* usually refers to a village fair where the procession of palanquin of gods is organised by the villagers. It occurs once in three years or depends on the village's tradition.

2 *Utsav* refers to religious celebration at village and most of the time celebration considers as god's birthday.

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CHILDREN AND CULTURAL CELEBRATION

Temples become the central place for children to introduce the god and festivals become the medium of it. Festivals are the significant events celebrated by the community. It reflects the characteristic aspects of a particular community and its culture. From the narratives of children from three different religions i.e. Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim it was inferred that they do not mingle with each other during religious festivals as they celebrate festivals within their own religions. Sometime it was observed that people from Buddhist and Katkari communities do participate in festivals of Hindus but children from Hindu religion do not participate in any festivals of Buddhist and Katkari communities. Buddhist children were more isolated from the rest of the village while celebrating Buddha and Dr. Ambedkar’s Birth Anniversaries. The smaller forms of festivals are being celebrated within hamlets only and others do not participate in other hamlets’ celebrations, which develops the feelings of ‘our hamlets and our festivals’ among children.

Ganesha festival is the biggest celebration in the Konkan region of Maharashtra. In one of the hamlets of the study village had Ganesha temple which was considered that the Ganesha idol in the Ganesh temple is self born or self created from the earth which is called Swayambhu Ganesha. Even they believe that god Ganesha completes their wish so they bring Ganesha idol on Vinayak Chaturthi and keep it for seven days. Children believed that god Ganesha fulfils the wishes of people. Religion plays a crucial role in imbibing superstitious practices among religious people. During the Dahi-handi festival, it was observed that children were forming a human pyramid to reach the Dahi-handi (earthen pot). Children did not know why the Dahi-handi was being celebrated but when one of the children was asked which god he liked most and he replied, “Krishna”. This shows that according to the festival children’s favourite god keeps changing.

The Jatra, a cultural form of celebrating god’s procession is much larger in size than any other festival in this village. Dalvatne’s Jatra and Shimaga brought onto the streets enormous numbers of people. People joined a large procession carrying palanquin by dancing and drumming along the village’s main roads, finally reaching one of the village’s sacred places carrying sacred groves. In addition to the actual ritual worship in the Kanhoba’s shrine, dancing is an essential part of the festival. Being awake for the whole night for Shimaga was an amusement thing for the children. These festivals are rooted into the minds of children and imbibed religious values through them. On the name of Jatra and festivals, parents promise their children to get new clothes and crackers. Hence children participate in such festivals with
happiness and wait for them rigorously. Enjoyment is the basic structure of all festivals which make children aware of religious practices and prepare them in believing god. Even offering new clothes or toys to the children during festivals also attracts children towards festivals. Initially children get attracted towards such celebrations which lead them to believe in god in their later stage of childhood.

The cultural folk art like Bhajan, Haripath, Naman, Jakhadi Nrutya Jangi Samana, Garaba and Dandiya, are the various art forms organised during different festivals. The religion keeps people involved in amusement activities so people, especially children enjoy being part of it. Such cultural forms are used strongly to impart the information of god and religion. Children are taught god is omnipotent. So such art forms are used to spread awareness of Hindu gods and inculcate traditional thinking among children. They start believing in such stories because children visualize the drama and believe that these gods are real. The gods and their mythological powers are introduced through such cultural art forms to children. So, they become more aware of different gods and become religious from their childhood. Cultural forms of the Konkan region inject the religious and spiritual ideology in the minds of children from their childhood.

The father of a seven-year-old boy was a follower of god Vitthal and was a vegetarian, wearing sacred Maal around his neck symbolically representing a vegetarian people. His father visits Pandharpur, a holy place for the Warkari sect considered as the birth place of god Vitthal. His father believed that children learn how to celebrate festivals by being with their parents. He felt proud of his son visiting Pandharpur and standing in queue for hours without getting tired. His son felt that Vitthal is the most powerful god. His son wanted to wear Maal but his father did not allow him citing reason that he did not know the difference between vegetarian and non-vegetarian food but he should learn that and avoid going to the houses where people eat non-vegetarian food. In such cases children whose parents follow Warkari sect do not visit houses where families are non-vegetarian. Children develop discriminatory feelings on the basis of the type of food people consume.

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3 Bhajan refers to the devotional religious songs
4 Haripath is another form of Bhajan
5 Naman is the form of cultural folk art
6 Maal in Marathi refers to the necklace
7 Warkari refers to people who perform Wari (meaning pilgrimage towards Pandharpur) and worship god Vitthal.
Even schools celebrate different festivals in the study village. They organise *dandiya* in schools where most of the girls participate. Teachers organise Saraswati *puja* which is worshiping goddess Saraswati by setting up an idol of Saraswati. Therefore, through Durkheim’s perspective, from school itself children learn about particular religions and festivals which help them to give meaning and purpose to their life but according to Marx’s perspective schools are not secular in terms of celebrating specific festivals and not celebrating Eid. Hence schools did not take any efforts to instil the secular values in the minds of children. To understand an awareness among Hindu children, they were asked why they do not celebrate Eid. They emphasised they are Hindu-Marathie and proudly responded with a proverb, “*Marathi Amacha Bana...Shivaji Amacha Rana*” meaning ‘we are proud of being Marathi and Shivaji is our Hero’. Dominantly in Maharashtra King Shivaji has been considered as Hindu king and saved Hindus against Muslims. Hence Hindu children identify themselves with King Shivaji. They knew Eid is the festival of Muslims. So children belonging to Hindu religion understand that children from Muslim community are different than them since they celebrate different festivals than Hindus.

The communal gatherings such as *Jatra* and other festivals bring people and children together and allow them to interact and communicate with each other. It helps children to develop a common set of beliefs and becomes an important agent of socialization (Emerson et al, 2011). In this way through Durkheim’s perspective religions help reinforce social unity and stability. Therefore the celebration of festivals makes children aware of what religion they belong to and how they are different from other religions. As children are involved in celebration of festivals, they develop fondness towards gods. When children were asked which god they like then they would take the names of god which they just celebrated the festivals of him or if they have a temple of a particular god. Children believed that village god *Kanhoba* is the incarnation of god Shankar. Children believed that god gives knowledge. So whatever elders tell children, children start believing in it without thinking critically. Because such festivals make their beliefs strong, this does not keep any space for children to question god or religion. Kanhoba is the village god and most of the children from the study village like him as a god with other gods. In this village, Kanhoba is exposed to children several times during different festivals. Secondly, whenever children fall sick, they are taken to Kanhoba’s temple for getting *Utara*.

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8 *Utara* refers to the holy ash given by local Gurav (care take of temple) superstitiously convincing people to put it on their forehead for getting relieved from any illness
that is the holy ash. So since Kanhoba is exposed to children as a knowledge giver, helper, one who cures, children start believing him blindly. Marx saw religion as a huge barrier to critical thinking and revolutionary change, referring to it as the ‘opiate of the masses’ (Marx 1964). After all it is hard to convince people to rise up against an upper caste in Indian context if they believe that the upper caste have the power of god behind them.

There was another source of developing an awareness of gods by different organisations which work for instilling the beliefs and faith on god among children. Kalawati’s classes and Dr. Narayan Dharmadhikari’s *Baithak* are some of the well known gatherings that take place at village level. Many of the Hindu children attend such gatherings and discussions. Parents believe that if children attend such meetings then they get properly disciplined, do not go waste and they get peace of mind. In such meetings children were told all kinds of mythological stories to make their beliefs on gods strong. *Baithak* was the initiative of Dr. Narayan Dharmadhikari who was a spiritual leader and spread the philosophy of Spiritual Sant Ramadas Swami. Nowadays, it has been observed that parents send their children for *Baithak* at large. So such religious gatherings and meetings are some of the mediums to imbibe religious learnings.

The views were examined of Buddhist children on their favourite gods and it was observed that some of them questioned the existence of gods. Unlike other Hindu children, they said that they do not believe in any god. Hence some of the Buddhist children do not believe in the concept of god. This perception can be seen only among children belonging to Buddhist community. Buddhist children developed this view as comparatively they were not involved in festivals as non-Buddhist children were.

**AWARENESS OF RELIGION**

It has been observed that at the age of eight, children do not become aware what religion they belong to. Children at their childhood considered Marathi as their religion since they speak Marathi language. Children after the age of nine or ten become aware of other religions like Hindus, Muslims and Buddhist. At this age though Hindu children would not become aware of what religion they belong to, but much before that they become aware that Muslims are different from them. Sometime Muslim people were identified as *eidwale* or *hindiwale* since only Muslims celebrate Eid and they speak Hindi sometimes. So for children, festivals differentiate people according to their celebrations. Since children from different religions do not involve themselves in celebrations of other religions children identify themselves as different from them. People from different religions do not share religious shrines with each
other that causes children to develop differences among them. Even different religious names of Muslim children make them different from Hindu children. The religious attire like burqa and not putting *Bindi* on forehead make Muslim women different than non-Muslims and it is easily identify by the non-Muslim children. As festivals introduced the religion to children, even in the case of Muslims, their attire too introduces their religion to other children. A Muslim girl shared a story of inter-religious marriage between Muslim girl and Hindu boy. She wanted to be politically correct so she emphasised if parents are ready then anyone can do inter-religious marriage but when she was asked whether her parents would get agree for her inter-religious marriage then she said no. Another fourteen-year-old Muslim girl responded that she would not get married with any Hindu boy. Such rigidness has been developed among children from their childhood. The similar attitudes were found among Hindu children. Even while playing any games in two different teams the same religious children wanted to be in one team. Hence children belonging to one religion find themselves different from children belonging to other religions.

It was surprised that a three-year-old girl responded to a question that who is Muslim and she responded that those who do not put *Bindi*. When she did not put *Bindi*, her parents commented that she looked like Muslims. This is interesting to understand that children developed an idea of the term Muslim which is something different than her and her family and people living around them. Three-year-old girl observed that people around her puts *Bindi* so they are not different but a community called Muslim who do not put *Bindi* are different than her. So for not looking like Muslim she puts *Bindi* on her forehead. At the age of three she did not even know that what religion she belongs to or there is Muslim religion existed in this world but from her childhood she developed the idea of differentness of one community which is separated from others.

As Hindu children develop differentness from Muslims at their childhood gradually they develop an inferior attitude towards Muslims. An eleven-year-old Hindu boy commented that Muslim children are not clever since their god does not make them clever. Another fourteen-year-old girl had a conception that Muslim girls are fools. This shows that Hindu children have an inferior attitude towards Muslims children. This also shows that with awareness of religion, children develop discriminatory attitudes towards different religious children. Though, according to Durkheim, religion is an agent of social control and strengthens social order, from which it is expected that to behave morally and be a good member of society, the reality reveals the opposite to it. According to conflict theory religion can also reinforce and promote social
inequality and social conflict (Marx, 1964), the attitude of Muslims and Hindu children was found discriminatory towards each other. Further even among Hindu religion, the discriminatory attitude was found among children belonging to different castes. The festivals are also celebrated treating one group superior than another.

**RELIGION AND SUPERSTITIOUS BELIEFS**

Many traditional religions, as well as superstition, do not believe that the world is driven by laws of cause and effect. Children carry several superstitious beliefs with them as they presume that there are immaterial forces influencing their lives. They did not think critically and they just believed it blindly. An eleven-year-old girl from Bhuvadwadi restricted children from climbing on the tree on the new moon day thinking that it is ominous to climb on a tree on new moon day. She thought that on this day if children climb then they would fall down from the tree. Others too supported her belief and shared another story of a person who fell down from the tree on new moon day. Even she believed that on new moon day one should not swim in the river otherwise he would drown in the water. Another twelve-year-old girl from Bhuvadwadi said one should not see the moon on Ganesh chaturthi. If someone does that then it is considered as ominous. Children narrated that Sanika’s father knew some Mantra and used to give holy ash to people who were suffering from any illness. He also used to chant Mantra and used to give holy ash when people get scorpion bite. Children did not have any evidence of such beliefs but they learnt from their peer groups and people around them that Mantra really works if there is snake bite or scorpion bite. They just believed without thinking. Such stories are heard by the children from their adults and since they are not taught thinking critically, they believe these stories blindly and start believing them.

A fourteen-year-old boy from Hindu-Gosavi caste was sharing about installing a new idol of god at his hamlet. In the temple there is an idol made out of stone called Pashan and in the palanquin they carry an idol made out of a silver quoted mental called Rupee. Now a new stone idol had been purchased for installing in the temple but he reiterated that the old stone idol of god should not be thrown away otherwise people will be punished by god. He overheard a story of punishment but was not sure about it. An eleven-year-old girl too said that once villagers threw idols of god and then god started harassing villagers by entering into the body of women. Another boy disagreed with her on her misconception but stayed firm on the point that idols should not be thrown away. It is imbibed among children that if the idols of god would be thrown away then they will meet with misfortune.
People demand something from god which is called navas (demanding or wishing something from god) and if their wish gets completed then they keep Ganesh idol for ten days till Anant Chaturthi. People believe that god Ganesh is known for completing wishes or Navas. A nine-year-old boy had ear infection so his mother wished god that his ear should get healed. But it did not work so she blamed her son only that he did not take proper care of his ear. If ear would have healed then she would have thanked god but since his ear did not get healed so she blamed her son only.

Children had a conception of Navas that if a mother is unable to give birth to a boy then offering Navas will help the mother to give birth to the baby boy. So the parents of that boy have to give something in return to the god. If they do not give anything in return then god punishes that family. Religion makes children believe in traditional things and does not allow children to think critically. As Navas is one of them where a girl believes that offering a coconut to god, a woman can give birth to a male child. The community members and family members imbibe the superstitious beliefs among children where these children set them firmly in their minds without thinking critically. Around this religion they do not get a space where they will get an opportunity to discuss critical issues.

Gurav performs Araj during Shimaga to demand something from god which is called Navas. If someone had a fever so the role of Gurav was to offer ash and cure it. So Gurav offers coconut to god…performs Aaraj9 (Aaraj means Gurav demands happiness for all from God) in front of god… gives holy ash to cure them. Performing Kalya lavane10 ritual also was the role of Gurav in the village temple. People go to the temple to dip the flower bud and stick to the stone. Gurav performs kalya lavane ritual when someone falls sick in the home or if they want to know god’s decision for anything they go to temple for kalya lavane. Kalya lavane is a form of symbolic practice that highlights faith in god that gives advice through the kalya lavane process. Children visit a village temple frequently and observe the Gurav’s action of kalya lavane which does not have any logical base. But children believe that by performing Araj, putting holy ash on their forehead and by performing kalya lavane rituals will help them to come out of difficult situations. Here one can argue that religious beliefs play a crucial role in making children’s minds superstitious and have faith in religious figures blindly. A firm belief in a divine force that governs human destiny is known as religious belief. Religious people

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9 Araj means Gurav demand happiness for all from God
10 Kalya meaning dipping flower bud and sticking to the stone
differentiated their beliefs from superstition. Such symbolic interactionism emphasises how religion affects the children’s thinking and making them believe in unscientific symbolic actions.

CONCLUSION
The article focused on how the development of religious situations affects children, how a set of religious rules and customs regulate children's mind and how symbolic interactions guide their relations with others. Childhood is a variable of social analysis. Other factors such as caste, class, gender, and ethnicity can never be completely separated from it. Rather than a single or universal phenomenon, comparative and cross-cultural research shows a variety of childhoods (Jenks 2009).

It can be inferred from several narratives of children that religion develops uncritical thinking among children and they believe in them without questioning. They are introduced to festivals as a medium of fun and joy but gradually festivals become an integral part of their life as they grow up and start believing in god. Since festivals are based on caste, children by default imbibe hierarchical values through festivals and then their beliefs become so rigid that they do not want to think critically on them. Even religions create a gap between children from different religious groups and develop inferior attitudes towards each other. Children start developing others' identity on the basis of their language or festivals.

So children are active receptors of cultural activities. They grasp whatever is happening around them. They learn from festivals, rituals, songs, their peer groups and parents. They see themselves celebrating some festivals and they see others celebrating different festivals and develop differences in their minds about others. Religion endorses hierarchy as it needs something which is universal and penetrates all forms of social life, otherwise it would remain on the fringes as an abstract concept. Hierarchy is a reality which exists even in the simplest of societies, and in case of Hinduism, by constantly practicing the said hierarchy is the symbol or ritual purity and upholding the virtues of the religion (Choragudi 2016). Festivals revolve around the theme of religiolising children and imbibing hierarchical values.

REFERENCES

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