
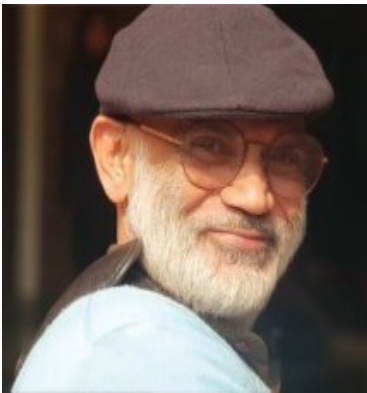


THE EVIL AND FOLK BELIEF

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Abstract: *This paper is about some of the folk beliefs of evil spirits amongst the people of India and see some analogous beliefs amongst the Slavs. Belief in evil spirits is not confined to only Magadha but is widespread in the whole of India. Since I have worked as a researcher in the Magadha area, Bihar, this study refers to the region. The fear of the malevolent has been depicted in many stories of the past. The discussion about evil spirits and godlings this paper is dealing with is not about regular gods who form the traditional pantheon. They are godlings feared by the village folk. Perpetual oblations are carried out as the godlings directly affect the village folk everyday life and even their occupation. This topic is broad but nonetheless interesting. It requires a more detailed discussion. The paucity of space restricts me to make a few observations.*

keywords: *malevolent, sorcerer, evil eye, charms, amulets.*

In any discussion about religious beliefs we should differentiate between folk religion and philosophical religion. A person maybe acquainted with all the religious rituals, festivals but might not have any idea about the philosophy. The other way may also happen. A person knowledgeable with the philosophical background of religion might not be fully acquainted with the folk festivals, rituals of that religion.

Folk religion is polytheistic, that is worship of or belief in more than one god. There are different deities. Such deities can be rivers, trees, mountains, streams linked with specific places. This is true not only amongst Hindus, but even within Muslim communities, although Islam categorically states existence of one God and negates belief in multiple deities or presence of multiple gods which we explain as 'Polytheism' but nevertheless the 'folk Islam', if we can call it so, integrates folk beliefs and practices including ecstatic rituals. Many Muslims

believe that amulets or 'tabeez', as Muslims call them, help protect against the evil eye. The soul is regarded as immortal and immutable. If we accept this premise, then there is every reason to consider the folks who vouch for their presence around us. Just like the humans who are alive the spirits or souls can also be vindictive, spiteful. They can also be benign and compassionate. A single entity can have both malevolent and benevolent traits. The immortality of soul is the epicenter of the belief in life after death and subsequently to the reincarnation. It is also interesting to observe that folks believe in salvation. If proper rituals are not carried out after death the soul of the person continues to suffer and is unable to depart or rather disengage from the material world.

Like the Indians the Slavic folk give considerable credence to several malevolent spirits which if enraged or displeased bring reversal of fortune, tribulation, and amplitude of adversities in instances of calamities, epidemics, and even personal predicaments. Many rituals are performed to conciliate the displeased spirit or god. Folks of different areas have different rituals and different gods. But it is fascinating to observe that sometimes two nations geographically and culturally separated augment rituals and gods quite common in nature. Many gods and goddess or spirits are revered sheer out of fear.

The belief that illness is the result of possession by malevolent spirits is deeply ingrained in many societies. This belief is not confined to any one region. It comes from across the globe. An evil eye brings sickness, injury destruction to a person's acreage, harm dealings and even destroy relationships. Even believers in Islam accept that the evil brings misfortune. You must have heard them say "Masha -Allah" while looking at someone or something with elation. The Holy Quran has many verses where evil eye is mentioned. One of them is: "And from the evil of an envier when he envies". The effect of evil eye can be either from a human being or from the malevolent spirit called Jinn. Many Muslims believe that Jinn does exist and so does the evil eye. But many do not believe in sorcery as according to them Islam prohibits. V. Dal' has correctly remarked that "Evil eye is a quite common belief, not only between all Slavic, but also very many other, ancient, and new peoples. Every educated society considers it a duty to mock such a ridiculous superstition publicly, while secretly many sincerely believe it, without realizing it"¹.

Use of amulets amongst the Muslims of Magadha is also not uniform in the community. Many wear amulets called tabeez. Care is taken not to accept tabeez from anyone who may claim to be the chosen one. The tabeez or the amulet should only have verses from the Quran and nothing else. It is believed to protect the owner from evil eye or malevolent spirits like the shaitan or afarit. Afarits are supposed to be very shrewd and crafty and they emerge from the ground with large wings. They lie in wait in ruins or at the bottoms of wells. Women need to be especially careful of the Afarits as their choice of brides as human being. When god (Allah) made the first human being -Adam he directed angels and jinn to bow to the creation. All obeyed the command of the creator and bowed before Adam but one of the jinn refused. This jinni is called Iblis. He was banished from the heaven for not obeying the order of the creator

1 Даль, Владимир. О поверьях, суевериях и предрассудках русского народа (Russian Edition) (Kindle Locations 749-756). Strelbytskyy Multimedia Publishing. Kindle Edition.

and became the devil who would incite human beings and lead them astray and commit sin. People believe that shaitan can exert lot of influence over men and women and dissuade them from taking the righteous path by inducing in them vices like pride, arrogance and commit evil deeds. To come out of the influence of the Shaitan one must rededicate oneself to the path of virtue. This amulet is said to be a protector against a shaitan. The ancient Slavs worshiped the cult of the Sun; therefore, many Slavic charms have been with solar signs, the main task of which is to protect the person who wears them. There were different types of amulets. For example Boris Alersandrovich Rybakov in his *Язычество древних славян*² notes that In the village burial mounds of the 11th-12th centuries of the land of the Radimichi, an Eastern Slav tribe, pendants-amulets depicting a fantastic hybrid creature, a cross between a horse and a duck were found. According to him amulets of this complex type should be interpreted as a round-the-clock amulet that protects their owner both during the day and at night from the evil eye.

Worship of evil spirits can be attributed to many regions including Magadha. This kind of worship is induced to pacify the malevolent spirit and evade their wrath. Illness is ascribed to possession of a person by spirits. It is advised not to mention the illness by its name if that illness is considered to have occurred as a result of anger of a spirit as by naming the illness will invite the spirit to enter the body of the person who names it. Smallpox for example was never mentioned by its name in Magadha. It is referred to as Devi which is associated with Shitala the goddess associated with smallpox. Even the name Shitala is not pronounced but referred to as Devi or Mata. The spirit of this disease is personified in the feminine gender. The attitude towards this disease was very respectful. In Magadha area the person who used to get smallpox was believed to have been inhabited by Shitala the goddess of smallpox. She remained inside the body for seven days. For the entire period of seven days the house was kept clean as the goddess was in the house. Five women sang devotional songs dedicated to the goddess every evening and morning all seven days and five incense sticks were kept burning and neem branches along with leaves were kept near the patient's bed who is even bathed in neem water. No one called the patient by name and was referred or addressed by the name of the goddess. During this period, the food was prepared without spices. If the patient did not eat it was believed that the goddess is not pleased and the women pleaded the goddess to eat and forgive the household for any mistake committed and they even go to the extent of banging their heads against the bed and seek forgiveness. An analogy is found amongst the Slavs. During the period of the illness they baked pancakes, pies and gave to the patient and while bowing asked the disease to have mercy. Bathing the patient was a necessity and the left-over water was used for bathing the children of the house. Just like in Magadha region it was believed by the Slavs that smallpox is a spirit that is in the patient's body, therefore they talked to her like a spirit, referring not to the patient, but to the disease. The smallpox in common Slavic language is called Chernaya ospa, or the black pox while chicken pox "Vetrinaya" or of the wind is referred to in a very affectionate manner, so as not to displease the spirit as "Vetrianka".

2 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/76001704.pdf> Размещение в сети: <http://www.rodon.org/rba/yads.htm>
 Дата написания: 1980; автора: 1908-2001; файла: 29.11.2007
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To make friends with smallpox, healthy children were washed with water left after bathing a sick child. It was believed that she would not attack her "friends". In Magadha other the goddess diseases are of cholera (Olai Chandi for Hindus; Olai Bibi for Muslims) or the goddess of blood infections (Raktabati).

Since ancient times people use all kinds of sorcery in their lives. Although few talks about it publicly these days but still many turns to sorcerers secretly without many coming to know about it. It is confined to either one household or just one small group to preserve the confidentiality as others may declare them regressive and even ridiculous. Sorcerer, a person with supernatural abilities occupied a significant place in folk belief. Easter Slavs believed that a person is a born sorcerer or obtained the boon from spirits to whom he is associated mentally. A sorcerer who is not invited to a wedding can spoil the whole wedding ceremony by delaying the groom or the bride or sending curse to the bride to become infertile. Vladimir Dal' wonders that "It is surprising to what extent blind confidence can fool people: people not only believe that the sorcerer can spoil the wedding by injuring the groom the horses or even turning everyone into dogs or wolves"³. The Russians believed obligatory to invite a sorcerer to the wedding who would then ensure that there is no glitch during the entire marriage ceremony and also see to it that no harm is brought about to the couple by other sorcerers or witches. A folk healer or a sorcerer in Magadha is called an 'Ojha'. He is believed to have command over spirits. In Russian folk dialects also there are special names for a sorcerer – *vezhlivets* or *vezhlivy* (вежливец и вежливый) which mean polite. A sorcerer can do both evil and good (like a healer, he treats people and animals damaged by him or another sorcerer; translates damage or disease from people to animals). According to the 'The Encyclopaedia of Russian Superstitions' "It is not uncommon for two courteous persons to attend the same wedding, one from the side of the groom, the other from the bride. His duty is "to protect the wedding from damage, to destroy malicious spells He examines all the corners and thresholds in the house, counts the stones in the stoves, puts the lock on the threshold, blows on the tablecloth of the wedding table, whispers various slander about the clothes of the young and under the horse harness, puts around the neck of the young a neckless etc⁴.

Ancient Indian civilization is witnessed to hymns, chants, spells, prayers, and black magic and rituals for safe protecting or warding off ailments and perturbation. The custom of warding off evil spirits by using charms, talisman, and amulets is prevalent in India even today. Since ancient times, many societies have believed that disease or illness remind the people the presence of spirits and gods. Amongst the ancient Slavs it is commonly believed that evil spirits harm people mainly at night, or "until the first crowing of roosters". They take milk from cows and send diseases and natural disasters. Charms for safeguarding are usually a prayer or even placing of certain plants like wormwood, horseradish, garlic, lovage. Menstruation are often referred to the presence of evil spirits. Such beliefs persist in many parts of the Magadha region even today.

Appearance of evil spirits are described as having such deformities like lame, blindness, one-eyedness, unusually tall or unusually short. Some be with tails or horns. Especially women spirits are visualised as extremely beautiful or extremely ugly, some with long, crooked fingernails

3 Даль, Владимир. О поверьях, суевериях и предрассудках русского народа (Russian Edition) (Kindle Locations 356-357). Strelbytskyy Multimedia Publishing. Kindle Edition.

4 Vlasova, Энциклопедия русских суеверий. <https://www.litmir.me/br/?b=231641&p=25>

(Bhairava, for instance). They are unusually dressed. Asurakumara, the demon princes in Hindu demonology, is described as black skinned and in red clothes while Bali A nocturnal demon of the Underworld has the appearance of a donkey. In Slavic demonology, Chert (чёрт) is the son of the god of winter Chernobog and the goddess Mara. He has horns, hooves, with a face of a pig, and has an emaciated tail. The entry of the evil spirit is also quite dramatic. According to Afanasyev has remarked that according to popular beliefs, the appearance and disappearance of unclean spirits is always accompanied by a thunderous crash and suffocating vapours that spread a sulphur or resinous smell⁵.

According to Slavic popular beliefs, one of the locations of the malign are dry willow like rakita tree. The shape of this tree itself is very scary at night. Likewise, folks of Magadha region believe that few malevolent spirits live on trees and jump down on persons crossing the tree. There are spirits who reside in water like Vodianoi of the Slavs and Panduba in the Magadha. The realm of Vodianoi is water bodies like rivers, tanks, and ponds. Remarkably similar to the Panduba of the Magadh, Vodianoi hangs on around the banks of waterbody and pulls down and drowns who ever tries to enter his realm. Panduba comes out of the water and drags in unsuspecting swimmers or fishermen. In both the cases if anyone tries to rescue the drowned person by jumping into the water will meet the same fate. Like water spirits who celebrated the death of a person by drowning with dancing and merriment, devils, according to Russian belief, start a frantic wild celebration near the corpses of the person dying because of strangling or suicide⁶.

Slavs and Indians both have many common beliefs to protect the pregnant woman from prying eyes and otherworldly forces, for example use of amulets to protect herself and the unborn child from any negative influence. Putting an axe under the bed of a child amongst the Slavs was quite common. This would ward off evil spirits from the children at night. In our lands, mothers would keep metallic coins or anything metallic under the pillow of her child for it to have a sound sleep and not disturbed by the evil spirits. Pregnant women and children are believed to be more susceptible to attacks from malevolent spirits. Both the mother and newborn child or the one yet to be born need to be protected. Pishach (पिशाच) is particularly fond of pregnant women. Pisacas like abandoned places, burial grounds and roam around villages spreading diseases. To ward off this spirit one needs to carry iron or a piece of the neem tree.

At 8 km North West of Gaya in the vicinity of Falgu river is a place called Pretshila. Pret (प्रेत) means ghost, spirit. To reach the main Pretshila you must climb 676 stairs. Few reach the top by foot others go by palanquin or palki (पालकी). It is believed a ghost, or a spirit used to reside on the hills. To pacify the ghost a temple was built, probably by Rani Ahilybai of Indore. This place is a site for worship of spirits of persons who have died an unnatural death and who return to haunt the living. Amongst the Slavs too there is a belief that some spirits of people who died prematurely or an unnatural death roam the earth. Rusalka is believed to be the spirit of a young woman who had committed suicide by drowning as she was disowned by her lover after she became pregnant before marriage. Children who die a premature death become kikimor,

5 Афанасьев, Александр "Славянские колдуны и их свита" http://shkola-magii.ru/files/lib/Slavjanskie_kolduny_i_ih_svita.pdf

6 ibid

ghouls. Rusalka intimidates men and tempts them to the river and then drown them. L.N. Vinogradov in his Folk demonology and mytho-ritual tradition of the Slavs says that according to popular belief mostly girls and children became Rusalki, i.e. those who died prematurely and in some rare cases because of violent death. Those who died at a young age were considered dangerous, since it was precisely such dead who visited the living and harmed them.⁷

There is a shrine a little away from Gaya. This shrine is of Syed Shah Durvesh Ashraf, a Sufi saint of Chistia-Ashari order. As you approach the shrine what you hear tears your heart. People screaming, crying. They are believed to be under the influence of some evil spirit. They come here, irrespective of the religion they follow to be cured of the evil spirit. It is to be seen to be believed how at times persons become so violent while inflicting injuries to oneself that they bleed. They run aimlessly from corner to corner, screaming, shrieking, banging their head on the walls, floor to get rid of the malevolent spirits. At times, the violent ones need to be even chained. This kind of being possessed is widely talked about in India irrespective of religious beliefs. If it is not the shrine that helps the possessed, then they are sorceresses who can communicate with the evil forces. The belief of being possessed by an evil was widely common amongst the Slavs too. In Russian they are called Klikushki if she is a woman and Miryak if a man. According to E. E. Levkieskaya "Information about klikushki is found in ancient Russian documents from the 11th century. The Legend of "Peter and Fevronia of Murom" narrates how a demon possessed the prince's young wife"⁸. Levkieskaya notes that "Klikushka during the seizure by the evil becomes so powerful that several men are unable to control her"⁹.

Such beliefs stem from the fact that few incidents, coincidences are taken on face value as the folks had no access to the right information or scientific explanations. People still believe the existence of such forces is another matter.

Нéчисть и народное поверье

Аннотация: Эта статья о злых духах в народных верованиях среди людей Индии и о некоторых аналогичных верованиях среди славян. Вера в злых духов распространена не только в Магадхе, но и во всей Индии. Поскольку я работал исследователем в районе Магадхи, в штате Бихар, эта статья относится конкретно к этому региону. Дискуссия о злых духах и божках, о которых идет речь в этой статье, ведется не о обычных богах, составляющих традиционный пантеон, а о богах, которых опасаются деревенские жители. Совершаются вечные подношения, поскольку боги напрямую влияют на повседневную жизнь деревенских жителей. Тема обширная, но, тем не менее, интересная. Это требует более подробного обсуждения. Из-за нехватки места мне пришлось сделать лишь несколько наблюдений.

Ключевые слова: злонамеренный, колдун, сглаз, чары, амулеты.

7 Л. Н. Виноградова. Народная демонология и мифо-ритуальная традиция славян. ИНДРИК, Москва. 2000 ст. 146

8 Левкиевская Елена Евгеньевна. Mifi Vostochnik Clavyan. Detskaya Literatura. Moscow 2015 p. 271

9 Ibid p. 273