

## **RELIGIOUS PRACTICES IN NORTH INDIA TO CURE DISEASES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

There is a belief among almost all the rural population that diseases born due to evil spirits are cured by praying the Gods and Goddesses. Different kinds of Prayers prescribed for different diseases have been described in this article in detail.

Although the world has entered new millennium and touching heights of science and technology, yet the belief that epidemics are due to evil spirits is very much prevalent in most of the states of North India as well as South India. The people apply different methods of worshipping to their respective Gods and Goddesses to get rid of various diseases. In this communication an effort has been made to project some of common beliefs prevalent in India especially North India.

History is witness that all religions in ancient civilizations worshipped various Gods and Goddesses for relief from different physical ailments and mental agonies. They worshipped deities for averting epidemic diseases and other such calamities supposed to have been caused by evil spirits. It was a common belief in villages that villages are surrounded by evil spirits who cause failure of crops fire or inflict diseases, epidemics like cholera, small pox, typhoid, fever and cattle diseases. No doubt world has reached to moon and it is progressing towards pinkest of science and technology

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in medical field. Even we know causes of these epidemics and their treatment part also but still due to illiteracy and sound belief in religions these sort of practices are present in most of the parts of the country. This is irrespective of religion, caste and sex. Keeping this in view authors have made efforts to compile the common practices going on in North India. These practices are supported by our ancient literature also. Ashwins are supposed to be associated with the act of healing according to Vedic religion. Several miraculous cures like rejuvenation, providing an artificial iron leg, cure of blindness, leprosy are attributed to these twin Gods. Many of the *mantras* of *Atharvaveda* are for cure of diseases supposed to have been caused by evil spirits.

In most of the North Indian villages 'Sitala Mata' is worshipped as Goddess of small pox. It is believed that by worshipping this Goddess, small pox cannot occur to children. Traces of worship of mother Goddess are found in Indus valley civilization there by giving an impression that worship of Goddesses was prevalent for cure of diseases. Chinese traveller I'tsing mentioned that image of *Harita* (*Hariti*) was found near door of all Buddhist monasteries. *Hariti* was regarded as an incarnation of disease that destroy children. Lord Buddha turned her into a protector of children from her old character of destroyer of children. So *Sitala* is an identical form of *Hariti* and Goddess of small pox worshipped in India.

In some villages 'Bhai Moolchand' is worshipped for removal of warts from the body. According to survey, if the affected person offers common salt to the God the disorder is cured.

Almost all over the North India 'Baba' is worshipped for so many diseases. Basically it is a 'Muslim peer'. There are so many places where the holy site known as 'Mazaar' is worshipped. People offer goat sacrifice to the God. There is a place *Malerkotla* in Sangrur district in Punjab where one such holy site is there for *Baba Haider Sheikh*. This is worshipped for so many psychiatric problems. Devotees attend the function on Thursday. 'Baba' is supposed to enter into one particular person and this person acquires some spiritual powers. "Deewans" or meetings are conducted. The spiritual person answers the questions of people and tells them the remedies for their problems. The devotees are supposed to stay in the night at holy place. This is known as 'Chowkee'. There is a place "Mehandipur" in Rajasthan. This place is

worshipped for curing of mental disorders. At this place *Lord Hanuman* is worshipped. In most of the villages in North India especially Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh, “*Badd Vadera*” or ancestors are worshipped. One particular place is allocated in the village and families of one particular ancestor worship them. It is believed that ancestors protect their families from diseases and other natural calamities.

There are two different religious groups known as “*Dhan Dhan Satguru Tera Hi Āsara*” from Sirsa district of Haryana and *Dera Beas* in Punjab. These groups are very much prevalent in Punjab, Haryana and Delhi. The disciples of these sects are supposed to be teetotalers. So both these groups are worshipped for de-addiction.

There is a place “*Chintapurni*” in Himachal Pradesh. This is a place of Goddess worshipped for removal of all types of mental tension. As is clear from name itself “*Chinta*” means tension and “*Purni*” means removal. So worship of this Goddess removes mental tensions. This is a place for one sister out of seven sister Goddesses.

One more group is emerging in Punjab known as “*Sarv Rog Ka Aukhad Naam*” means remembering name of God is panacea for all the diseases. According to philosophy of this “*Naam Jap*” (recitation of God's name) is the common and basic remedy for all the diseases.

Different Gods are worshipped for different disorders. *Surya* and *Mangal* Gods are worshipped for *Pitta* disorders especially for fevers and skin diseases. *Rahu*, *Ketu* and *Shanni* are worshipped for *Vata* disorders. *Shukra* and *Chandrama* are worshipped for *Kapha* diseases.

Accordingly there were also several beliefs for cure of skin diseases and snake-bites. An annual festive gathering known as “*Chambal Ka Mela*” occurs at a particular place in Jammu. It is believed that the soil of this place if rubbed over the affected part, cures the skin diseases. Like wise there is also a belief that people bathing in the water of “*Shastradhara*” - a waterfall in Dehradun and also a pond “*Samana*” in Punjab have the power to cure skin diseases. In the other instance it is also believed that the water oozing from a mine in ‘*Khodariba*’ in Alwar Dist. and also the water coming from the mouth of a cow statue at *Jha Jha Ram Pur* in Dousha Dist. of Rajasthan have the power to cure the skin diseases. The water flowing through a cave near Gurudwara at *Manikaran* in Himachal Pradesh is known to cure Rheumatic disorders. ‘*Gugamedi*’ a place in Rajasthan is known to be worshiped for curing snakebites. In most of the

Villages in Rajasthan a festival popularly known as *Devnarayan Pooja/Heraman Pooja* is performed on the eve of annual gathering during which the people believe that the God enters in to an human body of a person known as 'Gurla' who serves as a servant/mediator of God and cures snake bites and cattle diseases. In snakebites he sucks out the poisonous blood from the body of the patient.

For some cattle disorders, *Hanuman pooja* (worship) is performed in Rajasthan. In this, a yajna is arranged during which a wooden *deity* of Hanuman is made and put outside the village. Then sacred water is sprinkled on cattle. Consists of milk, curd, cowdung, ghee and *go-mutra*.

In *Sacharwada* in Rajasthan, there is a temple of "*Bibayi Mata*", this Goddess is worshipped for cure of cuts in feet. In *Jhaltala* in Alwar district of Rajasthan, there is a person who is supposed to have spiritual powers. By reciting *mantras*, he cures the dental carries.

In some places "*Mata Rani*" is worshipped for protection against typhoid and chicken pox. A place known as "*Abaneri*" in *Dosha* district in Rajasthan is famous and is worshipped for typhoid. People take clothes of the patient. The priest performs some ceremonies on the clothes and the disease disappear. Similarly, *Kali Maa* is worshipped in U.P. for cholera. In this *Lavang*, *Kapur*, *Dhoop* are ignited. Then water is poured on *Kali Maa* by all villagers. This protects the outbreak of epidemic is believed by villagers.

There is a *Muslim Mazaar* in Gonda in U.P. known as *Deva Sharif*. In this place, infertility cases are supposed to be cured.

### Conclusion

From the studies it can be concluded that despite the upcoming techniques in medical sciences, there is a significant section of people who believe in faith healing. This section of people belongs mostly to rural background. Though it seems too funny to believe in such matters in this era of science and technology yet authors feel that if some study is conducted at the mentioned places some scientific clues may come out to favour these facts.

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## सारांश

### उत्तर भारत में रोग चिकित्सा हेतु धार्मिक पथाए

-प्रवीन बन्सल, एम.वि. आचार्या, के.डि. शर्मा एवं जी.वेलुचामी

लगभग सारे भारत के ग्रामों में ऐसी धारणा प्रचलित है कि देवि - देवताओं की पूजन से बुरी आत्माओं द्वारा उत्पन्न की गई व्याधियों का विनाश होता है। प्रस्तुत लेख में विभिन्न व्याधियों के लिए की जाने वाली विभिन्न देवी-देवताओं की पूजा का वर्णन किया गया है। इस लेख में मानसिक रोग, त्वचा रोग, चेचक, हैजा, विवाई, सर्पदंश और बहुत सारे रोगों के लिए और बहुत सारी धार्मिक परम्पराओं को विस्तार पूर्वक उल्लेख किया गया है।