

# **REPORT OF THE PROJECT**

Scheme for protection and preservation of endangered languages

for the month of February 2015.

**LANGUAGE : MESHABI**

**DISTRICT : DODA**

**SUBMITTED TO**

Central Institute of Indian Languages

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## **Aims and Objectives of the Report:**

The aim of this report is to present the worship and the ritual system of the people living in Malhori area of district Doda. Almost every religion has sacred histories, description and stories that explain the existence and origin of their life and resurrection, gods/goddesses, omens, rituals, festivals, prayers, myths etc which constitute the belief system. Belief system is of prime importance in every community. This report attempts to provide an outline of the belief system of Malhori.

## **Malhori (a brief description)**

Malhori is situated 175 kms away from Jammu and 200 kms from Srinagar. The mother tongue of the inhabitants of this area is Meshabi which is also known as Khushali. The district has

mountainous terrain and is connected by two national highways NH-1A and NH-1B. The roads are freshly cut on the hill slopes which are not yet stabilized. It is 5 kms away from Khilani. Mahlori comprises of many villages where from data was collected by employing various research tools and techniques. The villages of this area are as follows:

1. Kulhotra
2. Sundhara
3. Kasaal
4. Bhidh
5. Raagi

All the inhabitants speak Meshabi as their native language. The area is dominated by Muslims, Rajputs and Harijans. The dwellers have migrated from the upper regions to the plains of Mahlori. The reason behind their migration was the scarcity of water in the upper regions. The people in Mahlori area differ from each other in terms of religion, but they respect each other

and religious sentiments and beliefs. They live together with harmony in this area.

The number of people speaking Meshabi as mother tongue is around 2000. There is hardly anything known about the classification, grammar, literature etc of this language.

## **Method of Data Collection**

The various techniques used to collect data for the present study are as follows:

- a. Questionnaire
- b. Interviews
- c. Direct observation

The beliefs of the inhabitants of this community were examined throughout all its villages and towns. For data collection the sample was selected across the community (i.e towns and

villages). The methods used to determine the sample were systematic and purposive sampling. The population was stratified by age, gender and education.

There is diversity in terms of religion in this community therefore the belief system varies within the community or from one village to another and was even found to vary from person to person.

Some groups have a strong faith in the existence of single God while others believed in numerous gods and goddesses. The present report is focused to present the belief system of the community as a whole

**The various research questions answered by the present report are as follows:**

1. What is place of worship?

2. Is there any change in the belief system of the community from grandparents to present in Mahlori area?
3. Is there any addition or deduction in the belief system of the community from grandparents to present in Mahlori area?
4. Is the community conservative, traditional, open or closed typed from grandparents to present in Mahlori area?
5. What are the main goddesses/God worshiped in the community of Mahlori area?
6. The belief system of the community regarding omens.
7. The belief system of the community regarding celebrations.

The concept about worship and rituals about the community of Malhori can be summed up under the following headings.

## **1. Place of Worship**

The place of worship can be at home or in temples and mosques for Hindus and Muslims respectively where they offer their prayers, worship and religious rituals.

Muslims offer their obligatory prayers five times in a day. Males go to offer their prayers in the mosque where they offer congregational prayers headed by a prayer leader (imam). While praying Muslims face Mecca (a holy place where Kaaba is located). Females usually pray at home. Some mosques are found in this area where people were seen praying five times (fajr, zohar, asar, maghrib, esha)

Hindus on the other hand pray both at home as well as temples. They (both males female folk) go to temples quite often. The most important times of day for performance of household rituals are dawn and dusk, although especially devout families may engage in devotion more often. For many houses, the day begins when the women in the house draw auspicious geometric designs in chalk or rice flour on the floor or the doorstep.

Most of the them have altar or a prayer room where a lamp is lit and Lord is worshipped. Other spiritual practices like *japa* (repetition of the Lord's name), meditation, *paaraayana* (reading of the scriptures), prayers, and devotional singing etc is also done here. Special worship is done on auspicious occasions like birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and the like.

They also hold the belief that Lord is the entire creation. He is therefore the true owner of the house we live in too. The prayer room is the Master room of the house. We are the earthly occupants of His property. This notion rids us of false pride and possessiveness. The ideal attitude to take is to regard the Lord as the true owner of our homes and we as caretakers of His home. The Lords presence is facilitated in their homes by having a prayer room or altar, which is, at all times, kept clean and well-decorated. Also the Lord is all pervading. To remind us that He resides in our homes with us, we have prayer rooms. Without the grace of the Lord, no task can be successfully or easily accomplished. We

invoke His grace by communing with Him in the prayer room each day and on special occasions.

Each room in a house is dedicated to a specific function like the bedroom for resting, the drawing room to receive guests, the kitchen for cooking etc. The furniture, decor and the atmosphere of each room are made conducive to the purpose it serves. So for the purpose of meditation, worship and prayer too we should have a conducive atmosphere - hence the need for a prayer room.

Sacred thoughts and sound vibrations pervade the place and influence the minds of those who spend time there. Spiritual thoughts and vibrations accumulated through regular meditation, worship and chanting done there pervade the prayer room. Even when we are tired or agitated, by just sitting in the prayer room for a while, we feel calm.

It was found by the observation that many villages, and almost all towns have temples where priests perform ceremonies throughout

the day: sunrise prayers and noises to awaken the god within the holy of holies, bathing, clothing, and fanning the god; feeding the god and distributing the remains of the food (*prasada*) to worshipers. The temple is also a cultural center where songs are sung, holy texts read aloud (in Sanskrit and vernaculars), and sunset rituals performed; devout laity may be present at most of these ceremonies. In many temples (particularly those sacred to goddesses) goats are sacrificed on special occasions. The sacrifice is often carried out by a special low-caste priest outside the temple itself. Thousands of simple local temples are found in the Mahlori area; each may be nothing more than a small stone box enclosing a formless effigy swathed in cloth or a slightly more imposing edifice with a small tank for taking bath. In addition, there are many temples of great size as well as complex temples in the community, which typically includes lighting a lamp and offering foodstuffs before the images, while prayers in Sanskrit or a regional language are recited.

In the evenings, especially in rural areas, mostly female devotees may gather together for long sessions of singing hymns in praise of one or more of the gods. Minor acts of charity punctuate the day. During daily baths, there are offerings of a little water in memory of the ancestors.

In Mahlori at each meal, families may set aside a handful of grain to be donated to beggars or needy persons, and daily gifts of small amounts of grain to birds or other animals serve to accumulate merit for the family through their self-sacrifice.

## **2. The belief system of the community regarding**

### **Birth and Rebirth:**

The data collected from the sample by using various research instruments was analysed and it was found that the Hindus of Mahlori have a strong belief in birth- rebirth cycles. They

believe in reincarnation. The basic belief is that a person's fate is determined according to his deeds. These deeds in Hinduism are called 'Karma'. Those who do good Karma in this life will be awarded with a better life in the next birth. Souls who do bad Karma will be punished for their sins, if not in this incarnation then in the next incarnation and will continue to be born in this world again and again. They believe in as they sow in this world so shall they reap hereafter. If a person has done righteous deeds and followed his religion ideally he will be reborn into human or spiritual life . While those who did sinful and immoral acts will be reborn into animals. The universe passes through a number of cycles, birth and rebirth continues.

The good souls will be liberated from the cycle of rebirth and get redemption which is called 'Moksha' meaning freedom. After a funeral ceremony Hindus normally burn dead bodies into ashes.

So far as the Muslims of this community are concerned, they believe in souls but not in birth-rebirth cycles. There is a total

contrast between the belief system of Hindus and Muslims in terms of birth rebirth. They believe there is single chance of life on earth. The person having done good deeds and following the teachings of Islam would get heaven as a reward for their deeds and bad ones will be rewarded with hell. For them heaven is the highest achievement and hell is the highest punishment.

As per the local population, death can put an end to their lives but their souls are immortal. This belief system regarding souls was same among muslims and hindus.

It was also found during the interview that gender plays an important role in the belief system both in case of Hindus as well as Muslims. The women of this area usually have firm belief in any religious aspect. The beliefs were found to be more prevalent among the female folk as compared to males.

## **2. The belief system of the community regarding God/gods/goddesses and Devil**

To understand the belief system of the community in terms of God/goddesses and devils and the thoughts encouraged by the community information was sought from indigenous people. The people of Mahlori believe in many gods and goddesses. According to them, out of many gods three Gods rule the world. They are as follows:

- a. Brahma: the creator;
- b. Vishnu: the preserver and
- c. Shiva: the destroyer.

Each of the gods have done noble and virtuous deeds that earned them the status of gods. Vishnu did the job of preserving the world by incarnating himself in different forms at times of crisis. The three Lords that rule the world have consorts/wives and there are goddesses too. Consort of Brahma is Sarasvati; goddess of learning. Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi; goddess of wealth and prosperity. Shiva's consort is Parvati who is

worshipped as Kali or Durga. As per them the gods have complete families (unlike the concept of God among Muslims).

Shiva is of prime importance. The inhabitants believe 'Shiva' is not an Avtar, he was born without the parents and is immortal.

The other Gods whom they worship are Avtars i.e., they are born from parents.

Besides those gods and goddesses there are a number of other gods and goddesses. To name a few of them, there is Ganesh; who has an elephant's head and he is also a son of Shiva and Parvati, Hanuman; who is an ape, Surya; Lord of sun, Ganga Ma; goddess of river Ganges; Samundra; Lord of the sea, Indra; king of the Gods ,Prithvi; goddess of earth, Shakti; goddess of strength. Goddess Durga Devi is also worshipped. The Hindus call their goddesses 'Ma' i.e mother. Further every village has its own rural gods and goddesses. The people of Mahlori worship them with profound devotion.

Apart from these gods and goddesses there are other gods from their community whom they worship. The names of these gods are:

1. Naar singh

2. Keelu veer

They were considered highly spiritual beings, which have served their community, and prevented them in the course of adversity.

Some trees are also regarded as divine and therefore worshipped. They include Banyan, Neem, Papal and Tulsi.

Muslims believe in one unique God (Allah) and his Messenger (PBUH) and follow the Islam i.e offer obligatory prayers regularly, give charity, fast in the holy month of Ramadan and perform Hajj if able to do so). They also believed in the day of judgement, fate as pre written by Allah and believed in Quran and existence of angels.

Belief in religious aspects in terms of mythology, spirituality and supernatural phenomena, heavenly interventions exists firmly in Mahlori area and is prevalent among Muslims as well as Hindus.

The inhabitants of this community believe in the existence of unseen forces which probably are negative in nature. According to them ghosts (demons, devils, negative energies etc) are found in terrestrial residences which are involved in haunting and possessing human bodies. Religious teachings are useful in repelling spiritual possessions. In order to dispel demonic possessions various tasks are used. If one has true faith/ firm belief in God no ghost can do any harm to them. They are of the opinion that evil spirits cannot do any harm to them if they are true believers of God. The root cause of possession lies in the fear and mistaken thoughts in one's own mind.

In order to be in a state where they cannot be possessed they have to be true believers and followers of religion. Turning to God is wherein the primary solution to get rid of them lies. Praying unites us with God who alone can free those being possessed by ghosts. One of the informants had a firm belief that overcoming ones own fear can repel ghostly manifestations of the souls that survive after death

For Hindus turning to gods, seeking help from Devi, Devtas (demi gods) , yag helps in getting rid of ghosts and evil spirits. The remedy for this problem is not confined to their religion only. They even go to Muslim Saints, visit gurdwaras, highly learned people including the disciples of various gods to do away with the disembodied possessions.

Muslims too believed that turning to Allah alone can do away with the evil spirits. Spiritual weapons are helpful in driving out ghosts from a person. Their diagnosis can be made by the Saints. The problem goes away by seeking help from highly learned persons,

reading verses from Quran, slaughtering an animal like sheep helps to banish evil spirits.

## **The belief system of the community regarding omens.**

The concept of good and bad omens is prevalent among the people of the community speaking Meshabi. Some of these omens are as follows:

If someone sneezes while going on a journey it is considered as a bad omen, while sneezing in normal conditions is good (if not good then normal)

Scarcity of water is also considered as a bad omen, which results due to the ignorance of the people (towards religion), sinful acts etc.

Natural calamities like earthquakes and floods are considered bad and a strict punishment from the God for immorality and wrong doings etc.

Returning half way to home for any reason like to take a forgotten thing is considered to be a bad omen .

People often hold religious gatherings, ceremony, sacrifices, worships to prevent from these omens and natural calamities.

Regarding marriages they also hold some beliefs. They are very careful about the time and date on which marriage ceremonies should take place.

For this they consult priests, molvis (in case of Muslims) and pundits (in case of Hindus) for fixing the time for those ceremonies.

## **Why do offer food to the Lord before eating it?**

Hindus make an offering of food to the Lord and later partake of it as *prasaada* a holy gift from the Lord. The Lord is omnipotent and omniscient. Man is a part, while the Lord is the totality. All that we do is by His strength and knowledge alone. Hence what we receive in life as a result of our actions is from Him alone. We acknowledge this through the act of offering food to Him. This is exemplified by the Hindi words "*tera tujko arpan*"– I offer what is Yours to You. Knowing this, our entire attitude to food and the act of eating changes. The food offered will naturally be pure and the best. We share what we get with others before consuming it. We do not demand, complain or criticise the quality of the food we get. We eat it with cheerful acceptance (*prasaada buddhi*).

Before they eat daily meals they first sprinkle water around the plate as an act of purification. Five morsels of food are placed on the side of the plate acknowledging the debt owed by us to the Divine forces (**devta runa**) for their benign grace and protection, our ancestors

(**pitru runa**) for giving us their lineage and a family culture, the sages (**rishi runa**) as our religion and culture have been "realised" and handed down to us by them, our fellow beings (**manushya runa**) who constitute society without the support of which we could not live as we do and other living beings (**bhuta runa**) for serving us selflessly.