

Mal Paharia: Under the Shadow of Beliefs

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Abstract:

A culture is a system of usages and beliefs relating to different aspects of life including environmental resources and potentials. It is also a system of norms and expectancies and a social and moral order. Obviously, a culture consists of many things and this conglomeration is maintained in a functional unity.

With the advancement of technology and flow of money the entire gamut of society is being changed and as a result even in the grass root level, that is village level the traditional interpersonal relation is also affected. A vast section of Indian tribal people who are mostly marginalized due to their forest infested habitat are having three broad aspects of their expression in culture, namely, nature, stands for geographical environment, while Man represents the society and the spirit signifies the supernatural world as well as ideational aspects of culture like, ethos, value system, world-view, ideals, belief system and the like. With the advent of time, various agents of culture change used to borrow alien culture elements which makes a traditional marginalized group to adapt the new situation and as a result a culture synthesis or culture change occur among the group. The present paper highlights to examine the nature of culture change in the courtyard of 21st century especially on impact of their celestial world i.e. belief systems, rituals as well as adaptation of new technology for survival and sustainable living among the Mal Paharia tribe of Rajmahal hills, Jharkhand.

Considering the dynamics of culture change in our country the Mal Paharia tribe of Dumka, Jharkhand are studied who are not only lead life of their own tradition in traditional abode of hilly- forest terrain of Rajmahal hills, also known as Damin-i- koh, but also adapted modern belief systems for their livelihood. Though, spirits' is the root of their belief system and controls their each and every sphere of life and action.

Key words: Man, nature, spirits and Damin-i-koh.

A set of beliefs, emotional attitudes etc. when practices by a group of people in order to cope up with his surrounding unknown and unseen problems which is otherwise termed as supernatural power, - is altogether identified as religion. Religion is a universal and pervasive institution in human life. The belief, thought and action with which religion is concerned could be found at all levels of culture i.e. among technologically ill developed marginalized tribal communities or even in advanced group of civilized people.

Herbert Spancer (1891) develops the theory of ghost worship by dealing elaborately with the primitive idea of life, death, resurrection, soul, spirit, the other world and the cult of the ghost. Spancer finds that some notion of existence beyond death, however vague, is almost universal. Perhaps from this belief comes the idea of ghost propitiation, not only at the time of funeral but also on various events. According to Spancer the seed of regular ancestor worship originates from here and he also opined that root of every religion may be traced from ancestor worship, and all other

forms such as idol worship, fetish worship, nature, animal, plant etc. worship, develop out of ancestor worship. In fact we do not find any society without religious beliefs and practices. All religion consist of a mental attitude is in the shape of beliefs and rituals; the former is regarded as the static part, while the latter as the dynamic part of religion. According to Banerjee (1990) “ what differentiates the so called higher religious from the primitive varieties is the relative absence of philosophical speculation in the latter... The whole primitive ‘philosophy’ is called animism and the system of primitive ideas is constituted by so called magic”. According to Durkheim (1954) there are two component elements in the supernatural belief, that is, sacred as religion while profane part as magic or primitive science. According to functional theory culture as a more or less integrated body of knowledge, pseudo-knowledge, beliefs and values. Culture, understood in this way, is a symbolic system of meaning, some of which define reality, as it is believed to be, others of which define normative expectations incumbent on humans. The elements making up the system of cultural meaning may be either implicit or explicit. Culture is integrated with the social system in that it enters into the definition of means and ends, of proscriptions and prescriptions, of the permitted and the forbidden, by defining the roles within which a society’s members confront the established expectations of their social situation. Religion with its transcendent reference to a beyond is an important aspect of this cultural phenomenon. Culture is the creation by man of a world of adjustment and meaning, in the context of which human life can be significantly lived. (O’dea 1969). Functional theory sees the contribution of religion to human societies and cultures to be based upon its central characteristic; its transcendence of everyday experience in the natural environment. Functional theory demands such needs as the result of three

fundamental characteristics of human existence.

Malinowski (1948, Reprinted on 2014) considers religions as the device to secure mental and psychical stability in one individual’s life. It has been originated to bring about a re-adjustment between man and the supernatural in upset states of existence, while to Radcliffe-Brown (1935) religion has been originated just as a means for social survival that is, out of a sense of dependence on it. It is the fear of supernatural. According to Tylor (1871) religion means the belief in spiritual beings. Tylor’s three major propositions on the origin and development of human religion also received empirical support, viz, (a) religion developed out of fear (b) though the conservatives think that religions is the product of civilization, yet there are suitable ordeal that all the societies of the world (advanced or archaic/simple) have their own interpretation of religion, which is not much diverse so far the core matter is concerned (c) all religions consist of a mental attitude and dependence towards the supernatural power.

Religion is said to be born out of physical and social needs. Early men lived under the sky open either in hills or forests and had to pass through some uncertainty and totally dependent at the mercy of nature. In course of maintaining livelihood which was full of struggle for existence in such a precarious condition of environment they were forced to depend on some supernatural power in order to revamp their minds to get requisite courage for overcoming the surrounding woes. Even today when one is in obscure state, he or she usually seek the help from supernatural power to overcome the crisis in life. In a way this is religious belief system, which usually act as a dependable walking stick like a blind man. The things, which are beyond our control, can be achieved by depending on supernatural power. It is also to be mentioned that religion helps to integrate not only the society but also the personality (Davis Kingsley, 1966).

With the advancement of technology and flow of money the society is being changed and as a result even in the grass root level, that is village level the traditional interpersonal relation is also affected. A vast section of Indian tribal people who are mostly marginalized due to their forest infested habitat are having three broad aspects of their expression in culture, namely, nature, stands for geographical environment, while Man represents the society and the spirit signifies the supernatural world as well as ideational aspects of culture like, ethos, value system, world-view, ideals, belief system and the like. With the advent of time, various agents of culture change are borrowed from alien culture elements, which make a traditional marginalized group to adapt the new situation and as a result a culture synthesis or culture change occur among the group.

The present article highlighted on the belief and practices among the Mal Paharia tribe at Damin-i-koh region of Santal Pargana, Jharkhand. The settlement of the Mal Paharia are in the hilly and forest tract of Dumka district of Jharkhand.

Mal Paharia are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG) of Jharkhand, chiefly concentrated in Dumka District, a Dravidian tribe. Until recently they live by hunting, gathering and kura (shifting hill) cultivation. It appears that the natural surroundings of the Mal Paharia are mostly afforesting hills where the fear of unknown and the unknowable, the denizen of forests and hills, streams and springs have crystallized their belief system which in turn generates beliefs in various benevolent and malevolent spirits which are deeply enmeshed in their sustenance activities. Under this backdrop the present intensive study carried out at Madhuvan village of Gopikandar block which is at the hilly and forest clad area, devoid of almost modern influence and decisively dominant by Mal Paharia (56 families; and for controlled comparison of collected qualitative data i.e. to substantiate qualitative data three more villages were also studied, Viz, (a) Upar

Murgathali of Dumka block—it was again on hilly area, without electricity (b) Gando—15 Km away from Dumka block head quarter and (c) Asansol village—a multi-ethnic village, adjacent to Dumka aerodrome.

Mal Paharia is one of the tribes who live in a geographically difficult area where they always have a feeling of insecurity and uncertainty or less predictability as stated above. In fact Mal Paharia is a separate group of the tribe Paharia. Paharia is a blanket term for three separate tribes namely Sauria Paharia, Kumbharbhag Paharia and Mal Paharia. All of the three are endogamous groups and confined their habitat in Damin-i-koh (a Persian word means skirt of the hills) area of erstwhile Santal Pargana district, which is now divided into Dumka, Pakur, Deoghar, Sahebgunj, Godda, and Jamtara districts.

In the Damin-i-koh area all the three groups of Paharia are distributed in the Raj mahal hills, which covers the entire Damin area. It consists of the upland, undulating, long ridges and depressions along with some fertile lands, which is intensively cultivated. There are three lofty peaks among which Massanjore is situated in Dumka subdivision.

As they live in such a geographical atmosphere where they have an uncanny feeling of unseen spirits that is in an adverse situation, to get strength in mind, to combat with the mysterious events, they get hold of the supernatural power, which are sole responsible to shape their culture and give protections from all evils. Hence their life is very much oriented by the belief of supernatural power and propitiation of spirits holds an important position in their religious life.

To begin with the religious life of the Mal Paharia, it is necessary to mention that the Mal Paharia have their own priest or religious practitioner who is known as Deohar or Pujar/Pujahar. The post is hereditary. He has his assistant called Fuljharia. Along with them there is a messenger called as Gorait who informs and

invites all Mal Paharias to attend and participate in the rituals and festivals. He also collects contributions from the villagers in case of any ritual and festival organized by the community or by the total village.

The whole religious pantheon among the Mal Paharia is divided into:

1. Jonkhs (Evil Spirit or Malevolent spirit)

2. Thans (benevolent Spirit)

Malevolent Spirit:

LIST OF FEW JONKHS (MALEVOLENT SPIRITS) WITH THEIR ACTIVITIES:

- 1) Pahar Thakur a form of Lord Mahadeo- If he is not worshipped during hunting expedition, he will be displeased and as a result, the hunter will be unsuccessful to get a hunt but will definitely be attacked by ferocious animals of the jungle.
- 2) Chordanu - If not worshipped, Chordanu will steal crops and cereals in the cultivable land and granary. If he is worshipped, he will protect them from all types of stealing. According to them if a star falls from sky, they are sure that Chordanu is displeased and somebody's wealth will definitely be stolen. So to please Chordanu, they immediately arrange for some of her rituals.
- 3) Mahadanu - If at night, a jackal howls or an owl hoots then they are sure that Mahadanu is displeased with them and giving them warning of any type of accident, mishap or even death in the village. Then they immediately worship the spirit to keep the Jonkh quiet. If it is satisfied, it will protect all their cattle, crop and other wealth.
- 4) Jonkh Dev - It is famous for its evil acts. It stays at the hills, jungle, river and trees. During her menstrual cycle a woman is not allowed to go to those places and also to climb a tree. This spirit has a tendency to marry a Mal Paharia girl during cycle and to lead a conjugal life with her. As a result the girl suffers from her acute lower abdominal pain and obstruction in the cycle. Again it is worshipped in the jungle and hills

prior to the harvest of barbatti to protect women who do the work.

- 5) Baghowas- It resides in hills. Prior to the harvesting of barbatti, they worship the spirit with sacrifices of pigeon, chicken or he-goat. They believe that if they do not worship him, then he will bring tigers from jungle to their village.
- 6) Bhaman Jonkh - It lives in Karaleta hills and also roams in Konda and Tanter Pani Hills. It scares people by taking different shapes and sizes in the shadow.
- 7) Yam Raja - It stays in Murga Pahari hills and is worshipped by them for safety in the hills when they work there. If it is displeased, death comes in the village
- 8) Rangadhari Baba - It is a very dangerous type of Jonkh. Generally they avoid it and keep safe distance but when it enters a house, they are forced to establish it as a family deity and perform its puja. Then it becomes a deity of family welfare.
- 9) Saonr Bhonwar - This Jonkh takes shape of a Bhonwar (wasp) and flies here and there. If they worship it, their property will be increased. Otherwise it will bite.
- 10) Bandro- When there is whirl wind, they think that Bandro is passing through the place. If anybody especially the children fall in that whirlwind, he or she becomes ill. The Ojha is called to drive out the bhut or the spirit.
- 11) Banashakti- Among their Jonkhs, Banashakti- the wife of Pahar Thakur is worshipped prior to visit to jungle for hunting. Each every hill has its own Banashakti. She is worshipped along with Pahar Thakur, whenever a person visits the jungle for hunting. She also protects the crops in the field. She is also worshipped during seed sowing both in hills and in their bari land. They dare to neglect her. If she becomes displeased, they will face various types of troubles in cultivation and when they pass through jungle, it is sure that ferocious animals in the jungle will attack them.

12) Ichra Kudra Jonkh- This spirit is also worshipped at family level for the welfare of family during the month Aghan (November-December) at the side of a river or rivulet or under peepal or a baniyan tree.

13) Bel Kupia- He is another Jonkh worshipped at family level for the welfare of the family. He is worshipped after 14th January that is after the performance of Makar Sankranti. The consecrated food is taken by males and unmarried girls.

Benevolent spirits:

To begin with the religious life of the Mal Paharia, it is necessary to mention that the Mal Paharia have their own priest or religious practitioner who is known as Deohar or Pujar/Pujahar. The post is hereditary. He has his assistant called Fuljharia. Along with them there is a messenger called as Gorait who informs and invites all Mal Paharias to attend and participate in the rituals and festivals. He also collects contributions from the villagers in case of any ritual and festival organized by the community or by the total village.

Beside them they have an Ojha / Ojha guru - sorcerer of their own community who is consulted in the crisis such as disease and death etc. To be an Ojhait is thought that one should have knowledge to detect and tackle the malevolent spirits and to neutralize their acts with suggesting the remedies. In addition to these in most cases the Ojhas also act as medicine man. If one Ojha fails to cure a person then they consult Jan guru- the sorcerer of the Santhal community who is believed as more powerful than their own Ojha.

Among the Mal Paharias there are several places selected as sacred place meant for the performance of rituals. These places are called as Than by the Mal Paharias. There are several Thans for the performance of different types of rituals. Some of these Thans in the studied village- Madhuvan of Gopi Kandar block are Goriya Than, Jahar Than, Singh Bahani Than, Kali Than/or Chordanu Than Chitipila Than, Kumhar

Deo Than and Ormu Than are also important. In those Thans the worship of Pahar thakur, Dharti, Bhui devetc. is done. In the village the Mal Paharias have their own Thans attached with their homestead where family deities are established.

Except all these Thans, each and every family has Mara Morpa or Marha Morpa – the place of their deceased ancestors. They establish those after the performance of sradh ceremony. In fact in Madhuvan village they establish Mara Morpa in most of the cases beside the hearth. The chulha or hearth is regarded very pure and auspicious to them. So they prefer to establish it there. In some cases it is established at a corner of the courtyard but the place should be very clean. Three vertical lines are drawn there with vermilion, which signify the place as symbol of Mara Morpa. They believe that their deceased ancestors are their guardian deities who are worshipped every day and in every occasions, rituals and festivals. They offer new crops to those ancestors prior to their own consumption. In case of any unnatural death, they do not establish the ancestor in the place, such souls are regarded as malevolent spirit and they are driven out across the boundary of the village. Again within the boundary of the household, sometimes they establish their household deities also in the courtyard.

They have divided their worldly deities and spirits into two divisions – the benevolent and the malevolent. Among their benevolent deities the Surja Devata is the supreme authority. Every day in early morning they salute the deity. The families who have taken Sun God as a lineage God perform Surjaho – the elaborate festival of the Sun God after the interval of three to five years.

Among other benevolent deities, Pahar Thakur (also enlisted among the malevolent spirits), Dharti or Basumati Ma, Lit Mai, Lit Baba (their originator), etc. along with their ancestors established at Mara Morpa are very important to them. They propitiate them through various rituals, which are mainly connected with their economic life. Some of those are Maghi Parab or Akhan

pujaper formed to get protection from the snake, scorpion and other ferocious animals of the jungle, and when they go for collection (a very important and compulsory occupation) in the deeper forest and also for a good harvest and protection of their cattle. They also worship Mahadano, Chordanu etc. spirits (those will be discussed later) for protection of their crop. In each and every third year, just after Maghipuja, they perform Bhui Dev (mother deity) puja. They bring two sakhoa twigs and fit those in the courtyard of the Pujahar's house. Upper portion of the twig is bifurcated and an earthen pot full with pochai is kept upon the twigs and then they dance encircling the vessel and worship all the Bhuts (evil spirits) and Deos (the benevolent spirits) by telling their names and showing those regards with salute. During Maghi Parab, they also worship Ghat Deo – the deity at the boundary of the village, acts as the guard deity. In Madhuvan his place is situated between Madhuvan and Ormu village. Another ritual associated with cultivation is Rohini Puja, performed in the month of Jaith (Mau-June). The villagers perform it collectively. Without the performance of this ritual they are not allowed to take out seed for sowing otherwise the Bhui Dev will be displeased. They perform Ashari Puja collectively just prior to the start of monsoon cropping and also at family level, with a prayer to their deities and ancestors for plenty of crop for each and every household. They sacrifice a he-goat as stated earlier and Mal Paharia males consume it in the village border. The blood of sacrificed goat is sprinkled at the border with a belief that they are driving out all the evils from the village and in this belief they set free two black pigeons symbolizing that they are driving out all the evils in the form of those two pigeons. These are done to protect the village from all types of evils and malevolent spirits who may attack from outside the village. In this ritual they offer all the new items of the season such as chhati (mushroom), new leafy vegetables, phutkaor kondki – a potato like

tuber etc. to their deities and ancestors in the family who protect them from all evils. Similarly in Charak Puja, when the mango seeds are matured, they worship Sing Bahani, offer her the newly ripened fruit. After that they are allowed to eat it. Otherwise tiger will come to their village and attack them.

Makai Puja - another similar ritual performed at family level when the maize gets ripened in the cultivable land, gets ready for harvest. In this ritual, they worship Kali, Mahadeo, Lit Mai, Lit Baba (their originator), and their ancestors at Mara Morpa. They offer a pair of pigeons to Kali Ma, one red chicken to Mahadeo, black chicken to Lit Baba, Lit Mai and also to the ancestors at family level. Along with these items they offer five bunches of maize grain each to all of them with a prayer that they are offering the new crops to the deities and ancestors as a thanks giving ceremony, as with the blessings of those they are able to produce some crop. Then they pray before the deities that they are going to eat the new harvest so they pray that they should not suffer from any kinds of stomach problem, headache and other disease. After that they go to the bariland, offer puja there and then they cut the maize and bring those at home. Then at first they have some rituals for purification of the harvested crop in a belief that if there is any evil eye on it, it will be driven out through the performance of those rituals.

Ghangra Pujais performed at family level in the household and after that collectively at the Singh Bahani Than. This ritual is performed after ghangra – a variety of crop is fully matured, ready for cutting in the month of Aswin (September – October)-Katick (October-November). This is a thank giving ceremony when they offer five bunches of maize grain each to all of the deities with a prayer to get their blessings for a good harvest and also to get protection from any kind of stomach problem, after taking new crop. To get protection from snakebite and other animals and insects and for a good harvest they perform this ritual,

In Manasa Puja they worship snake deity Manasa Devi to get protection from snakebite and other poisonous creatures in their vicinity. They perform Banashakti (a malevolent spirit already discussed) Pujaprior to the work of digging, locally known as khobi or khonta, for cultivation of barbatti or ghangra (a variety of beans) in their vitto land, with a prayer to protect them from scorpion, snake and other poisonous animals during the time of cultivation. Patjhari pujais performed during the month chaitra the season pat jhora that is, the falling of old leaves and coming of new leaves. In the heap of the falling leaves, poisonous snakes and other insects may hide themselves and may bite during cultivation in the hills. When the new leaves come out in some fruit bearing trees including mango, jackfruit, mahua, they perform Bisho / Bisho Puja. It is also performed at family level. After the ritual they take the new fruits. Otherwise there is a chance of any type of mishap in the village, Tiger and other ferocious animals may come out to kill them and their cattle. Bahal Pujais another ritual performed prior to the harvesting of paddy in the Bahal Than to drive out all the evil spirits from their area surrounding area. Prior to the performance of the ritual if anybody cuts paddy, it is believed that then he or his family members definitely will be attacked or killed by the tiger.

They have several other rituals associated with hunting. The months April to June are regarded as their hunting season. They worship Banashakti (Durga) and Pahar Thakur (Lord Siva) prior to any hunting expedition.

Baski Nath Pujais performed during the time of Makar Sankranti and Siva Ratri. It is performed with a prayer for plenty of milk of the cattle. They pour water and milk at the root of a bel (wood apple) tree. They also perform rituals at their respective homes. In this way their economic life is very much oriented by their beliefs and rituals. It is observed that all these rituals and ceremonies are performed for their overall protection from all dangers and

hazards during their economic operations, to get success in life, for a good harvest, for welfare of family and community seeking blessings from them. To avoid natural calamities they have several ritual performances. In Ormu Than they worship Dharti Ma and during the ritual performance they speak the filthy language and abuses. They believe it that when there was a great natural calamity known as parlay, Dharti Ma was disturbed by the evil spirits and shaken heavily and to get rid of that turmoil several filthy and vulgar words were used to drive out the ghosts-spirits ultimately she was out of that crisis and became quite.

It is found that belief in supernatural power also has influences in their life cycle. They perform several rituals to appease their deities with a hope to get blessings from them. Again there are some other ritual performances and taboos to get protection from all evil spirits. When a woman conceives, she is restricted to go to the forest and any water source alone specially during noon and evening, as they believe that there are several types of Jonkhs (evil spirits) in their vicinity who through their mischievous / malevolent acts do harm to the woman. Childbirth takes in a temporary shelter constructed outside the house but within the boundary of the house. If the child birth takes place inside the main room, it is regarded as a serious offence to the ancestors established in the Marha Morpa. They are excommunicated and a heavy fine is imposed on them. The mother and the child are not allowed to enter the house till the performance of the purificatory rites as it is dishonour to their ancestors at Marha Morpa.

On the day of purification after taking bath, the woman goes to the ponds and other water sources of their hamlet with sindur (vermilion) and kajal (eyeliner). She draws three lines of sindur and two lines of kajal on the side/ bank of all the water sources to protect the water sources from all evils and impurity. Then she goes to each and every Mal Paharia household and draws similar lines on the pitchers and all other water

pots, husking pedal, on the okkhal /khonta/akhal (digging stick) to safeguard the water sources, containers and other utensils and implements. On the occasion of handipoda, and mujhutti they offer cooked food to Dharti Ma and then mujhutti for the child is performed. With the performance of these rituals,

The time suitable for marriage starts from the month of Fagun (February- March) after the performance of Siva Ratri-one of their very important ritual. According to them Siva Ratri is the celebration of marriage ceremony of Lord Siva and Parvati in the celestial world. So it is a very auspicious time to arrange their marriage in the terrestrial world.

Prior to the marriage, the bridegroom is married with a mango tree and the bride with a mahua tree. This custom is known as am biha and mahulbiha. It is believed that if there is any danger including death for the couple after marriage, it will happen to the tree with whom the first marriage is done and in this way they neutralize the crises if there is any.

Just before the entry in the village, at the entrance, the bridegroom's deheriis given a red chicken, which he sacrifices at the boundary and the blood is sprinkled there. This is known as Gaon Puja. Through this ritual he drives out all the evil spirits and purifies the village. He in this way binds the village and obstructs all the evil spirits to enter and interfere in that auspicious occasion. Then the bridegroom's party crosses the boundary and enters in the village. After marriage when the newly married couple enters the main room at the bridegroom's house, salutes the ancestors established in the Marha Morpa and all other deities established in and outside the room. Then in the cooking of food for the ancestors, lineage members, and other invitees the bride takes part. After the cooking is completed, the bride has to offer it to the ancestors at Marha Morpa. Then they serve it to all present there.

It is noted that the Mal Pahariya always avoid talking on death. Death as usual like

other communities of the world (with a little exceptions) is a very sorrowful event. The Mal Paharia are always very suspicious in any case of death happened in their village. As a reason for death, at first they suspect that there may be some evil act of mischievous spirits or caused by some malevolent act of some person. The soul of a person died due to some accident or suicide or some epidemic disease, is not established in the Marha Morpa. The other souls are established there and regarded as their guardian deities,

Saraswati Puja – It is not their traditional ritual but a new inclusion probably as an impact of spread of formal education in their village. Saraswati is the deity of learning. So they have started to worship her as other tribal and Hindu communities to appease her for better knowledge and education. They perform this ritual at their own vicinity, preferably at the school building. The school teacher (non-Brahman) officiates the ritual with the assistance of some Mal Paharia boys and girls. This is performed in the fifth day of the lighter half of the month of Magh (January-February).

They perform Karma and Jitia. Karma is performed in the month of Bhado (August-September) and after fifteen days they perform Jitia at family level for their children's welfare.

Lakshmi Puja - During Diwali, they perform Lakshmi puja when they worship cattle at their cattle shed. They anoint turmeric paste to the cattle and bathe their cattle; wash feet and mouth of those, burn incense, mark with turmeric and vermilion and offer food. That day they do not engage the cattle in any type of work.

Above all their religious beliefs and practices are enriched with the beliefs in spirits and most of which are malevolent.

They have belief in Dayen (witch). In case of any mishap or sickness they suspect that either any malevolent spirit or a Dayen is responsible for that. They cannot touch the spirit but can catch hold a woman suspected as Dayen and torture her brutally even

sometimes kill her only basing on their suspicion.

There are some Mal Paharias got higher educations. They have daily contact with the block headquarters and even with Dumka proper. They have got opportunities to come in contact with different types of people with different religious beliefs, people with better technical knowledge and logical expression of various ideas and beliefs. In this situation these people have got a chance to exchange their ideas with them, got new ideas and they began to make an effort to give logical interpretation of their beliefs specially on the spirits and in most of the cases they failed to give satisfying interpretation. Again the Dayen or belief on witch and the horrifying torture on a suspected witch created a negative feeling on their society. Side by side they are influenced by the other religious beliefs and practices. Some have taken the membership of Satsanghof Sat Palji Maharaja of Hardwar. This Sangha has an ashram in Naihat of Dumka, 60 kms far from Dumka town from where some Mal Paharia families have taken diksha. They are the disciples of Sattananda Swami. He had taught the Mal Paharia disciples to have a disciplined life with vegetarianism and abstinence from taking liquor. They are told not to tell lie though for a good work telling lie is not a sin. Each and every day they worship Sat Palji and Hanji Maharaja. They are told to wear white dress and to stop the traditional beliefs and practices, which are thought by the sect as superstitious. These traditional beliefs and practices sometimes brings unpleasant atmosphere in the village. RajindarDeheri, a 26 years old Mal Paharia of Madhuvan village, a disciple of Satsangh, told that though they do not take any non-vegetarian food but dress code they do not

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follow. They try to eradicate the beliefs, thought by the sect as superstitions but till date not succeeded. At family level they have stopped to keep Mara Morpa and Thans for different spirits and deities but they cannot deny contributing in rituals performed collectively by the Mal Paharia of the village. Otherwise they will be excommunicated. They contribute half amount, as they do not take the consecrated food.

This apart, they perform the ancestor worship at mara morpa as well as in the house where a specific place is assigned where outsiders are not allowed to enter.

Therefore, the religious belief system among the Mal Paharia shows that it is full of beliefs on various spirits, deities both malevolent and benevolent as well as belief in ancestors worship and these are evolved in their life to adjust with the uncertain ecological niche of their habitat which becomes a part and parcel of their survival strategy. The feeling of in-group social bondage become strong due to intricate dependence on various spirits.

Hence, from the above discussion it can be said that “religion is a phenomenon of social articulation followed by ritual and practices and by practicing it one have to feel security from uncertainty as well as a feeling of an in group social bondage, which differs from other. The intricate dependence of various benevolent and malevolent spirits, which are, becomes the part and parcel of their survival strategy in such niche. Gradually with the advancement of time and present network of changing situation the Mal Paharia are also affected by accepting as well as adopting Christianity and various Hindu religious traits and reformist activities” (Sarkar and Dasgupta,2011).

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