



# **Conflicts Reconciliation Through Deity Possession: A Traditional Form of Psychotherapy**

**Deepika Negi<sup>1</sup> & R.L Zinta<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla-5

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University, Summer Hill, Shimla-5

*Email: deepikanegi.80@gmail.com, zinta.roshan@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>*

**Abstract:** From the primordial times to the present science and technological scenario, the deity possession therapy has kept indelible impression in the mind of the people. Be the people are erudite Men and Women belonging to any caste or their counterparts, they are predisposed towards paranormal beliefs especially on devi and devta customary practices. The people of tribal areas leap forwards in such practices and district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh is on vanguard. The results based on qualitative analyses revealed that Devi Devta beliefs in general and their traditional therapy in particular assimilate with the psychotherapies in mitigating intra and interpersonal psychosocial conflicts efficaciously. It has proved a vital tool in regulating, resolving, and restoring the conflicts arises from natural resources, injustice, relationship, education, vocation and personal problem. The Devta agent i.e. Gur or Mali during possession play a catalytic and charismatic role in the process to appease the excruciating soul.

**Keywords:** Deity belief, mali, possession, conflicts reconciliation, psychotherapy.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

From the ancient times up to this date, religion and spirituality have been important topics in human being's life. Moral discipline derived from religion has important effects on behavior, feeling and experience of human beings. Even though most of early psychologists such as William James (1902), Carl G. Jung (1969), Gordan Allport (1954), and others studied religious experiences and their role in psychological well-being, religion and spirituality were neglected in psychology and psychotherapy for many years. In a research Combs, (2002), it has been found that these spiritual tools have aided the resident communities in enhancing cognitive integration, developing healing practices, and fostering new ways of self-transformation. In research by Kataik and Zinta (2013) it has been seen that the deity's intervention played vital role in increasing the emotional intelligence of the people consult them during distress to attain bliss.

The culture and customary practices of the people of Himachal Pradesh is very unique and prominent. According to the native people deities play an important role in promoting their life in multifarious ways. Himachal has plenty of traditional beliefs and legends associated with deity's heroes and cults, and these play an important role in customary practice and behaviour of the masses (Bhardwaj, 2015). Similarly, deity institution has played a significant role in shaping socio-culture edifices of Kinnaura communities since ancient times. Negi (1976) found in his research that deity religious tradition is governing people in every sphere of life like birth, death, disputes, health

problems, productivity of their land, natural calamity, social ceremony etc. In a research by Malhotra (2010) has been found that people conduct lives according to deity's will and take consent of the presiding deity before undertaking any new tasks. Devta regulates the activities of the people; play role in distribution of natural resources like land, water, forests, deliverance of justice, and the fulfilment of having direct perceptual relationship with supernatural being. Besides he helps human beings to satisfy their quest for a relationship with the spiritual and metaphysical forces (Ruchi, 2007). In a research Zinta and Negi (2019) also found that belief in local deities in rural areas may be one of the medium for the achievement of bliss.

Moreover, in Kinnaur deity and Mali plays very significant role in alleviating intra and inter conflicts through possession. Here deities and mali are similar to psychotherapists. During the conflicts reconciliation, the Mali or the Gur in the local deities possesses some very important vocal techniques that also resembles with psychological intervention to resolve the socio-emotional conflicts of the people in the communities. They do everything on the order of their local devta those possess in the human being. The possessor i.e. Gur uses verbal language and various bodily gesture to communicate the problem of particular people in general and the local communities in particular. In the words of Pirta and Ranta (2007) the deity possession successfully resolved individual and group conflicts of a long standing in the village.

For the people of Kinnaur deity and Mali possession is one of the most common techniques of ritual healing. He helps the people in right decision making and use



cognitive based intervention. He tries to identify irrational or maladaptive thoughts that cognitively restructure them and help the people in relieving their distress. The healer and his/her healing practices are integral to the beliefs and practices of the local communities. The explanatory system which a healer employs is mostly congruous with the thinking of the masses. Evolved over centuries and verified in a countless number of cases these beliefs about pain and suffering are compatible with the beliefs about life and the supernatural. According to Thakur and Pirta (2010) people approach the deity or recall him when there is external threat. In this regard God assume a care giver and people trying to get rid of socio emotional conflicts which are residing in their life. Negi (2013) explored that a Gokch (Mali) communication in particular plays very important in reconciliation of socio- emotional distress through shamanistic and ritual culture practice style. People have strong faith upon their personal deities and Mali of their village consult their local deities before going to the hospital during disease and emotional distresses.

For the people of Kinnaur deity possession is one of the most common techniques of ritual healing. Mali exhibits the deity possession during the healing process. Mali use psychological stratagems to reconcile their intra and interpersonal problems. During possession he uses trickeries to hypnotise the people. He uses therapeutic rituals to reconcile the people's problems. In beginning possession takes place when atmosphere and client get charged with devotion. Suddenly he changes his behaviour and act differently and create the environment to grab the emotions of the client. And after that he make comfortable zone for client in whom he can share his problem and Mali listen client carefully. At that time his aim is to solve the client's problem. He gives counselling to the client and uses psychotherapy in which he uses modern ritual psychotherapy exorcisms that is the series of prayers are loosely broken down into the 'imploring formula', in which the Gokch (mali) asks deity too free the client from the bad influences such as 'doshang' and devil. It can be said that the deity possession and communicate with deity is a traditional form of integrations of cognitive, humanistic and existential psychotherapies for the treatment of those who suffer intra and interpersonal conflicts.

According to Kakar (2003), it is the unquestioned faith in the paranormal powers of the healer, which is at the core of positive outcomes. It is belief in the person of the healer, not his or her conceptual system or specific technique, which is of decisive importance in the healing process. Earlier he observed that the suffering person often does not understand the rituals in which the healer engages but the ambience created transports her/him into an altered state. The aura and authority of a healer is carefully cultivated through the stories of

miraculous healing. The tradition of the guru as healer is not always consistent with the notion of a diviner. A good deal of healing takes place within the guru-disciple paradigm, in which the close relationship with the guru is an extension of the parent-child relationship (Kakar, 1991).

In the same tune, Neki (1975) has discussed at the length and the therapeutic value of the guru-chelā relationship, and of surrender before the guru. The healing powers of the guru were observed to reside in his or her ability to connect with the disciple's psyche, sending him the messages of strength and reassurance. For people who are seeking redressed of their mundane life problems, the glimpses of divinity in the guru is an assurance that he can deal with their problems. In reconciliation process group in first phase it established the guidelines which is necessary to build a group culture of healing. This phase is built the safety, security respect and dignity among the members of healing groups. Group members use phase-one tools in Phase Two with the goal of healing relational trauma. Through the use of the reconciliation process group model, healing trauma helps us find a balanced and stable reconciliation. Structured support, guidance, and appropriate facilitation are all central for the healing process in Phase Two. In phase three provides long-term support to the individuals who have finished with phases one and two. Phase-three is task-oriented and designed to extend healing into each person's relational world, and the larger community. It has been shown that people put their faith in religious beliefs in times of crisis.

Therefore, there is a common belief amongst the people that the deities and Mali (gur) play an important role in protecting them from diseases, promote their economics, and bring success, in employment, education and vocation as well as prevent them from natural calamities like drought, earthquake, fire and flood. Now a day the people have firm belief that the locala deities in villages are protecting them from spreading the COVID virus. It is also magical that the people of only urban areas are enmeshing in the Corona viruses whereas in Himachal Pradesh very few people in rural areas are in its claw. The writ of the village deity and Mali is still respected by the people in the settlement of their disputes (Shiv Raj, 2015).

**Present Study:** The study has been conducted in Kinnaur district of A survey has been conducted in three Blocks of Kinnaur i.e. Kalpa, Nichal and Poor. The study has ben conducted through participant interview and observation methods so as to record the case study of the people of the areas. The people of Kalp, Kamroo, Sangla, Bhawa valley and Changaun have been included for the case study.



### **CASE STUDY NO- I**

The first interview was conducted with a middle aged woman (dubbed here as A) hailing from Kalpa. Her husband used to fall sick repeatedly and the family as a whole was reeling under immense stress of financial burden. Someone recommended her to approach a mali hailing from Sangla valley because she belongs to Sangla and to seek help through "Rishta" (paranormal means of reconciliation process). Further, she visited to mali (Grockh) with her parents. He told them that, a ritual will be performed by Devta and mali himself at night, in which through tantric-mantra (Tana-Mana) and goat sacrifice (Jed Bali) they will remove black magic which is done on her husband by someone. The rituals were held at home. She said that during the Rishta the mali was under deity possession and he was not able to find the magic because it was so powerful. That magical thing was running sometimes up and down and in entire home. After a rigorous worship recitation mali caught that magical thing under the mud behind the house. It was a bunch of hairs tied inside a shiny cloth. It was very weird thing. And Mali gave them some jantras and sarson/Sheso (Mustered seeds) and formulated some puja on them. According to 'A' it was only after they received therapeutic treatment through mali(Grockh), that all their woes were annihilated. She further added that, after spiritual healings, now- they are living happily.

### **CASE II**

A man, (dubbed here as B) hailing from Kamroo had come to enquire (through shamanic reading) whether his pregnant wife's delivery would be normal or would involve any medical complication, as instated by doctors in their findings. He started conversation with deity in local dialect and all of sudden he acted differently, he was under deity possession. Then he used Sharso seeds, poured a few drops of wine (Traditional wine use for deity rituals) placed in a glass and placed a thin white paper on top of it. He, thereafter, whispered some mantras and gave him five seeds of mustard, on the paper foil. Subsequently, he asked the man to hold the glass upside down. Following observations were recorded during this reading a) Water inside the inverted glass (with paper at its base) did not flow out. According to Gur, it signified that things were normal, and there was no need to worry about the delivery process.

### **CASE III**

A middle-aged couple (C & D) hailing from village Sangla had come with a query concerning family issues arising due to real estate disputes. According to them they used to get evil dreams and the family as a whole, suffered huge monetary losses. Also, members of the household were diagnosed with certain health conditions which were never detected before. As recounted by the couple - with no rhyme or reason- one of their granddaughters stopped eating food altogether

and grew noticeably weak. These ensemble of woes led them to seek help through shamanic means, so that the underlying causes for aforementioned happenings could be unveiled and also, suggestive remedies could be put in place for its resolution. As asked by mali (Grockh) they had brought soil residue of the disputed land, packaged in a loose paper foil. Mali held the soil sample near to the deity's idol and started reciting devic mantras. Concurrently, he kneaded the soil sample with his fingers for about five minutes and thereafter, gave his reading. Some of his reading observations included: a) Family is inflicted with the (Thansish)curse of ChamangDevta(Diety of the lower caste in Nichar) b) There is Vaash/ Joothha (impurity) in the house and it has been conspired by neighbors who were claiming to have share of the disputed land. c) Though, Chamangdevta is relatively lower in hierarchy as compared to other devis/devtas like Bering Naag, Naagin Devi Sapni, Badrivishal etc. but He does have strong influencing powers and therefore, His inflictions cannot be cured easily. As suggestive measures, Gur prescribed devotee they have to arrange a healing ritual ceremony 'Rishta' in which mali and deity will visit at their home and two goats will have to be sacrificed. After that it will possible to reconcile the problem.

### **CASE IV**

A 48 years old man 'E' hailing from Bai village in Bhabhe valley shared that his grandfather died about a decade ago. 'C' said that his grandfather remained ill for many months and he knew that the time for him to leave this world of human beings had come. They are economically sound, but grandfather did not go beyond Wangtu (the western limit of Kinnaur) during his whole lifetime. He did not know where Sarahan and Rampur (the state capitals of Bushahr) were. He had a large flock of sheep and goats to look after. Though he had shepherds in a (great) number for that, but he would like to have a complete supervision over his shepherds and home servants (and therefore never left Kinnaur). Now that the death would come was certain in his case and he wished that his ashes be carried to 'Hari Dawar', the Ganges. 'C' told that after his grandfather death, his father and uncles that were there held a council and decided that as one of them was keeping bad health and the other was required to look after home affairs, while the third absentee could not be expected back from the Rajah's 'darbar' (court), it was decided in the private council of his father and uncle that the ashes of the deceased grandfather should not be picked up for being sent or carried to the holy Ganges.

The soul of grandfather entered the body of our relative woman, (who was) sitting in another room with women, and after the usual quivering with high temperature of another spirit in the same body, (she) said: 'my last wish for you, my sons and home folks, was to see my ashes carried to and drowned into the holy Ganges, but just after my leaving my body forever



you have forgotten me and the ashes are not to be sent to the holy Ganges. This is the only pain and concern for me, which makes me remind you of my last words'. His fathers agreed to have the ashes picked up and carried to the Ganges and the soul of their father left the relative woman alone, in whom it (had) manifested itself for (the) revision of his last word even after his death. The ashes were carried to the Ganges and called our deity in our house for puja ceremony and asked Mali regarding the grandfather that have he got salvation. Mali recited some mantras and said that a goat would have to be sacrificed and gave some shasho mustard seeds and he asked to throw around the entire house. Since then, no more trouble arose from the soul of their deceased grandfather.

#### **CASE V**

'F'is Grockh (Mali) of gram Changaun, according to him from long time his khandan is working for their village deity Maheshwra. Every people of village and another village visits here to settle and reconcile their problems. According to him they have some supernatural power to represent devvani to express feelings and thoughts of development. And solve people's problems. They reconcile people's problem through the possession and traditional practices like worship (poojejiya) of god on the behalf of clients, by tantric mantra (tana-mana), sacrificed beast (Jed Bali) etc. While in possession (a trance state, when a human body is possessed by deity's spirit), he claims to experience flux of high energy forces, which tend to control his bodily dimensions. He is of the opinion that, he is merely a vehicle through whom godly commandments are being relayed to the people and in a way, this makes him feel both, socially privileged and morally responsible. He highlights on a few structural aspects related to Deity Institution: a) Lower caste people can also seek his assists, but they have to maintain some distance from deity's sacred enclosure b) People seek deity's help in matters concerning marriage, social conflicts, health, wealth, children and so on. He claims to have had visions of devta in Her disembodied form and according to him, oftentimes, these revelations have guided him in providing detailed readings to his questioners.

As highlighted in aforementioned cases, people of varying age, gender, class and caste seek help through traditional healing techniques. Due to immense believe in deity and mali, people approaches them instead of doctors and professionals. According to the cases it has been examined that here in Kinnaur mali (Grockh) is a central part in exercising moral influences. Mali is a person who practice healing ritual through deity possession. People consult mali and deity to resolve their problems. According to the Kinnaura people deity possession on mali is healing therapy including reconciliation of their physical, emotional and social implications. In research paper by Pirta and Ranta (2007) it has been found that spiritual possession of mali or chela plays central role in healing of vast

practice. Deity possession during the ritual course of therapeutic ritual, a unique changes occurs in his body and mind. The socio-cognitive explanation of dissociation is getting credence in psychology (Spanos, 1994). Further, in research paper, it has been found that Kinnaura's customs and ritual as well as devi-devta tradition further comes in the way while making relationship with other people. They are traditional and customs bound. People here face many psycho-social conflicts. And deity's remedial therapy proved a strong way for remediation of people's psychological deficits and conflict resolution. Mali as a therapist inevitable in people's life. He addresses the affiliative needs of individuals and includes an entire gamut of cognitive, affective, moral, aesthetic, celebratory, as well as mystical values vital of the fabric of life. Also a deity and mali serve people to all human psychological needs of believing and belonging.

In nutshell it has been found that the people since past to the present science and technological scenario, are best considering the deity possession as therapy. They are considering their devta as an ideal for promoting their wellbeing and mental health. Be the people are erudite Men and Women belonging to any caste or their counterparts, they are predisposed towards paranormal beliefs especially on devi and devta customary practices. The people of tribal areas leap forwards in such practices and district Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh is on vanguard. The results based on qualitative analyses revealed that Devi Devta beliefs in general and their traditional therapy in particular assimilate with the psychotherapies in mitigating intra and interpersonal psychosocial conflicts efficaciously. It has proved a vital tool in regulating, resolving, and restoring the conflicts arises from natural resources, injustice, relationship, education, vocation and personal problem. The Devta agent i.e. Gur or Mali during possession play a catalytic and charismatic role in the process to appease the excruciating soul.

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Berti, D. (2011). Kings, Gods, and Political Leaders in Kullu (Himachal Pradesh). HAL.
2. Bhardwaj, V. (2015). Folk belief and traditions of the supernatural: A Case study of Shimla Hills in Western Himalayas. *European Scientific Journal*, 342-351.
3. Kakar, S. (1991). *The analyst and the mystic*. New Delhi: Viking
4. Kakar, S. (2003). Psychoanalysis and Eastern Spiritual traditions. *Journal of Analytic Psychology*, 48, 659-678.
5. Malhotra, A. (2010). Shamans of Himalayas. Negi, T. S. 1976. Scheduled Tribes of Himachal Pradesh: A Profile.



6. Neki, J.S. (1975). Psychotherapy in India: *Past, present and future. American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 29, 92-100.
7. Pirta, R. S. (2010). Super natural elements as context for deliberation on cultural and cognition. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 27, (20), 1842-1859.
8. Sharma, S. K., & Sharma, A. K. Mechanical Vibration of Orthotropic Rectangular Plate with 2D Linearly Varying Thickness and Thermal Effect. *International Journal of Research in Advent Technology*, 2(6), 2014, 184-190.
9. Khanna, A., & Sharma, A. K. Vibration Analysis of Visco-Elastic Square Plate of Variable Thickness with Thermal Gradient. *International Journal of Engineering and Applied Sciences, Turkey*, 3(4), 2011, 1-6.
10. Kumar Sharma, A., & Sharma, S. K. Vibration Computational of Visco-Elastic Plate with Sinusoidal Thickness Variation and Linearly Thermal effect in 2D. *Journal of Advanced Research in Applied Mechanics & Computational Fluid Dynamics*, 1(1), 2014, 46-54.
11. Pirta, R. S., & Ranta, R. S. (2007). Social conflicts and possession: The role of reconciliation processes mediated by local deities. *Journal of Indian Academy of Applied Psychology*, 33 (2), 201-212.
12. Ruchi, (2007). Devta Institution of Himachal: A Sociological Stud. *Research Article, SumerHill. HAS REVIEW*, 21, 31, 2- 200.
13. Shiv Raj (2015). Customary Laws: Study of Kinnaur. *International Research Journal of Management Sociology & Humanities*, 4 ,3, 2277 – 9809.
14. Spanos (1994). Hypnosis and Multiple personality disorder: A Sociocognitive Perspective. In S. Lynn & J.W. Rhue (Eds.), *Dissociation: Clinical and Theoretical Perspective. New York: Guilford Press*. 136-155.
15. William James. (1902).: A Study of Man: The varieties of Religious Experience; *The New York Times*.
16. Zinta, R.L. & Kataik, U. (2013). *Fear of Success: Religiosity and Well Being*. New Delhi: Neha Publishers & Distributors.
17. Zinta, R.L. & Negi, (2013). Wellbeing. *A case study on among polyandrous and monogamous Tribal people*. New Delhi: Neha publishers.