

Role of Media in Highlighting the Religious and Cultural Importance of “NarmedhYajana” (BhundaMahayajana) in Rohru Sub Division of District Shimla (H.P)

16

Chetan Chauhan*

Abstract

The present study reflects the media’s role (print and electronic) in highlighting the rich cultural and religious practice of “NarmedhYajana” also called “Bhuna Mahayajana” celebrated in far flung areas of Shimla and kullu Districts of Himachal Pradesh. This was unreported and remained confined to a particular region before 2005, because of the limited reach of media in outskirts of Himalayas. The present study reveals the facts that media played significant role in making it known worldwide because of its increasing influence.

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is the land of fairs and festivals. The richness of its culture and faith in Gods and deities is depicted in its festivals, which are celebrated with great enthusiasm and fervor throughout the year. The NarmedhMahayajna (Bhunda) is a strange and perilous religious practice. This religious festival is celebrated in about 18 villages of Rohru and Rampur region, of district Shimla and Nirmand region of Kullu district.”Yajna is the sacrifice which one performs for attaining union with reality. It includes all forms of self-abnegation and dedication. Yajna is a very comprehensive term whose meaning is deep. You may, in a sense, say that the entire culture of Bharatavarsha is summed up in the single word, ‘yajna’. The lord himself is

**Assistant Professor Govt. P.G.CollegeSeema(Rohru)*

compared to yajna- yajnovaivishnuh, and in the masterly Purusha-Sukta of the Vedas the whole creation is compared to a yajna of the supreme being. Yajna is, therefore, the supreme effort of the soul to unite itself with God”[1].

“The celebration of Bhunda had been one of the most important celebration in the Bushahri cultural area on the both sides of Satluj, it is almost unheard of, at least in the recent times, in the Kulluvi and Mahasavi cultural areas. It is alleged that this custom existed in the some parts of Garhwal long time back” [2]. Bhunda is an age old festival, local people have immense respect for such religious practices. Even in the old times, when there was no proper way of communication and information dissemination, local people show their dedication to such religious practices by devoting their valuable time in disseminating the information of the celebration of such practices, in order to gather more and more population to the village of celebration. During the old time, the information regarding celebration of this festival was confined to upper hilly areas only, because of the limited sources of information dissemination. In old time, the people come to know about Bhunda celebration through interpersonal communication. Thus information passed on from one person to another. The relationships had also played a vital role in transmitting information from one place to another place. The people of the Bhunda village (when the Bhunda was going to be celebrated) had invited their relatives in the celebration. These informed relations used to pass on this information to their another relations, thus the information of Bhunda celebration would spread to different villages.

Another effective source of imparting information was messengers who were sent by the Bhunda village to inform the people residing in different villages of the region. As the

technology developed, the means of information dissemination also developed. People started informing other villages through letters and later through telephones.

The media's penetration in rural Himachal was marked in late 90's, when print media started highlighting grass root problems and started providing space to the cultural activities in newspapers and magazines. Earlier there were limited Hindi newspapers, which covered such cultural activities. They were, Punjab Kesari, VirPartap etc. After the year 2000 many other Hindi and English newspapers like Amar Ujala, DainikBhaskar, DainikJagran, Divya Himachal, Hindustan Times, The Tribune, Times of India, The Indian Express etc, were introduced. The print media now become more localized and had started penetrating even in the isolated areas of hills. More and more space was provided to such cultural activities in newspapers (Hindi as well as English).

The year 2005 was the remarkable year in the history of Bhunda celebration held in Bachchunch village of Rohru Sub Division. When electronic media flashed the three day long Bhunda celebration ceremony live providing a global coverage. The National Channels AajTak, Star News, Zee News, showed it live throughout the nation and made people aware about the unique culture of Himachal. In the year 2006, the Bhunda festival was celebrated in Deothi village of Rampur sub division. Again, it was covered by almost all the national and local Channels- AajTak, Star News, Zee News, NDTV 24x7, IBN 7, Doordarshan. Today, Bhunda celebrations has become global and information related to Bhunda is now available in every country through internet. The media's coverage of Bhunda celebration played an important role in strengthening cultural and religious practices in the state.

Traditional Activities And Brief Historical Background Of Bhunda Mahayajna

The BhundaMahayajna is an age old festival and being celebrated since centuries in Himachal Pradesh. The Bhunda practice is nothing unusual for local people, for them it is as old as the hills, but strangers call it a crazy because it is homicide practice to please the god. The human sacrifice were prevalent in Bushahri culture in old times. Ushadevi and Bhima Kali of Bushahr were well known for such sacrifice. The main temple of the two Goddess are situated side by side at Sarahan, which was once the capital of Rampur Bushahr.”The victim of practice was kept in a room for at least ten days. The blood of the victim was applied to the tongue of Bhima Kali and then it was used to wash the feet of Usha Devi. The head of the victim would be thrown into Satluj and the body covered well” [3]. This form of homicide is not in practice in present time, because it is punishable crime. The human sacrifice practice is not completely vanished from society but still existing in different form of Bhunda practice.

“Gradually the practice of human sacrifice vanished and it took different shapes known as Bhunda ceremony, where if a person escaped from fatal test, received honor and state award.” [3]. The Bhunda festival is celebrated for the prosperity of the area. It is believed that Bhunda is performed to propitiate local deities and devtas. The deities in turn, ring out evil spirits and ring in good will and prosperity for the villagers. The main alteration of the festival is preparation of a special rope known as “Baroot” and “Beda”. For more than a month, Beda man eats his meal once a day and gathers clumps of “Munji grass” found in hard to reach “Ghasnis” (grass lands) in the hills. He then weaves the sacred rope. An assembly of devtas, Malis (human incarnation of devtas) and Kardars (incharge of temple treasury)

decided the venue and date for the Bhunda Sacrifice. The rope measuring over 300 to 500 meters in length is then tied across a nullah that symbolize a 'well of death'. The Beda, a sliding wooden device made by the Beda man is kept on the rope way. The "Jelly family" played a vital role in the Bhunda festival. The jelly family is the only family in the state who perform rope trick in this festival. Kanwar Singh the decendent of Jelly family has performed this rope trick four times.

The Beda man accomprid by a procession led by a devta, he reaches the starting point of the hill amid drum beats. A few Brahmin perform puja. He wears a white kafan, containing Panchratan (substance put in the month of a person while performing his last rites as per the Hindu faith). His wife is adorned with jewellery and declared as widow. At the end, the gifts, jewellery and Rs 35000 is given to the Beda family from the temple treasury. It Beda man dies while performing the rope trick, the Panchratan is put into his month and it is believed that the deity has accepted human sacrifice in lieu of dispelling the evil spirits from the village. If he survives, as it happened at Bachhunch village in 2005, and in Deothi village in 2006, the villagers struggle with each other to get Panchratan, believed that it has become a devine oblation because the devta had made the sacrifice successful.

After this ceremony, the Beda man is deified and is carried in a Palanquin of the presiding devta to the temple complex, where over hundred of lambs are slaughtered one by one to propitiate the devis and other spirits during the Shikha-Pher ritual. The villagers and guests share the divine Bhunda feast at dinner. The entire village offers lambs to the devta that day as per their income. The villagers believe that Gods have accepted the Bhunda sacrifice and will ward off evil spells that arrives in the forms of epidemics, natural calamities or even

crop failure. This practice was banned during British rule after a Beda man had died while performing the rope trick, recall, old timers.

As it witnessed as “The well of death” the district administration intervened in this and laid safety net under the rope for the Bhunda held in Bachhunch village in December 2005 and Deothi village in December 2006 of district Shimla. Even the organizers had tied two sand Bags of equal weight across the both sides of the Beda to help him balance as he slide on the rope, the length of the grass made rope was also reduced up to 300 to 500 meters, earlier which was more than one thousand meters. The old timers said, it is believed that the king of the erstwhile Bushaihar state whose present heir is former Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh patronized the Bhunda sacrifice in Rampur-Rohru, part of the Bushaihar state, here this ritual has become a part of their cultural heritage. This tradition continues among the god fearing village in the belt.

The Bhunda festival is being celebrated since centuries in the state, but none known about its exact origin. Old timers said, the Bhunda literally means human sacrifice, they trace it to the cult of Parshurama in the hills, whose temple still stands at Nirmand village in Kullu district, the birth place of Bhunda. The “Narmedh Text” in the Parshurama temple mention the Bhunda sacrifice, but no body can read it as it is written in Tankri Script, which is yet to be decipherd. As per the hearsay, the old timers said, - it is believed that lord Parshurama had been suffered from leprosy in ancient time. To cure the disease, he had done all the possible efforts, he met various Rishis and yogis. At last, he got the solution, which was strange. He was advised that if a person cross a river or nullah by sliding on a grass made rope, the disese would be cured. All the arrangements of this yajna had been completed, but no body was ready to

slide on the rope. Then lord Parshurama himself had decided to slide down on the rope. Then at the same moment, a Rishi from Jelley cast arrived and got amazed to see that lord Parshurama himself sacrificing his life to get rid of leprosy, jelley Rishi then decided to slide on the rope in place of lord Parshurama. Since then, the decendent of jelley cast still continue to follow the tradition of crossing the river or nullah by sliding on the rope.

The tradition of NarmedhYajna (Bhunda) is being celebrated with great enthusiasm in Himachal and remain continue even after experiencing many halts in its thousands of year journey, which depicts local people's immense faith on god and their immense respect for their tradition, culture and moral values. The Dev-Bhumi Himachal Pradesh has preserved the age old tradition of NarmedhYajna (Bhunda) even in this modern age. To preserve and respect the culture, customs and tradition of Himachal Pradesh since centuries is not only the matter of honour for the state but for the nation also.

Methodology

For the present study quantitative and qualitative data was collected.

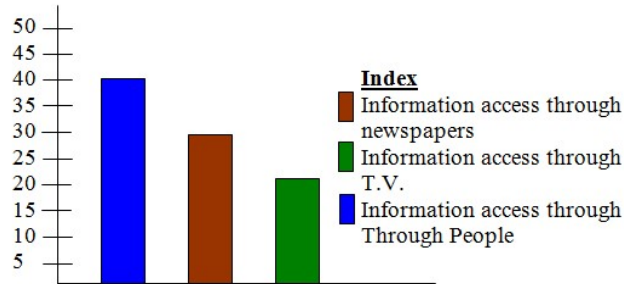
For, Quantitative data, questionnaire was prepared, in which questions related to the topic were asked from different people selected randomly.

For qualitative data or information the places or villages where BhundaMahayajna held were visited. People associated with the Mahayajna were interviewed.

Observation And Results

For the present research work the people of Rohru sub division are questioned that how do they come to know about the information about Bhunda celebration.

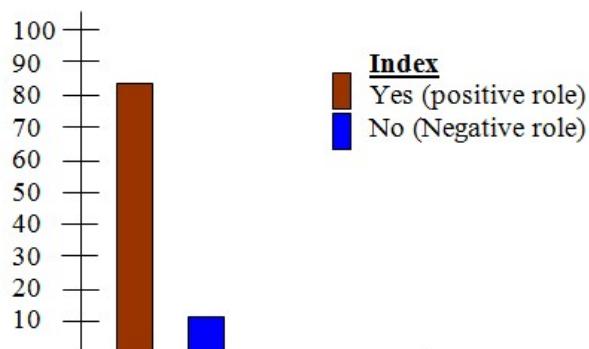
Fig 1.1 : Perception of people about information access of Bhunda celebration



This (Fig 1.1) observation reveals that 37 percent people are of the views that they were informed through interpersonal communication and 33 percent people said, they got information through newspapers, while 30 percent people said, they got information from T.V. which shows the increasing impact of media in this region.

This survey reveals that majority of people believed that media played important role in propagating religions and cultural importance of Bhunda celebration.

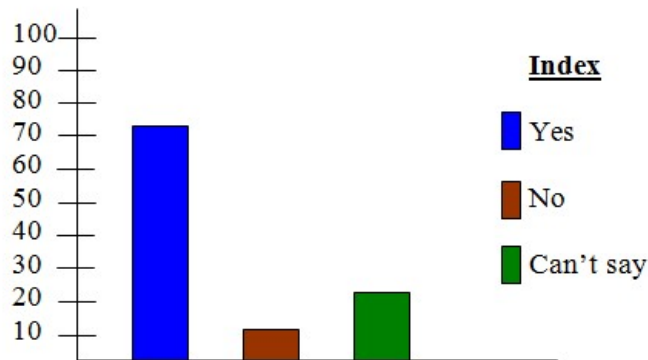
Fig 1.2 : Showing the perception of people regarding role of media with respect to Bhunda celebration.



88 percent people believe that media has played an important role in turning this popular, while 12 percent people disagree with this.

This shows large numbers of people are affected by media coverage in this region.

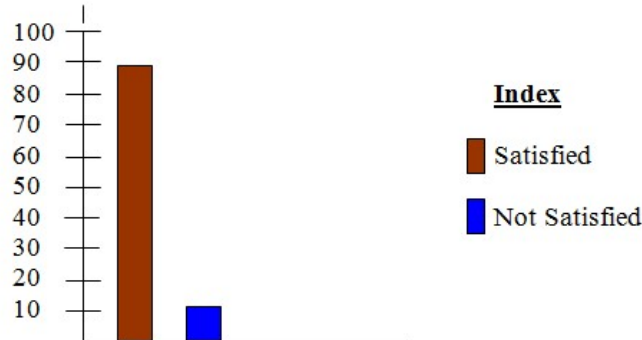
Fig 1.3 : Showing people's perception (percentage) about the role of media in strengthening religious practices.



Majority of the people (70%) were of the opinion that Print media's coverage of Bhunda celebration after 2000 and the penetration of electronic media after 2005 surely helped in strengthening religions and cultural practices in the state. They justify it by saying that media has the only potential to put such religions and cultural activities into limelight. 12 percent people disagree with this statement, they said, the excessive interference of media and sensational presentation of such religions practices will distort its religions importance and this celebration will become only a sense of entertainment than its religions importance while 18 percent people did not comment on it.

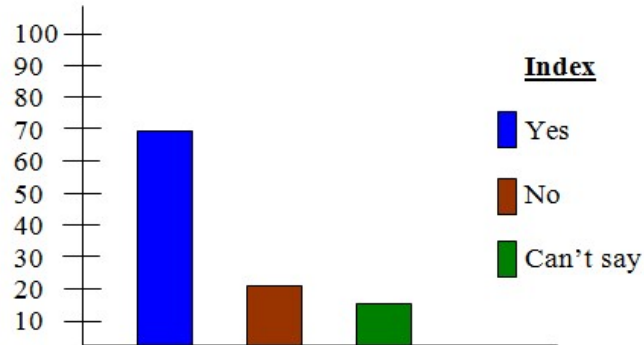
Local people were also asked about their views in regard to media coverage of Bhunda celebration whether they are satisfied with the coverage or not.

Fig 1.4 : Perception of people about satisfaction of media coverage of Bhunda celebration.



90% people were satisfied with media coverage of Bhunda celebration. People have different views, some of them felt proud of being host, some were happy with highlighting the area and others were satisfied because they believe that media (Print and Electronic) has covered each and every aspect from historical background to present form of the celebration. 10% people were not satisfied with the media coverage of celebration. People from the Bhunda village (where the Bhunda was celebrated) were fed up because of the extra burden of guests and several. People were of the opinion that they do not like overcrowding. They believe, when it splashed on media people from different parts of the state and country do come to see it and caused overcrowding and extra burden of guests. Opinions of the local people were sought about the use of safety measures like safety net and sandbags implemented due to media presence.

Fig 1.5 : Showing the opinions of people about media's influence on safety measures.

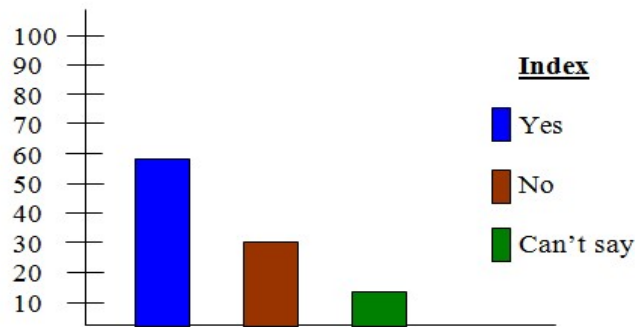


70 percent people believed that the use of safety measures in Bhunda celebration was implemented due to media pressure. They said, when media has covered this perilous religious practice, where the Beda man has maximum chances of being killed in this practice, attracted the attention of district administration and forced it to intervene and made the provision of safety net under the rope over which Beda man slides down. Even the organizers had tied two sand bags of equal weight on both the sides of the Beda to help him keep balance while sliding on the rope. The length of the grass made rope was also reduced up to 300 to 500 meters, earlier which used to be more than one thousand meters.

16 percent people disagree with this statement, while 14 percent people did not comment on it.

In Bhunda celebration thousands of goats are slaughtered in the temple of presiding deity. In the present study local people were questioned whether they are satisfied with the sacrificing of goats in this celebration or people were also asked whether sacrificing practices should be there in practice or not and media's coverage of animal sacrifice in Bhunda.

Fig.1.6 : Showing the percentage of people expressing their views about satisfaction with regard to animal sacrificing practices in Bhunda.



60 percent people were satisfied with the sacrificing practices of goats in Bhunda celebration. They were of the views that slaughtering of goats in Bhunda celebration is their tradition and have been following since centuries. So they have to follow it to preserve and to respect this age old celebration.

28 percent people disagree with the sacrificing practices in this celebration, while 12 percent did not comment on it. The majority of people were of the opinion that print and electronic media covered the sacrificing practices in Bhunda celebration. Almost all the national and regional channels covered sacrificing practices in the celebration.

At least 90 percent people were satisfied with the media coverage of the celebration. Different media print as well as electronic media covered the celebration from different angles. In print media, some newspapers covered the historical background of such celebrations, while several newspapers provided detailed information about its present traditional activities. Some newspapers published article on Bada man i.e. Kanwar Singh, who has now become hero among people. some

of the newspapers published news stories and articles related to traditional activities and future perspective of the celebration. The electronic media splashed the celebration live on T.V. Channels and covered each and every aspect related to Bhunda celebration. Majority of people who were questioned were satisfied with media coverage print as well as electronic. So this has revealed that media (Print and Electronic) have given qualitative and quantitative coverage of Bhunda celebration which will improve further in near future.

Conclusion

Narmedhyajna (BhundaMahayajna) is a prevalent religious and cultural practice in Rohru and Rampur region of the Himachal Pradesh and being observed since centuries. The present study has revealed the fact that since the celebration entirely covered by media (Print as well as electronic) in Dec 2005 was a remarkable period in the history of Himachal to cover such religions practice globally. Before Dec 2005 this religions practice was unknown and confined to this particular hill region only. In Dec 2005 media (Print and Electronic) first give wider coverage to this celebration and has penetrated to the core of the cultural and traditional practices of this small hill state. The present study is one of its own kind very few people have written about Bhunda and some have made documentaries about it but there has been no systematic study about the media's impact on such religions practices and vice-versa. So this study is first of its kind in Himachal.

References

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