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Reminiscences of Valour and Community Faith: A Study of Panchgaon

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Abstract

The present paper is based on the field research undertaken to study the historicity of Panchgaon by interviewing people of different strata of society in different areas of Panchgaon. As the oral testimonies suggest, this place has historical importance from Mahabharata times and was very active during the British Colonial period. The discussion revolves around the contribution of the people of Panchgaon to the freedom movement in India, particularly their participation in the Indian National Army. Along with these memories of pride and sacrifice, oral history highlights the spiritual significance of this place. The article emphasizes the faith of people in the spiritual deities and the significance of the Manokamna Durga temple. It argues how the understanding of belief systems held by the community, constitutes a significant part of the study of their society and politics.

Keywords: Panchgaon, Indian National Army, Manokamna Durga Temple, Jaharveer, Oral History

Introduction

An effort to collect and preserve oral reminiscences is a very important tool of historical research for a long time and becomes more relevant with the growing importance of people's history. It has been very useful, particularly during the time of political and societal upheavals. It enriches the insight into social injustices and conflicts which is generally not reflected in elite documentation. Oral history deepens our understanding by consciously obtaining information from different perspectives. It is an important tool for authentic data collection and dissemination of knowledge which is preserved within the individuals of a community.

As a part of our Innovation Week Celebration at Amity University, I visited Panchgaon with my colleagues of the History department Dr. Ajay Sharma and Dr. Ajeet Kumar, and some students of ASLA. We visited various areas and interviewed people of different strata of Panchgaon. Panchgaon area is a cluster of 5 villages-Chandla, Fazalwas, Gwalior, Kukrola, and Fukharpur- in the Gurugram district of Haryana. The name Panchgaon is just a pseudonym as the constituting villages are independent and have their separate gram panchayats.

Heroes of the freedom struggle: Participation in the Indian National Army (INA)

The freedom struggle of India was full of indomitable valour, heroic spirit and selfless sacrifices. It was a combination of multiple efforts both armed struggle and non-violent campaigns/ protests. Mahatma Gandhi was the indisputable leader of the masses in the non-violent path of the freedom struggle. At the same time, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army played a pivotal role in the armed struggle against British colonial rule. His famous dictum - "Give me blood, I shall give you freedom" inspired a lot of people to fight against colonial rule.

The Indian National Army (INA) was founded in August 1942 by Captain Mohan Singh, a former officer of the British Indian Army with the cooperation of Indian soldiers, Prisoners of War, and the Imperial Japanese Army. Afterward, the first INA was disbanded in December 1942 due to growing disagreements between Mohan Singh and the Command of the Japanese Army revolving on the question of the autonomy of the Indian National Army. It was revived by Subhash Chandra Bose who took command of the Second Indian National Army, popularly known as **Azad Hind Fauz**. Under his leadership, there was an enormous growth in the number of soldiers who joined INA. The INA saw initial success through the early phase of its operations against British rule but was forced to withdraw during the battle of Imphal and Kohima in 1944. Eventually, the British captured the INA soldiers after the defeat of Japan in World War II. The following trials of the surviving members of INA arouse great nationalist uprisings amongst the soldiers of the British Indian Army and the general population. Such developments accelerated the process of transfer of power from British Colonial rule and ultimately India achieved freedom after fighting a long struggle.

The people who were surveyed during the field visit narrated the historical role of the people of Panchgaon in the Indian National Army. In this connection, they narrated the names of some INA heroes of the locality. They include Hariram, Chandra Singh, Chandiya, Bhagmal, Simbhu, Jailal, Chinnaji, Nihal Singh, Rampat, Ganeshi, Chanda, Sri Chand, Ramu, Lakshmi Chand, Manohar Lal, Sukhram, Amar Singh, Jagmal, Patram, Harnarayan, Beghraj, Rohtas, Hari Singh, Dhan Singh, Puran Singh, Mangal Singh and

Arjun Singh. All these heroes sacrificed their lives to liberate Mother India from the bondage of colonial rule. The villagers proudly described that they were brave soldiers of the Indian National Army and ever ready to do or die for their motherland.

The stories of the bravery of Chandra Singh who joined INA told by their sons Sikander Singh and Ram Singh were also replete with the sufferings and hardships of their family. Similarly, Ratiram described the heroism and martyrdom of his brothers Hariram and Chander Singh and how they used to tease the officials of the British Colonial Administration with the slogan of 'Jai Hind'.

To keep alive the memory of the soldiers, the people of Panchgaon established **Azad Hind Fauj Veer Smriti Van** adjacent to Amity University. This is a source of patriotic spirit for various generations. For the older generation, this memory of freedom struggle is the source of pride and heroic identity of the people of their family and community.

Tale of Community Faith: Shree Manokamna Shakti Peeth (Paharowali Maa Durga Mandir)

Since time immemorial people have been reposing their faith in spiritual deities. Such community faith has an enormous impact on people's psyche. If faith or belief in spirituality inspires us and boosts our optimism and sense of community living, it is undeniably a very constructive energy. However, if such faith encourages superstitions and parochialism, it exerts a negative impact.

Along with the glorified history of martyrdom in the freedom struggle, the discussion with the villagers also revolved around the history and religious significance of Shree Manokamna Shakti Peeth situated on the Aravali hills adjacent to Amity University.

The literal meaning of the Hindi word Manokamna is 'desire or wish'. Manokamna temples are those temples where it is believed that the wishes or desires of devotees get fulfilled by the visit and prayers.

The Shakti Peethas are significant shrines and pilgrimage destinations in Shaktism, the goddess-centric denomination in Hinduism. Shaktism has different sub-traditions, ranging from those focused on the most worshipped Durga, gracious Parvati to that of fierce Kali. Goddess Durga is considered Adi Shakti by many and is worshipped in various parts of India.

The survey of Panchgaon unfolds the extent of community faith expressed in various stories and beliefs associated with this Durga temple and the burial of Jaharbeer Pir.

The history of Manokamna Shakti Peeth was narrated by Pandit ji Rameshwar Nath Mishra who has been rendering his services in this temple

since 2013. He narrated his perception of this Durga temple while he was staying at Amity University with his family. One night, he dreamt that Lord Rama, Lakshman, and Goddess Sita were roaming beneath the adjacent hills. He was swayed by the mythical significance of the place and decided to serve the Manokamna temple.

His descriptions were full of legends related to the Manokamna Durga temple and the spiritual significance of the meditating place of the Baba Jaharbeer. He also dwelt on the historical significance of the Aravali hills.

Baba Jaharbeer was a disciple of Guru Gorakhnathji. He is also known as Goga Maharaj and worshipped as Deity, especially in Northern states of India e.g., Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttarakhand, Punjab region, and Uttar Pradesh. It is believed that Peer Jaharveer was born with the blessings of Guru Gorakhnathji who gave a fruit to Jaharveer's mother who was desiring a child. Afterward, Gogaji or Baba Jaharveer was born.

Guru Gorakhnathji and his disciple Baba Jaharveer contributed to a secular religious tradition in India. People of all religions, sects, and castes come to visit their shrines to pay their homage. According to Pandit Rameshwar Nath Mishraji, Baba Jaharveer used to meditate on the adjacent hills of the Panchgaon area. His popularity grew over time as people started believing that they could be cured of various diseases by the blessings of Baba Jaharveer. Describing his power, Panditji narrated that a childless woman from Kanpur came to this place to fulfill her intense desire for a child. In the course of time, she gave birth to a child and donated a large amount of money to construct the Durga temple. Devotees from various places in India started visiting the temple in large numbers. It is popularly believed that Goddess Durga visits this temple during Navratra with the sound of her anklets. Many community festivals are held in this temple which has been contributing towards keeping the spirit of unity amongst the people of the Panchgaon area.

The hills spreading from Amity University to the village are considered immensely sacred by the villagers. The cave in the hills is believed to be historically significant since Mahabharata time. Narrating the significance of those hills, Panditji narrated the story of a mentally retarded child of a barber who entered the cave and came back cured.

There were various stories and beliefs associated with the Durga temple and this has become a remarkable center of community faith. It is believed that faith has great power. It is a psychological booster. It gives people a sense of belongingness.

Conclusion

Thus, the historical explorations of Panchgaon revealed that oral testimonies are important tools for learning different perspectives of people about the historicity of events and places. It enriches the study of history and politics

by giving a subaltern perspective to it. The field study made it crystal clear that shared beliefs held by individuals in a social group or specified geographical location are of utmost significance to understanding community value at a broader level. These values function as community norms and impact social behaviour. If we analyze these beliefs critically, we may find them superstitious to some extent. But in the cultural study of a given society, even superstitions are to be taken into consideration. We cannot be oblivious to the fact that culture consists of both intangible things like beliefs and thoughts as well as tangible things. Thus, the study of the past events and current cultural belief systems of a community is very important for the in-depth analysis of various socio-political and cultural issues.