



MEHENDIPUR BALAJI REVISITED: A DESCRIPTIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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Abstract:

The role of faith healing centers in the management of psychiatric conditions has become an integral part of psychotherapy in India. However, there are limited academic ventures trying to explain these practices via a psychological perspective. The present study aimed to explain the Mehendipur Balaji healing tradition by a qualitative exploratory study design using the tool of observation. Data was scrutinized through the strategy of qualitative narrative enquiry. Findings revealed the need of a psychological perspective in understanding faith healing practices along within the healthy accommodation of faith healing to mainstream psychotherapeutic practice.

Keywords: *Mehendipur Balaji Temple*, catharsis, faith healing, narrative inquiry

1. Introduction

History of mankind has always worshipped the unknown. The civilized and the tribal population have always had high regards for super naturals (Kakkar, 1982; Kalantri, 2002). Mental conditions in these traditions are conceptualized as the outcome of demonic possessions and henceforth the act of malevolent powers.

Temples and shrines have become the treatment centers of these mental conditions. Temple healing traditions are, indeed, alternate treatment modalities for the mentally sick (Raguram, Venkateswaran, Ramakrishna and Weiss, 2002; Somasundaram, 1973). The societal and economic factors of poverty, illiteracy, rural background, dislike towards psychiatric services, make faith healing a reliable option. Faith healing across the cultures on a unanimous voice has got an influence on all the societies, whether the aspect of faith becomes a part of their “daily rituals” or to specific “problematic situations”. When the construct of medical plurality is being upheld by

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the world health organization in the present period, temple healing traditions that form an integral part of mental health system are left out with rudimentary statistical observations (Nathawat and Menon, 2017). This has become the call for a systematic study. The working mechanism of temple healing traditions beyond a “statistical number” has henceforth affected our attention, particularly, when they become or rather, supposed to become “cultural clinics” of modern psychiatry.

The temple becomes the blessing spot of three deities. On the ground floor, one can see the idol of *Balaji* or lord hanuman. In an annex, a large stone slab, with a carved eye makes the representation of *Bharonji*. The upstairs, it is owned to the ruling zone of “*Pretraj Maharaj*”, the lord of demons (Satija, Nathawat and Sharma, 1981). The present paper is a revisit of a Healing tradition that has marked its space in the management of psychiatric condition in the past and owns a due share in the present.

2. Methodology

The lacunas of a theoretical eye to see and understand the working know how of *Mehendipur Balaji* temple has become the rationale of the present study. The aim of the study was to generate a descriptive narration of *Mehendipur Balaji* Healing tradition. The objectives included the creation of a story plot to explore and explain the healing technique of *Mehendipur Balaji* Tradition. The study followed a qualitative exploratory study design. *Mehendipur Balaji* located in *Dausa* district of Rajasthan, became the venue of the study. Data was collection via the strategy of participant and non-participant observation. Sampling design was purposive in nature. The technique of analysis was qualitative narrative inquiry within a phenomenological framework. Patients attending the *Mehendipur* healing tradition were observed and analyzed within the phenomenological context of narrative inquiry in the respective environment of healing ritual. All the patients attending *Mehendipur* healing tradition was included for the study irrespective of the involvement in other healing modalities, educational status, gender and age, considering the explorative nature of the study.

2.1 Procedure

The sample was selected via purposive sampling strategy. The researcher visited the temple for a period of ten days. Data was collected via the strategy of participant and non-participant observation of the patients attending *Mehendipur Balaji*. The rituals and subjective experiences of patients attending *Mehendipur* healing tradition became the plot of narrative inquiry respectively, where the researcher narrated the dual components of faith and the psychological eye, within the phenomenological framework using an omnipotent eye.

2.2 Description of tools

Socio demographic profile and observation schedule was used to assess patients attending *Mehendipur Balaji* healing tradition.

3. Results and Discussion

The temple overflowed with the devotees of lord Balaji. The atmosphere triumphed, the power of lord Balaji. The affected and their caretakers came inside the temple with the hope of getting cured and healed by the power of lord Balaji. The loud screams of men and women portrayed the agony and their desire to be relieved from the “possession”. There is clearly no place for a pathological explanation within the premises of Mehendipur Balaji, where the power to heal the affected rests in the hands of lord Balaji. Bad spirits are believed to be punished by the spirit of lord Balaji. The reasons of the suffering aren't discussed with anyone, henceforth; it was very difficult for the researcher to intervene the process of habitual faith healing within the healing tradition of the temple. The demonic possessions are expected to become powerful, if they are openly, spoken about. The beliefs, the nature of existing rituals, added power to the treatment modality within this indigenous healing tradition. The etiology of the illness depended upon the wrong doings of the affected.

The journey began with the observation of four chambers. The chambers of Lord Hanuman and Lord Bhairon were awaiting the black coloured balls. The black coloured balls are a symbolic representation of warding off the negative spirits and making the body pure, relieving it out of their attack and possession. This becomes a fundamental basis for therapeutic reassurance. The power of Lord Hanuman becomes the source of an unconditional positive regard and effective therapeutic modality to heal the affected. Once the researcher entered the chambers, there were acts of head banging and acts of self-hurting, like, pouring hot water on the body etc. The acts of beating and chaining, was channels of catharsis and displacement within the “psychotherapeutic modality” at Mehendipur Balaji. The inside world of healing spoke the indigenous language of cure, creating a boundary between good and evil, segregating the explanations of cause and cure.

The researcher realized that the theoretical base that governed the power of healing in Balaji is explained by the belief in good and bad deeds. This ironically becomes the etiology of the illness and framework of cure. The evil spirit that enters the body due to the wrong doings are summoned by the techniques of the power of god, belief in goodness and alleviation of guilt via the pathway of correcting one's mistakes, even by taking adverse measures. The researcher saw the accommodation of a psychotherapeutic perspective within the healing practice of Balaji.

4. Conclusion

Clinical observations at Mehendipur Balaji suggest the relevance of a psychotherapeutic perspective in explaining faith healing practice at Mehendipur Balaji Healing tradition. The underlying psychological explanation to this indigenous healing tradition unearthed the necessity of a dual perspective in understanding faith healing traditions, the necessity of a healthy accommodating perspective within mainstream healing systems respectively.

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