



International Journal of Sanskrit Research

अनन्ता

ISSN: 2394-7519
IJSR 2016; 2(6): 24-25
© 2016 IJSR
www.anantaajournal.com
Received: 09-09-2016
Accepted: 10-10-2016

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Influence of Atharvavedic magical charms on superstitions, beliefs and practices of Assam

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Abstract

The Vedas are generally believed to be the oldest literary records of the indo- European race. The Veda is the treasure house of ancient Indian culture and civilization, forming the foundation of early religious beliefs of the Hindus. The Atharvaveda contains the magical charms which are capable of giving results in this world and the other world i.e. Aihika and pātraika. Such magical charms of the Atharvaveda have very much influence in the society. However some of the magical charms, which may be harmful to society, are still practiced in some region of Assam. This paper describes some beliefs and practices, which are considered superstitious causing social problems.

Keywords: Atharvavedic magical charms, superstitious beliefs

Introduction

India has the honor of visualizing the light of the Vedas. The Vedas are generally believed to be the oldest literary records of the indo- European race. It is impossible for anybody to find out the right point of view about religion, moral and literature of the Hindus. Therefore, the Veda is the treasure house of ancient Indian culture and civilization, forming the foundation of early religious beliefs of the Hindus. It is the matter of surprise that even there in early times, the origin of religion and philosophy was generated from the ancient Indian people. In the words of Max Miller: 'the sphere in which the Indian minds finds itself at liberty to act, to create and to worship, in the sphere of religion and philosophy; and nowhere have religious and philosophical ideas struck root so deep in the mind of a nation as in India'.

The Vedic literature is divided into four classes' viz. the Saṁhitās, the Brāhmaṇas, the Āraṇyakas and The Upaniṣads. The Saṁhitās are the collection of prayers, benedictions, incantations, sacrificial formulas, marriage hymns, funeral hymns and some philosophical hymns. The Saṁhitā period comprise the four Saṁhitās respectively known as the Ṛgveda, the Sāmaveda, the Yajurveda and the Atharvaveda.

In the enumerations of the Vedic Saṁhitās, the Atharvaveda occupies the fourth position as it was considered as a Veda at a very later date. The reason for this being, while the other three Vedas deal mainly with the sacrifices, the Atharvaveda had no direct connection to the sacrificial performances. Otherwise, it was connected to the belief and religion of common people. The Atharvaveda contains the magical charms which are capable of giving results in this world and the other world i.e. aihika and pātraika. Such magical charms of the Atharvaveda have very much influence in the society. This paper is an attempt to discuss the impact of the Atharvavedic magical charms on superstition beliefs and practices in Assam.

The methodology of paper will be analytical and descriptive.

Different types of magical charms in the Atharvaveda

The chief constituent parts of Atharvaveda consists of songs and spell for healing disease (bhaisjyāni). Prayers for health and long life (āyusyāni), imprecation against demons, sorcerer and enemies (ābhicārikāni and kṛtyāpratiharānāni), charms pertaining to women (strikarmāni), charms to secure harmony and the like (sāmmanasyani), charms pertaining to royalty (rājakarmāni), prayers and imprecation in the interest of the Bahamas (brahmanyāni), charms to secure prosperity and freedom from danger (paustikāni), charms of expiation of sin (prāyaścittāni), cosmogonic and theomorphic hymns (ādhyātmikasūktāni), ritualistic and general hymns. The books dealt with individual themes, twentieth book and Kuntāpa hymns etc.

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All these hymns of the Atharvaveda are two kinds of magical charms namely holy magic black magic (śanta and ghora). The oldest name of the Atharvaveda, Atharvangirasah also donates two types of magical charms seen by the two seers Atharvan and Angiras. The mantras seen by Atharvan were auspicious and the mantras seen by Angiras were harmful (ābīcārika). The aim of Atharvaveda hymns is to appear to bless and to curse. About the forth of the contents of the Atharvaveda carry such ideas. The numerous magic formulas, however which contain curses and exorcisms belong to the field of unholy magic. Nobody feels and differences between cult and magic here in this Veda. So, also the priest and the Atharvaveda magician are one the same. Magic and religion thus belongs to different sphere. But in the case of Atharvaveda, we find a mixture of these two trends. In fact it is not a heirchy religion but a magical religion.

Impact in Assam

Assam is a land which is abode of various castes and tribes with various languages. The meaning of society is a group of people leaving together having a common goal and purpose, united by a common vow and holding the same believe and the opinion. Sometimes, religion or faith becomes common factor to unite a group of people in society. The development of society depends upon the development of culture which again depends upon the progress of education and literacy. Unless the people will not be free from superstitions, ill belief and ill practices.

The literacy rate of people in Assam is not so satisfactory. As a result the astrologers, soothsayers' medicine men and similar professional men take advantages of ignorance and general human weakness in respect to one's health and future. Thus the mass people are being exploited to a considerable extent. In the middle ages it was known as a land of sorcery and magic. It is considered to be due to the prevalence of the Tantric cult. Here, we may say, that the impact of the Magical charms of the Atharvaveda is also not avoidable. It has been noted earlier that the Atharvavedic Magical charms are of two kinds auspicious i.e. Śāntika pausṭika and harmful i.e. māraṇa, mohana, cātana etc.

The Bhaiṣajya hymns of the Atharvaveda are concerned with the disease and medicines but here the medicine are herbs, amulets the rakṣā kavaca etc. The herbs are prayed on used in the amulets for the cure of the diseases. Many medicinal herbs viz. Jangida, Laksā, Rajanī, Śyāmā, Ajaśṛṅge, Prśniparne, Kuṣṭha or kuṭṭhu etc. are used to remove various disease like fever, cough, jaundice, scrofula sores, leprosy fracture, bite of snakes bite of other poisonous creatures etc.

It is noteworthy that at that time people believed that diseases are caused not for physical unfitnes or physical inconsistency but due to the influence of the power of the demons i.e. rākṣasa and pisācas which either afflict or torture their victim from outside or inside. Therefore, in many places there is the description of the ways to drive away the demons using different herbs. The herbs or medicinal plants are praised many times as those will serve the cure the disease. In the Atharvaveda the fever is personified as the demon 'takeman'. The Atharvavedic priest prays this demon not to come to one's body and torture him. Good physical also has been prayed to remove fever. Here hot fever is sent away to the cool frog for which may not be enjoyable. The idea of illness by the power of demon is also prevails in Assamese society and is tried to cure by some 'Oja' in the village area.

Again the patient of jaundice was advised to be laid bare so that the rays of the sun fall on his body and he should drink milk of red cows.

It is believed that as the patient of jaundice becomes yellow, so he should be surrounded by red object. This belief fits well with the Hindu system of medicine where he also should see red objects everywhere.

Regarding the disease dropsy (Jolodara), it has been believed that this is inflicted by God Varuna as a punishment of the failure of the moral duty (anṛta). It has been combined with heart disease and kindred maladies and is believed to be cured by following water which is with a touch of homeopathy in present.

Some hymns belong to the Angiras category of the Atharvaveda namely ābīcārikāni and kṛtyāpratiharanāni cover the central ground of abhicāra and yātu vidya. The abhicāra includes sapatnabaddha, vasikarana, vidveṣana, mohana, māraṇa, stambhana, cātana, uccātana etc. These sorcery practices are considered to be of late origin which goes back to indo- Iranian times. These practices are found in case of Assamese people also. We have more examples of witch hunt in Assam.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it reveals at that the magic charms of the Atharvaveda have very much influence in superstitions, beliefs and practice of Assam people. We can quote the remark of Professor M Bloomfield in the regard such: "the Atharvaveda is of unrivalled importance for the history of superstitions, of folk lore and popular practices. Related to character are the so called 'House-books' (Gṛhya- sutras)". For him these hymns were composed as formal treatises at a comparatively late Vedic period, yet they report practices and prayers of great antiquity.

Now the society has much developed. Yet it is not avoid of the practices most of which are considered to be not so good. To make free from the evil aspects all people should be more educated so that they can judge themselves what are good and what are bad. Specially, the women should be well developed and some incidence of violence should be avoided. These magic spells which yields luck and favor should be retained.

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