Whooeaoism: A Concept of Origin of Religion among the Jarawas of Andaman Islands, India

Awdhesh Narayan Sharma

Abstract—The concept and practice of whooeaoism exist among the Jarawas of Andaman Islands of India. The Jarawas are one of the simplest populations of the world and truly represent the hunting and food-gathering stage. The study is conducted among the Jarawas of Kadamtala region, which is situated approximately in the western part of the south and middle Andaman Islands, India. The Jarawa tribe belongs to Negrito race and is one of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups of the Andaman Islands. The present study is based on 45 Jarawas of Kadamtala region. The observations have been conducted through the semi-participant observation method and informal interview method. It has been observed that there are neither any beliefs and practices related to supernatural power nor any concept related to the soul, manasim, demonology, totemism, animatism etc. They only have faith on Whooea, i.e., a small bone of their deceased ancestors and they wear it by the help of a bark band around the neck and shoulder or around the waist, especially during hunting or fishing and food gathering time. The Jarawas either keep the whooea in higher places or hang it and they make sure that it must not touch the earth. The beliefs and practices related to whooea may be designated as Whooeaoism. It may be concluded that in spite of various existing theories related to the origin of religion viz. Animism, Animatism, Manasim and totemism and others, the origin of religion initially developed from the Whooeaoism and then other concepts of religion evolved gradually by the manifestation of human beliefs and assumptions.

Keywords—Andaman Islands, Jarawas, origin, religion, Whooea.

I. INTRODUCTION

The beliefs and practices related to supernatural power are known as religion. There are several theories exist regarding the origin of religion especially in the field of Anthropology viz. animism, animatism or manasim and totemism etc. But still few societies of the globe show absence of the religion or they represent the rudimentary stage of religion. In other words, some of the simple societies practice the elementary stage of religion and such initial stages of religion provide the idea on the origin of religion. The Jarawas are one of the simplest societies of the world and truly represent the hunting and food gathering stage. They practiced the so-called initial stage of religion. The Jarawas do not have any beliefs and practices related to supernatural power or soul, demonology or shamanism etc. The Jarawas believe only on Whooea and practice it. The beliefs and practices related to Whooea may designate as Whooeaoism.

Various scholars have under taken a number of studies on the different aspects of origin of religion; like, Tylor [8] worked on primitive religion and opined that culture should be studied on the basis of artistic and spiritual achievements of civilization as well as technological and moral achievements. He proposed the theory of animism i.e., everything in the world, including air, seas, rivers, lakes and mountains are alive and have spirits. Müller [7] focused on natural religion; according to him the theory of nature worship is based on worship of nature and believed that nature had a physical component which is visible. His theory of nature worship emphasizes on early Vedic Gods. Durkheim [3] worked on the elementary forms of the religion and analyses religion as social phenomena. He stated that religion is the product of human activity, not the divine intervention, thus considered religion as a sui generis. Goode [4] studied religion among the primitives, beliefs and related practices. Awolalu [1] carried out the study on African Traditional Religion and revealed that Africans are still practicing ancient religious beliefs and practices in various forms. These beliefs and practices belong to past but Africans do not consider it as the thing of past, they consider it as the important tool which connects their past with the present and present with the eternity. Joseph [5] focused on evolutionary explanation of the religion. Culotta [2] carried out a study on the origin of religion and tried to explain the arrival of religion in human society and did his work on the theme of evolving God and tried to explain it. King [6] conducted a study in Africa and revealed interesting links to lives and minds of our primate cousins and proposed that primates and paleoanthropology of extinct ancestors could present a new idea of thinking about the origins of religion. The objective of the present attempt is to analyse the beliefs and practices of the Whooeaoism for the validation and establishment that religion originates from the stage of the Whooeaoism. The significance of the study is very remarkable, which indicates that Whooeaoism is the initial stage of the evolution of religion.

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study is conducted among the Jarawas of Kadamtala region of Andaman Islands, India. The Andaman Islands comprised about 204 islands and geographical area of 2508 square miles. From long back, Andaman Islands are indigenously inhabited by Negarito-tribes. The Kadamtala region is situated approximately in the western part of the south and middle Andaman Islands. In fact, the southern geographical region of the island is usually referred to as Kadamtala, but it included many small hamlets even Kadamtala town also. The name of Kadamtala has most probably been derived from the earlier presence of kadam trees (the botanical name of kadam tree is Anthrocephalus...
cadamba). The government of India established the village Kadamtala in the late 1950s. The Jarawas inhabited in a tropical geographical region. This thick and natural forest is known as tribal reserve, which was designated by the Andaman and Nicobar administration. The total geographical area of the reserve (as notified in 1979) is 886 square kilometers. The Jarawa Reserve basically came into the existence due to the reason of their hostility. The outsider population who resides at edge of the reserve forest often encroach and exploit natural resources of the Jarawas habitation.

On the other hand, Jarawas come to the nearby areas to steal the banana crop, coconuts etc. due to scarcity of food in the reserve forest. It has been reported by the localities that the Jarawas had to attack on settlers, but have taken away food items viz. bananas, coconuts and metal articles from households on many occasions. The Jarawas still off and on continue to use nearby geographical areas, which is situated outside the notified area.

Due to the encroachment and exploitation of their habitat, Jarawas are still hostile in nature. However, they have plenty of natural resources in the reserve forest. For convenience, Jarawas classified their geographical area into five categories, i.e., seashore region, locally known as Pilleh, marshy area (tagidh), plain forest area (chanhanap), hilly dense forest (tinon), stream, inlets (wa). They collect aquatic recourses from Pilleh, tagidh and wa areas and terrestrial resources are collected from chanhanap and tinon geographical areas. The wa fulfilled the freshwater requirement. The main territorial recourses are the wild pig, monitor lizard, honey and a wide range of plants, roots, tubers, fruits and shoots etc. The main aquatic recourses are various species of fishes, crabs, shells, mollusces, turtle meat and eggs and other aquatic recourses.

The important thing observed among the Jarawas is that they have no knowledge of making canoes and steering them into deep water. The fishing activities of the Jarawas are confined to shallow coastal areas, creeks and freshwater bodies. They use bows and arrows for fishing purposes. Likewise, they do not hunt the deer, which are found abundantly in their surrounding habitats.

They practice indigenous health practices, including certain portions of specific plants and a certain type of clay for the cure of various ailments. However, recently they are utilizing modern health facilities also.

They come in contact with the outer world in 1998 with the continuous attempt of the Government of India. Still, they represent the hunting and food gathering stage. They do not take any spices, salt, oil etc. in their food intake nor do they use clothes in the natural surroundings of their habitats. They either take meals in raw or boiled or roasted form or use clothes outside of their natural habitats, i.e., during visits to Kadamtala town.

The present study is based on 45 Jarawas of Kadamtala region. The observations have been conducted through the semi-participant observation method and informal interview method.

III. Result

It has been observed that there are neither any beliefs nor practices related to supernatural power nor any concept related to the soul, manaism, demonology, totemism, animatism and others. They just believe and practice the ritual of wearing the whooaa (a small bone of their deceased present or member of the family or band) with medium sized thick bark thread between neck and shoulder or in waist time to time (Figs. 4 & 5), especially during hunting or fishing and food gathering or during the visit in the dense forest etc.

The Jarawas do not practice any religious activities. They only believe in whooeaa ritual. It was observed that Jarawas represent the simplest form of society; they still look like prehistoric man, except preparing arrow heads of iron pieces and using big size of aluminium pots for boiling the meat, fish and tubers etc. In fact, the iron pieces and big aluminium pots are provided by Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti of Andaman administration.

The story of the so-called total ritual of whooaa begins with the death of any parent (father/mother) or senior member of the family/band. The dead body is kept under the shade of a large or big tree and is covered with leaves etc. The death ritual is known as “Thanditoob”. After decomposition of the dead body, they collect a small or flat bone (carpal/metacarpal/clavicle or any small bone) from the skeleton. The chosen or picked bone is known as Ooathato and the bone is known as Hateeutha. The knot of the bark thread is known Habitee and thin untied rope are known as wheathoo. The rounded bark thread is known as Toopilee. The total structure of the bone with bark thread is known as Heebi-toang.

The senior male member of the family wears it around the shoulder and waist during fishing, hunting and their visit to the dense forest. The person who wears the Heebi-toang is known as whooee and the total ritual is also known as whooeaa. They try to keep the Heebi-toang/whooeaa in higher places and they make sure that it should never touch the floor. This is the only value prevailing among them. It may be associated with the concept of purity. They believe that by wearing the Heebi-toang, they get better hunting and fishing material and in good quantity. The Heebi-toang also saves them from various kwan and unknown dangers. It is believed that by wearing the Heebi-toang/whooeaa, it helps them in fishing (to get plenty fishes), hunting, food gathering (to gather a very good amount of food) and saves them from expected or unexpected dangers during their visit to the dense forest.

It is estimated that whooeaa or heetaoee is the earliest form of purity, respect and origin of the so-called unsung prayer. They do not believe in soul. They have specific regards with whooeaa or heetaoee and emotion of purity. They do not perform any belief, practices, sacrifice and rituals. They do not have any concept, idea, imagination or assumption regarding God or super natural power, even they do not have any other values related to God or super natural power except Whooaa. Whooeaism is even not related to any mythological beliefs and practices. They do not practice or perform any other acts other...
than whooea. The only taboo is related with *whooea* or *Heataooe*, that it should not be touched with earth, always be kept high by any means either by wearing on the body or keeping it at higher place.

In nutshell, *Whooeaism* is the initial stage of ancestor worship and cults of the dead. In this sense, religion originated from ancestor worship and cults dead and *Whooeaism* is the origin of so-called ancestor worship. The researcher opined that *whooea* or Whooeaism is the real base of origin of religion. Religion originated from it because Jarawas represent simplest and most natural form of the society.

**IV. CONCLUSION**

The essence of the observation reveals that origin of religion commences from Whooeaism, then slowly and slowly the concept of soul, God, super natural powers, totemism, animatism, manaism, demonology and others evolved from the manifestations of human brain and development of the spiritual values of the society. It may be concluded that the purpose or aim and objective of origin of religion is to fulfil the basic needs of the human being i.e., to get good quantity of food material through various means (food gathering, fishing, hunting and others) and to get rid of fear from various known and unknown dangers or problems related to life and it can be observed even today among all the religions. That’s why the researcher proposed this theory of origin of religion i.e., “Whooeaism”.

**REFERENCES**

