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Evil eye doll (Drishti Bommai) vendors at Tiruchirappalli district

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Abstract

The Evil Eye Doll (Drishti Bommai) vendors at Gandhinagar, Tiruchirappalli district were analyzed to understand their living conditions. The data were collected from forty one respondents (head of the family) through census method. A self prepared interview schedule was used to collect the data from the respondents. It was observed that 68% had debts with an exorbitant interest which was very difficult for them to run their family, 68% were not satisfied with their income, 85% reported that evil eye dolls was no more an attractive object among urban and metropolitan residents, 75% agreed that child marriage was practiced in their community, it was surprising to observe that all female children were not allowed to go to school. Government can provide alternative jobs to support their livelihood. Education and employment alone can improve their quality of life and prevent child marriages in future.

Keywords: evil eye dolls, masks, drishti bommai, vendors.

1. Introduction

Evil Eye Doll vendors are a community people who buy or make their own Evil Eye dolls or Drishti Bommai and sell it at various crowded location to earn their living. These evil eye dolls are believed to ward off evil eye from jealous people. Drishti Bommai is a mask which actually a propitious symbol said to ward off evil. In order to prevent accidents and bad fate, demon masks are hung on construction sites, terraces of houses and multistoried buildings. This ensures that all evil is warded off and misfortunes evaded. These people were formerly involved in Boom Boom Madu they were called as 'boom boom mattukaran'. But this job gradually faded away as the number of performing animals and their owners has dwindled in the last few years due to a lack of patronage. Michael Herzfeld (1981) [2] stated that anthropological approaches to the evil eye have suffered from the analytical inadequacy of the evil eye construct itself. The primary focus is thus semiotic; it is an attempt to show how villagers interpret personal habits and characteristics, including the possession of an allegedly dangerous eye, as signs of the individual's failure to satisfy those membership criteria adequately. On the basis of this ethnographic evidence, it is suggested that the concept of boundary transgression may prove to be a more useful tool of cross-cultural analysis than the generalized stereotype of "the evil eye." (evil eye, witchcraft, moral systems, social boundaries, semiotics, Greece)

Devdutt (2011) [1] reported that the best way to understand the concept of evil eye, is to accept the idea of auras. Every human being has an aura around them. This is known as the subtle body. It is a kind of energy shield emerging from our physical and mental health status. The Hindu (2011) [3] reported that Drishti bommai are painted with fangs, large eyes and moustaches, and displayed outside houses to ward off the evil eye. In Andhra Pradesh, the cheriyal masks are used as decorative items. Only five families that prepare these masks, remain today. The Hindu (2009) [4] stated that a one of the traditions that has silently crept into the culture of Adlibbed is the 'drishti bommai' from Tamil Nadu. The bommai or image in question is the fearsome face of a demon on a squarish metal plate meant to be displayed prominently on the premises where the object that needs protection from 'drishti' or 'evil eye' is located. The fear of evil eye making things go awry has given rise to the tradition of efforts towards warding off the evil eye. Every place has its own traditional methods of going about it. People used to tie five green chillies, a lemon, a few cowries or small shells on the new houses or economic ventures or new vehicles that are to be protected from the bad influence.

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A black spot, usually of kohl, is made on the cheek of a new born baby for the same reason. About two decades back, the gummadi kaya or pumpkin fruit came to be hung from the facades of newly built houses as a measure of warding off the evil eye. This is slowly being replaced by the seemingly easy-to-handle drishti bommai from Tamil Nadu. Since the last five years or so the green face of the demon is being displayed prominently at the entrances of cotton ginning factories. Perhaps the Coimbatore connection of cotton business facilitated the new tradition coming to Adilabad. Most of the previous studies were about evil eye concepts and its impact on individual life. Considering this as a research gap an attempt was made to study about evil eye doll vendors.

2. Objectives

- To analyse the lifestyle, economical aspects, educational aspects of children, child marriage and future plan of the respondents.
- To suggest measures to improve their quality of life.

3. Methods and materials

The study was carried out with the evil eye doll vendors (Drishti bommai) at Gandhinagar, Tiruchirappalli District. All the head of the family (41 respondents) residing in Gandhinagar were included in the study through census method. A self prepared interview schedule was used to collect the data from the respondents.

4. Results

The findings revealed that 34% were in the age group of 25-30 years and same (34%) were in the age group of 35 to 40 years, all the respondents were male, more than half (54%) live as joint family, 95% were from rural background, 66% had 4 to 6 children, 96% did not show any favouritism to any God, 90% had married within their castes, 95% vast majority do not practice dowry system, 63% of the respondents earn Rs 200 to 300 through gambling, 88% had the habit of saving their income and 89% consume alcohol.

Economic Aspects: It was observed that 90% of the respondents purchase dolls from wholesales vendors, 57% of the respondents had 10 to 15 years of experience in selling evil eye dolls (drishti bommai), 54% earn Rs 200 to 400 per day selling Evil eye dolls. The respondents reported that the income were not sufficient to run their family.

All the respondents reported that their wives work as coolies to support their family. They would get good profit only if they sell bigger size dolls and they gain more profit when they sell shell and lemon evil eye dangles, which is popular among truck drivers. For those who sell very less dolls, reported that these dolls were no longer a fast-moving item. They are just kept on display to let any passer-by or customer know that they are just available, 85% of the drishti bommai (dolls) were sold in rural areas. This indicates that superstitious beliefs are still pertaining in rural areas than in urban areas, 85% reported that evil eye dolls was not an attractive object among urban and metropolitan residents, 68% of the respondents were not satisfied with the income, 41% of the respondents reported that they would sell 5 to 10 dolls per day, 90% adopt various tricks to sell their products, 61% have 5 to 10 types of dolls, 90% reported that they did not receive any help from the government, 68% reported that they had debts with exorbitant interest.

Their living conditions were very poor and sometimes they have only one meal a day. All the respondents believed in Drishti or Evil eye affect and they strongly believe that Drishti Bommai is the best way to ward off jealous neighbours, relatives and evil forces.

Educational aspects of children: It was surprising to observe that all the respondents do not allow their female children to school, they are married once they attend puberty, 75% agreed that child marriage were practiced in their community.

Future plan: While analysing the future plan of the respondents It was observed that 63% of the respondents preferred to change their occupation as they were not satisfied with the income.

5. Discussions

- The evil eye dolls (Drishti Bommai) are no more an important object especially in Urban and metropolitan cities. To bring life to these vendors these evil eye dolls or masks can be perceived as a decorative piece at living rooms, garden, restaurants etc., People prefer beautiful and charming things at home today. Aesthetics play the deciding factor maybe it's time to give the Drishti gombe an image makeover and match pace with the changing times.
- Government can provide alternative jobs to support their livelihood including women.
- Education should be provided to these children especially to the girl children.
- NGOs and Government organizations can take initiatives to prevent child marriage. Education and empowerment of girls alone can stop child marriage in the future.
- Boom Boom Mattukaran can be introduced with decent wages in Indian cultural programmes to entertain people so that the traditional practice will be safeguarded among youth and other countries. Or else the one or two Boom Boom Mattukaran families which still exist will become the last and ever forgotten in Indian history.

6. Conclusion

The Evil Eye Doll (Drishti Bommai) Vendors lack basic requirements of life thus the Government and Nongovernmental organization should bring changes in their life through employment opportunities and education to their children. The review on previous studies were mostly related to the beliefs pertaining to evil eye, types, techniques to ward off evil eye and its impacts on human being. But studies about evil eye doll vendors were lacking. Future researchers can explore the problems of these vendors, life satisfaction, quality of life and help to derive measures to uplift their lives which could bring greater impact on their family and children.

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