



Personality, Religious Attitude and Social Conformity in the practice of *Pind Daan*: An overview

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ABSTRACT

Pind daan has great significance amongst the followers of Hinduism in India and abroad. It is one of the most important forms of *daan* whereby the person performing the ritual offers homage to the deceased elders from the family. Research literature depicts that conformity to the social norms and affiliation to a specific religious group play important role in the inclination towards religious practices. The role of personality of an individual has also been found important in this regard. In this article, the researcher intends to explore the underlying psycho-social mechanisms behind the practice of the ritual. Various social, religious, and personality factors underlying the decision behind performing the *pind daan* ritual shall be tapped. The researcher further lays out few important questions which needs to be assessed empirically in the future.

Keywords: Pind Daan, Personality, Religious Attitude, Social Conformity, Religious Practices

Religious rituals can be seen prevailing almost in every corner of the continent. India is bestowed with a rich cultural heritage whereby various spiritual and religious practices are evident. One such practice is *pind daan* in which the child offers his/her last homage to the deceased members of the family. According to *dharmashashtra*, debt towards *pitra* is one of the most important debts on an individual. It is essential to perform this ritual in order to make the ancestors attain *moksha* (salvation) and also in order to attain the blessings of the forefathers. *Pinds* are round-shaped balls made of rice and barley flour, black sesame, and ghee, which are offered to ancestors during *shradh*. According to *Hindu* mythology, doing *pind daan* in Gaya city is considered most auspicious as the soul could be liberated from the agonies of hell and sent directly to heaven (*moksha* under the foot of Lord *Vishnu*).

Recently, *pind daan* is gaining worldwide fame and taking a global picture as even people who are not followers of Hinduism offer *pind daan* to their forefathers. Nowadays people are even performing online *pind daan*. Thus, with this kind of enthusiasm being evident it becomes interesting to study the psycho-social factors which play a crucial role in the dynamics of this ancient ritual. The role of social and cultural values is essentially important in this regard. Social norms govern the behaviour of an individual to a large extent. The religious practices and attitudes are managed predominantly by the social group we belong to. Many religious practices are unconsciously learned and practiced only because of this reason. Thus, examining the role of connectedness with a social group and *pind daan* can be an important dimension that needs to be studied extensively.

In this regard, role of social conformity behaviour is important. Social conformity can be operationally defined as an attribute whereby an individual tries to conform with the social norms so as to fit in the group. Thus, being part of the culture where religious practices like *pind daan* are performed, it will be interesting to study its role in this regard. Furthermore, an individual is composed of several dynamic components like, personality, religious attitude, and other individual factors which may also play an important role in the decisions and behaviour of an individual. Spiritual inclination, social behaviour, religious practices are governed to a large extent by these factors. Thus, it will be interesting to study the importance of individual factors in relation to the act of performing a religious activity like *pind daan*.

Literature suggests is a strong relationship between social dimension and religion. The connection is evident in terms of various social psychologists working in this field. As researched by social psychologists, beliefs and behaviour are adopted by the surrounding group (Sherif, 1936; Asch, 1951). Extensive work can be found on the attribute of social interdependence and feeling of belongingness to a particular group (Marshall, 2002) and how the rituals are framed (Levy & Razin, 2012). In one study the researchers studied the social conformity behaviour and inclination towards religion (Thiruchselvam, Gopi, Kilekwang, Harper, & Gross, 2017). Thiruchselvam *et al.* (2017) found that participants who scored low on social conformity were low on the inclination towards religiosity.

Personality is another important variable that has been extensively studied in relation to religion and religious rituals. 'conscientiousness', 'agreeableness', and 'extraversion' have been found positively associated with religiosity (Khoynezhad, Rajaei, & Sarvarazemy, 2012). On the other hand, 'openness' and 'neuroticism' have been found negatively associated with religiosity (Khoynezhad, Rajaei, & Sarvarazemy, 2012). However, McCullough, Tsang, and Biron (2003) reported a positive significant correlation between religiousness and 'openness'. Studies regarding personality orientation in terms of locus of control (LOC) have also been reported in few related studies. In a study by Amedome & Bedi (2018), a significant interactive effect was found between religiosity and locus of control on the perception of mental illness. Internal LOC was found to mediate the relationship between awareness of God and better psychological health, and external LOC was found to mediate the relationship between instability and poorer psychological health (Ryan & Francis, 2012)

Yet another dimension that is seen in the literature is religiosity and the practice of religious rituals. Religiosity and religious practices have positive effects on the perception of the value of older people

(Leelavanichkul, Chamrathirong, Jampaklay, & Gray, 2017). Religious involvement was found as the predictor for reduced frequency of alcohol use (Thompson, 2017). Religious practices, positive attitudes and coping behaviours were found among hospitalized medically ill older adults and were related to social, psychological, and physical health outcomes (Koenig, 1998). Religious attitude is found to be positively correlated with good psychological health (Habibian, Ahmadi, Vashian, Mortazavi, & Dadkhah-Tehrani, 2015).

In the Indian scenario religion is one topic that is much discussed amongst researchers especially in humanities and social sciences. Several scientific studies in the field of religion have also been done (Verma, 1978). Much work can be seen in the direction of mental health (Joshi & Kumari, 2011; Behere, Das, Yadav & Behere, 2013). Religious belief is also found to be associated with psychological well-being (Joshi, Kumari & Jain, 2008). Religious attitude has been found to have a positive relationship with happiness (Aghili & Kumar, 2008). In a study on the South Indian population, Power (2018) found a positive relationship between collective religious rituals and social cohesion.

Pind daan is important to maintain cultural integrity. Today family structure is in a dynamic phase whereby most families are constantly moving towards nuclear family culture. In this respect, we shall be at a better place in explaining the possible reasons behind breaking families and ways in which the integrity of the families can be maintained. Culture and religion are considered as a constituent element of a healthy society. Every religion has a specific set pattern of practices which the members of that specific religion practice on daily basis. For example, praying, celebrating a specific festival, etc. Religious rituals, in this respect are very crucial as they define the religious integrity. *Pind daan* is a ritual which dates long back. It is one of the best examples of family cohesiveness and feeling of affiliation even to the deceased members of the family. The attribute of belongingness, sense of responsibility and satisfaction with life is enhanced by the practice of *pind daan*.

The ritual itself is very important and holds value at the national economic front. Lots of foreign reserve is generated each year by the *pind daan* activity. So, its promotion and popularity are very essential so as to protect the cultural heritage and economic security. Despite many studies have been done to tap the underlying factors behind religious practices, we can find that scientific interest in the practice of the *pind daan* ritual is very new. In the light of the major research work reviewed, it is evident that very few studies have been reported which have attempted to assess the underlying mechanism involved in performing *pind daan*. The essential element like the role of family relations and bonding needs to be assessed in a better way in the light of the issues.

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