

# A STUDY ON RELIGIOUS COMMUNICATION WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO CHHATH FESTIVAL

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## Abstract:

India is a country of many religions, faiths, festivals and events. Owing to its around 1.2 billion populations, there are mass gathering events being organized at various levels involving large number of people. Chhath festival has a powerful grip and value on the religious structure of Bihar. People have strong belief for this festival. Most of the devotees believe that chhath festival gives them an internal energy and also helps in establishing an essence of spiritual communication among them and connects them with God. Spirituality is a broad concept, considered by some to be indefinable because it means something different for each individual. Many regard spirituality as an internal process concerned with finding purpose and meaning in life and some see it as communication with a higher power, with an inner power, with each other, with the earth or with a universal energetic force. The study is done through survey method in terms of descriptive explanations. The research area of the proposed study is Motihari and its nearby area of Bihar state. A sample of 100 chhath devotees is selected through purposive sampling method.

**Key words :** Chhath festival, spiritual communication, religious identities, beliefs.

## Introduction :

According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, festival is a series of performances of music, plays, films/movies, etc, usually organized in the same place once a year. It can be a series of public events connected with a particular activity, occasion or idea. It is generally organized for entertainment where participants display some of the best human feelings like joy, friendliness toward fellow humans, creativity etc. India, the land of varied cultures and traditions, can also be called the land of festivals and fairs. Owing to its around 1.2 billion populations, there are mass gathering events being organized at various levels involving large number of people. From east to west, north to south, wherever we go, we will surely have at least one festival or a fair every month. Be it cultural or religious, festivals provide opportunities to enjoy and get together. These events or festivals are observed with large number of turnouts, within a short span of time in

a very limited space with limited resources.

Chhath festival is one of such events that see a sudden surge of people coming to Bihar and gather around all the possible water bodies to offer their prayers. Chhath festival is the biggest festival for the people of Bihar, living within Bihar or across the country or world. According to a report, this festival is performed in more than 10 million houses in Bihar. The festival is often referred to as "Mahaparv" and roughly spreads over a period of four days involving many rituals. It is the only festival where no priest is involved and no temple is visited. All prayers and ritual is to be seldom performed by the devotees. This particular festival has a powerful grip and value on the religious structure of Bihar. People have strong belief for this festival. Most of the devotees believe that chhath festival gives them an internal energy and also helps in establishing an essence of spiritual communication among them and connects them with God. Spirituality is

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a broad concept, considered by some to be indefinable because it means something different for each individual. Many regard spirituality as an internal process concerned with finding purpose and meaning in life and some see it as communication with a higher power, with an inner power, with each other, with the earth or with a universal energetic force. Chhath is mainly characterized by riverside rituals in which the Sun God or Surya is worshiped, giving it the name of 'Suryasasthi.' It underpins the ever so scientific belief that the Sun God fulfills every wish of earthlings and so it's our duty to thank the sun with a special prayer for making our planet go round and bestowing living beings with the gift of life. The [ghats or riverbanks](#) throng with devotees as they come to complete their ritual worship or 'arghya' of the sun – both at dawn and dusk. The morning 'arghya' is a prayer for a good harvest, peace and prosperity in the [new year](#) and the evening 'arghya' is an expression of thanks to the benevolence of the Sun God for all that he has bestowed during the year gone by.

The origin of Chhath Festival dates back to Vedic times, as Vedic texts contains rituals associated with the worshipping of Sun. It is also believed that Draupadi, from the epic Mahabharata, used to perform similar rituals. Some people also believed that Chhath Festival was started by Son of Surya, Karna from Mahabharata. Chhath Festival is not only religiously significant, but also has several mental and physical benefits. Physically, the practice of Chhath facilitates in improving the immunity of the devotee. It is also believed that light rays emitted by sun are quite beneficial for the normal maintenance of the body. Being antiseptic in nature, the safe radiations from sun can help in curing fungal and bacterial skin infections. Sunlight received during Chhath provide energy that when get combined with blood streams enhances the performance of white blood cells, which further leads to improving fighting power of blood. Chhath is mainly celebrated by the Bhojpuri and Maithili speaking community apart from the Nepalese Hindus. It assumes a joyous and colorful form as people

dress up in their traditional clothes and gather by rivers and other water bodies to celebrate Chhath. Many devotees take a holy dip at dawn before preparing the ritual offerings or '[Prasad](#),' which mainly comprising 'Thekua,' a hard and crude but tasty wheat-based cake usually cooked on traditional earthen ovens called 'Chulhas.' The divine offerings are placed on circular trays woven out of bamboo strips called 'Dala' or 'soop.' Women adorn new clothes, light lamps and sing devotional folk songs in honor of 'Chhath Maiya' or the [holy river Ganga](#). After sunset, devotees return home to celebrate 'Kosi' when earthen lamps or 'Diyas' are lit in the courtyard of the house and kept beneath a bower of sugarcane sticks. Serious devotees maintain a strict [anhydrous fast](#) of three days. Apart from the all ritual procedure and principles, devotees have developed their own notion of understanding and meaning about this mega festival. They have a strong belief that if they take part in this festival and follow all the steps systematically, their husbands and sons will get long and better life. Devotees also believe that things which they use in this festival have certain values and significance.

#### **Objectives**

The objectives of the study are:

1. To study the significance of Chhath festival among people.
2. To see the perception of people towards & Spiritvalism.
3. To know the beliefs of devotees for Chhath festival

#### **Methodology**

The study is carried out with primary as well as secondary data. The primary data for this study is collected with the help of survey method and by using self made close and open ended questionnaires. Primary data collection is given the highest priority in this study and it draws information directly from the field. The nature of this study is relied on quantitative and qualitative data which is taken from descriptive method.

#### **Sampling**

A sample of 100 *chhath devotees (female*

only) is selected through purposive sampling method. The research area of the proposed study will be Motihari and its nearby area of Bihar state.

**Data analysis and Interpretation**

The Data gathered for this study is organized, coded and analyzed using Statistical Packages for Social Science (SPSS) where Frequency and Percentage were used to present the result of the study.

*Table 1 showing demographic of the respondents.*

SN	Category (s)	20-28	29-37	38-46	47-55	Above 55	
1	Age (in years)	18 (18%)	33 (33%)	21 (21%)	17 (17%)	11 (11%)	
	2	Housewife	41 (41%)	Government employee 19 (19%)		Private employee 28 (28%)	Retired 12 (12%)
3		Education	Primary	23 (23%)	Senior secondary 17 (17%)	Graduate 23 (23%)	Post graduate 21 (21%)
			Secondary	16 (16%)			

In table 1, it is revealed that:

Out of all, maximum number of participants belonged to the age group of 29-37 years (33%) and followed by participants of the age group of 38-46 years (21%). 18% are from 20-28 years age group. 47-55 are 17% and only 11% participants are from the above 55 age group. 41% housewives have participated in this study, followed by 28% who are in private jobs. 19% respondents work as government employees and 12% are retired from various jobs. After analyzing the data, it is found that the ratio of secondary and graduate respondents are equal i.e. 23% each. 21% respondents are post graduates and 17% have studied up to higher secondary. Only 16% respondents have got primary level education.

*Table 2 - Showing the number of years Chhath festival being practiced by respondents*

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	1-5 years	24	24%
2	6-10 years	33	33%
3	11-20 years	27	27%
4	Above 20 years	16	16%
	Total	100	100%

**Chart 1**

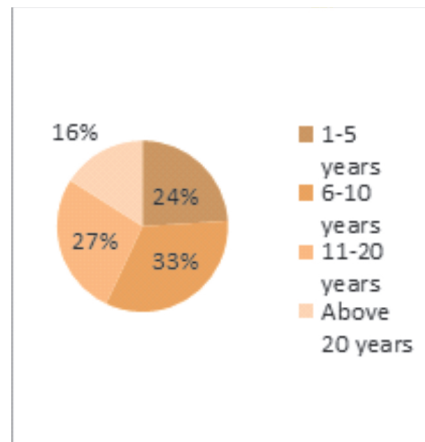
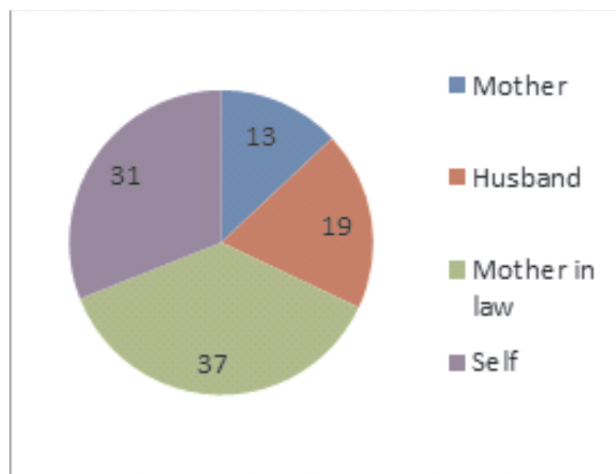


Table 2 exhibits that 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the respondents have been practicing Chhath festival since 6-10 years. Following them are the respondents who have been practicing it since 11-20 years, closely followed by the new practitioners (27% and 24%). Least respondents were the seniors who are practicing the festival from more the 20 years (16%).

*Table- 3 Showing motivator for practicing chhath festival*

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	13	13%
Husband	19	19%
Mother in law	37	37%
Self	31	31%
Total	100	100%

**Chart 2**

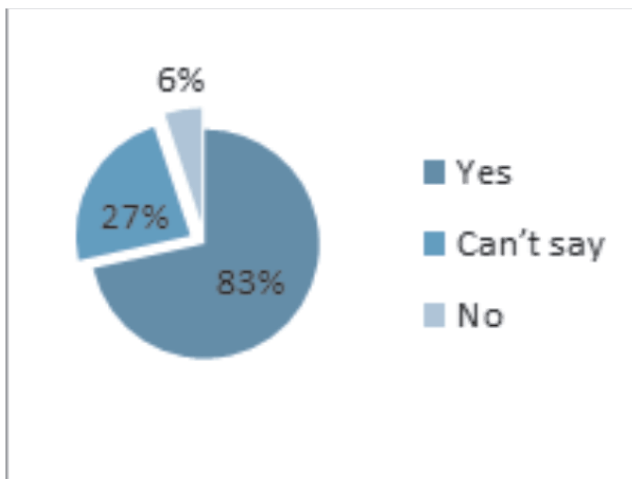


Since Chhath festival is considered as very sacred festival of Bihar and east Uttar Pradesh, out of all 37% devotees said that they are influenced by their mother in law for performing chhath festival. 31% have said they were self motivated for practicing this festival. 19% have said they were influenced by their husbands and only 13% respondents were motivated by mothers.

*Table 4- Showing the belief of devotees towards the ingredients used in Chhath festival and their religiosity*

SN	Response category	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	67	67%
2	Can't say	27	27%
3	No	6	6%
	Total	100	100%

**Chart 3**



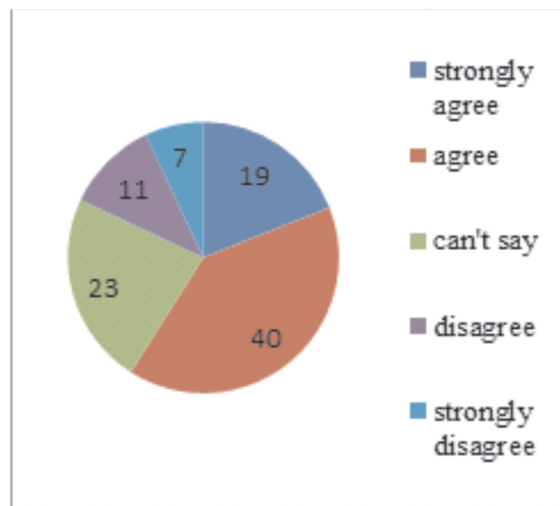
Out of all, 67% respondents believe that the ingredients they use in Chhath festival reflect religiosity. Respondents revealed that all the ingredients are very sacred and they are very conscious about them. 27% respondents are not sure whether it reflects spirituality or not and only 6% respondents have said that the ingredients does not reflects any religiosity.

Out of all, 40% of respondents expressed that Chhath festival is the base of long life of their son's and husband. Devotees have a strong belief

*Table- 5 - Showing the observance of chhath festival fast for long life of husband and son*

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	19	19%
Agree	40	40%
Can't say	23	23%
Disagree	11	11%
Strongly disagree	7	7%
Total	100	100%

**Chart 4**



that by practicing chhath festival the life of their loved ones will increase. 23% respondents are neutral on this topic. 19% respondents have said that they strongly believe on this statement. 11% and 7% respondents said that they don't agree on this statement.

*Table 6 showing the perception of people on commercialization of chhath festival*

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Agree	4	4%
Can't say	13	13%
Disagree	34	34%
Strongly disagree	49	49%
Total	100	100%

Table 6 exhibits that 49% and 34% respondents are not agree with the commercialization of

Table 7 showing the perception of devotees towards religious and spiritual communication

SN	Statement	Yes	Can't say	No
1	Does chhath festival help you in understanding spiritual communication?	83%	11%	06%
2	Is chhath festival a major source of spiritual, religious and mass communication?	79%	12%	9%
3	Do you think that chhath festival is religious means of communication in other parts of India?	64%	22%	14%
4	Do you think that since the past decade chhath festival has become a tool of political communication?	73%	14%	13%
5	Do you feel that politicians are exploiting chhath festival to enhance their political image?	59%	27%	14%

chhath festival. Respondents said that this festival is very sacred for them. 13% respondents are neutral on this statement and only 4% respondents have said that they do not have any problem with this.

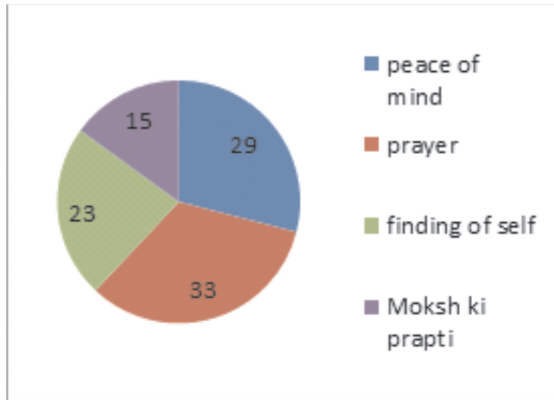
- On the question of understanding religiosity and spirituality, 83% respondents have said that chhath festival has helped them in understanding the essence of spirituality. 11% respondents are neutral on this topic and only 6% respondents are not agreeing with this.
- Out of all, 79% respondents have agreed that chhath festival a major source of spiritual, religious and mass communication in society. 12% are neutral and 9% respondents are not agreeing on this.
- Since chhath is a mega festival and being performed by thousands of people of Bihar and east Uttar Pradesh. Many people who live outside the state practice this festival from other cities. Out of all 64% respondents believe that chhath festival has become religious means of communication in other parts of India and spread the culture of Bihar state in other parts of India. 22% respondents are neutral on this and 14% respondents are not agreeing on this statement.

- 73% respondents think that since the past decade chhath festival has become a tool of political communication. Politicians are using this festival for their own profits. 14% are neutral on this and 13% respondents have said that they don't feel that politicians are using this festival as a tool of political communication.
- The study also revealed that the respondents think that political parties and individuals are using this festival as a tool of creating their own political image in front of society. 59% respondents said that they feel this festival is being used for creating political image now. During the days of festival, all the political parties become active for their image building. 27% respondents are neutral on this statement and only 14% of respondents are not agreeing on this statement. They think that this festival is sacred and it can't be exploited.

Table 8- Showing the perception of spirituality for devotees

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Peace of mind	29	29%
Prayer	33	33%
Finding of self	23	23%
Attainment of Moksh	15	15%
Total	100	100%

**Chart 5**

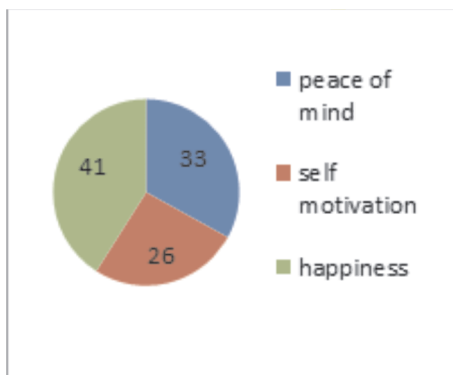


Out of all, 33% of respondents said that by offering prayers they feel spirituality. For 29% respondent's spirituality is peace of mind followed by 23% who takes spirituality as finding their inner self. 15% respondents said that salvation/moksh is spiritual for them.

*Table 9- Showing perception of devotees towards benefits of practicing chhath festival*

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
peace of mind	33	33%
self motivation	26	26%
happiness	41	41%
Total	100	100%

**Chart 6**



Why do people practice chhath festival? On this question, maximum number of respondents said that they practice chhath festival for the happiness of their family. They believe if

they practice chhath festival, it will help their family to live a happy and prosperous life. 33% respondents practice this festival for the peace of mind and 26% respondents feel self motivated after practicing this festival.

*Table 10 showing the perceived means of communication between god and devotees*

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Performing rituals	31	31%
Festival	28	28%
Saint	11	11%
Worship	30	30%
Total	100	100%

Out of all, 31% respondents has talked about performing rituals that it is a medium of communication between devotees and god. 30% respondents feel that if they do worship regularly, they will be connected to god. 28% respondents said festival as a medium of communication between them and god. The study also revealed that 11% of participants feel saints are the medium of communication between them and god.

*Table 11 showing the responses of participants towards chhath festival as a tool of political communication during the past decade*

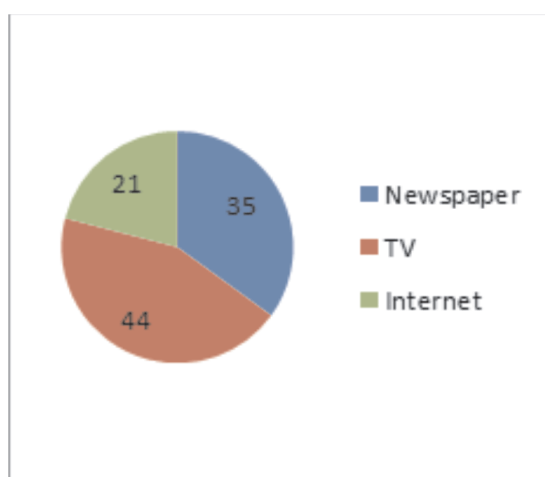
Response Category	Frequency	Percent
strongly agree	42	42%
Agree	19	19%
Can't say	27	27%
Disagree	12	12%
Total	100	100%

42% respondents feel that chhath festival has become a tool of political communication during the past decade. 27% are neutral, 19% are just agreeing on this statement and only 12% respondents are disagreeing on this statement.

Table 12- Showing the media for spreading popularity of chhath festival in other parts of country

Response Category	Frequency	Percent
Newspaper	35	35%
TV	44	44%
Internet	21	21%
Total	100	100%

Chart 7



Since, this festival is very popular in Bihar and east Uttar Pradesh, the popularity of this mega festival is also observed in other parts of country. 44% respondents said that television is playing a major role in popularizing chhath festival in other part of country. 35% have said print media and 21% have given this credit to internet and new media technologies.

#### Findings and Conclusions

Present study deals with religious and spiritual communication with the special reference of chhath festival of Bihar and east Uttar Pradesh. Chhath is a mega festival and is being practiced by thousands of people. There else many researches on religious communication but current study primarily focuses on the role of chhath festival in enhancing the belief of religiosity and spirituality in society.

The major findings of the study are as follows:

One third of the respondents have been practicing Chhath festival since 6-10 years.

Maximum number of devotees said that they are influenced by their mother-in-law for practicing chhath festival.

Since this festival is a mega festival, and considered very sacred, almost all (83%) respondents feel that chhath festival helps them in understanding spirituality.

More than half (67%) of the respondents believe that the ingredients they use in Chhath festival reflect religiosity.

Respondents expressed that Chhath festival is the base of long life of their son's and husband. Devotees have a strong belief that by practicing chhath festival the life of their loved ones will be blessed with longevity.

Respondents have agreed that chhath festival is a major source of spiritual, religious and mass communication in society.

64% respondents believe that chhath festival has become religious means of communication in other parts of India and spread the culture of Bihar state in other parts of India.

Respondents feel that politicians are using this sacred festival for building their political image.

Maximum number of respondents said that they practice chhath festival for the happiness of their family.

31% respondents has talked about performing rituals that it is a medium of communication between devotees and God Almighty.

Almost half (44%) of the respondents said that television is playing a major role in popularizing chhath festival in other part of country.

India is a culturally rich country. The Asian countries of the sub-continent are spiritually high, and practice many pagan rites and rituals. From the perspective of social system theory, religion is a mediator by which the relation

between the individual expressions of the God and beliefs upon Him, and system of meanings of Godly things (sermons, rites and rituals) may be communicated (Davie, 1994; Hoovar and Lundby, 1997). Moving on the same lines, in the current research paper, the notion of religious communication as a system of beliefs, challenges and the complexity of the world, trying to reduce that, transforming the external differentiation into an internal one is tried to be explored.

Here we have studied communication in religious contexts. The sacred festival of *Chhath* was studied, from the point of view of fast observing devotees. Results revealed that most of the devotees observe the fast due to familial pressures. They may not know the spiritual and philosophical aspect behind it, but practice it for longevity of male relatives (sons and husbands) going beyond the polarization between tradition and modernity. This goes with the Peck's (2013) view that religion is explicitly concerned with

both ontological and experimental dimensions of existence, with being and meaning. The social security aspect conquers the reasons among all reasons for fast observing devotees. This is cultural adaptation of religion (Croucher, 2012). In Indian patriarchal society males are the ones who hold the social cord. So, by observing the fast respondents adhere to be safe and secure socially and also economically. Furthermore, in past few years politics has played its role in festivities too. Politicians are using rituals and festivities as their weapons, and the same is reflected in our results. Media has played a vital role in popularizing *chhath* festival in other parts of the country. The findings approaches to offer, with respect to media, as an agent of religious communication, and negotiation of meanings of rituals which will prove valuable to those from other parts of country gathering under the state named India.

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