

## **Social Conflicts and Possession: The Role of Reconciliation Processes Mediated by Local Deities**

**R. S. Pirta and R. S. Ranta**  
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

This paper discusses six case studies involving social conflicts over resource use between villages and on social issues within and between the families from three Tahsils of Shimla District, Himachal Pradesh. These conflicts become further complicated due to the mediation by the institutions of local deities. In some acute cases the affectional ties are severed to appease the soul of the deceased person. However, attempts are made to re-establish the social bonds through various reconciliation strategies adopted by the community in accordance with the little and great traditions. The important part of breaking and making of these affectional bonds is the possession of persons by spirits and deities. Some hypotheses have been proposed to explain this behavioural phenomenon. .

While the work of Kakar (1981; 1982) on traditional socio-psychological and socio-religious systems of psychotherapy in India is seminal one, it is embedded in different layers of depth psychology. He has given heuristic explanations of some folk psychological phenomena. However, there are other clinical psychologists and psychiatrists (Balodhi, 1989; 1991; Hoch, 1977; Satija & Nathawat, 1984; Venkoba Rao, 2002), who provide important insights for psychotherapeutic approaches for well-being of individuals and communities.

At the regional level some literary persons have used psychoanalytic framework to analyse the myths prevalent in Himachal Pradesh (Ranchan, 2001; Ranchan & Justa, 1981). These myths form the core of socio-cultural history of the agropastoral communities in this region. Some times different myths get connected with each other and lead to the construction of social identity. For example, the myth of Hadimba which is the principal goddess

worshipped in Kullu region is connected with the myth of Banasur in Kanaor (Sharma, 1976; Thakur, 1997), which is then associated with the greater tradition, the Pandavas of Mahabharat and Lord Krishan, the chief of Yadavas, which were the pastoralists of Mathura-Brindavan (Voudeville, 1986). The narratives of Singh (2003) on the psycho-religious aspects of the people of Ravi valley of Chamba, the stronghold of Gaddi transhumants, also exemplify the dynamic of the greater tradition of Hindus with the regional deities. It has some similarity with the primeval psychotherapy, but above all it is an objective narration of episodes of psychotherapeutic work of traditional healers, the *chelas* or spokespersons of the local deities. Unlike Kakar, she has kept her narratives free from theoretical framework and this leaves enough scope for analysis and interpretation.

In this paper we report some case studies involving social conflicts where affectional ties

get severed and surface in mental, physical and social well-being problems. However, there are mechanisms for reconciliation of social relations, and re-establishment of affectional systems that enhances well-being of individual and group. But the institutions of local deities mediate these processes. An important study in this area is by Vagrecha and Asthana (2002) on the rural community of Nathdwara tahsil, Udaipur, Rajasthan. These psychologists have named it "Purvaj Syndrome," a distinct form of Mediumistic Trance Behaviour (MTB). The "Purvaj Syndrome" is widespread throughout the Aravali Hill belt and many other parts of state. In this syndrome the trouble, illness or misfortune in the family, "is due to the suffering of a recent family member's soul.

*The 'soul' could not obtain Sadgati, liberation or rebirth due to its deep involvement in the family or family affairs, and now wanders here and there, creating trouble in the family. It wants solace, recognition, importance and institutionalization (Sthapana) if the family wants to get rid of these troubles.*" Some signals of resurgence of the deceased member in the form of a soul or 'Purvaj' narrated by Vagrecha and Asthana are as follows: milk getting sour on recurrent days; mulch cows and buffaloes ceasing to give milk; illness of domestic animals; death of cattle; frequent quarrels in the family; dispute with neighbours; economic hardship or any other trouble; failure of crop; illness or accident in the family; and vogue pains in the body, stomach, legs or head of some family members. These symptoms are also accompanied by dreams and trance states—among the family members. The recurrence of any or all of the above episodes prompts consultation of the priest of the local village deities known as *Bhopa*, who ascertains the possible cause of trouble and gives advice about the remedial measures. The story ends with the formal recognition and institutionalization of the so-called ancestor's soul. The "Purvaj Syndrome" is important as a

special kind of Mediumistic Trance Behaviour (MTB), a culture-bound reaction to stress, for re-establishing group ties, which promote social integration.

We observed a phenomenon in Himachal Pradesh that include three related terms "*Pap*, *Newa* and *Chhua*" having similarity to "Purvaj Syndrome," and find mention in the Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States 1910 (Punjab States Gazetteer Volume VIII). The scenario today about the prevalence of these phenomena is more or less same as it was a century ago, "*It is believed that, unless duly propitiated, the spirit of a deceased person, who has not been accorded the proper rites after death, will haunt the family house and torment the members of it. Such a spirit is termed pap. ... The worship of newa is much the same sort of thing. The circumstances under which this becomes necessary are, for instance when a man dies childless, and his brothers or cousins succeed to his property. The latter are frequently annoyed by the ghost of the deceased appearing to them in their dreams or haunting the house. The inevitable Bhahman is consulted and he directs an image of silver or copper or stone to be made and worshipped in a certain manner on the Amavas.*" (Anonymous, 1910/1995; Page 33) In these cases, sometimes the death occurs during social conflicts within a family or between the two families or villages. Under such circumstances the two parties observe *chhuan*—neither party takes food, which has been touched by the other, until reconciliation has been effected.

Social conflicts are common occurrence among people in villages over property distribution, use of natural resources, and socio-religious issues. Of special importance are the conflicts where a member or members of one party dies due to the events that take place during the conflict. The local people believe that the soul of the deceased remain malcontent and takes revenge from the opposite party, either directly from the persons

involved or from their descendents. The effects appear among the concerned families in the form of psychosomatic disorders. First they consult the *mashania*, a person who is conversant in communicating with the souls of dead. He diagnoses the problem, which largely involves the displeasure of the departed soul. After this diagnosis, they consult the local priest, who knows *shastric* systems (the rituals of greater tradition) and different procedures of worship needed for the invocation, worship and departure of the gods and goddesses including the local deities. It helps in the appeasement process of the departed soul. Thus there are two parts of the traditional clinical practice: the diagnostic and the therapeutic. Each process involves a different person and requires different techniques.

In addition, the important part of the entire process is the involvement of the entire families and communities. The united effort of these members facilitates reconciliation process between the units with strained social relations and who have virtually severed all social relations with each other. Essentially it is the re-establishment of the affectionate relations. However, the precipitation of this social agitation in cognition, affect and body is the challenging problem in mind and body relationship. Although mind and body issue is an old problem, it has attracted the attention of medical scientists in recent years. Now the mutualistic relationship of mind and body is the main paradigm shift in mental health by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2001).

Though the mechanisms that mediate the reciprocal relationships of mind and body are not clear, it is easier to comprehend the effect of the body on the mind, whereas, it is difficult to demonstrate the effect of the mind on the body. It is not mere reporting of psychosomatic problems, as is assumed by clinical psychologists and psychiatrists, since the client is not able to identify his/her mental state. But it is possible that the physical and psychological states occur together and have

common causal factor. Alternatively, the family does not take the psychological symptoms narrated earlier by the person seriously. This may even happen with physical disorders as well. Our attempt at this preliminary stage should be to arrive at the classification of these psychological and physical problems narrated by people and find similarities and differences at the regional level among different communities, and then move at higher levels. It may involve historical, linguistic, mythological, and religious analyses, where the understanding of the way of life of people is imperative.

Our previous work in this area describes the institution of deity from the western Himalayan region and its relationship with general well-being of people (Pirta, 2005; 2006; Ranta & Pirta, 2007). In these studies, the main objective has been to present an argument for a policy decision to develop the traditional institution of deity as a center for community based mental health care. This may help us to evolve an indigenous approach to mental health. However, for a working model based on the institution of deity we need more information on several questions: the indigenous concepts and methods of mental health; the role of the institution of deity in the general well-being of people; and, the relationship of indigenous concepts and methods with the contemporary psychology and psychiatry.

An important characteristic of the group for its survival is to keep intact the affectionate relations among its members (Bowlby, 1969; Harlow & Mears, 1979). Since conflicts among the members are unavoidable, the group has to develop mechanisms of reconciliation to resolve these conflicts, and largely they are conceived within the institution of deity. Thus belief in deity's rule is seen as causal agent in maintenance of order, and many of the mechanisms can be understood according to positive and negative reinforcement, punishment and omission procedures of

learning. After a person or party accepts deity's decision, he is absolved from the assumed annoyance or *dosh* of the deity. But he may have to do something for the appeasement of the deity and on some occasions to satisfy the demands of other good or bad spirits. In case the other party refuses to abide the *kara*, a unilateral sanction is enforced, and the other party or individual may then be liable for further annoyance of deity. Occasionally, the deity suggests *chhuan* or severing of all physical and social relations with the disobeying party, even if one is close kin. The present study reports some case studies that involve breaking of affectional ties, and later the effort of community for social reconciliation through

the institution of deity.

### Study area and methods

The necessary information about social conflicts was collected from the villagers directly through observation and interview (Table 1). The study population included villages in the Kotkhai, Jubbal and Rohroo Tahsils of Shimla District in Himachal Pradesh. These villagers were agro-pastoral communities, but they have now adopted horticulture as main source of livelihood. They are Hindus and have strong faith in the local deities. Literacy is high as compared to many Indian States. The investigators used local dialect for interview and verified the verbal information from other participants and direct observations.

**Table 1 Study area, informants and mode of interview**

Case studies	Study area	Main informants	Interview
Case 1	Naor/Rohroo	Priest: Chet Ram	Oral and Video
Case 2	Naor/Rohroo	Priest: Chet Ram	Oral and Video
Case 3	Daroti/Rohroo	Affected person	Oral and Video
Case 4	Gajandali/Rohroo	Affected person	Oral and Video
Case 5	Darkoti/Kotkhai	Affected descendents	Oral
Case 6	Dakaod/Jubbal	Affected descendents	Oral

### Results

There were two categories of conflicts: between the groups and within the groups. The first kind of conflicts involved the two nearby villages, whereas the second category of conflicts included conflicts among two or more families in a village or within a family.

**Between groups conflicts:** First, we present two case studies of social conflicts between two adjacent villages of the agro-pastoralists in the Naor valley.

**Case 1:** A herder of a Brahman family of the Friukaroti village was pasturing his cattle; the animals entered in the fields of the Thakurs of the Koti village. The Thakurs of Koti

thrashed the herder of the Brahman family. It is customary under such circumstances that the Thakurs should have spoken to the Brahman family whose herder had done the mistake. Feeling insulted, the owner of the cattle herd, decided to approach the Thakur family in the Koti village. Apprehending the negative consequences, he carried poison in his pocket; in the eventuality of altercation he would consume it. When the Thakurs of Koti did not show any sign of reconciliation and became more aggressive, the Brahman consumed the poison he was carrying in his pocket and died on the spot.

Later on the Thakurs of Koti started falling ill; the consultation of *mashania* gave a clue

that the deceased Brahman's soul is leading to the state of affairs in the village. With mutual consultation it was decided that the Thakur of Koti village would worship the deceased Brahman as '*paap*.' Still the people in the surrounding area of Koti believe that the Thakurs of Koti did not obey the prescribed rituals suggested by the priest and were still suffering from the curse of the Brahman whose soul is suffering from the mistreatment of the villagers of Koti.

**Case 2:** There are two villages in the Naor valley, Dhenoti and Khulawan, besides other deities they worship the Goli Nag. The Goli Nag is from the deities of Nag family of Kanaor. His old name was Nag, a local Thakur got jealous of deity's growing reputation as a rain god, and challenged the deity. The Nag deity on an occasion passing by the village of Thakur showed his power by a cloudburst in the field of Thakur. The frustrated Thakur could not tolerate it and fired a shot (*goli*) at the Nag. The Thakur died, but the worship of Nag continued even more vigorously, thereafter the deity came to be known as Goli Nag. Recently the name has been changed to Nageshwar devata.

There was a famous person in this region known as Bazi Bahadur, the Kiladar (head) of Tikar who belonged to Dhenoti village, having enormous influence in the area. Probably he wielded political patronage also, but more significant is that he was a fearsome warrior and always carried a special sword with him. Villagers of Khulawan wanted to get rid of the dominance of Bazi Bahadur and planned a strategy to kill him. In this task, they sought the blessings of their deity Goli Nag, the deity promised to help them. He gave them a small marble to hit the bazi Bahadur at a particular spot. There they would lay ambush on his party, and after this the other villagers would shower stones on the party of Bazi Bahadur. But Goli Nag warned the villagers of Khulawan, that the sword of Bazi Bahadur has special powers, beyond the deity's control. The

villagers of Khulawan befriended the trusted servant of Bazi Bahadur, this servant was from the Khulawan village. This person tied the sword of Bazi Bahadur to his clothes in such a way that when he was attacked, he could not take out his sword. And in this way people of Khulawan killed Bazi Bahadur.

Now the descendents of Bazi Bahadur feel that the soul of Bazi Bahadur is afflicting them since he has asked them to take revenge from the Khulawan village. Villagers of Dhenoti believe that about eleven males of the Badarate family, descendents of Bazi Bahadur, have died due to sudden death on various occasions, and they are under severe psychological pressure. The people of Khulawan and Dhenoti have *chhua* between them since several generations, which was invoked for some time, but is continuing presently. Attempts of reconciliation have not succeeded; the priest Chet Ram believes that the proper procedure was not followed. Until a proper procedure is followed to satisfy the soul of Bazi Bahadur, his *paap* will continue to disturb his descendents, who are not able to take revenge from the villagers of Khulawan.

**Conflicts between families and within the family:** Besides the conflicts between the villages, sometimes individuals within the family engage in a conflict. In these cases the soul of a deceased person afflicts the persons within the family. Though in these cases also the affected persons report various symptoms affecting the body; the treatment sought from the medical persons is not successful. Finally, having no respite from the disease, they look for the traditional institutions of mental health. On the suggestion of the *gurs* of deities, local priests, and the elders in the family and village, finally the *mashania* is sought. We report here two cases of individuals, who have benefited by performing worship of *paap*, the soul of the deceased person. We present here four case studies where the conflicts took place within a family.

**Case 3:** A woman, in her seventies, having majestic personality is married in Daroti village. She is the second wife, the previous wife died leaving behind an adolescent daughter. After her marriage she used to have hysteric attacks; she would fall and become unconscious and had to be carried from fields. She consulted doctors, but for several years there was no relief. Finally, on the suggestion of some people, the *mashania* was called and he suggested that the soul of the deceased wife was affecting her. The deceased lady was worried about her daughter's well-being. The family assured the deceased lady that they would take care of her daughter; even the daughter herself conveyed to her deceased mother that she was perfectly all right with the stepmother or *mausi*. Then, a *paap* of the deceased lady was constructed for worship. Thereafter the lady never had hysteric attacks.

**Case 4:** An adult young man of thirty-five years from Gajandli village; married twice and have three children; still suffering from various stomach problems. His problem started with swelling of different parts of body, which turned into bedsores. He was admitted to hospital and put under medical treatment, but his condition did not improve. On the suggestion of village priest the *mashania* was called. The *mashania* told that the soul of his first wife has returned and she was not happy because her children were not treated well by the second wife. The soul of the deceased wife asked for the assurance from the young man and his wife. After this the *paap* of the deceased wife was worshiped by inviting the priest Chet Ram. In the meantime, the second wife left the young man, thus the problem of the maltreatment of the children of the deceased wife was automatically resolved. Since then, there was visible improvement in the physical condition of the young man, and he was on the verge of complete recovery.

**Case 5:** In rural areas land disputes are common cause of differences among people. One such family feud continued in Darkoti

village over several decades (see Pirta, 2006). A neighbouring family made several attempts to acquire the property of a lady who was the sole member left in the family. Finding herself incapable of safeguarding her possessions, she resorted to the help of the Mahasu, the popular village deity of the region. She recounted the hardships she was going through and requested the deity to intervene and grant her justice. Making the Mahasu as a witness to her hardships, she imposed *chhuan* on the rival family, thereby prohibiting any kind of interaction between the two families. It included nonparticipation of both the families in each other's functions and refraining from eating or drinking anything that has been touched by a member of the rival family.

The *chhuan* continued over a time span of approximately fifty years during which the lady and the individuals of the rival family, who were primarily involved in the dispute had passed away. But the *chhuan* continued to be practiced by their descendents. Finally, in 2003 the two families agreed upon ending the *chhuan*. For this they approached the deity, the Mahasu and both the parties expressed their mutual desire to end the *chhuan*. The *mali* of the Mahsu, under the possession of the deity, recommended the following procedure to do away with the *chhuan* between the two families. Both the parties gave a *Jagara* of the Mahasu in their village, which involved the night worship of the deity in which the whole village was involved and the expenditure was borne by the affected parties. Next the male members of both the families accompanied by some villagers visited the birthplace of Mahasu at Hanol, far away from their village. Here they offered a *bali* or sacrifice of a ram or *khadu* to Mahasu and asked for his blessings. This is how the *chhuan* that had existed over more than five decades was ended and both the families once again resumed cordial relations.

**Case 6:** The concept of '*paap*' is culturally general as well as specific. We provide here a case to illustrate the point from the Dakaod

village in the Jubbal valley (see Pirta, 2005). This case study is based upon the narration of fourth generation of descendents, where the worship of 'paap' was still continuing. In a particular family one of the three brothers developed strain in relations with other members of the family due to non-cooperative nature of his wife for the common good. He was finally given a separate house and a share of land; still his wife did not change her indifferent attitude to work and was neglectful in her chores. For instance, to clean the child she would use wool ('oon'). An elderly neighbor pointed out this to her husband, who was by that time disgusted from his wife's behaviors. The neighbor told him "Oon, soon hai," meaning that the wool is like gold, but his wife was throwing it out after cleaning the fecal matter of the child. This proved the last straw for a highly depressed person to end his life.

But while committing suicide, he might have spoken in the name of deity "here I am ending my life due to rejection from my brothers and also due to the misbehavior of my wife, you are witness to it." Some time later, trouble started in the family among his brothers. The remedy suggested by the local deity was to worship the 'paap' of the deceased. It is a small silver plate cut to resemble the person, and enclosed by pieces of cloth. Since then, four generations have passed and the family has also grown, but the "paap" is still worshipped. If the family members do not worship the "paap" some misery may fall upon the family. Sometimes, allergy of the skin (*oshta*) is associated with such annoyance of the "paap." It is also possible that the local deity takes the "paap" in its fold and along with the deity the "paap" is also worshipped daily. There are two ways of diagnosing as well as suggesting therapeutic measures in association with the "paap." One is known as *bharoon*, where several *malies*, the mediums, go into the state of possession, sound of beating a brass plate (*thali*) accompanies, finally one of the family members or their kin gets possessed by the

"paap" (the deceased person). In the other process, a person with special powers to communicate with the dead persons, the *mashania*, is called for and this person speaks about the problems, desires and feelings of the particular deceased person. They may also suggest some remedial measures.

The above is the emic part of the "paap" concept. The final remedy, however, connects it with the great tradition or etic part. In order to get rid of the curse of the "paap", it is taken to Gaya in Bihar where the last rights of such deceased persons are performed. These latter rituals in the concept of "paap" are associated with the great Hindu tradition and embodied in the concept of the subtle body (*suksma deha* or *linga deha*). Different schools of Indian thought have different views about the constitution of the subtle body (Sinha, 1986). But its most common feature is that although the material elements are not there, it still has attachment (*kama*), and merits and demerits (*karma*). Through the rituals, people satisfy the *vasanas* of the dead person who is still wandering in his *suksma deha*.

Thus the great and the little traditions meet and depart from each other, but there may be an integrated whole of etics and emics. The little traditions are adaptations to local needs, beliefs and environmental conditions. For example, in the higher regions of the Indian Himalaya, from west to east, where Tibetan Buddhism has influenced local traditions, elaborate rituals exist to monitor this intermediate stage of life, from the physical death to entry into another womb (maximum period is 49 days). These rituals are described in *Antarabhav Shrutvimukti* (bar-do tho-dol), written by Acharya Padmasambhava. It has enormous influence on the beliefs of people in this region, keeping this in view the government of Himachal Pradesh has brought out its Hindi translation (Bisht, 1996; several English translations of this Tibetan text are available in the market). The aim is to get rid of the attachment, anxiety and fear of the *chitta*,

so that the state of nirvana or true state of mind is achieved.

### Discussion

The most conspicuous feature of these case studies is the phenomenon of possession or trance, in the therapist (the *mali* or *chela* or the spokesperson of the deity) as well as in the client (or the person affected by the spirits). Both of them undergoes the state of dissociation, a different state of mind, at some point of time or intermittently when they experience problems. Bourguignon's (1984) work on folk healing is still far the most comprehensive in this area. She has noted various forms of trance behaviours among people under stressful situations, which were related to their beliefs.

**Possession or Trance:** Spiritual possession of mali or chela plays central role in healing of vast variety of cases brought to the institution of deity. But the mali pays personal visits to the affected families when invited. Deity possesses him during the course of therapeutic ritual or during the festivals, a unique change occurs in his body and mind. The socio-cognitive explanation of dissociation is getting credence in psychology (Spanos, 1994). Moreover there is suggestion to explore possession as a form of indigenous psychiatry (Crook, 1997). In developing countries, the continuing existence of healing in the institution of deity questions the value of Western psychiatry for a wide range of conditions.

Some kind of social learning and training make a *mali* of the deity perform this task according to the norms of institution. In the beginning possession (*tyari*) takes place during festivals of deity when the atmosphere is charged with devotion. The person may experience very high affective arousal accompanied by seemingly irrelevant motor activities and verbalizations. Content of his memories during these verbalizations is emotional and procedural. But on later occasions the person may go into state of

possession only during social and therapeutic rituals where the aim is to sort out problems. However, as a person gains experience of possession he is socially accepted spokesperson of the deity. He shows control on behaviour and above all his speech is coherent. A common observation is that the *mali* seldom remembers what he has spoken and done during trance. It strengthens our hypothesis of involvement of procedural and associative (emotional type) memories in possession and further research will make it clear whether words spoken by the *mali* are prophetic and require declarative memory also. As far as the mali's own observations and content of the verbalisations are concerned, it has involvement of episodic memory too. Moreover, these are words of deity for the followers who abide by it. At the same time, there is some flexibility for the followers, they can find alternative solutions, which in many cases are limited and may have already been exhausted by the client.

In a socio-ecological study of Ladakhis, Crook (1997) provides an analysis of the phenomenon of possession among young females in that region in the light of several contemporary theories. The prime mover, both in the initiatory illness and in the promotion of the possessed to the status of village oracles, appeared to involve psychological pressure (within gender, family or social relations) requiring an adjustment in an individual's sense of identity. According to Crook (1998) the dissociative possession has remained poorly understood either by the therapists or by the psychologists from various schools in the West. Even though possession was not uncommon in the western medical and psychiatric consulting rooms.

**Developing hypotheses:** We can probe the preceding issue, the inner dimension, by taking a specific example. Crook (1988) has made a distinction that self-consciousness is reification of 'self as agent.' It was a felt concept of self-esteem; based upon own and other's



evaluations. On the other side, Krishnamurti (2000) emphasises the therapeutic aspect of experience approach. Here it is an awareness of the process—seeing, walking or singing, without the idea of self as performer. Some events such as possession by deities also involve some inner or non-terrestrial dimension. However, psychiatrists categorise it as dissociation or multiple personality disorder (MPD). For us it is important to understand the nature of this inner change since the phenomenon of possession is also associated with the deity worship and healing practices all over the India.

Some hypotheses proposed by psychologists to explain possession, dissociation or MPD are as follows.

**Anxiety hypothesis:** Long time back, Willoughby (1935) observed that some phenomena that were of very great importance, have received little attention from experts in psychology. For example, improved mental hygiene due to prayer. He proposed that phenomena such as shamanistic divination, magic and religion were more or less continuous series of defensive efforts of the organism to neutralize or resolve tension or anxiety. A neurophysiological mechanism was proposed underlying the anxiety-tension dimension. Then each behavioural phenomenon was arranged according to intensity of anxiety requiring control. Finally, the prevalence, sources and effects of anxiety in relation to culture-type were discussed to estimate the efficacy and desirability of control methods.

**Evolutionary argument:** The neuropsychologist Gazzaniga (1994) has proposed that there was evidence to suggest that human beings and perhaps some other mammals have an innate 'feeling of control' over their immediate environment. The more one felt control over his environment the more he was likely to feel confident, assertive and capable. On the other hand, the lower the

feeling of control the higher the chances that the person expressed inability, insecurity and helplessness. Although Gazzaniga has not suggested a link between feeling of control and responses such as possession, the general accounts of other investigators suggest that possession is a defense to exert control. Environmental situations that created fear in the minds of the people may strengthen their belief in a divine force (Banerjee & Roy, 1998; Kulhara, Avasthi & Sharma, 2000). Among women in the hills, possession has been suggested as a mechanism to exert control (Cranney, 2001; Shirali, 2001).

**Medical model:** In psychiatry it is common to assume, and there are large number of correlational studies that are based on this model, that MPD is the result of many persistent mental and physical problems (Mulder, Beautrais & Joyce, 1998; Spanos, 1994). These patients were under unusual stress, often physically or sexually abused during childhood. Therefore some psychiatrists considered MPD as a distinct mental disorder resulting from childhood trauma. Thus dissociation or splitting of self or personality was a kind of defensive reaction. These dissociated parts of personality or self, developed into alter identities or multiple personalities. The model has the assumption that, later on, in order to cope up with certain situations the individual manifested his multiple personalities.

**Socio-cultural model:** Using experimental, cross-cultural and historical findings, Spanos (1994) has argued that (a) multiple identities were usefully conceptualised as rule-governed social institutions, (b) neither childhood trauma nor a history of severe psychopathology is necessary for the development or maintenance of multiple identities, and (c) multiple identities were established, legitimated, maintained and altered through social interactions. MPD was thus considered as a socio-historical process. Over the last 30 years, according to Spanos

(1994), North Americans have become familiar with the notion of multiple personality and they were using it as a legitimate way of expressing their failures and frustrations. They have also learned to use multiple selves to attain succour and other rewards. Those persons, who exhibited MPD, actively used available information to create a social impression that was congruent with their perception of situational demands and interpersonal goals that they intended to achieve.

### Conclusion

In India where we find possession as a socially legitimate way of expressing the words of deity or other spirits for over a long period in our history, psychologists have thrown it in to the dustbin of superstitions. Instead of observing and documenting the experiences of the people who undergoes possession in numerous ways, psychologists have turned their faces to the west to explore extrasensory perception and related phenomena (see Rao, 2001). It is however, remarkable to note that a distinguished quantum physicist, who has sensitivity for his culture, once wrote that an effort to eliminate day to day 'conflicts of interest' was the ascription to a deity (Sudarshan, 1983). Sudarshan observed, "*All human mind can do is to act and anticipate in accordance with the divine will: 'Deo Volente'. Causation is restored, but anticipation is permitted only in so far as one tunes oneself to the divine will.*" Keeping this observation in mind we are extending the "native cognitive model" (Pirta, 2003) to explain the phenomenon of possession or dissociation. Broadly, in the model we conceive three processes affective, cognitive (memory) and contextual (socio-cultural) at individual and group level, which determine their responses to environmental situations. These responses, varying on resiliency-vulnerability dimension are important for the maintenance of allostasis at the individual level. Two important mental processes are attachment systems and memory systems. The dissociative response

is conceived here as, as the outcome of allostatic mechanisms.

The interest of empirical scientists in developing 'cognitive science' as 'the science of mind' (Krishna, 1995) is likely to make psychologists sensitive to mental issues that they tend to discard. But it is true that the phenomenal contents of the mental processes explored by computer scientist and the psychologist are likely to differ. Where a psychologist decides to explore the mental states in spirit possession, the computer scientist may try artificial neural networks for consciousness. Yet another impetus to psychologists has come from neurologists. If the continuum of neuroscience spans from material molecules to consciousness (Tandon, 1995), psychologists need not be unnecessarily wary about the phenomena and approaches that are highly subjective. In his presidential address, Sharan (2006) has given a call to psychologists in India to explore the various dimensions of human mind.

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**R. S. Pirta**, PhD, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University,  
Shimla-171 005, Email: rspirta@yahoo.co.in

**R. S. Ranta**, Department of Psychology, Himachal Pradesh University,  
Shimla-171 005,

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