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Contents

❖ प्राचीन भारतीय सभ्यता एवं संस्कृति में विज्ञान का योगदान <i>वीरवल कुमार</i>	1-8
❖ बिहार के जहानाबाद जिला में ग्रामीण सेवा केन्द्रों का क्षेत्रीय प्रतिरूप एक भौगोलिक अध्ययन <i>राकेश पासवान</i>	9-28
❖ कुपोषण जनित बीमारियाँ : समस्या एवं समाधान (बेगूसराय जिला का विशेष अध्ययन) <i>डॉ० पूनम सिन्हा</i>	29-31
❖ Panchayat- A Born Democratic Institution <i>Ajay Kumar</i>	32-42
❖ मन्नू भंडारी के उपन्यासों में नारियों की सामाजिक चेतना <i>कुन्दन कुमार</i>	43-53
❖ वेदों में वैश्विक शान्ति एवं कल्याण की अवधारणा <i>डॉ० विद्या भारती</i>	54-57
❖ शिवपूजन सहाय का हिंदी को अवदान <i>डॉ० कुमारी शशि</i>	58-64
❖ Financial Performance of Steel Industry in India <i>Dr. Anil Kumar (Nawada)</i>	65-75
❖ रोहतास जनपद में जनसंख्या प्रक्षेपण का संक्षिप्त जनांकिकी अध्ययन <i>डॉ० विवेक कुमार राय</i>	76-83
❖ मित्रो मरजानी : स्त्री के प्रत्यक्ष विद्रोह का प्रतीक <i>सीमा यादव</i>	84-88
❖ राष्ट्रीय अध्यापक शिक्षा परिषद द्वारा संचालित द्विवर्षीय बी०एड० पाठ्यक्रम के प्रति शिक्षकों की अभिवृत्ति का अध्ययन <i>डॉ० नीतू तिवारी जयकिशोर तिवारी</i>	89-95
❖ Preventive Measures of Juvenile Delinquency <i>Dr. Deepika Taterway</i>	96-101
❖ हिन्दी कहानियों में ग्रामीण चेतना के विविध स्वर <i>प्रदीप कुमार साव</i>	102-108

❖	दिनकर की राजनीतिक चेतना के प्रेरक तत्त्व <i>पूजा श्रीवास्तव</i>	109-112
❖	हीनयान सम्प्रदाय में 'निर्वाण' <i>काजल सिंह</i>	113-116
❖	सहानुभूति और स्वानुभूति का प्रश्न <i>डॉ० राधेश्याम प्रजापति</i>	117-126
❖	पूर्वमध्यकाल में नारियों की स्थिति : एक ऐतिहासिक अवलोकन <i>डा. प्रीति सागर</i>	127-129
❖	The Prospects of UK-India Economic Ties: Trade Relation <i>Mustayeez Alam</i>	130-141
❖	Development of Sub-surface Water Resources <i>Pinki Kumari</i>	142-147
❖	اردو صحافت اور اودھ پنچ اخبار کی انفرادیت <i>مریم صبا</i>	148-152
❖	मुगलकाल में समुद्री व्यापार <i>संतोष कुमार</i>	153-155
❖	Comparative study of festivals celebrated in Russia and Northern India (i.e. states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh). <i>Sushma kumari</i>	156-165

Comparative study of festivals celebrated in Russia and Northern India (i.e. states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh).

Sushma kumari

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Abstract:

India and Russia are considered to be the best example of unity in diversity with different ethnic groups celebrating various festivals of different rituals and beliefs. All over India many festivals are celebrated according to their ancestral beliefs and seasonal harvests of crops. These festivals in different regions and among different communities (Hindu, Muslim and Christian) are known by different names and has different way of celebration among ethnic peoples. Few festivals are related to mythology i.e. victory of god and goddesses over devil i.e. triumph of good over evil. When we study about the festivals of Russia and compare with the festivals of northern India (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), we see some common similarities and major differences between these festivals reason being India and Russia follows two different religions, but overall the essence of festivals are same i.e. victory of good over evil, triumph of truth over lie, victory of light over dark. These humanitarian essences join two different cultures and people of different region. In our study we will focus on festivals of northern India (Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) and Russia. We will compare the various festivals and try to find the cultural similarities and differences and categorize the festivals in different groups.

Key words: *diverse, ethnic group, rituals, ancestral beliefs, mythology, humanitarian, cultural similarity.*

India and Russia share very strong bond in field of politics, economics and foreign relations. From the past, India and Russia are considered to be the good friends, both countries have provided assistance, whenever needed during war or during economic crisis. Through this article we will try to build the bridge for understanding the cultures and festivals of both the countries. This article will help Russian natives, (who visit India

for trade, commerce and study or research purpose) and Indians (who are studying Russian as foreign language and people employed in diplomatic relation) to share their intercultural thoughts and practices. In our study we have analysed that from ancient times Indians and Russians have been praying and worshipping pagan deities and till date we worship them and they are sacred in both the societies, but the method of worship and celebrations are different. Also, we came across the similarity that both countries festivals are connected to the harvests at the end of season. And upcoming of new season is celebrated as festival with lots of joy and happiness. India and Russia celebrate their National festivals related to freedom and victory of Nations. India and Russia have very different mythologies, reason being that Russia follow orthodox Christianity and Indians follow Hinduism, Islamism and very few percentage follow Christianity. But at present we can see a very different practise among Russians, they have started following ISKCON (International Society of Krishna Consciousness) culture. Many Russian have started devoting lord Krishna and celebrates festival (Krishnastmi or Janmashtami – the day of birth of lord Krishna) this is a new culture rising in Russia, in India we have various temples under this organisation, who worship lord Krishna. When we see various festivals of India related to mythology then in this regard northern part of India (region of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) is the richest one. Because in the states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh many festivals are celebrated on the basis of community and ethnic mythology. In these regions of northern India (i.e. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), many festivals like: Jitiya, teez, baiduj, chath, anant puja, vishahri puja, Govardhan puja etc. don't have national recognition and there is no official holiday, because these festivals are worshipped and celebrated by very small ethnic groups but it carries great importance for the native people of ethnic group living in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. One of the oldest ethnic festival is Reindeer Herder's festival in Russia. The famous festivals of Russia are: (New year, orthodox Christmas, Maslenitsa festival, Reindeer Herder's festival, Russian orthodox Easter Week, Moscow Golden Mask Festival, Victory Day, St Petersburg White Nights Festival etc.); and the famous festivals of northern part of India (states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh) are:

[(Dussehra or Durga puja, Diwali, Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Basant Panchami or Saraswathi puja, Makarsankranti (lohari), MahaShivratri, Janmashtami) these festivals are celebrated by Hindu community of India; Easter, Christmas day (Christians of India celebrate this festival), (Eid, Muharram: are celebrated by Muslim community of India)]. National festivals which are celebrated all over India with exhilaration and cheerfulness are: (New year, Republic day, Independence Day Gandhi Jayanti), on this vary day all over India there is holiday.

On the basis of our analysis we have categorised the festivals of Russia and India on following groups:

- 1). National Festivals related to war victory or independence.
- 2). Festival based on nature worship
- 3). Festival based on Idol worship
- 4). Festivals of particular ethnic community, groups and region
- 5). Literary festivals** [Hindi Pakhwada Divas in northern India (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) and Golden Mask festival [Russian Theatre Festival, related to all types of arts)].
- 6). Festivals or occasions to commemorate the birth of various eminent personalities of Russia and India.** (birth anniversary of Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Munsii Prem Chand etc...)
- 8). Family gathering** (on occasions like: birth of a new born child (chathi, sataisa, annaprasan), birthday, marriage anniversary, marriage, godbharai (when a lady conceives the baby) and New year).

1). National Festivals.

In India the two major national festivals are celebrated in all parts of India they are: Independence day - it is celebrated by all Indians living in India and outside India on 15th august every year, as on 15 august 1945 our country India got Independence from British Rule; and Republic day, which is celebrated on 26th January every year, because on 26th January 1950, (Our Constitution) came into effect. In Russia, Victory day (i.e. Den Pobedi) is celebrated every year on 9th May. This day is very auspicious day for russians, as on 9th may 1945, Germans along with their troops surrendered before Russia during World War II. On the occasion of these festivals in both the countries parades are conducted by military troops.

2). Festivals based on nature worship.

In Russia, (Maslenitsa) is very famous festival. This is the only Slavic festival, which has holiday entirely in Russia and according, to Slavic Mythology it is Sun festival (i.e. one of the main elements of nature (sun), is worshiped) also many rituals of Slavic Mythology are practised in this festival. In this festival eating of meat is forbidden and (Blini with honey)- is the main food item to be served to guests and other dairy products like cheese and egg are eaten. Entirely one week the festival is celebrated, people go to their relatives and also invite them for dinner and lunch. On the very first day people burn the effigy of Maslenitsa lady and welcome sun i.e. summer season, the season of harvest and cropping. On the last day of Maslenitsa Russians asks for forgiveness to the one, whom anything wrong is done by a person and offer gifts to relatives. Similarly, In India festival (Chath) is the symbol of (lord Sun) and people of northern part India (states of Bihar and UP) on this festival prey to (lord Sun and Ganga river). It is four-day festival, first day is (nahay khayee, i.e. people eat rice and pumpkin), second day is called Kharna, (on this day people, who do prayer keeps the fast and other family members clean and dry wheat under sun, and use the wheat flour to make chapati and kheer from cow milk and rice. These items are served to different deities and Chath maa), third day is called Sandhaya Arg, (in the evening on this day women or men, who has kept fast enter into the bank of Ganga River or pond and holding the plates (Sup, container) with various fruits like coconut, banana, orange, apple, sweets (thekua, made from wheat flour) flowers, deepak and incense sticks are devoted to the (lord Sun and Chath Maa), fourth day is (Subeh arg), on this day people wake up early in the morning and again the same process of prayer is offered and relatives and guests offers milk or water i.e. (arg) to the (lord Sun and Chath Maa). After the prayers (prasad, i.e. fruits, thekua and sweets are distributed to family members and guests. According to mythology this festival celebrated for the wellbeing and prosperity of family members and their success. Thus, we have found that these two festivals of Russia and northern India has one thing in common i.e. worshiping sun. Also, these types of festival connect peoples and bring happiness.

In Russia (white night festival) of St. Petersburg is very famous for celebrating their (near midnight sun), this festival comes in summer. Reason behind this phenomenon is that, St Petersburg is situated around arctic circle. It is celebrated from 12 June to 2nd July, during this period various performances like ballet, opera, dance and competitions are conducted. People enjoy the midnight sun and do bonfire and enjoys with family and friends. No religious myth is attached to this festival.

3). Festivals based on Idol worship

By the introduction of ISKON culture (i.e. worship of Lord Krishna) in Russia, Russians do idol worship of Lord Krishna. In Russia there are various ISKON temples, where idols of Krishna are placed. Festival (Krishnashtmi or janmashthami) is celebrated in India as well as in Russia. It is one day fast without water, food and at 12 o' clock night prayer is offered to lord Krishna, because Lord Krishna was born on this (Amavasya day) at 12 0' clock night. After the prayer the devotee can eat sweet food items. This festival is celebrated every year in Russia and India.

The Christmas festival is celebrated in Russia and India both by the Christians. This festival is celebrated on the eve of birth of (Lord Christ). It is 10-day festival, on 25th December it is celebrated in both countries people visit church with family members offer prayers to idol of Lord Christ and before the cross symbol. On this day people invite guests for special dinner (it includes blini, cake, different sweets, meat, cold drinks etc), decorate x-Mas tree cut cake and offer gifts to each other and one among family members become Santa Clause (the messenger of god) to offer gifts and blessings. Many of the people keep fast on this day for Lord Christ.

In India most of the festivals are the one, in which idol worship is done. For example: Dussehra (Durga puja), Ganesh puja, Kali puja, Vishwakarma puja, Saraswathi puja, Diwali, Janmashtami (Krishnasthami), Shivratri, Laxmi puja etc...

Dussehra is 10-day festival, some people keep fast for 9 days and on 10th day they open the fast. For the ten days prayers are offered to ten different forms of Shakti i.e. (Durga Maa). From the seventh day (Saptami) the fair is organised near Durga Maa Temple and devotees offer prayer to the idol of Durga maa and many stalls, statues and decorations are done for the

travellers and devotees. On the tenth day effigy of Ravana (symbol of evil) is burned by Ram. According to mythology of Hindu, it is considered, that on this very day Lord Ram killed the symbol of evil, i.e. Ravana, who captured the wife of Ram by trickery. After the completion of 10 days worship as per Hindu mythology the idol of Durga is submerged in river or pond water. Similarly, Ganesh puja is one day festival in northern India, but in southern part of India it is celebrated for 10 days as Ganesh Chaturthi, in this festival Idol of lord Ganesh (symbol of prosperity) is worshipped. In the same way other Indian festivals like, Kali puja (idol of goddess Kaali is worshipped, it is said it remove all troubles of devotee); Vishwakarma puja (idol of Vishwakarma lord is worshipped, on this day people clean their vehicles and machinery, As per Hindu mythology he saves person from accidents and death); Sarasvati puja (idol of goddess Sarasvati is worshipped, she is symbol of knowledge and intelligence); Janmashtami (idol of lord Krishna is worshipped); Shivratri (Idol of Shiv and Parvati is worshipped. This festival is celebrated on the eve of marriage ceremony of Lord Shiva and Goddesses Parvati. People keep one full day fast. In various temples of Shiva, the marriage ceremony of god and goddesses are celebrated); Lakshmi puja (idol of goddess Lakshmi (symbol of prosperity, success and well-being) and lord Ganesha is worshipped) are celebrated, these are one day festival and people may or may not keep the fast for prayer. Festival Deepawali (symbol of lights and victory of light over dark), according to Hindu mythology, on this day lord Ram came to Ayodhya after 14 years of vanbas (spent 14 years in the forest), to welcome God Ram entire Ayodhya was decorated with lights and crackers were bursted in his and his wife welcome. Every year this festival is celebrated by north Indian people and people clean their home and surroundings and decorate their home with lights, candles and deepak, family members wear new clothes and prayer is offered to lord Ganesha and goddess Lakshmi. Among Russians easter is a very famous festival and one of the oldest Christian holiday. This festival is celebrated in the honour of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is celebrated on the first Sunday after the full moon. Traditions of this festival include consecration of coloured eggs and cakes and welcome kissing.

4). Festivals of particular ethnic community, groups and region

In Russia, Reindeer Herder's festival is celebrated every year and they have one day official holiday. Villages of nomands in the region of Yamalo-Nenets in the Russian Arctic region celebrates this festival every year. People from all around Russia visit to enjoy this festival. On the eve of this festival various competitions and physical activities are conducted by these people and tourists participate with their family members and friends.

In north India (i.e. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh), many festivals like: Jitiya, Teez, Baiduj, Chath, Anant puja, Vishahri puja, Govardhan puja, Raksha Bandhan, Makarsankranti etc. are celebrated. On these festivals there is no official holiday. Jitiya festival is celebrated in few regions of Bihar (Eastern and western part of Bihar) and Uttar Pradesh (eastern UP). On this day fast is done by mother for the well-being of their children. Festival Teez is celebrated among women of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh for the well being of her husbands and his long life. Women keep entire day fast and in the evening after watching moon and husband simultaneously, they open the fast by drinking water from husband's hand. Festival Bhaiduj is celebrated by sisters for the wellbeing and long life of their brothers. Vishahri puja is also celebrated by few ethnic groups of Bihar, who are called vansaj of lord Shiva, on this day milk and lawa (fried rice) is offered to Lord Naag raj. Festival Govardhan puja is famous in Bihar and UP, people belonging to cow rearing community celebrate this festival. On this day cows are cleaned, bathed and decorated and are given sweets and cereals to eat, because cow is considered sacred animal in Hinduism, as per the Hindu mythology cow is the vahana of lord Krishna. In northern part of India, festival Raksha Bandhan is famous festival, this festival is for brothers and sister. Sisters tie rakhi or sacred thread on the wrist of brothers for his well being and so that brother will protect his sister from troubles. Makarsankranti festival is celebrated in the month of January, this festival symbolises good harvest of crops. People eat curd and rice and sweets on this day after doing prayers to their deities and ask for good harvest every year. Different ethnic groups have different names for this festival like (Lohri, Pongal in south India etc.).

5). Literary festivals [Hindi Pakhwada Divas in northern India (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) and Golden Mask festival [Russian Theatre Festival (for all types of arts)].

In Russia, Golden Mask is a National theatre award, during this festival best nominees in the genres like: drama, dance, opera, singing are awarded. In northern India (Bihar and UP), festival of (Hindi Pakhwada) is celebrated for the upliftment and enhancement of Hindi language in the society. In all government and private schools and colleges, this festival is celebrated for ten-day and various competitions are conducted such as: singing, Hindi story writing, Hindi poem writing and recitation of poem, sketching, painting dancing, quiz, essay, slogan competitions in Hindi language are held and prize distribution is done.

6). Festivals or occasions to commemorate the birth of various eminent personalities of Russia and India.

In India we have national holiday for the festival (Gandhi Jayanti, Mahatma Gandhi is still remembered for his Non-violence Movement and freedom fighter of the nation), it is celebrated all over India on 2nd of October, Gandhi was born on this very day. In India we have more eminent personalities, whose birthday are celebrated for their contribution to society and literary world such as: Bhim Rao Ambedkar, Subhash Chandra Bose, Jawahar Lal Nehru, Munsii Prem Chand, Phaneshwar Nath Renu etc...Likewise in Russia also the birth anniversaries of famous writers, authors, painters and political leaders are celebrated, for example: birth anniversary of Pushkin, Gogol, Dostoevsky etc...

7). Family gathering on occasions like: New year, birthday (chathi, sataisa, annaprasan), marriage anniversary, marriage, godbharai (when a lady conceives the baby).

In both the countries (India and Russia), the New Year festival is celebrated and on this day there is national holiday, on this day people wear new clothes, worship to god for better year ahead and greet their family members, friends and colleague by saying (wish you a very happy year ahead!) or (Nav Varsh ki Shubhkamnayein!) in India and in Russia it is said (Snovim godom!) i.e. Happy new year. People with their family and friends go for picnic in park and enjoy lunch there and at night go

to restaurant or bar to party. Especially youngsters and children enjoy this festival.

In both the countries, the birthday, marriage anniversary celebration is common. On this day birthday boy/ girl cut the cake and celebrate with their family members and friends, either at home or at restaurants. Friends and relatives give birthday gifts and throw surprise parties. Similarly, in Marriage anniversary couples cut cake and enjoys with the family members and friends.

In India, different community have different rituals of marriage, in northern India arrange Marriage is a four phased ceremony: engagement, haldi, mehndi, tying knot (kanya dan): engagement is done before the marriage, on this day ring is exchanged between bride and bridegroom, family of couples and relatives attend the party and special dinner is served. On the day of (Haldi Rasam), married elder relatives and friends apply haldi on the body of bride and bridegroom, and sangeet and dance is performed by family members, and friends. On the (Mehndi Rasam), both Bride and Bridegroom are applied mehndi on their hands and all the family members attend the function to celebrate mehndi and song and dance are performed by bride's family and bridegroom's family. On the day of marriage both couples keep fast, various rituals are performed and the mantras of lord Ganesha are read by priest and the tying of knot is done by father of Bride and seven rounds of (phera) around fire is done by couples. The bridegroom tie (Mangal sutra) around the neck of bride and put vermillion (sindur) (i.e. sacred coloured powder on the top of forehead), according to Hindu mythology married lady should apply vermillion on forehead, as a symbol of well-being for their husbands. On this very day of marriage guests arrive to party with gifts and eat special dinner. Married women go to the house of her husband and a day after tomorrow again a reception party is organised and guests of bridegroom's family and relatives are invited to get introduced with the new bride.

As per Christianity in Russia and Christian families of India both have common rituals for marriage. On the day of marriage ceremony, all family members, relatives and friends are invited to church for the prayer and ring exchange is done between couples on this very day before priest (father of church), sacred words are uttered by the Father of church and couples kiss

each other after several promises. In Islam community, all the ceremonies like, engagement (exchange of ring), haldi and mehndi functions are same as hindu marriage functions, on the day of marriage they don't have concept of mangal sutra, tying knot, and applying vermillion. On day of marriage in muslim community, bride and bridegroom says (Kabool Hai!) three times, after that people congratulate each other and enjoy the feast.

In north Indian family (Bihar and UP), after six day (chatthi) or after twenty-seven days of the birth of a child (sataisa), ceremony is celebrated and guests are invited to give blessings to child. Relatives comes with new clothes and toys for the new born child. Special dinner is served to guests and relatives and everyone celebrates the function. And when the child is about to eat cereals, then festival called (Annaprasan) is celebrated. On this day prayer is offered to (goddess Annapurna) for the well-being of child and good health of child and for the first-time child taste the food items made up of cereals. Relatives and friends come to the function with various gifts for the child and special dinner is served to the guests.

This article will help Indians as well as Russians to know about the various festivals and ceremonies celebrated in India and Russia. Our study will help in developing a strong intercultural relation and intercultural communication between India and Russia.

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