

Possession Trance: A Study of it's Spitiyual and Psychological Dimensions in Kurunthancode Panchayat

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ABSTRACT

Possession trance is a culturally rooted phenomenon commonly observed in rural communities, where it is often interpreted through spiritual beliefs. This study aims to examine the spiritual and psychological dimensions of possession trance in Kurunthancode Panchayat. The study adopts a descriptive research design and uses purposive sampling to collect data from respondents who have experienced possession trance. Data were collected through observation and a self-prepared questionnaire. The findings reveal that possession trance is strongly influenced by cultural and spiritual beliefs. At the same time, psychological factors such as emotional suppression, inferiority feelings, and childhood experiences also contribute to trance episodes. Many respondents reported physical and behavioural changes during trance and a sense of relief after the episode. The study concludes that possession trance is a multidimensional phenomenon involving both spiritual and psychological aspects. A balanced understanding is necessary to provide effective psychosocial support.

Keywords: *Possession trance, Spiritual beliefs, Psychological factors, Dissociation, Rural communities, Cultural practices, Mental health.*

Introduction

Possession trance is an altered state of consciousness in which individuals temporarily lose control over their behavior and feel influenced by a supernatural force such as a spirit or deity. This phenomenon is commonly observed in rural communities and is closely connected with cultural beliefs and religious practices. From a spiritual perspective, possession trance is often seen as a form of divine communication, especially during temple rituals and festivals where such experiences are socially accepted and respected. According to I. M. Lewis (1971), possession trance is a culturally meaningful ritual that reflects social experiences and collective beliefs rather than simply being an abnormal condition.

From a psychological perspective, possession trance is associated with dissociation, which may arise due to stress, trauma, or emotional suppression. Scholars like David Spiegel and Etzel Cardena (1991) suggest that such states are linked to disruptions in normal awareness caused by psychological factors. In rural India, where awareness of mental health is limited, these experiences are often interpreted spiritually rather than clinically. Therefore,

possession trance cannot be understood from a single viewpoint. It is important to consider both cultural and psychological aspects, and this study adopts a bio-psycho-social-cultural approach to better understand its causes and impact.

Objectives

- To identify the demographic profile of the respondents.
- To explore the spiritual and psychological dimensions of possession trance.
- To identify the psychological factors influencing possession trance.
- To understand the perception of respondents regarding spiritual and psychological causes.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive research design to examine the spiritual and psychological dimensions of possession trance in rural communities. The study was conducted in Kurunthancode Panchayat, and the universe consisted of individuals who have experienced possession trance. A total of 51 respondents were selected using purposive sampling, as the researcher specifically chose participants who had relevant experience with the phenomenon. Primary data were collected directly from the respondents using a self-prepared questionnaire, along with observation and field notes to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences. A pre-test was conducted with a small number of respondents to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. The collected data were analyzed using statistical tools such as mean and standard deviation with the help of SPSS software. This methodological approach helped in systematically understanding both the cultural and psychological aspects of possession trance.

Analysis and Interpretation

Distribution of the personal demographic of the respondents

Sl.No	Variables	Value Level	Respondents	
1	Age	17-20	5	9.8%
		21-25	16	31.3%
		26-30	9	17.6%
		30 above	21	41.1%
2	Gender	Female Male	34	66.7%
			17	33.3%
2	Education	Primary	11	21.5%
		Middle secondary	6	11.7%
		Higher secondary degree	2	3.9%
			17	33.3%
			15	29.4%

3	Occupation	Coolie	26	50.9%
		IT	4	7.8%
		Professionals	6	11.7%
		No job	15	29.4%
4	Marital status	Married unmarried	27	52.9%
			24	47.1%
5	Type of family	Nuclear family Joint family	44	86.2%
			7	13.8%

The above table shows the distribution of personal details including age, education, occupation, marital status and type of family of the respondents.

Majority of the respondents (41.1%) were belongs to the age 30 above and age between 21-25 years at which accounts for (31.3%). At the age of 26-30 and below were almost 17.6% and 9.8%. The middleaged people seem to be more affected by possession trance in rural community.

Majority of the respondents 67.7% are female and less half of the respondents 33.3% are male.

This shows that female are mostly affected by trance possession over male respondents.

Majority of the respondents (33.3%) were studied up to higher secondary education and 29.8% of respondents were studied up to degree. About quarter percentage of the respondents 21.5% was studied primary education. The small percentage of the 11.7% was in the group of middle school education.

Majority of the respondents 50.9% were engaged in labour wages (coolie). 29.4% of respondents were unemployed. And 11.7% of the respondents were doing professional work. And small percentage of the respondents 7.8% were doing IT field jobs at home.

Majority of the respondents 52.9% were unmarried. And 47.1% of the respondents were married.

This shows that unmarried women were more affected by trance possession in Kurunthancode Panchayat.

Majority of the respondent 86.2% were belongs to nuclear family. And less half of the percentage 13.8% belongs to joint family. This shows that nuclear family respondents mostly affected by trance possession because emotional availability.

Distribution of dependent variables of the study:

Sl. No	Variables	Category	No. of respondents	Percentage
1	Childhood experience	School experience	41	80.4%
		Strict	30	58.8%

		parenting		
		Inferiority complex	35	68.6%
2	Trance experience	First trance experience	28	54.9%
		Temple experience	38	74.5%
		Memory after trance	32	62.7%
		Control over trance	40	78.4%
3	Society perception	Fake perception	30	58.8%
		Social respect	38	74.5%
		Ghost belief	40	78.4%

The above table presents the distribution of respondents based on different dependent variables such as childhood experience, trance experience, and society perception.

Under childhood experience, it is observed that a majority of respondents (80.4%) reported having a positive school experience. However, 58.8% of respondents experienced strict parenting, and 68.6% reported feelings of inferiority. This indicates that even though many had a generally good childhood, emotional pressures and strict upbringing were also present.

In terms of trance experience, 54.9% of respondents reported that their first experience occurred at a younger age. A large proportion (74.5%) experienced trance in temples, showing a strong connection between trance and religious settings. Additionally, 62.7% of respondents reported having memory after trance, and 78.4% felt they had control over their trance experience. This suggests that trance is not always completely unconscious and may involve some level of awareness.

Regarding society perception, 58.8% of respondents believed that possession trance could be fake, indicating mixed opinions within the community. At the same time, 74.5% reported receiving social respect, and 78.4% believed in the existence of spirits. This shows that despite some skepticism, cultural beliefs and acceptance of possession trance remain strong.

Conclusion

The study shows that possession trance is influenced by both spiritual and psychological factors. A majority of respondents (80.4%) had positive childhood experiences, but many also reported strict parenting (58.8%) and inferiority feelings (68.6%), indicating emotional influences. About 54.9% experienced trance at a younger age, and most occurrences (74.5%) were in temples, showing a strong cultural and religious connection. Many respondents reported memory (62.7%) and control (78.4%) over trance. In terms of social perception, while 58.8% believe possession trance can be fake, a higher percentage reported social respect (74.5%) and belief in spirits (78.4%). Overall, the study concludes that possession trance is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by cultural beliefs, psychological factors, and social influences, and it requires a balanced understanding.

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