

# Gory and Ghoulish Practice among Hakki-Pikki Tribal Community of Karnataka: Offering Animals to the Gods and Spirits

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## Abstract

The land of India witnesses numerous distinct folk rituals and ceremonial practices. Hakki Pikki belongs to a semi-nomadic tribal group that migrates from one place to another for livelihood; their deities also migrate along with them. The community resided in dense jungles for a long time and created its plant and herb based medicine systems. One of the fascinating aspects of the community is its way of life, beliefs, and traditional practices and customs. According to Hakki-Pikkis' traditional belief systems and practices, a deity, spirit, or supernatural being is the stakeholder of the sacred offering during sacrificial ritual ceremonies. The study aims to know about the origins of Hakki Pikki society, way of life, belief systems, social practices, and, chiefly, the practice of Gory and Ghoulish rituals in the community.

**Keywords:** Hakki Pikki; Gory and Ghoulish; Beliefs; Spirit; Invoke; Rituals.

## INTRODUCTION

Civilizations serve as incubators for the development of many cultures, and these have left their cultural essence, ruins, and fragrance through people via folklore for budding

generations to enjoy (Patil and Prabhakar, 2023; Patil, Prabhakar, and Karthik, 2023; Prabhakar, and Patil, 2023).

Ecological configuration continues to influence a society's cultural models (Vidyarthi, 1963). Diverse ethnic groups, communities, and caste groups are used to articulate and represent these cultures and customs.

The world is the habitat for a wide variety of folk customs, traditions, and rituals. These help humans achieve their worldly desires, which depict devotion to the words of nature. Across the globe, an array of distinctive folk customs and rituals thrive, serving as pathways for individuals to pursue their worldly aspirations and illustrating a deep seated reverence for the harmonies of nature.

Animal scarification rituals are common practices carried out worldwide by numerous ethnic groups,

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renowned societies, and local communities. Animal sacrifices are frequently practiced and are deeply ingrained among the indigenous peoples of Afro-American and African faiths (Marie, 2003), along with numerous social groups across the world. The Gadhimai Fair in Nepal traditionally involves animal sacrifice (Prakash, December 2, 2019). Western Maharashtra's sacred groves have an animal scarification custom for female deities (Gadgil and Vartak, 1975).

Kandhen Budhi, god of the Kantamal in the Boudh region of Orissa, and its annual animal scarification rituals (Archived, March 18, 2012; Pasayat, 2009) The religious beliefs of Tabuh Rah in Balinese Hinduism and its scarification customs (Jean *et al.* 2008) The Santal tribal community practices the bird scarification custom of holy offerings to the spirits (Heitzman, 1996). Voodoo (vodou), a folk religion of Haiti, and its animal sacrifice (Kiev, 1962). Animal scarification is now a common practice among many different folk and religious groups as a means of paying homage to the gods and spirits (Supernatural beings).

In India, it is pacified in Hinduism and is primarily associated with the cult of Shaktism (Mukhopadhyay, 2020). It is strongly rooted in local popular or tribal traditions, and in India, these are part of the ancient Vedic religion and are mentioned in scriptures such as the Yajurveda (Arthur, 1989; Arthur and Ralph, 2013; James, 2002). The ritual practice of animal scarification is observed in most of the villages of India, and these are the annual scarification customs practiced during worship ceremonies in honour of powerful and scary forms of deities.

On these occasions, animals are decapitated and their blood is offered (James, 2002). In Sanskrit, it is called Bali, which in its origin means "tribute, offering, or oblation" and includes both vegetable and animal oblations. In Hinduism, it is known as Jhatka Bali (Radhan, 2002; Gopal and Madan, 1990).

*The research paper is structured in the following way:* The first part provides detailed information about the Hakki Pikki community. The second part elaborates on their society, way of life, beliefs, and practices, while the last section of the paper depicts their gory and ghoulish ceremonial ritual practices.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present research paper is primarily based on qualitative data, which utilises both primary and secondary sources of information. The required

primary data was gathered through fieldwork, while the secondary data were obtained from existing published literature on the Hakki-Pikki community. Data for this paper were derived from the folk beliefs of the community residing in the Davanagere district in the state of Karnataka.

To gather detailed information on Hakki-Pikki tribal community ritual practices, traditions, belief systems, and so on, anthropological data collection methods of qualitative research such as quasi-participant observation, unstructured interviews, focus group discussions, case studies, and in-depth interview methods were used. Elucidations of information were also made through collective discussions with elder members of the community to understand the significance of rituals among the community.

### *Ethno History of the Hakki Pikki Community*

Hakki Pikki is a semi-nomadic tribal community that lives in the forested zones of the western and southern regions of the Indian subcontinent, mainly found in the state of Karnataka (Drishti, April 24, 2023; Vajiram and Ravi, April 20, 2023). They migrated from northern India to Karnataka a long time ago, and they have a rich oral history that portrays the origin, history, culture, and social practices of their society. The word Hakki Pikki is derived from the Kannada words Hakki and Pikki, where Hakki stands for "Bird" and "Pikki" stands for the verb "to catch." The community is known as "bird catchers," which is their traditional occupation (MLA, April 21, 2023; Drishti, April 24, 2023; Vajiram and Ravi, April 20, 2023).

The community is known by different names throughout the country, namely Chigaribetegar, Guvvalulu, Kurivikkaran, Longoti Pardhi, Bagri, Melshikari, Nakkala, Gaypardhi, Narikoravar, Kuruvikaran, Narikurava (in Tamil Nadu), Osi Koravai, Pittalollu, Oachikorava, Pittalulu, Waggai, Haranashikari, Pusalollu, Vaghri (in Gujarat), Pashi Pardhi, Pashe Pardi (in Maharashtra), Adavichencher, Guvvalollu, and Shikari (Joshua Project, 2023; MLA, April 21, 2023; Vikhar, April 24, 2023; Deepak and Sindhu, 2017).

According to the Joshua Project (2023), the community's population is 30,200, with 29,000 people residing across various Indian states. These states include Karnataka (14,000), Tamil Nadu (7,800), Andhra Pradesh (5,500), Telangana (1,500), and Puducherry (200), respectively. Additionally, 1,200 people reside outside India, particularly in countries such as Sri Lanka, and they speak Telugu as their mother tongue. Members of this community

mainly speak the Vaagribooli dialect, which is similar to the Gujarati dialect. The Vaagribooli language belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family (MLA, April 21, 2023).

At present, they are living in the deep forests of the southern parts of India and depend on forests for their livelihood. Hence, they speak Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam, which are regional administrative languages (Deepak and Sindhu, 2017). As per the 2011 census of India, the population of the community is about 11,892 (but in 2001 it was 8,414) (MLA, April 21, 2023; Drishti IAS, April 24, 2023; Vikhar, April 24, 2023).

Numerous research studies have reported that they are Kshatriyas, or warrior tribal communities, who had to migrate to southern India after their defeat by the Mughal kings and have an ancestral relationship with the legendary king Rana Pratap Singh (Guruprasad *et al.*, 2015; Drishti IAS, April 24, 2023; Deepak and Sindhu, 2017). After the defeat of King Maharana Pratap Singh of Mewara, the community broke up throughout India (Vikhar, April 24, 2023). Despite its semi-nomadic nature, the community has travelled to different parts of the country in recent decades (MLA, April 21, 2023). It is strongly believed that the community is native to Gujarat and Rajasthan, migrated south of India through Andhra Pradesh, and settled in Karnataka a long time ago (Drishti, April 24, 2023).

The community is mainly concentrated in the Shivamogga, Davanagere, Hassan, Mysuru, Ballari, Tumakuru, Bangalore, Mandya, Chikkaballapur, and Ramanagara districts of Karnataka (Vikhar, April 24, 2023; MLA, April 21, 2023; Deepak and Sindhu, 2017). In the state of Karnataka, the majority of the community resides in rural areas, with a significant population concentrated in Hunsur taluk of Mysore district, where more than 500 of them live in enclosed settlements (Vikhar, April 24, 2023).

Earlier, they inhabited the dense forests of the Indian subcontinent and sustained their livelihood by hunting birds and wild animals. However, they moved out of the jungle after the Indian government implemented forest laws that curtailed their rights over jungle produce. In the 1970s, the Indian government banned the trade in bird hunting, leading to the community's rehabilitation. They were forced to settle wherever land was provided to them and subsequently engaged in various jobs, such as working as wage labourers in nearby agricultural fields and sharpening sickles and knives while travelling around towns (MLA, April 21, 2023).

During the British reign, the community and other similar ethnic groups across the country were classified as criminal tribes in 1871, leading to their marginalization. In post-Independence India, these criminal tribes are known as "Denotified Tribes," and many of them, including the Hakki Pikkis, are designated as scheduled tribes (Vikhar, April 24, 2023).

The Hakki-Pikki and its associated communities observe all Hindu holidays and live according to Hindu lifestyles, customs, and traditions. They predominantly adhere to a matriarchal social structure. The community comprises four clans: Gujrathia, Kaliwala, Panwara, and Mewara (Deepak and Sindhu, 2017). Within these clans, a hierarchical structure exists, with Gujaratia holding the top position and Mewara at the bottom. These clans can be integrated into the caste system observed in traditional Hindu society.

The Hakki-Pikki community practices endogamy and monogamy. Marriages between cousins are preferred, and the customary age of marriage is 22 for men and 18 for women (Drishti, April 24, 2023). They are non-vegetarians, and their diets are not completely isolated from the nomadic way of life. The nomadic lifestyle is influenced, in part, by their dietary practices. During traditional ritual and festival ceremonies, they prepare sweet dishes like Kajjaya and celebrate in their unique way (Deepak and Sindhu, 2017).

The consumption of local arrack (sendi, local sharab, and sarayi) and tobacco items is prevalent among youth and elders in the community (Deepak and Sindhu, 2017; Mann, 1981). These community members rely heavily on forestry for their livelihoods. Primarily living a semi-nomadic tribal lifestyle surrounded by nature, male family members often travel outstation for labour work, trade, and gathering forest products. In some crucial situations, in their absence, the women of the family assume the role of the family head, managing the household and generating income by selling beads, polishing beads, and arranging decorative flowers and vases (Deepak and Sindhu, 2017).

### ***Ethno-medicine (traditional) Practices of the Community***

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This ethnic community, having resided in the dense jungles of the Indian subcontinent for an extended period, has developed its indigenous knowledge system for medicine, utilising locally available medicinal plants and herbal medicines in traditional healing practices. They possess



the expertise to treat ailments and identify them (Drishti, April 24, 2023; MLA, April 21, 2023). The community has preserved and passed on its aboriginal healing and medicinal knowledge over generations by word of mouth.

According to their community beliefs, they are not interested in disclosing the ingredients, preparation methods, healing methods, and procedures of these drugs to anybody other than their community. There is a strong belief that the traditional essence of healing will be lost. Their traditional ethnic medical formulas and medications are in great demand in many countries around the world, so they often go overseas to do business and sell their medications.

They frequently travelled to different parts of the Indian subcontinent to sell their valuable home-made products. Over the past few decades, their enterprising spirit has allowed them to export their products, which include potent plant-based herbal products for hair growth and massage, ointments, medications for colds and coughs, gastritis, and renal calculi (Vikhar, April 24, 2023; Drishti, April 24, 2023). Along with selling items made from plants, spices, home décor, plastic flowers, copper rings, dolls, scrunchies, soft toys, rudraksha beads, expensive stones, and trinkets (Guruprasad *et al.*, 2015; MLA, April 21, 2023; Deepak and Sindhu, 2017; Vikhar, April 24, 2023; Drishti, April 24, 2023).

### Way of Life, Beliefs, and Community Practises

Ceremonies and rituals have become important to every human being since the evolution of cultures across the globe, and they serve a vital role in every community. These serve as a conduit for the fulfilment of people's beliefs in nature (Prabhakar and Gangadhar, 2011). Every Indian cultural group worships gods and spirits for a variety of social reasons, firmly believing that they support them in all of their needs and actions. The origins of global deity and spirit worship and rituals may be traced back to prehistoric human communities. This sacred territory of India's ceremonial practice for supernatural beings began at the locations of the Indus Valley civilization before.

Rituals are important in every community and have taken on a vital role while completing life cycle rituals. Although the Hakki Pikki community at present identifies as Hindu, they have their own unique culture, history, traditions, customs, laws, folklore, deities, and belief systems. They are religious-minded people who have a strong belief in their deities, ancestors, and holy spirits. In the beliefs of the community, these deities and

spirits are associated with several causes, such as conception, childbirth, marriage, health, healing, agricultural wealth, fertility, the protection of animals, fields, and granaries, and some guard the village boundaries. This ritual practice for divine entities in the sanctified land of India started at Indus Valley civilization sites before the pre-Vedic era (Mookerjee 1989).

According to the community folklores, some deities can expel ghosts and demons, protect against snakebites, or heal them (Richard 1983). They strongly believe that these are celestial entities with supernatural powers. They believe in the existence of supernatural beings as guardians and benefactors of humans, and offerings are made to adore and remember them for the good cause and well-being of all in this universe. The priests preside over the rituals, and offerings are made to the ancestors. God and the spirits will descend upon the spiritual master of the community, and they will invoke these spirits to destroy the evil spirits.

### Gory and Ghoulish Practice: A Traditional Ritual of Offering for Divine Entity

Every year, as per the Hindu calendar, that is, in the month of Ashadha or Adi (June 22 to July 22), the Hakki Pikki ethnic group observes Gory and Ghoulish rituals in their community in honour of their clan deities and ancestors. The annual ritual ceremony is conducted by the chief of the Hakki Pikki community, who acts as a master of ceremonies during junctures. He also acts as a spiritual master of the community who presides over the rituals and performs a traditional ritual practice known as gory and ghoulish. He performs these rituals under the influence of alcohol, with the "spirit" of the gods, goddesses, and holy spirits supposedly on him (Michael R. Patrao/Deccan Herald, July 31).

The ceremonial ritual involves assassination and sacrificing animals as an obligation to the divinities. The ritual initially begins with a small knife; the ceremonial chief pokes a hole in the neck of the sacrificing animal. As part of religious and ceremonial rituals, they sacrifice animals like hens, pigs, goats, bulls, etc.

The sacrificed animal and birds will be cooked and eaten together to fulfil their blessing. By doing these kinds of practices, man connects rituals that may contain worship of nature, depict devotion to mother earth, and fulfil the main purposes of achieving their worldly desires. They usually use a goat for this ritual ceremony, and as it struggles

for life, he suckers the blood from it. He is not satisfied and also dabbles in another dangerous ritual: taking a sweet named Kajjaya (Adhirasam) from a deep pan of boiling oil with his bare hands (Michael R. Patrao/Deccan Herald, July 31). After that, the chief distributes it as prasadam, a sacred food blessed by the gods, goddesses, and holy spirits among the tribe's people.

Animals are sacrificed to whom the sacrifices were offered, and this act signifies that all the complications and evil eyes will be gone. The deity is remembered for timely tasks and problem-solving, and Indians honour their forefathers for their contributions to the community. These spirits protect villages from calamities and prosperity, and their anger is believed to bring bad luck.

The villagers take part in the rituals, fairs, ceremonies, and festivals of their divinities, and offerings are made in their names. Villagers pray and beseech a divine being for the fulfilment of their worldly desires. In return, they seek the blessings of the deities through priests and worshippers. They plead to gods, goddesses, and holy spirits for the well-being of the villagers, for the healing of diseases, for childbirth, for children's health, for the welfare of creatures, for the prosperity of agricultural wealth, etc. (Patil and Prabhakar, 2023; Patil, Prabhakar, and Karthik, 2023; Prabhakar, and Patil, 2023).

After the fulfilment of their desires and needs, they offer a silver ring; silver images of the deity, a silver chain, alms, money, and animals are sacrificed as a token of gratitude to the deity. Further, they strongly believe that our household deities are the first to take care of any problems they face in their lives before and after death. The sacrificed animal and birds will be cooked and eaten together to fulfill their blessing. By doing these kinds of practices, man connects rituals that may contain worship of nature, depict devotion to mother earth (panchabhutas) and fulfil the main purposes of achieving their materialistic desires (Patil and Prabhakar, 2023; Patil, Prabhakar, and Karthik, 2023; Prabhakar, and Patil, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

Hakki Pikki belongs to a semi-nomadic tribal group that migrates from one place to another for livelihood; their deities also migrate along with them. This ethnic group is included in the scheduled tribe in both state and central reservation categories to avail government benefits for well-being.

It is observed that the community is socially, economically, politically, and educationally backward, with a very low literacy rate. Currently, they are primarily engaged in manufacturing and selling plant extracts as alternative medicines in India and abroad. They are known to learn several languages, aiding them in bartering at a local level when selling their crafts and low-cost wares. The community resided in dense jungles for a long time and created its plant and herb-based medicine systems. Their traditional medical knowledge is in high demand in several African countries, and they have established a market worldwide with the help of modern technology. One fascinating aspect of the community is its way of life, belief systems, and traditional practices and customs. As per the 'Hakki-Pikkis' traditional beliefs and practices, a god, spirit, or supernatural being is the stakeholder of the sacred offering during sacrificial ritual ceremonies. At this juncture, animals are sacrificed as a token of gratitude.

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**Ethical Issues:** There are no ethical issues involved in this research study. Likewise, there is no direct involvement of humans or animals in the present study. But it is purely based on the way of life, belief systems, and practices of the Hakki Pikki folk society of Davanagere district in the state of Karnataka, India.

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