

Out of the blue

Gods of liquor, cigarettes & beedis

by R. Shankar

Smoking is injurious to health and drinking in large quantities can first get you a pot belly and then knock out your liver. Both together can kick your bucket early on. But try telling this to Khapri, a local god near the port town of Karwar in Karnataka, known for its naval establishment and tourist centres. The god there is so fond of liquor, cigarettes and beedis that he gets them every year in large pegs and packs.



Every year around this time, the temple of Khapri near Karwar is the centre of a colourful jatra where devotees come armed with liquor bottles and perform a 'spirited' abhishek (pouring the liquor over the idol) followed by huff-and-puff aarathis with lighted cigarettes and beedis. All in the belief that such poojas would

bring them good health and fulfil all their wishes. Whether anybody has prayed to the Khapri for kicking these two unhealthy habits is not known, but considering the god's taste, such a prayer may only invite a wrath.

The jatra that takes place at Kodibag near Karwar attracts people from across all religions. Recently, devotees performed an abhisheka with a cocktail of liquor – from Jhony Walker and Chivas Regal to Old Monk and Cleopatra (a local arrack). Soon after the abhishek came the aarathi of cigarettes and beedis.

Devotees believe that performing the abhishek

and aarathis would bring them health, luck and also help them realize their wishes. One may not have heard of a Khapri god. Not surprising though. Some say that the Khapri is not actually a god, but were slaves from Africa brought in by the Portuguese to Goa over 200 years ago. One brave Khapri managed to escape from the camp of the Portuguese and sought refuge in Karwar that was then under British rule. The British rewarded him with the security responsibility of the Kodibag area. On his death, a small band of slaves built a small canopy over his grave which later became a temple of sort. Whether Khapri loved liquor or cigarettes (if there was some form of it 200 years ago) is not known, but people believe that the slave-turned security chief still protects people around the area.

God bless!!

If you thought Khapri is a lonely and unusual god, well, he has company. In Bijapur, located at the other end of north Karnataka, liquor is served as holy water at the Siddappa Mutya temple in Sungathan village. But unlike Khapri, Siddappa has one more strange ritual that, people believe, can bring them health and luck. Young men, drenched to their bones in liquor, carry a palanquin with the idol of Siddappa and literally walk over women.

The women lie in a prostrated pose on the road and the men walk over them. The women say that they felt healthier after the walkover.

God Bless, again!!! ☞



R. Shankar
Editor (South), HEAL India
shankar@heal-india.com