Balhats (Potlatch) Ceremony As A Huge Festive Ceremony

Introduction

Balhats (Potlatch) ceremony is a huge festive ceremony held based on any particular reason includes celebrating sections like dancing, singing and fasting in the name of their birthright and securing the ancestral tradition and values. This essay will explain the Balhats ceremony and its journey in the Nadleh Whut’en first nation territory.

Main body

Balhats (Potlatch) system is a traditional economic system practiced as a gift-giving ceremony or occasion practiced by indigenous people residing in Canada and the US. Nadleh Whut’en first nation is a group of indigenous people in Canada residing near the south of the Arctic Circle where they are known as Inuit. The territory has Northern Athabaskan language and they are a part of the Athapaskan language family. They refer them to be the residence of the area saying that they are 'people who live where salmon return'. The clan system is followed by them in it they are divided into four clans, Lhtseh’yoo (frog), Dunterm’yoo (bear), Lhtsumus’yoo (Owl, bear) and Tsayoo (beaver). Balhats is an opulent ceremony celebrated by lavish and socially stable people to distribute their wealth in the form of useful items like food, blankets and clothes to needy people. (Andrews & Olney, 2007)

Clan system- it is assumed in the indigenous people residing as the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation belongs from a proper clan. The system of clan is matrilineal means clan run from mother side. Rules and regulations are imposed on all the four clans like they are not allowed to marry inside the clan and the title of honour of head in the family is transferred hereditarily in the Balhats system (Fisher, 2012).

Reason to hold Balhats ceremony is related to their day to day affecting factors like Birth, Death, Adoptions, Name transferring, Changing clans, Debt paying, Justice and Dispute resolutions, majorly these Balhats are celebrated in the winter season because they are full of wealth and share their wealth with their neighbours. Potlatch ceremony is held in the common house known as numyam where only rich people were allowed to hold it. Slaves were not assumed to be rich hence they were only allowed to participate as the taker, not as the giver of the wealth. In the ceremony of Potlatch a hierarchical system of the clan was demonstrated (Oates & Grynaviski, 2018). Another reason of celebrating the potlatch system was based on the aging factor as the born of a child ceremony was targeted to give a birth name to the child, after some times family of the child was supposed to hold a potlatch ceremony to distribute the gifts to those who were present in the naming ceremony of their child 3 name-giving and changing potlatch ceremonies are celebrated for a single child. At the time of holding the potlatch ceremony, many traditions are followed in the name of government ad superior order (Beck, 2013). They dance, sing, hold food festivals and also practise fasts as the command given to them by the government.

Balhats system strongly came into practice with the entrance of Europeans into the territories of Canada. The indigenous communities residing prior to the Europeans were afraid and unfamiliar

to the rules and customs of Europeans, hence to save and secure the existence of the clan system indigenous communities if Canada started practising the potlatch ceremonies at large level and usually, this ceremony were held to secure the position and transfer of the hereditary title in the clan system. The ban was seen as a negative impact on the traditional practice saying that Indians are getting attracted to the western culture. The act with the introduction of section 3 in the Indian Act said any person dancing or practising the potlatch festivals will be entitled to punishment (Boyer, Boyer, & Hippler).

As the amendment to the Indian Act (1880), practising the potlatch system was banned and made illegal in Canada in 1884. This system was said illegal because involving useless practice in the name of rules and orders. The ban on the Potlatch was begun in 1885 and remains in practice until 1951 (Fisher, 2012).

Conclusion

In 1951, the ban was removed and indigenous communities were allowed to hold the potlatch ceremonies to sustain their customs and culture followed by their ancestors. Now day’s practice of the potlatch festival has become more frequently practised to claim their birthright and to develop their traditions and beliefs (Newell & Schreiber, 2006). Hence the practice of Balhats ceremony after persistence has become more practised and important to save the traditional beliefs and practice of clan in the Nadleh Whut'en First Nation territories.

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