

Churail – High Theory Podcast (rough transcript)

Hello, my name is Abhishek Avtans. I teach Indic / south Asian languages and linguistics at Leiden university in the Netherlands.

In Hindi/Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali and Marathi *cuṛail* *cuṛel* or *cuḍel* is the ghost of a woman who dies while pregnant, or in childbirth.

It is also imagined as an evil feminine spirit which sits in the shape of a bird on the roof of a house where a woman is pregnant.

The word *churail* is composed of *cūṛā* (topknot) + suffix *ail*. The idea is- *चुड़ैल* *cuṛail* has a long topknot through which they can be controlled. Remember the bizarre episodes of hair braid chopping in various places in India.

There's also a belief that *cuṛail* has her feet set backward, and her breasts hang so low that they can be turned over the shoulders. *Cuṛails* are believed to be experts in witchcraft and are harmful for small children and pregnant women.

Interestingly Hindi *cūṛā* (topknot), Punjabi *cūḍā* (knot of hair); Bengali *cul* (hair of head) etc. are related to Sanskrit *cūḍā* {as in *cūḍākaraṇa* (ceremony of tonsure)} which is ultimately related to a Dravidian source.

There is a Pakistani web series named *Churails* (2020), which was banned briefly in Pakistan. Interestingly In a locality known as Baharia town in Islamabad (Pakistan), a roundabout with a statue of liberty is rather popularly called *Chaudail chowk*.