The Cultural History of the Tribals of the Koraput Region

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Introduction:

The culture of any community is closely associated and assimilated with its history since time immemorial. Further the existence of culture is the base of history. Therefore, the craze to know the way of life of any community requires study and analysis of cultural history of that tribe deeply. If one thinks of cultural history of primitive tribes one must turn towards South Odisha, the hub of tribals. So, this Koraput region, the domain of tribals has become centre of study and research.

Although the tribal population in Odisha has around 25%; their contribution in the development process of the state is outstanding. Their tradition and culture is broad and uncommon. And the cultural history of tribals of this undivided Koraput have special importance all over India. The tribal population consists of 53.74% in the undivided Koraput (now divided into 4 districts Koraput, Rayagada, Nawarangpur and Malkangiri) as per 2001 census operation. The anthropologist study gives an account that there are 62 types of tribes in Odisha. They all live in the above district although their number is so small. As far as the population of a tribe is concerned the Bhumia, Bhatra, Gond, Koya, Paraja, Kondh constitute above one lakh each, while other 26 tribes population is around 1000.

The Bonda and Didayi are considered as rare tribes because of their greatness and typicality of culture. Their domain and sphere of activity is confined to the dense forests of Eastern Ghats and on the mountainous river. This aboriginal tribe is divided into three communities’ viz. Munda (Austro-Asiatic), Dravidian and Indo-Asian. They have their culture of own which is linked to their ambiance and language. Literarily the definition of their culture is so broad that we appreciate and accept every aspect of their lifestyle which is associated with culture. Let us have a glance at their culture from different perspective such as social and religious milieu, village system, folk literature, dance and song, fairs and festivals, way of life and folk art.

Socio-cultural Life of the Tribals:

Normally the primitive tribes express the cultural identity through their custom, tradition, festivals, dress and ornaments. A certain name is coined especially for the identity of a tribe e.g., the Bonda, the Koya, the Didayi, the Paraja, the Kondh, the Saura etc. One can have a clear view from this name. Every tribe has a certain place of origin and its spreading they have their own oral and written language for interaction of each other. The matrimonial alliance of a tribe is arranged in its own community as they oppose inter
community marriage. Each tribe has its own social bond, administration, tradition and judicial system. All these play a key role in maintaining law, youth dormitory, worship and enchanting, economic policy, collection of food, hunting, shifting agriculture, and handicraft and so on for their lively subsistence. Indeed all these things are a case study of cultural history of tribes for the new generation of writer.

**Salient Features of Tribal Socio-Cultural Life:**

1. They live in relative isolation usually in hills and forests in interior area.
2. Their social identity is defined and redefined from time to time.
3. They constitute simple societies which are socio-culturally homogeneous.
4. They have their written and oral language or dialect for communication.
5. A particular tribal community is endogamous and is divided into a number of exogamous divisions.
6. They have low access to education and health care services.
7. They possess their own socio-cultural history which may be shallow and un-written.
8. They have their rich cultural tradition and heritage although their social organization is simple.

**OTHER CULTURAL MILIEU**

**A. Traditional Village Council**

The village council is considered to be the cultural centre of tribal village. It comprises various posts and their duties to perform. The head of the village council is the head of the village. The head of a village is normally selected as per seniority and talent. His commitment, love and affection towards villagers are also taken into consideration for selection as head. Almost all the tribe calls the head as “NAIKO”. Assistance is chosen to help the head is called as “CHALLAN”. The duty of convening a meeting is rested on the shoulder of “BARIK”. The priest of the village is regarded as “DEHURI”. Apart from that the posts of the council of village of all the tribe is different from each other. For example the head of the Koya village is “WARDE”, the Paraja’s the “MUDULI”, and the Sauras’s the “GOMANGO” and so on. The religious head of the Kondh community is the “JANI” who is assisted by “BIS-MAJHI” during the time of meeting. These are the aspects which are the main source of cultural wave of tribes that provide a lot of account regarding their culture.

**B. Youth Dormitories**

The youth dormitories (Dhangda, Dhangdi Basa) play a major role for keeping the tribal culture and tradition afloat. And most of the tribe has such institution for unmarried youths. The boys and the girls spend nights there in separate room in the dormitories. An open space is there opposite to the dormitory which is meant for practising dance. It would not be wrong to say it as school for improvement of dance. This dormitory has another importance particularly choosing of life partner by the youth. It is indeed a democratic institution for promotion and carrying culture of tribes and we have to recognize the role of dormitory in this regard is uncommon.

**C. Ceremony of Tribals :**

Ceremonies are inseparable part of the way of life of tribals. There are two types of ceremony so far as the observation at family level and community level is concerned. The family level ceremonies mainly include Newly Born Babies, Marriage and Death. These ceremonies have specific custom and convention, for instance the
Naming Ceremony of the newly born baby which is taken place on 21st day after birth. There is also provision of prayer and worship to the forefather for blessings. This ceremony also includes the drawing of “Muruja’ and “Jhoti” in tantric design. Similarly during the time of death rites there is also the rule of drawing tantric design and offering of non steam rice, wine, cocks etc. for pleasing the spirits of the deads. These ceremonies are conducted in the presence and guidance of Jani, Sisa and Gurumai.

D. Culture Associated with Religion:

All tribes are the worshipper of nature as they felt the presence of divinity in nature. Indeed, this is important from religious ground. They give more emphasis on three elements of nature. They worship the soil as mother earth, sun as religious god and water as the life giver. But the head decides the observation of different festivals on considering the religious culture. So it is noticed that there is some uniformity and diversity of observing festivals. The aim and objective of religious objects are as follow: (a) prayer for blessing (b) system of improved bread earning (c) worshipping and remembering of forefathers (d) welfare of world (e) recreation (f) environment protection and (g) integration among communities.

The religious practices go on in tribal culture all over the year, e.g. construction of home, shifting cultivation, sowing of seeds, setting of wooden pole in the ground, hunting and worshipping. These practices are the main perspectives that keep alive the religious culture till now.

E. Song, Dance and Festivals:

Other aspects that associate with tribal culture are folk song, folk dance, fairs and festivals which cannot be ignored or side-tracked. Although these are source of pomp and gaiety, still these are collectively reflecting tribal culture. They prefer to perform song and dance in group rather than pairs or single. They play traditional tribal musical instruments such as drum, horn, tamak, Dungdunga etc. The expression of the parts of the body like eye, head, waist and hand attract others and especially at the time of dance which is parallel to the tune of musical instruments. Usually these types of song and dance are organized at the time of fair and festivals. The main festivals include Chaiti Parab, Pus Parab, Sim (bean) Parab, Aam (mango) Parab, Bhairabi Jatra and marriage ceremony. They put on their traditional dresses and ornaments well on these occasions so as to sing and dance in groups. The Pus Parab and Chaiti Parab of almost all tribes of Koraput region is recognized as main festivals and Dhemsa, the popular dance is regarded as the best in the country. Their important festivals and dance are discussed below.

1. Chaiti Parab

The whole month of Chaitra is celebrated as a holiday by the tribals of this region. The month is spent in feasting, nighlong dancing and singing and in expeditions in to the forests together. Mohwa blossom during which it is said, free love is the rule among the unmarried. Men and boys go into the forest for hunting. With depletion of forest and restrictions imposed on it, the scope of hunting has declined in course of time.

2. Pus Parab

Pus Parab is observed in the month of Pausha in which men, women and children participate. After the rituals and sacrifices are made in front of a heap of wood is lit and people sing and dance encircling the fire. The Bonda, Koya, Paraja, Didayi, Bhatra, Matia etc. observe this festival with much pomp and ceremony.
3. Dhemsa Dance

A popular dance form like Dhemsa which is normally performed in every village of Koraput is really fascinating. This is such a group dance which consists both men and women of all ages. They perform the group dance knitting fingers of one another and with the tunes of the instrument. Although all tribes perform the Dhemsa only the Koya’s style and expression is eye-catching. The Koya male put on the horns of the bison during the dance. The beautiful song, dance, musical instruments associated with these performances by the tribals and their colourful costumes and ornaments are the greatest attractions for the viewers.

4. Art and Crafts

The artistic skill of the tribal people is not only manifested in their dance and music, but also in their dress and ornaments, wall paintings, wood carving and toy making etc. But through art and craft their self image and aesthetic sensibility are visualized. The Sauras, the Koyas, the Kondhas decorate their houses with motifs of flowers, birds, and geometrical designs. The Saura paintings are intimately related to religious beliefs and drawn in order to appease demigods and spirits. The wood carving of Kondhas, metal work by Bathudis is really things of attraction to outsiders.

The Bonda and Gadaba have their own looms by which they weave cloth for their own use. The Bonda women though are considered to be very primitive, look majestic when they wear head bands of grass, necklace of coloured beads and girdles made of brass on their bodies. All these are expressions of their artistic quality and aesthetic sense.

Conclusion :

Literally, the tribal culture is so much liberal and simple. A deep observation, study and analysis regarding tribal culture will clarify our understanding. On account of these above reasons the tribals of these parts are considered as simple, truthful and freedom-oriented. Although modernization and the process of globalization has already entered into the hills of Koraput region and changing their life style; yet their costumes, tradition associated with cultural history will remain evergreen in the world. Now it is the need of the hour to study and highlight the rich culture of these South Odishan tribes of Koraput region, though they are unaware of their contribution for widening and enriching the scope of global culture. In the words of Verrier Elwin, the notable scholar of tribal studies in India “Let us teach them that their (tribal’s) own culture, their own arts are the precious things that we respect and need. When they feel that they can make a contribution to their country, they will feel part of it. It is therefore, an important aspect of their integration”.

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