

Cultural Heritage of Undivided Koraput District of Odisha

(Origin and Growth of *Janajati* Culture)

Er. Nirakar Mahalik

The undivided Koraput district with headquarters at present town of Koraput was chosen by the British in 1870 AD for better health prospects. On 1st April 1936 Odisha became a separate province. Koraput was formed a separate district with headquarters at Koraput with two sub-divisions namely Rayagada and Koraput, from 1941 a new sub-division called Nabarangapur sub-division, consisting of the *taluk* of Malkangiri, Jeypore and Nabarangapur was created and above three sub-divisions continued till 1962. A separate Malkangiri sub-division was created during 1962 and civil sub-division of Jeypore was created on 1st January 1966. The erstwhile Koraput district was bifurcated into four separate districts at present namely 1. Koraput 2. Nabarangapur 3. Rayagada 4. Malkangiri. Area of undivided district of Koraput is 18063.67 sq. km. It was a largest district during the creation of Odisha Province.

Koraput district comprised the ex-Jeypore estates in early medieval times was known as Nandapur Kingdom under Silavansi king and subsequently shifted its capital from Nandapur to Jeypore during Vira Vikram Dev of solar dynasty in 17th century A.D.

The tribals who constitute the bulk of population of the district speaking either the Austric or Dravidian language live like a short of

stone age people. The Marias, Gadabas and Bondas are the people who are affected by such cultural contacts. They still practise the primitive axe and hoe cultivation, pottery and basket making, spinning and weaving and erecting funerary, religious menhirs from the past.

General people of the district follow their own tradition and culture. They are humble and contented. Their family ties were fostered by old age customs and they had supreme faith in an all powerful leader. This supreme faith of theirs in a superior being manifested itself in their love for a tree, a stone, an animal, a hill, a river, a forest or even an devine idea. Indeed Koraput is a museum of old and new in nature and human endeavour.

Culture is the characteristic way of life lived by people under the influence of certain fundamental values in the form of art, idiom and literature, institution and customs, refinement of conduct and the art of living as a whole are but the expression of such a way.

To the flowering of such a culture, the primitive tribes are isolated from non tribal or other tribes and settled in Koraput region. They maintain a language of their own and have manners, customs and practices, dresses which are specifically distinctive of them. It is said that the Godabas owes its name to the fact that its

ancestors emigrated from the banks of the Godavari river and settled at Nandapur, the former capital of the Rajas of Jeypore. The Godabas have a language of their own. At present they are inhabitants of Nandapur, Patangi, Semiliguda, Machhkund, Kotapad and Kodinga police station area.

The Godabas are clearly divided into three classes – Bonda Paraja, Bonda Gadaba and the Perenga Godaba. The cultural heritage of Gadabas and Bondas are similar and one can hardly doubt that they are both representative of ancient Austro-Asiatic culture. The Bondas are found to be linguistic and having cultural affinities with the neighbouring communities like the Gadaba, the Perenga and the Didiyi. The Bondas known among themselves a ‘Remo’ (men) are a small tribe of the type now often called Austro-Asiatic. Their country is the wild and mountainous region called Bonda Hills, North-West of the Machhkund river and here they have preserved themselves comparatively unaffected by the march of civilization. The Bondas are regarded as one of the most savage and primitive tribes of Odisha, with the scanty and strange body dress-in general and the clear shaved head as well as heavy masses of colourful necklaces in case of females. They stand in sharp contrast to their neighbouring tribes. They speak an Austro-Asiatic language belonging to Mundari group. At present the Bondas are inhabiting in Mudulipada area in Khairput Block of Malkangiri.

The Perengas are now settled in Nandapur area of Koraput district. They are hill cultivators found in Koraput, Dasmantpur, Laxmipur, Semiliguda, Patangi, Nandapur, Tentuli Khunti, Borigumma, Umakote, Jharigaon and Bissam Katak Police Station area.

The Koyas are a tribe inhabiting in the hill in the North of the Godavari river and are also found in the Malkangiri area. They are

belonging to the great Gond family. It is said that they were driven from Baster area before two hundred years ago. But they are spread over mainly Rayagada and Bissam Katak Tehasil area. Other tribes are Marias, Khonds, Bhumias, Parojas, Gonds, Didayis, Sauras, Jatapus, Holuvas, Pentias, Bhottadas and Bagatas live here with complete harmony with nature.

The rich cultural heritage of the tribals has also undergone a major change during the period. The art, dance and songs, religious beliefs, symbolic relation with forest and the like are gradually dying town due to so called development activities. Their traditional social institution like dormitory which was responsible for the development of a healthy society through the spirit of co-operation and mutual help is also rapidly fading away.

However the cultural heritage of these tribals are the megaliths found in the areas of Bondas, Gadabas and Ronas. Prominent among the various types of megalith monuments erected by the tribes are the stone circles which is known as ‘Sodar’ by Gadabas, the Perengas and the Ronas and ‘Sindibar’ by Bondas which is a megalithic platform constructed either in the centre or in one end of the village. The difference between Sodar and Sindibar is that the former is erected in memory of the dead whereas the latter is considered to be the seat of some deity like the Bursung, the Earth Goddess. These stone circles are built by irregular collection of stone slabs and upright menhirs and as the general sitting places for the villagers. Only on two occasions the Gadabas add stones to their Sindibars (horse shoe shaped) in the Gurrur sung ceremony in the month of Deoli (Oct-Nov.) and Gia feast in the month of Chaita (March-April). These ceremonies of Gadabas and Bondas are quite different from each other in their rituals and beliefs.

A Bonda village sometimes contains five or six common Sindibars. But in very rare cases a private Sindibar is built. In general a Sindibar a private or public contains very few menhirs. In the village Mudulipada the shrine of their supreme deity 'Patakhanda' is erected under a great Banyan tree. Here a sacred sword is carefully kept on the tree. Once in a year the Bondas gather here to worship their supreme deity.

Besides the heritage of the tribals of undivided Koraput district, it has a rich cultural heritage from the past. It is believed that Sri Rama with his beloved Sita and devout brother Laxman lived in the Dandakaranya (Dandakbana). In the Ramayana there are reference to the solemn grandeur of the impenetrable Malyabantagiri (Malkangiri), Ramagiri, Kiskindha (Korukonda) and the sacred river the Tamasa.

Nandapur occupies a unique place in Koraput, famous for the throne with 32 steps, the Batrisa Singhasan arouses nostalgic memories of a golden era. The ruins of historic mud wall that once surrounded the little township stands as mute witness to glorious times in the past. The two beautiful sculptured boulders and the image of God Ganapati are the main attractions. The image of the elephant faced god is about two metre high and is a marvelous work of art. The shrine of Sarbeswar with antique inscription reminds us of prosperous days of Nandapur. Hathipalhar near Rayagada is remarkable for its scenic grandeur. The huge boulder looks like real elephants. The river Nagavali running through a deep cut valley from two magnificent water falls, Temple of Majji Giriya (Majhighariani) who was the presiding deity of the then kings inside a mud fort of Rayagada now in a ruin state is the heritage of Rayagada.

As regards the Saiva heritage of Koraput, Papadahandi Siva temple which is few km. away from Nabarangapur is very famous. The place

has significant archaeological importance. The plasticity of its architecture defies human comprehension of medieval period found at Podagarh, the then capital of Nalas. The abode of Siva at Gupteswar is a virtual heaven situated about sixty Km. away from Jeypore on left bank of the river Kolab on the border of Bastar, dist of Chhattisgarh. Another Siva temple having archaeological importance is the Malikeswar temple on the top of Jagamanda hill at Padampur of Gunupur sub-division. It is peculiarly built by big blocks of stone without the use of mortar. The shrine contains an inscription of 7th century A.D. There are other four nos. of Siva temples dedicated to Manikeswar, Dhobaleswar, Nilakantheswar and Podukeswar on the same Jagamanda hill. One old stone temple of Sive of Kondakamberu (Malkangiri) was once a place of pilgrimage in the locality.

Siva temple at Alamanda situated on the bank of the Jhanjhabati river under Narayanpatana Police Station is said to be a monument of 17th century A.D. Siva in shape of Bhairaba is worshipped in famous Bhairaba temple at Borigumma Temple of Pataleswar Siva of Chatikona in Gunupur sub-division adds to our heritage site. Siva of Devagiri in Kalyansinghpur is inside a mountain cave where people go inside by crawling only to pray God. The temple of Minna Jhola Siva lies 34 Km. from Gudari on the confluence of three rivers is a scenic spot.

As regards the Jain heritage is concerned, the undivided Koraput district bears a good nos of Jain site. A few km. away from Nandapur there is a village Suai (Subai) famous for a Jain monastery with three cells on each side. The image of Rishabhanath is located in the centre. The image is surrounded by other Tirthankars. There is an image of four-armed Tara in one of the cells adorned with bangles. Other main Jain heritages are at Bhairab Singpur, Charmula, Jamunda of

Padampur, Borigumma, Kotapad, Katharguda, Jeypore, Kechala and Nandapur. From B. Singpur 21 nos of Rishabhanath, Parsvanath, Ajitnath, Mahavir, Ambika etc are found and kept in Jeypore Museum. Many fine arts and beautiful Jain images at Choramala, Naraigaon, Kamata, Kumuli exists nearby. Live image of Parsvanatha at Jamunda is beautiful. Jain temple at Kechala 11 km. from Kalab Dam is existed at present. It contains five images of Tirthankar - one of Ambika and another of Yaksha-Yakshini seated together. In a separate stone block twenty four Tirthankars are engraved.

As regards the Buddha heritage of undivided Koraput district, one can find an inscription on the Malikeswar temple of 7th century AD situated on the Jagamunda hill near Padampur of Gunupur sub-division. It preserves a small genealogy of three Buddhist Acharyas – Chandralekha, Baddhakhan and Dharmakirtti. It is known from Tibetan account that the Dharmakirtti, the famous logician and philosopher had his monastery in Kalinga.

Regarding Jagannath culture of this region, it is said that originally Savar king Biswawasu worshipped Sri Jagannath in a cave Khillamunda over the Jagamunda hill. There are many Jagannath temples spread over undivided Koraput district like Nandapur, Jeypore, Narayanpatna, Rayagada, Paikpada, Bhairab-Singpur, Borigumma, Debapentha and Koraput town. Besides Jagannath temple there is a small temple of God Balaji at Sankrida of Kashipur.

Jeypore is the main cultural heritage site of undivided Koraput district. It is the capital town of Ex-king of Jeypore and a great trade centre of the area. Here exists the temple of Goddess Kali, Kanak Durga, Narayan Ballava, Devi Bhagabati, Sri Chaitanya, Nilakanthesvar, Raghunath, Jagannath and Maa Jagajanani temple. An image of Drona in the temple of Nilakantheswar Siva is a rare and unique one.

Besides the Saktipithas of Jeypore there are many Pithas spread throughout the undivided district, Majhighariani temple of Rayagada, Mahalakshmi of Devagiri hill, Baital-Bhairabi of Nandapur, Bhandar Gharani of Nabarangapur, Biru-Khamba of Kendupoda (Baipariguda), Pendara Handiani of Umarmkote, Gangeswari of Patangi, Murteluamma of Koraput, Manikeswari of Kashipur, Harachandi of Biswanathpur, Agni Gangamma of Neelabadi, Kanta Bausuni of Damanjodi are the important deities of Sakta Cult in this area.

Modern cultural heritage of undivided Koraput district is on the threshold of industrial revolution. Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd., M.I.G. Engine factory at Sunabeda, Alumina refinery complex of Damanjodi, Bellarpur Paper Industries of Jeypore, J.K. Paper Mills, at Singur, Rayagada, Tosali cement factory at Ampavalli, Ply wood factory at Nabarangapur, Jeypore sugar factory, Rare Earth Ltd at Thiruvalli, Ferro-Manganese Plant at Damanjodi are some of the major industries in the district. The majestic water fall Doduma (Machhkund) also known as Matsya Tirtha, comes cascading from a height of 157 metre. A hydro-electric Project with its winch developed amidst deep greenery. The other hydro-electric projects are Balimela, where the epic Sri Rama assailed Bali, the hero of Monkey is a famous hydro-electric project across river Sileru at Chitrokonda, Kolab Dam, Indrabati Dam, and Telingiri Dam are the other major projects in the district. The broad panorama of enchanting hills, the rippling streams, spectacular water falls, the wonderful caves and traditional hospitality of tribes, their colourful necklaces, head dresses and gesture make the cultural heritage of Koraput wonderful.

Er. Nirakar Mahalik, N1/82, IRC Village, Bhubaneswar-751015