

# Cultural Life of the Tribals of the Koraput Region

*Rabindra Nath Dash*

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 has 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. The anthropologist study gives an account that there are 62 types of tribes in Odisha. They all live in the above districts 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 one thousand.

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 forest of Eastern Ghats and on the mountainous river. This aboriginal tribe is divided into three communities viz, Munda (Austro-Asiatic), Dravidian and Indo-Asian.

Literarily the definition of their culture is so broad that we appreciate and accept every aspect of their life style which is associated with culture.

In 1863 this region was under direct administration of British. The Government of India Act of 1919 declared the entire area of Koraput district as Scheduled Area and the major tribes inhabiting the district have been declared as scheduled tribes.

Normally the primitive tribes express the cultural identity through their custom, tradition, festivals, dress and ornaments. 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 by 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.

## **Important 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 homogenous.
4. They have their written and oral language or dialect for communication.
5. They have their rich cultural tradition and heritage although their social organization is simple.

#### Other cultural features:-

1. **Traditional Village Council** – The village council is considered to be the cultural centre of tribal village. The head of the village council is the head of the village. He is normally selected as per seniority and talent. 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 **BARIKA**. The priest of the village is regarded as **DEHURI**. The head of Koya village is **WARDE**, the Paraja's the **MUDULI**, the Sauras the **GOMANGO** and so on. The religious head of Kondh community is the **JANI** who is assisted by **BIS-MAJHI** during the time of meeting.
2. **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 have such institution for unmarried youths. The boys and the girls spend nights their in separate room in the dormitories. This dormitory has another importance particularly choosing of life partner by the youth.
3. **Position of women**:- It is very interesting to note the role of women in the socio-economic and cultural spheres of the Kondh community. For the management and development of family, the role of women was very important. Family was the smallest unit in the Kondh social organization. Life of a Kondh family was most peaceful and without conflict and tension. Wife and Husband helped each other in such a manner as the custom of their society dictated. It was a social custom on the part of the husband and wife not to address each other with name. Women did not speak the name of her husband and younger brother because if she was widowed, she might have to marry one of them. Women were allowed complete freedom before marriage. The women played a vital role for the management of the family. In every manner the Kondh women were considered as an important asset to the family. They not only help the male-folk socially but also economically. The women were not fond of gossip. They were busy as bees all round the year. They had no Purdah system. Most agricultural activities were done by women. Women were capable to purchase the daily necessities of life from the market. They were expert spinners. The Kondhs performed various festivals in a peculiar way and in every festival women enjoyed equal status with men.
4. **Ceremony of tribals**:- ceremonies are inseparable part of the way of life of tribals. There are two types of ceremony so far as observation at family level and community level is concerned. The family level ceremonies mainly include newly born babies, marriage and death. The naming ceremony of the newly born baby is observed which is taken place on 21<sup>st</sup> day after birth. There is also provision of prayer and worship to the forefather for blessing.

The 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 dead. These ceremonies are conducted in presence and guidance of Jani, Sisa and Gurumai.

5. **Worship of nature:-** 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. The aim and objectives of religious objects are as follows (a) Prayer for blessing (b) System of improved bread earning (c) Worshipping and remembering of forefathers (d) Welfare of the world (e) Recreation (f) Environment protection and (g) Integration among communities. The religious practices go on in tribal culture all over the year.
6. **Song, festivals and dance :-** Other aspects that associate with tribal culture are folk song, folk dance, fairs and festivals which can not be ignored. 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 fairs and festivals. The main festivals include Chaiti Parab, Pus Parab, Ghanta Parab, Sim(bean) Parab, Aam (Mango)

Parab, Bhairabi Jatra, Nuakhai, Dhan-Nua, Dialli, Mandai 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 tribe of Koraput region is recognized as main festivals and Dhemsas, the popular dance is regarded as the best in the country.

- A) **Chaiti Parab:-** The whole month of Chaitra (March-April) is celebrated as a holiday by the tribals of this region. The month is spent in feasting, night long dancing and singing and in expeditions into the forests together. Men and boys go into forest for hunting.
- B) **Pus Parab :-** Pus Parab is observed in the month of Pausha (December – January) in which men, women and children participate. After the rituals and sacrifices are made 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 pleasure.
- C) **Ghanta Parab :-** Ghanta Parab is observed for three days in the month of Baisakha (April). Ghanta means pot. Each such pot with four cakes, was offered to Thakurani Penu along with a sacrificial animal by the vow-taker who suffered from Small pox and Cholera.
- D) **Am-Nuakhai:-** Am Nuakhai held among the tribals in the month of March. On this festival they take the first mango of the year after worshipping their village gods and goddesses. It is not a group festival but individual.
- E) **Amus:-** It is held in the month of July. Each family member worships cow on the same day. They go to their paddy field with milk,

Dhup, Kendu leaf for worship. In this occasion each member takes wine and goat, pig, cocks are sacrificed.

- F) Dhan-Nua :-** This is also Nuakhai. A feast will be arranged in all families on which new rice is first eaten. At first they give the new rice of the year to their gods.
- G) Dially:-** The tribals observed the Dially festival in the month of February. The milkman of their concerned master distribute goat meats to their masters. In the evening milkmen collect paddy and new clothes as their presentation. The young villagers show their skill of fighting with sword and club. This is known as Gardhan.
- H) Mandai:-** Mandai is a festival like exhibition. It functions in the month of February. All the village gods are invited to this function. Coloured clothes covering on a long bamboo stick are known as the Lathi. Each villager holds this stick and attends the Mandai with drums.

**Dance (Dhemsas):-** A popular dance form like Dhemsas 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 instruments. Although all tribes perform the Dhemsas 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.

**7. Food and drink:-** For food tribes depend mainly on agriculture. Mango, tamarind, jack-fruit and other fruits are largely collected. In the day

time they take a liquid food made from Ragi and a few quantity of rice. Bamboo shoots are very popular which is known as "Basta" in their language. The Saoras in their early morning and sunset, go to the palm-tree for their wine. They also make chutneys of various kinds. For food the Bondas depend mainly on agriculture. They prefer for meat. Rats and mice were considered delicious. The Kondhs did not eat snakes, lizards. Vegetarian and non-vegetarian curries were generally prepared by boiling and adding only chilies and salt. But gradually they learnt the use of mustard oil and Mahul oil to make their curries. The favourite drink of the people is prepared from Mahua flower.

**8. Method of treatment:-** Among the most primitive tribe of Odisha, there is the belief that disease is caused by hostile spirits, the ghosts of the dead or due to the violation of some taboo. They have their own doctors. In the realm of netting the tribals are still living in the age of magic with its practitioner. By their magical performances they also cure various kinds of disease like stomach trouble, fever etc. Before proper treatment the tribal doctor or "Disan" called upon to attend a patient for diagnosis. For the diagnosis, what is known as "Chaula Khoja" any male relative of the patient brings a handful of rice which the patient is made to touch. Indigenous methods of treatment of the diseases among the tribal can be divided into two categories namely 1. Magical cure and 2. Medicinal cure. In case of epidemics like small pox, cholera or cattle disease they believe that it is caused by the evil influence of the Duma (Ghost). The family has to celebrate a worship to village goddess (Thakurani).

**9. Education:-** Education is one of the aspects of tribals development. Now they realize the importance of education. The government through the department of Tribal and Rural Welfare have been trying its best for the

educational development of the tribals. Ashram Schools, Sevashram and Training centres have opened by the government for educating the tribal people. Stipends are granted to tribal students for higher education.

**10. 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. The Saura paintings are intimately related to religious beliefs and drawn in order to appease demigods and spirits. But through art and craft their self image and aesthetic sensibility are visualized.

#### **Conclusion:**

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 changing their life style; yet their costumes, tradition associated with cultural history will remain evergreen in the world.

#### **References:**

1. Government of Odisha (1990) Tribes of Odisha, Tribal Welfare Department, Bhubaneswar.
2. Mohanty K.K & authors (2006), Tribes of Koraput COATS, Koraput.
3. Patra, D. (2010) Mudulipadara Loke, Sanshrita Prakashani, Malkangiri, Odisha.
4. Census of Odisha (2001), Odisha Census Directorate, Odisha, Bhubaneswar.
5. Elwin, V. (1950) Bondo Highlanders, Oxford University Press, Indian Branch, Bombay.
6. Bell, R.C.S (1945) Orissa District Gazetteer, Koraput, Odisha Government Press Cuttack.
7. Adivasi Vol.xxvi, no. December 1986. Tribal and Harijan Research –cum-Training Institute, Bhubaneswar.
8. Barbasa M. Boal, The Kondhs, (Bhubaneswar ) 1984.
9. William Macpherson, The Reports on the Kondhs of Ganjam and Cuttack districts (Madras 1863).
10. N. Pattnaik and P.S. Das Pattnaik, The Kondh of Odisha (Bhubaneswar) 1982.
11. L.N. Sahu, Jeypore Tribes (Cuttack) 1942.
12. N.D. Majumdar, The Original Tribes of Odisha, vol.6 (1953).
13. R. Nath Saora, Tribes of India, (New Delhi), 1950.
14. John Campbell, The Wild Tribes of Khondistan, (London ) 1964.
15. Elain, Religion of an Indian tribe.

---

Rabindra Nath Dash , Lect. in History, Gopalpur College, Gopalpur on Sea (Ganjam), E-mail – rabidash1973@gmail.com.