



ODISHN TRIBES AND THEIR CULTURAL LIFE

Arts

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ABSTRACT

The features of the different Odishan tribes lie in their customs, cultures, and beliefs and, in particular, the harmony in which they survive in unanimity with nature. Most of the primitive tribes in Odisha possess their own gods and goddesses, reflecting the dependence of tribal people on nature and animals. Except for the few, most of the tribes are affable, hospitable and fun-loving, coupled with potent community bonding. Some of the tribes share patriarchal cultural ties and some of the tribal societies are inclined towards women-oriented issues. Thus, they have their own festivals and celebrations. Odishan tribal culture speaks volumes about the diversity of the state. Tribal culture of Odisha, their traditions and practices interpenetrate almost all the aspects of unique tribal culture.

KEYWORDS

ODISHAN, TRIBE, CULTURE, SOCIETY

Tribe has been defined as a group of indigenous people having common name, language and territory tied by strong kinship bonds, practicing endogamy, having distinct customs, rituals and belief etc. Such definitions are not very helpful because we find lot of variations in life styles of different tribes. The tribe inhabits and remains within a definite and common topography. In the absence of a common topography the tribe would also lose its other characteristic features as community sentiments, common language, etc. For this reason a common habitat is essential for a tribe. Most of the tribal villages in Odisha are found on the top of hills, spurs and base of hill forest area. There unique characteristic features and rich cultural heritage distinguishes them from the neighboring tribes and non-tribal groups. Their distinctiveness is revealed specially from their dress style, mode of living, indigenous skills and technology, cultural pattern and social system. They claim themselves to be the descendants of their ancestral. This belief binds them together and keeps their social affinity undisturbed. Tribes of Odisha are lover of beautiful arts and craft. They adorn their body with various of ornaments. Their customs also deserve special mention, because of sociocultural importance. The male members also adorn their body with jewellery items and keep long hair like the women folk. The men members put on two nose-rings whereas the females put on three nose-rings. The excellent embroidered cloth with beautiful needle-work reveals the indigenous artistic talents of the tribal women. Each Odishan tribal village has the institution of youth dormitory. It is the centre where unmarried girls spend their leisure hours. The number of dormitories varies according to the villages. Boys from other villages belonging to different clans visit the girls dormitory and spend nights with the girls. The dormitory is the place where the girl socializes herself with the community living, social norms and cultural values. The boys and girls also get chance to interact with each other for choosing their life partners. The dormitory is the cultural centre for various activities of the boys and girls. By and large, it is a place for dance, merrymaking, enjoyment and learning things that becomes useful in future. The Odishan tribes have an intimate relationship with their forest. It provides them materials for construction of their houses. It serves as the major source of food and other essential consumable items. They collect a variety of mushrooms, tubers, roots, stems, green leaves, flowers, fruits and seeds from the forest for their consumption. Members of Odishan tribal communities present gifts to and accept gifts from kinsmen and ritual friends. Within kinship network, it has been determined what kind of gift is to be given and expected in return. The forms of gift vary from a number of buffaloes to some chickens and few pots of sago-palm juice. It brings unity and solidarity among members of various clans and lineages.

The exchange of gifts sometimes determines the relationship between two individuals and groups. The Odishan tribes celebrate a number of feast and festivals in which, on the one hand, they satisfy their deities and spirits and on the other, enjoy delicious food items. There are certain festivals and rituals which are organized at the individual household level and some as the village of community level. At the individual household level, they celebrate Ghanta Parba, mostly feast and festivals and participation of all kin groups including members of different clan groups. The households observe t in collaboration with

the villagers and a formal meeting of all household heads takes place, prior to the celebration. According to the date fixed, quests and kith and kins are invited to attend the ceremony. In a Monday or Friday, the ceremony starts before which the host household owner thatches his house and makes wall paintings with help of co-villagers, for collection of thatching materials and other works, the host serves a sumptuous meal to the helper. The participation of magico-religious specialists, recitation of incantations, sacrifice of animals and birds, enshrinement of special stone by the villagers, enjoyment of special drink and eating of sumptuous meals are some of the major attractions of this occasion. Odishan tribes have their own village council conducts its meeting at a place in the village called, Sadar, the seat of the earth goddess. Almost every day early in the morning to village messenger shouts loudly to call the villagers to Sadar. The meeting of the traditional council starts when the traditional village leaders and other participants gather there. Each member takes part in the discussion, but also decision is finally given by the secular chief. The matters that are put forth in the council meeting are related to fixation of days of a rituals, fixation of family contributions for the ritual, sharing of responsibilities to different persons and other matters. The traditional leaders also resolve disputes among persons and groups. While taking decisions, the council makes efforts to settle disputes. Tribal people live within nature and absolutely clean environment and this determines their economic activity which consists of hunting and look for food like roots and wild fruits. They have their own social functions and festivals where they sing and dance in characteristic body movements in the same dress by girls, the males playing on musical gadget like drums, flutes etc. The tribal social organization is based on the egalitarian principle. Thus there are no institutionalized inequalities like the caste system or sex based inequalities. Thus men and women enjoyed equal status and freedom. However some degrees of social inequality may be found in case of tribal chiefs who enjoy a higher social status, exercise political power and possess wealth. Odisha occupies a unique position in the ethnographic map of India for having the largest variety of tribal communities. Although they are found in all the districts of the State, yet more than half of their total strength are found in the districts of Koraput, Rayagada, Naurangpur, Malkangiri, Kalahandi, Nauapara, Kandhamal, Baudh, Keonjhar, Sundargarh and Mayurbhanj. The tribes of Odisha are at various stages of socio-economic development. At one extreme are the groups which lead a relatively secluded and archaic mode of life keeping their core culture intact, while at the other extreme there are communities which are indistinguishable from the general agricultural communities. The ceremonies and festivals of the tribes can be classified into two groups, that is, those that relate to the individual families and those that relate to the village as a whole.

The ceremonies and rites relating to birth of a child, marriage, death are observed family-wise whereas those relating to various agricultural cycle, eating of new fruits, hunting, etc. are observed by the village community. Some of the important festivals observed by the tribal communities of Odisha include Guar ceremony of the Saora, Gotar of the Gadaba, Push Punei of the Juang, Kedu of the Kondh, Karam festival of the Oraon, Chait Parab of the Bonda and Magha Parab of the Santal. The tribes of Odisha, despite their poverty and their pre-

occupation with the continual battle for survival, have retained the rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music forming integral part of their festivals and rituals. Among them, the dance and music is developed and maintained by themselves in a tradition without aid and intervention of any professional dancer or teacher. It is mainly through the songs and dances the tribes seek to satisfy their inner urge for revealing their soul. The performance of these only give expression to their inner feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passion and their appreciation of beauty in nature and in man. Like dance, the songs sung by different tribal groups differ from one tribe to the other. Among the tribes everyone is a musician and poet. When happily inspired, they can coin a song then and there and sing it. Like any others, when they see things of beauty and meet pleasantly, they exhibit this pleasure and happiness by composing songs. The tribal people turn out excellent handicrafts for their own use. The wood carving of the Kondhs, metal works by lost wax process among the Bathudis, cane and bamboo basketry works among the Juangs and Bhuyans, are all symbolic of artistic creation. The tribes of Odisha have retained the rich and varied heritage of colorful dance and music forming integral part of their festivals and rituals. Among them, the dance and music is developed and maintained by themselves in a tradition without aid and intervention of any professional dancer or teacher. It is mainly through the songs and dances the tribes seek to satisfy their inner urge for revealing their soul. The performance of these only give expression to their inner feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passion and their appreciation of beauty in nature and in man.

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