



ODISHAN FOLK AND INDIGENOUS WAY OF LIFE: AN OVERVIEW

Social Science

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ABSTRACT

The culture of Odisha has been presented a picture of synthesis of both classical and folk form. Due to the assimilation of various types of racial and cultural elements Odisha occupies a unique place among the states of India. Odisha is known as "Utkal" (the land of excellence in art) because of her brilliant folk traditions which have been maintained from ancient past. Whatever their level of economical status, literacy rate as well as motion of progress, most of the communities of Odisha have their own folk cultural way of life which includes folk dance, art & crafts, theatre, songs, rituals, legends and ballades etc. Odishan folk culture is still preserved in our rural life and agrarian society. Folk dances imbibe new influences and at the same time maintain tradition and continuity. Folk art, drama, dance and songs etc. have nourished a rich cultural tradition in Odisha.

KEYWORDS

Odisha, Folk, Culture, Society, Rural, Art

Since ancient period the village has been playing the role of an important unit of the Odishan socio-cultural and folk way of life. The villages in Odisha have been continually developing over a very long period extending bulk into thousands of years. Fundamentally the village is still an important socio cultural unit of our state in spite of the innumerable changes which has undergone since ancient period. Even, presently no less than at that time, there is a head of the village that is responsible for the entire village in all matters. Many villages combine to constitute one folk cultural area which lends its individual cultural characteristics to each of these villages. Each of the folk arts whether song, dance or drama presents numerous varieties each distinctive because of its character, occasion, style and presentation. There are songs forms the cradle to the grave. There are dances beginning from merry-making to martial activities and there are folk plays depicting various episodes from mythology, history and legend, which inspire the people and help to keep up their morale. Odisha has the distinction of possessing rich folk culture in all its aspects, spreading in various folk communities from one end to the other, communicating to the mass its past tradition in the present day setting and shaping folk life to its tune. Though from every view point like socio-cultural, political and economic sector etc. the village of our society is dependent to a large extent upon people not belonging to the village. The contemporary villager is no longer only a member of just a single rural community but also a member of a specific caste, a religion and a nation as well.

In contemporary socio cultural life of our nation our village folk life is having several unique features. As our society has been recognized as an agrarian society so, most of the population still lives in villages. From the cultural view point our villages are very important because they preserve our ancient culture and folk cultural traditions. The way of life of the villagers depends considerably upon natural forces due to their occupation, which is purely agrarian in nature, so they still worship nature. The people of villages still exhibit faith in the doctrine of karma, which is a fundamental principle of our culture and lead a simple and natural life dominating by folk traditions, sacrifice, theistic tendency and the importance of religion in every aspect of village life.

Generally in village life the family fulfill the needs of its members in all aspects of their socio-cultural life and exercise control over them. It is through the family that the new members are initial introduced to the folk customs, conventions and culture of the society. Life in a village is self dependent. Most of the villagers are farmers and besides agricultural practices the farmer is quite capable of handling the work generally done by the artisan class of people. The community of ideals and customs as well as for social balance is even today an important element of our folk culture.

Another important feature of our folk culture is the joint family system. Generally, the father is the head and representative of the family and is invested with the duty of maintaining discipline among the members. In every festival, marriage, business etc., it is he who manages the affairs of the family. All the members of the family share the burden of the family occupation. In this way, working together, the villagers maintain a sense of mutual cooperation among themselves. Most of

attention is directed towards the preservation of the family honour and utmost care is taken to observe and maintain the folk traditions of the family.

The people of rural areas have limited means and they do not ostentation. Even in the materialistic age of contemporary socio-cultural life the generally accepted ideal in the village is a simple life and high thinking. In the folk life every individual endeavors to attain and observe the ideals of his family and caste. The rural people are not incapable of making a false pretence at cultured behaviour, nor are they capable of boasting. They have sympathy for others and want to meet each other on a natural and human footing. Their way of life is tranquil, peaceful and simple in which mental conflicts and complexities are almost absent. In their life there is a determined pattern and method for everything so that they are spread the labour of continually pondering over them. The small needs of life are fulfilled by the rural people themselves. The level of morality is high and the life in the rural area is more natural and orderly.

The rural population compares favorably with the people who inhabit the urban life in matters of religion, being more inclined in this direction. This disparity arises from a number of factors of which the most prominent is their preoccupation with agriculture, which depends very much upon nature despite stupendous progress that science and technology may have made in any country. This faith upon nature gives an added importance to the natural forces in the folk life, which consequently indulges in a variety of religious activities, offering and prayers designed either to pacify or to please the deified powers which play such an important role in rural life.

The life of the people in rural areas is almost completely exposed to the vagaries of nature. The folk religion originates in the worship of nature, the preponderance of nature being evident in every aspect or rural cultural life. Every village has its own local God and Goddess. The most important God in rural religion is Shiva, who is worshipped in different forms and different names. And the worship of mother Goddess (Grama Devi) also is a popular tradition in folk cultural life. In the folk religious life many trees, plants and animals are considered divine. The Bungan, Neem and some other trees are treated as divine and worshipped. The worship of Tulasi in particular is considered important in Odishan folk culture. The cow is considered to be sacred and cow dung is generally used to cover any place which is to be purified. Besides Gods and Goddess, the rural populace credits the existence of ghosts, instituting different kinds of activities designed to appease them, please them or get rid of them. There are various types of superstitions concerning God and evil, are to be found in the folk way of life of rural people for any kind of specific activity some particular days and months are considered as auspicious and as having a good portent.

There are also a considerable number of assumptions pertaining to the supernatural on the other like heaven; hell, rebirth etc. are everywhere believed to be real. Most of the rural people believe that heaven and hell are two good and bad places where the souls of good and bad people respectively enjoy in pleasure and suffer after death. Many

moral beliefs and also conjoined to Odishan folk religious life. A benevolent person of high character who worships God with fervour is commonly recognized as a religious person or superior soul. Religiousness is a fundamental element of Odishan folk culture, for which people of rural areas still clings to tradition and is no less religious than their ancestor despite the many and varied changes that may have intruded into their religious notions and beliefs.

In the case of any type of important works or rituals the local priests make calculations and advise the interested parties in respect of the auspicious day and hour. The folk life of Odisha attach all kinds of superstitions to natural phenomenon. Like, solar and the lunar eclipses are believed to be the causes of the catastrophe is of Demon Rahu and Ketu. Absence of rain and drought, too much rain, untimely rain etc., is attributed to displeasure on the part of the king of God Lord Indra. The temple of rural areas holds a very important place in the folk life and culture of the Odishan village. The village temple has its religious importance but in the village it also exerts ostensible influence upon the social sphere as well. As a result of which, the temple in a village becomes the centre of public programmes. Most of the villages have more than one temple. The temples of rural areas are looked upon as community property and a particular family hereditarily looks after it and performs the part of the priest. If the priest of the temple is an intelligent and learned person, he has a prestigious status and role in the folk life. Often his premonitions and forecasts have profound influence upon the thinking and conduct of the people of rural areas. In this way the temple priest is an astrologer, prophet, conductor of prayers and story teller all at the same time.

In spite of a lack of agreement rural people generally look upon acts of kindness and assistance, both moral and concrete to the poor and the helpless, as benevolent. As a matter of fact, people belonging to different religions and cultures are found co-existing in the daily life in rural areas. With the increase in urbanization, the rural people also being continuously transformed. Besides, the increase in communication facilities enhance in the mobility of the rural people, and the rural population is adopting the habit to travel cities for business and other employment opportunities, which are ultimately, have their effect upon rural life. But still the rural areas retain their traditional way of socio cultural life and still recognized as a glorious chapter of our culture.

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