



Agrarian Festivals And Tribal Society: A Case Study Of Mayurbhanj And Midnapur Districts.

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Abstract:

Mayurbhanj and Midnapur are the districts of two neighbouring states Orissa and West Bengal in India. Historical record proves that the lands of both the districts more or less were under the same administration for hundreds of years. In the social context it has been seen that out of 62 types of tribals of Orissa, Mayurbhanj alone houses 53. But only 18 types of tribe live in Midnapur which is in a minimum number of total populations. Tribes of both the districts observe a number of agrarian festivals like Hindus or all other farmers of various religious groups in India. To know the changing scenario of these festivals since past to present along with the interrelationship of these festivals with the other Hindu agrarian festivals are the objects of this paper.

Keywords: Agrarian, festivals, tribes, Hindus, scenario.

Introduction:

Nature lover tribes live in a free society in the lap of nature. They are simple, humble and have a great deal of feeling for their fellow villagers and relatives in particular and community members in general. They grow up in close proximity to the social environment of their communities. Their closeness with nature inspires them to live a carefree life. They enjoy roaming in mountains, forests, fields. Nature makes them closer to the environment. They often meet friends and heirs at various festivals and periodically meet new relationships and socialize with people. The Commissioner of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in his report for 1952 listed eight of their common characteristics. These are: They live in remote areas lying in forests and mountains far from the civilized world. They belong to any one of three stocks – Negritos, Australoids or Mongoloids. They speak the same tribal dialect known as primitive spirit-animism where the worship of ghosts and spirits is the most important element. They follow primitive occupations like gathering, hunting and gathering forest products. They are mainly carnivores or meat eaters. They are naked or semi-naked, using tree bark and leaves for clothing, and have nomadic habits and a love of drinking and dancing. As against the national average of 73%, 91% of tribal workers are engaged in agriculture.¹ From preparation of land for cultivation to harvest they observe a number of agriculture related festivals which are also seen among the tribes of Mayurbhanj and Midnapur also. According to the 2011 Census the total number of Schedule Tribe in India is 1210568 which is 8.61% of the total population in India.² In 2011 census, in Mayurbhanj the total number of Scheduled Tribe was 1, 479, 5763 and in Midnapur it was 907967.⁴

Mayurbhanj and Midnapur are the districts of two neighbouring states Orissa and West Bengal in India. Historical record proves that the lands of both the districts more or less were under the same administration for hundreds of years. In the social context it has been seen that out of 62 types of tribals of Orissa, Mayurbhanj alone houses 53.⁵ But only 18 types of tribal live at Midnapur which is in a minimum number of total population.⁶ So, the society and culture of Mayurbhanj is tribal dominated whereas in case of Midnapur it is caste dominated. Among the tribes the numbers of Santal is in the first position of both the districts. In Midnapur the majority of people are of Kaibarta or Mahisya caste⁷ whereas in Mayurbhanj majority of people are of Santal, Kolha, Bathudi and Bhumij tribe.⁸ In case of ethnicity there are many similarities found among the various tribes and castes of both districts. Numerous festivals are observed by the tribes of Mayurbhanj and Medinipur in the whole year. The tribal year starts on and from the month of magh (January-February). In this month they celebrate *Maghsim*. It marks the end of the year. In this day the old *panchayat* members resigns from their post. The new members are selected for the next year. Even older members can be re-elected. Worships are offered to their all gods and goddesses in this day. Most of the tribal festivals are related to cultivation. Santals of the both districts are engaged in many agriculture related festivals. These are *Erok-sim*, *Harihar-sim*, *Sare bor*, *Naoai*, *Iriguldisim*, *Janthar* etc.

Objectives and Methodology:

The objectives of this article are to know the agrarian festivals observed by the tribes' whole year. Besides, to investigate the relationships between the tribal festivals and the other Hindu agrarian festivals of the research area and to know the changing scenario of these festivals since past to present are the objectives of this article. The article is written with the help of primary and secondary sources. Personal interview is also taken from the reliable persons form the research area also.

Discussion and Analysis:

Agriculture is the principal occupation of the tribes beside their other source of food collection such as hunting, collection of fruits and roots from the forest, fishing etc. They worship various deities for their cultivable land, seeds, seedbeds, machinery and animals which are required for cultivation and for good harvest. Similarly, from seed sowing to the growth of seedlings and harvest, various festivals are celebrated by them. The farmers in different stages of their cultivation pray to their deities through various rituals and festivals. Such agrarian festivals of the tribes are discussed hereunder with the help of historical sources.

Akhan:

The agricultural year of the Lodhas begins on the first day of *Magh* (usually the middle of January) is known as *Akhan*. On that day the headman of the family or the others members of the family first plough the land after taking bath and wearing the new clothes. It is called as *halchar*.⁹

Erok-sim:

Erok-sim or ero sim or eroki sim is the first agricultural festival (sowing) of the Santals, Mahali, Bhumija, Ho, Birhor and Lodha named tribes. It is held in the hottest month of the year (May-June). On this occasion, the deities of *Jaherthan*, *Manjhithan*, *Orak-bonga*, *Abge bong a* and boundary *bonga* are appeased through sacrifices publicly as well as in their houses in order to make the field fertile, to have bumper crops, sufficient rain, peace and prosperity. It is celebrated Village wise.¹⁰ It is held at the outset of sowing the seeds in the fields. Santals go to the *Jaherthan* and pray to the goddess *Jaher* saying collectively -

Aisa Aisa Chhita Kapura.

Aisa Aisa Dangi Punri.

Aisa Aisa Hinshi, Dumni.

Aisa Aisa Ga.

The six forms of *Jaher* goddess as *Chhita*, *Kapura*, *Dangi*, *Punri*, *Hinshi*, and *Dumni* are praised here in this Bengali mixed prayer song. They start the beginning of their whole year's programmes of festivals through this festival. In this *parab*, the goddess soil is offered by food and god *sin bonga* by beasts under a tree. The Santals, Mahali, Bhumij and lodha of Mayurbhanj observe this festival on the day of "Akshitrutiya". They worship mother earth with great veneration on this day. Non-boiled rice, flower, vermilion, incense sticks are used in this worship and a black cock is offered to the goddess also. Tribal songs and dance with sound of drums makes this festival more enchanting.¹¹

Jathel:

To the tribes, especially the lodhas, Jathel is an agriculture centric festival observed on the eve of cultivation in the month of Ashara (July – August) praying bless from the god. They start cultivation just after this festival. Besides, in the forest areas this festival is celebrated in the month of Kartik on the eve of cultivation of silk beads. If anybody fails to observe it unintentionally, he has to offer foods to the god separately as its punishment.¹²

Jantal Puja:

The Jantal Puja takes place in the month of Ashara (July- August) when the young plants look green. The Lodhas and other artisans of the village observe this festival for good rain and good harvest. The village headman fixes up the date of the festival and the *dakua* or *chhatia* (messenger) circulates the message through the village. On that Day, ploughing, digging soil and working in the field is strictly prohibited. The man who violates these rules is fined by the village headman. He - goats and cocks are sacrificed to propitiate the village deity. The village priest or Dehuri worships the deity in *Jaherthan* and the ritual is called Jantal or Ashari Puja. After the puja the villagers eat the sacrificial meat and the rice bear together. The chopped heads of the sacrificial animals and birds are given to the priest. No other man except the priest has the right to eat the meat of the said heads. Women are strictly prohibited to eat the sacrificial meat.¹³

Harihar-sim:

The transplantation of paddy seedlings is known as harihar – simco. It is identical like Erok-Sim in June as stated by Campbell and Riseley.¹⁴ It is celebrated in time of growth of the seedlings. Mother earth is worshipped with offerings of sacrifice, non-boiled rice, flower and vermilion. Women are not allowed to participate in it. It is observed on the month of Sharabana (July-August). There is a tradition of offering green coloured hen in this worship. It is done in this believe that the paddy tree will be more green thereafter.¹⁵

Sarebor:

On the month of Bhadra (August-September) when the paddy becomes ripe, Nayek comes to the field at first and cut the paddy tree and he brings this first harvest to the *Jaherthan*. Leaving the said crop on the ground he pours milk on it and calls all deities. This *parab* (festival) is called *Sare bor*.¹⁶

Naoui:

Next of *Sare bor* another *parab* called **Naoui** (nabanna) is held in the houses of the villages.¹⁷ It is similar as the *nabanna* of the Hindus.

Iri and Gundli- Nawane (The Millet festival):

This festival is held in the month of Bhadra (August – September). Millet crops are offered to various deities and spirits. None will taste it unless these are first offered to the deities.¹⁸

Janthar:

It is an agrarian festival which observed for the first fruit of the winter paddy. None can take the new rice but can, only after the festival. Sacrifices are offered at *pargana than* in honour of the tribal deity Janthar (God of Hill). According to Durkheim, 'by their very aspect the first fruit of the harvest manifest the energy which they contain.' In this festival all the articles are supplied by the priest. The deities and spirits of *Jaherthan* are also propitiated.¹⁹

Like the tribes the Hindus of the study area also observe a number of agrarian festivals. In Purba Medinipur the farmers observe 1st day of the month of Magh as *aikhan*. In this day the head of the farmer's family go to the field and plough in it for two and half times as a ritual. The next ritual is the worship of the paddy field before plantation of the saplings which is called *Khetpuja*. It is also familiar with the term *ruaunkun* or beginning of plantation in regional language. When the paddy tree is about to reveal its brim, worship is arranged which is called *nalpuja* in expectation of good health of the tree and bumper harvest. After harvesting the farmers arrange a fest along with their kith and kin cooking the new rice and ate them in contempt. This festival is called *Nabanna*. Besides the animals and instruments which are related to their cultivation the farmers worship most of them also. They observe *hal puja*, *Mehi puja*, *Khamarpuja*, *Dhenkipuja* and *Gohalpuja*.²⁰

Findings and Conclusion:

Man is utterly helpless against the forces of nature. Therefore, since ancient times, by worshiping various forces of nature in the form of deities, they have tried to satisfy them so that there is no harm to their farming and also to get good crops. After harvesting they cook the new rice selecting an auspicious day and invite their relatives to dine with them. This enthusiasm can be observed in both tribal and non-tribal Hindu communities. We see different types of festivals in both tribal and non-tribal societies at the time of sowing of paddy before cultivation, at the time of growth of seedlings, at the time of harvesting and at the time of taking the paddy as new rice after harvesting. Again, as auxiliary machinery in agriculture, *hal Puja* (worship of plough), *mehi puja* (worship of ladder), *khamar puja* (worship of the storage container of paddy), *gohal puja* (worship of cowshed) as an aid to paddy cultivation are held in most of the Hindu farmers, similarly in tribal society, *bandhna parab* (worship of the cows) is observed in the honour of cows. Especially since the beginning of cultivation, the crop that comes home in the month of Agrahayan, cow is one of the claimants of the achievement. So the Santals do the *saharai* festival after harvesting the paddy in the month of Agrahayan or Poush to honor this cow.²¹ As a result, it is clear that along with agricultural production, various types of festivals have been in vogue in both societies since ancient times as areas of crop production and protection and consumption. But now in the 21st century, due to the use of advanced agricultural machinery and systematic changes in farming, the above programs are slowly losing their importance. Similarly, the number of oxen is also decreasing. Moreover the changing landscape that globalization has been created across the world through its triple weapons of assimilation, deconstruction and homogenization in the current socio-economic and cultural landscape raises the question that how long village societies can sustain the existence of these rituals in the near future.²²

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