



ASECA CHANNEL

(A monthly Journal from All India ASECA)

Website: www.allindiaaseca.org

E-mail: contact@allindiaaseca.org

Volume: XV Issue: 4 April, 2016

Annual Subscription Rs50/-

Single copy Rs5/-

Myth and Reality of Tribal Culture

Paper presented by Sri P.C. Hembram during **National Seminar on Cultural and Literary Traditions of Tribes of India** (29th and 30th March 2016), at K.R.G. Hall, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Race Course Road, Bangalore – 560 001 on 30 March 2016

Introduction

Culture is the expression of any Social Group including Tribal Groups. This integral part of a social existence is transferred from one generation to another. The language, social norms, beliefs, symbols, practices are the various features of a culture. Culture is seen on groups at local, regional, national and international level. Culture and identity are inter-related, synonymous or complimentary to each other. Every cultural group, therefore, has its own set of value system and usually a distinct language. As each tribal group has/had its own language, the evolution, propagation and promotion of culture follow a distinct pattern. Cultures like traditions are sometimes categorized under “Great” and “Little” format. Whether this kind of classification is necessary or has a meaning attached to it can best be analyzed by the experts and scholars. Cultures of some groups are confined to local level whereas others have reached a stage where people can distinctly recognize various aspects due to overt expression and propagation along with desired level of excellence through continuous process of creation, development and promotion. Cultures evolve from a minimum level of development in the concerned group as well as through social emancipation and peaceful existence. People of that group can only think of developing their culture upon attainment of some level of prosperity. In the human existence every society is having a social system involving functions and social milieu for continuance and coexistence. It is really heartening to come across so many languages and groups in India. The cultures on a comparative scale are in different states of development. Some have

reached zenith whereas others are finding it difficult to continue with the present forms and norms.

Tribal Culture

A minimum understanding of Culture becomes sine qua non for deliberating on Tribal Culture in terms of myth and reality. It becomes necessary to have minimum awareness level so as to be able to explain the criteria for and characteristic of a Culture. A Tribe owing to his having traditional unique characteristics is considered different from others. These are: 1. Religion - religious beliefs, practices and usages; 2. Language; 3. Name; and 4. Social Behaviour, norms. The above criteria are not strictly in order. These features have been preserved and are continuing as tradition. Religion is a belief, which is established through religious events, practices during various auspicious occasions including a person's birth to death rituals. Language is used for communication purpose and literary pursuit. By name (family name) one is distinguishable. Gradually when surname becomes obscure it becomes difficult to know immediately a person's social identity. Traditionally a person inherits the name of grandfather(s)/mother(s) or close relations or totems. Social behaviour includes the social relationship, respect and love associated with the relation, hospitality and the forms and practices within the society. It is generally accepted that Tribal culture is based on simplicity, honesty and benevolence. The virtues of oneness, similarity and majority views are believed to be the common bonding factors in a distinct culture group.

Myth and Reality

Religion: Over a period of time, it observed that in the tribal societies, group name remained the same where as religion and religious belief has been declared as different. The members of a particular tribal group do not have a unique religion and thus are being defined either by their original religion(s), Hinduism, Christianity, Muslim or other religions of India. Interestingly, despite the different religious affiliation, all claim to belong to the same category. Unity in diversity is seen on this aspect.

Language: Notable aspect is that majority still have retained the language. Only some portion of the present generation in urban areas is helplessly ignorant of the native language.

Name: Due to the process of acculturation, naming a person choosing, good words from native or other languages, names of own or otherwise Gods and Goddesses, great personality etc., is the new trend followed by mostly educated people. This trend of naming a person choosing good words from native or other languages is becoming common practice now-a-days.

Social behavior and norms: The social behavior and norms have mostly remained intact and continuous sincere attempts are being made to avoid the evil practices of others to creep in to the tribal society. Gender equality is maintained and promoted scrupulously. Dowry has been vehemently resisted in order to avoid the incidents of divorce, marital discord and bride burning.

Conflict Resolution

From the above, it can be seen that purely unique identity or culture is missing in any tribal group. There is the existence of certain conflict areas in the community and it is natural to quest for the answer as to how the community is addressing such differences. The vital bonding is retained through **affiliation and/or recognition** to tide over some difference in identity or culture of a group. In respect of the above four aspects, let us see how it applies. 1. An individual retains all and gets recognition, 2. An individual retains some, seeks affiliation and gets recognition; 3. An individual retains some, does not seek affiliation but still gets recognition; 4. An individual does not retain any but seek affiliation and gets recognition; and 5. An individual does not retain any nor seek affiliation but still gets recognition.

That means above four criteria namely religion, language, name and social behavior are also not sufficient unless there is mutual recognition by the members among themselves. This is the present status of Tribals to identify themselves and time will tell how far it will lead them to remain united.

For continuing a society a segment has to retain some unique characteristics, which as a whole make them distinct from others. One can apply this to know his position how and why he is a Tribe. The practice of excommunication or non-cooperation can be considered as a short-term non-recognition by the community or group. The present dilemma of Tribal identity is based on this concept of recognition. People belonging to same stock are not recognizing each other due to difference in one or more than one aspects namely religion, language, name and social behavior.

Let's say there are two persons belonging to same Tribe or Culture group totally unknown to each other met in a place. Their link breaks ab initio in the absence of two features one is "language" and other one is "name". In the presence of any or both, they become friendly immediately by knowing each other's name or by the language they speak. They also are comfortable when the social behaviour is the same. But they gradually differ if they profess different religion or follow different religious practices. In spite of all good will, they fail to recognize each other as equal though originally they belong to the same stock. The present day dilemma and controversy on identity revolve around this only.

According to a different school of thought on identity, one can call him/her self belong to same Tribe or cultural group irrespective of his religious belief and affinity. Many a times it is argued that belief is not part of Culture. A Tamil, Telugu, Malayalee or a Punjabi introduces him/her self as a Tamil, Telugu as the case may be to the outsiders irrespective of his religious beliefs and permanent domicile status. As the regional identity is not attached with the Tribals of India, this example does not hold good. Accepting this argument in this form, however, throws open following questions: 1. Whether the above identity is based on Language or territory?; 2. Does this identity represent a single group or any combination of groups?; 3. Is it a Cultural identity of a territory initially and people carry this identity wherever they go; 4. Whether religious division has come after the

development of Cultural identity; 5. Can this principle/idea be applied in toto vis-à-vis Tribals or it is a patch work to find out a temporary short term solution for a single issue i.e. the religion. From this, it can be advocated in future that as there is no uniqueness in matters of language, social affairs, education etc. in those identity we can also do away with all kinds of similarities among Tribals. In other words Tribals can act differently but still qualify to be known as Tribals.

Cultures develop through constant patronage and centres of excellence. There has to be some dedicated institutions with matching wherewithal to promote different aspects of culture. Without matching

resources, cultures do not achieve desired goals and even pushed to margin.

One peculiar reality is that people tend to follow different cultures even if it does not pertain to their groups. It clearly points to a reality that people are attracted towards good virtues and value systems and the same are imbibed, adopted and followed.

In Tribal context, the figure shows that only 32 out of around 650 tribal communities are with the strength of 5 lakh and above. Now a natural question comes what is the optimum population, which can sustain and support development of a standard culture in the modern parlance and the strength is required to promote a particular culture.

*** * ***

ADIVASI SOCIO RENAISSANCE ASSOCIATION (ASRA)

organized celebration of the Birth anniversary of Saonta Guru Shyam Sundar Hemram on 10th April 2016 at Khadisole Jamuna, Post: Deulia, via: Barsahi, Dist: Mayurbhanj, Odisha – 757 026. The celebration started with Bonga Buru (worship) in the morning followed by paying homage to the statue, meeting and award giving ceremony and culminated in cultural programmes.

ASRA conferred awards to Shri Ramrai Majhi, Ranisahi, Tiring, Shri Kuanra Majhi,

Rairangpur, Shri Sunaram Hembram, Purunapani, Badasahi, Shri Madan Tudu, Palabani, Basipitha and Shri Kanhu Tudu, Dasarapada(Hudarpur), Brundaban Chandra Pur for their outstanding services to the society in various fields. The guests deliberated on various issues of the society and particularly the language and universal adoption of Ol Chiki by all Santals.

Overnight drama and other cultural events were part of the celebration, which were enjoyed and appreciated by the audiences. The village level initiative was lauded by the participants and guests and all wished this should continue.

**** * ****

Folklore of the Santal Parganas

Translated by **Cecil Henry Bompas** of the Indian Civil Service, 1909

{ASECA CHANNEL intends to publish the stories in order to familiarize the stories among the general public for their better appreciation}

{Continued from March 2016 issue}

XXVII. The Flycatcher's Egg.

They prepared to take away the corpse to burn it and the *bonga* girl asked to be allowed to go with them as she had never seen the funeral rites of a jugi: so they let her go.

Before starting she tied a little salt in the corner of her cloth. When she reached the burning place, she sang to the two dogs:-

“Build the pyre, Rauta and Paika!

Alas! The dogs have bitten the jugi,

Alas! They have chased and killed the jugi.”

So the two dogs built the pyre and lay the body on it. Then she ordered them to split more wood, singing:-

“Cut the wood, Rauta and Paika!

Alas! The dogs have bitten the Jugi,

Alas! They have chased and killed the jugi.”

So they split more wood and then she told them to apply the fire, singing:-

“Light the fire, Rauta and Paika!

Alas! The dogs have bitten the Jugi,
Alas! they have chased and killed the jugi.”

When the pyre was in full blaze she suddenly said to the dogs “Look up, Rauta and Paika, see the stars are shining in the day time.” When the two dogs looked up, she threw the salt into their eyes, and, while they were blinded, she sprang into the flames and died as a *sati* on the body of her husband.

XXVIII. The Wife Who Would Not Be Beaten.

There was once a Raja’s son who announced that he would marry no woman who would not allow him to beat her every morning and evening. The Raja’s servants hunted high and low in vain for a bride who would consent to these terms, at long last, they found a maiden who agreed to be beaten morning and evening if the prince would marry her. So the wedding took place and for two or three days the prince hesitated to begin the beating; but one morning he got up and, taking a stick from the corner, went to his bride and told her that she must have her beating. “Wait a minute” said she “there is one thing I want to point out to you before you beat me. It is only on the strength of your father’s position that you play the fine gentleman like this: your wealth is all your father’s and it is on his wealth that you are relying. When you have earned something for yourself, and made a position for yourself, then I am willing that you should beat me and not before.”

The prince saw that what his bride said was true and held his hand. Then, in order to earn wealth for himself, he set out on a trading expedition, taking quantities of merchandise loaded in sacks; and he had a large band of retainers with him, mounted on horses and elephants, and altogether made a fine show. The princess sent one of her own servants with the prince and gave him secret instructions to watch his opportunity and if ever, when the prince was bathing, he should throw away a loin cloth, to take possession of it without the prince knowing anything about it and bring it to her. The prince journeyed on till he came to the country called Lutia.

The Raja of Lutia was walking on the roof of his palace and he saw the cavalcade approaching, and he sent a *sipahi* to meet the prince and ask him this question, “Have you the secret of prosperity for ever or of prosperity for a day?” When this question was put to the prince he answered that he had the secret of prosperity for ever. When the Lutia Raja was

told of this answer, he ordered his men to stop the prince’s train; so they surrounded them and seized all the merchandise and the prince’s retainers fled on their horses and elephants and left him alone and penniless. In his distress the prince was forced to take service with a rich Hindu, and he had nothing to live on but what his master chose to give him, and all he had to wear was a loin cloth like the poorest labourer.

The only man who did not desert him was the servant whom the Princess had sent; and one day he saw that the prince had thrown away an old loin cloth while bathing; this he picked up and took home to his mistress, who put it away. When she heard all that had happened to her husband, she set out in her turn to the Lutia country and all she took with her was a mouse and a shawl. When she reached the Lutia country the Raja as before sent a messenger to ask whether she knew the secret of prosperity for ever or of prosperity for a day.

She answered “prosperity for a day.” Thereupon the Raja had her sent for and also all the retainers who had deserted the Prince and who had collected together in the neighbourhood. When they had all come the Raja said that he would now decide who should have all the wealth which had been taken from the prince: he produced a cat and said that the person towards whom the cat jumped should have all the wealth. So they all sat round the Raja and the Princess had her mouse hidden under her shawl and every now and then she kept uncovering its head and covering it up again. The cat soon caught sight of the mouse and, when the Raja let it go, it jumped straight to the Princess in hopes of catching the mouse. The Raja at once adjudged all the merchandise to her, and she loaded it on the horses and elephants and took it home accompanied by her husband’s retainers.

A few days afterwards her husband came home, having got tired of working as a servant, and, putting a bold face on it, he went up to her and said that now he was going to beat her; all the retainers who had accompanied him when he set out to trade and also the servant whom the princess had sent with him were present. Then, before them all, the princess took up the old loin cloth and asked him if he knew to whom it had belonged; at this reminder of his poverty the prince was dumb with shame. “Ask your retainers” continued the princess “to whom all the merchandise with which you set out now rightfully belongs, ask them whether it is yours or mine, and then say whether you will beat me.”

The prince had no answer to give her and after this lesson gave up all idea of beating his bride.

FROM:

If undelivered please return to:

ALL INDIA ASECA,
SFS Flat No. 326, Pocket 10,
Sector 11 (Extension), Rohini,
Delhi - 110 085.

• **Editor:** Purna Chandra Hembram • **Published and Printed** by Kuanr Chandra Kisku on behalf of All India Adivasi Socio Educational and Cultural Association (Registered), New Delhi • **Printed** at S. K. Enterprises, B- 975, Mangol Puri, Delhi 110 083 and published from **SFS Flat No. 326, Pocket 10, Sector 11 (Extension), Rohini, Delhi 110 085.**