

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF THE HILL KHARIAS OF MAYURBHANJ IN ODISHA, EAST INDIA

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ABSTRACT-- *This article is intended to analyze religious Beliefs and Practices of the Hill Kharia Tribe of Mayurbhanj district in Odisha, India. It had unique rituals characteristics, which is overlooked by most of the current community society. In order to investigate the primal religion of Hill Kharia Tribe in Odisha state, India. In this article Oral and written sources are used. The sources are intensively used to validate the concept of primitive tribe's religion of Hill Kharia tribe masked by the domination of Hindu Since in the 20th century. The religious practices and belief are known as primitive tribal religion of the Hill Kharia Tribe believes that Dharma Devota/Thakura or Thakurani (Sun God / Earth God) is the supreme being and humans live in their own life circle known as the religion of the Hill Kharia Tribe believe that morality and ethics as core issues which emanates from the ancestral spirit of respective clans. The sacrifice was a basic ritual practice in the Hill Kharia society of Odisha state in Eastern India. Therefore, this article describes the indigenous wisdom of primitive Hill Kharia Tribe to understand the material and spiritual world.*

Key words-- Primitive, tribe, Dharma Devota, Thakurani,, Hill Kharia, Mayurbhanj, Odisha, India.

I. INTRODUCTION

The religious beliefs and practices of the Hill Kharias of Mayurbhanj is one of the fascinating aspects of primitive tribal culture of Odisha in Eastern India. The district of Mayurbhanj is famous for the home land of different tribal communities. More than 50% of the total population of Mayurbhanj district is dominated by the tribal people. For this fact, the region of Mayurbhanj is aptly considered by Government as a tribal district of Odisha. The Mayurbhanj district lies between 20°17' and 22°34' north latitude and between 85° 40' and 87° 10' east longitude. The Mayurbhanj district covers an area of 10,418 sq. kms, with a population of 25,19,738 according to the 2011 Census. The density of population of the district is 242 per square km. as against 270 per square km. of the state. As per 2011 census, the Population of scheduled caste is 1, 89,682 (7.30%), that of scheduled tribe is 14, 79,570 (58.7%). In the other district of Odisha of size, Mayurbhanj district is the largest among the 30 districts of Odisha and District head quarter is Baripada. This Baripada town is so old,. In the Mayurbhanj district have 3950 villages (including 202 uninhabited villages) covering twenty six blocks, twenty six tahsils and four sub-division. (Mayurbhanj District Gazetteer, 1967.p.2) and it was the largest and wealthiest of the feudatory states of

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Odisha. (Wright, (1917, p. 574) Hill Kharia, Lodha, Munda, Santal and Birhor etc. are grouped as tribal Hindus people in Mayurbhanj district. Out of Sixty two scheduled Tribes of Odisha, forty five are found in the district of Mayurbhanj district. (Karua, 2008, pp.95) Among the tribes of Odisha the Hill Kharia tribes is another. The Hill Kharia is a primitive tribe (*adivasi*) people, who are living in Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha state of India. The Hill Kharias mainly found in Jashipur block, Karanjia block, Morada block, and Suliapada Blocks of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha. The Hill Kharias are also called *Pahari* (Meaning Hill). They are locally known as '*Pahari Kharia*', because they live in the midst of forest and basically their livelihood depend upon forest produce. The Hill Kharias are most primitive community. The primitive tribal groups' people live in their personal adornments subsistence mountainous habitats in a state and their cultural are different type style Language, unique style of personal adornments subsistence activities.

Their economic condition basically hinge on forest resources like so many different types such as collection of leafs, mushroom, edible, roots, fruits, honey and herbs and they sell nearly village or daily market gets some money and maintain their family. And in the different some areas, Hill Kharias plough cultivation and are better off than the other Hill Kharias. The Hill Kharias of Mayurbhanj district their houses comprise of only one room, which is used as bed room, store room and kitchen room But now-a-days Bijupuka House, IAY house are providing by the Odisha govt. or Central govt. to each family Among the people of different races, the functional affinities, the Socio-economic and cultural life of the Hill Kharia Tribe is quietly distinct. So, this Mayurbhanj region of Northern Odisha has been selected. In the Hill Kharias society family is the hub of social organisation. Most of the families of Hill Kharia community are nuclear in nature. Particularly, the young couples establish their independent families after marriage. Patriarchal family is found in the Hill Kharia community. Among the Hill Kharias, clan system is prevalent till today. Normally, their social and cultural identity are known to us through their social life, custom, tradition, festival, music, dance, dress and ornaments, ritual, etc. No evidence of written literature of the Hill Kharias has so far been retrieved. Still perennial stream of literature exists in the Kharia culture that finds its existence in folk tubs. There evince of the topic lies with the fact in this globalization world, the material culture of the Kharia tribe has changed considerably. So it is the need of the hour to preserve and protect and to keep the society and culture of the Hill Kharias in history for the future generations' knowledge. Hence, this article has been undertaken.

The Hill Kharia person observes religious rites to appease the supernatural elements for the betterment of the society and welfare of the community. Atharadeuli was/is a sacred place in Similipal Hill (National sanctuary). It is the shrine of Baram Maa/Badam Maa Surrounded by holy Sal trees. They regard the Badam, the presiding deity of Similipal hill. The Hill Kharias believe that if worshipped and offered sacrifices, the deity will fulfill the desire of the devotees. They think the Sal trees as sacred because fire of its wood is sacred, leaf provides sacred plate, and Sal resin is sacred perfume and serves as disinfection. Sal trees are believed as abode of deities and spirits. Religiously the Hill Kharia considers the Sal (Robust) trees a sacred species and do not cut the trees. Only the priests go for worshipping it twice a year. The grave yard containing trees are venerated and not cut. Totems and taboos refrain them from cutting trees and killing animals and birds. The worship of forest and *Jhahiraa* patch of Sal groves, where their village deity resides to protect their village and villagers. The Hill Kharias believe in the Sun god, *Dharma Deota*, as the creator and worship him. For them every hill in Similipal (National sanctuary) (Ota, 2016, p.10) is regarded as a deity and believed to be the custodian of forest resources. They call the deities as Badam Maa (female

god), Ramaraja, Pabanbira, Mabira, BhandarDebat, Thakurani, Bauli, Basuli, Basuki, Gramdevi, etc. Besides deities, they also worship *Dahni*(Witch) *Bhuta* (Spirit). (Ota, 2016pp.10-16) Bamsa and lineage deities along with the ancestral spirits are properly propitiated in most of the rituals and festivals for family wellbeing. The forest deities are worshipped for successful food gathering and hunting. In every village, there is a sacred place called *Jaheera*, where Sal is dominant tree, and the tribal offer worship to satisfy the God and Goddess (Sinha, 2010, p-17).

At village level *Thakurani* or the mother goddess is the main deity of the Hill Kharias. In the MelaniParab,(Festival) they organize annual worship of *Thakuran*for prevention and cure of the diseases, like small pox etc. They also worship *DharaniDevata* and a hero named Banda, they worship their ploughs and aces on the day *Dashara*. The tribesmen believe that the cause of diseases and lines are due to wrath of god and goddess, spirit intrusion, evil eye and sorcery and breach of taboo and norms . Their religious beliefs and practices are based on the propitiation of various gods and spirits in various ways by observing different tires, ceremonies and sacrifices to get rid of illness and to be blessed with boon. They also worship Sun god, and other deities and spirits by offerin them sacrifices of goat, fowl,liquor and other ritual food,they believe that the spirits who reside in hills and forests control nature. They believe in black and white magic. They invite Gunia/Raulia, who is expert in diagnosis of cause of the diseases by examining oil, water and sticks in the name of the patient. But currently their religious ideas, beliefs and rituals witness traces of borrowing from the Hindu pantheon. Hindu Hill Kharia depend on magico-religious specialists (Gunia) and medicine man (Kabiraj), who treats a sick boy. Bhandar Puja: the first collection of honey offering to mother goddess is performed(Sinha, 2010, p-17).

II. METHODOLOGY

The data for this article has been collected as part of the research carried out from our field works conducted during March and April 2018 on the Hill Kharia people of Jashipur and Karanjia Blocks of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha. The present researchers have taken so many methods for the collection of primary data n through household survey, structured interview, scheduled and help of case studies, participant observation and group discussion have also been made. But in this article, only qualitative research method has been adopted for the collection of primary data. The primary data for this present research scholar have been collected randomly from different Hill Kharia villages of the above two blocks of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha. For the writing of this article, the primary data have also been collected from Gazetteers,original texts, Government reports and public opinion. Both the primary and secondary data are adopted here for the writing of facts of subject as per the methodological analysis and interpretation.

III. RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

3.1. Deities (Devadevi)

The supreme deity among the Hill Kharias is “*Dharamdevota*”whom they call “*Bhagwan*”(God). According to their *Bhagwan* is unseen, but his existence can be feel who was regarded as the creator of the world and lives in every body all over the universe, among all animals of inanimate objects. They believe Sun God as one of the

supreme deities who was the guide of all other deities. Survival of the world is possible due to him and he was watching the activities of everybody staying above all. No such regular sacrifice was demanded to please the Sun God except on few occasions. He is considered as the pure deity for which white fowls (*Dhoblakukda*) and white goat (*Dholabudah*) and rice bear (*Handia*) are required to satisfy him. The name of *DharamDevota* was recited before any other religious affair or eating of new fruits and when they feel its necessity at that time of any troubles or any work and Sometimes they believe to be cured from any sort of suffering just by reciting the name “*DharamDevota*” without any offering (Mohanty, 1982, p.7).

3.2. Village God (*Gram Devota*)

The Hill Kharia people of Mayurbhanj district, propitious tutelage spirit of the settlement under the name of *BasukiMatato* which reference has already been made. As we have said this spirit is evidently a borrowed deity identified with Earthgoddess. The *Devi Mai* or the Mother goddess, identified by some Hill Kharias with the *Dharti Mai* or Earth goddess, is also included among the village deities in many Hill Kharia villages. The name of this deity might seem to imply that she is as Hindu deity; and as a matter of fact, all the Hindu castes, besides most agricultural primitive tribes of Mayurbhanj District. Worship this deity as a village goddess.

Among the Hill Kharia, *Gram Devota* was the village deities; those were living in the locality and were worshipped for benevolence of the community. They were believed as the guards of villages and protect the people from all sorts of diseases calamity' dangers and any other difficulties. When, somebody falls ill or they go for honey collection, gathering of roots and fruits village deities were propitious. They were located in the courtyard in form of a tree, stone, image or idol, Sabar also use the image of an elephant as a village deity. Among them Basumata (Mother Goddess), Basukimata, pat deota, Baram or Baom (Jungle deota) are propitiated by offering fowl of red colour. They were differently named according to their situation and function, as well sacrifice made before them. The days of worship depend on the necessity and seasonal important Hill Kharia worship the deities privately or community. The sacred priest is called Loy. Sacred performance before the deities were done under the *Jahiraor* sacred grove where the *Gramadeotas* were enshrined in different forms and positions. These all were the benevolent deities and were seldom brings harm when displeased (Patnaik, 2016.p. 7).

3.3. Hill Spirit-PaherorPaharDevota

Thus the primitive Hill Kharia tribe recognizes, besides the Supreme Spirit represented by the sun (Dharamand Earth-goddess or Mother Goddess (*Basukimata*), the spirits of one or more prominent hill near his settlement. These Hill Spirits which he calls Dehuri or pat. This Dehuri or Pat Spirits, to whom special sacrifices are offered, are known each by the name of the hill god of which it is believed to be the guardian spirit of their village (SinghdebSachan, 2012,p.45). Of the different hills in their neighborhood or district, the one which was either their former home or is at present nearest to their settlement is called the Dehuri of the village family, and the others are deities of the same class who inspire reverent awe. The number of those Dehuri or pats is legion. The title *Thakurani* (Revered Lady) is often suffixed to them. Thus, we hear of Kona Pat Thakurani, Nature DehuriThakurani, Bhali Pat Thakurani, Kalu Pat *Thakurani* so many Thakurani, and so forth, among the Mayurbhanj Hill Kharia. It may be noted that the title *Thakurani* is also sometime applied by the Hill Kharia to the Earth –goddess as her proper name, or is suffixed to

the name 'Basuki' (Patnaik, 2008,p.125) the Earth goddess and the jungle-spirit (Barammaa) together constitute the main Gram deoti or village deities of the Hill Kharia. Of these, Borammaa is said to be a female deity and Basukimaa. The Hill Kharias of Mayurbhanj invokes at every puja their three principal deities. Dharm.Pat, and Basuki or Thakurani or Basumata. To define their creed, the Hill Kharia say that: "Akasse Dharma deota; PataleBasukiThakurani; Gram prati Gram deota"(This translations is like – (God in the heavens; Basuki is the nether regions; The village deities in every village) (Upadhaya, 2010, p.55).

Among Hill Kharia they had strong faith on spirits of different hill/ different place of the forest those were regarded as the dean of respective hills and forest. It is their mercy to make available, roots, fruits and leaves in their respective jungle. (Mohanty, 2017 pp. 55-59) The Hill Kharias sacrifice red fowl or goat on different occasion. They were invoked in the time of necessity for their help. When sacrifice was made inside the grove to different hill spirits in the name of the specified hills, all the members of the villages or a particular group participate. Prior to food collection or gatherings of jungle products, the respective spirits in the name of the hill are invoked and their help and guidance was sought. In the low land but just near the hill broom, are living, who are helpful to villagers and to who sacrifices were made.

3.3 *Burha - Burhi:*

These were the ancestral spirit of the Hill KhariaPropel. As the people believe, death occurs in every body's life, but the souls wereimmoral, that was why their near and dear relatives were especially remembered and respected. No sacrifice was made which were especially mean for *BurhaBurhi* among the Hill Kharias. They always offer food, ricebeer, sacred foods first to ancestral spirit which were supposed to be living at a corner of the house. The things were then used by members of the family (Vidhyarthi&Upadhayap.7).

3.4 *Tiger Spirit*

Hill Kharia people believe in tiger spirit. According to them, Tiger spirits were a typical human spirits of those who have been killed by a tiger, After death they travel as a tiger spirit either to help the follow men from tigers or to put them into trouble, Sometimes it brings terror to the village such suspect is taken into communal discussion and a sacrifice is made after the name of the suspected tiger spirit to appease it and to expel from the settlement for mass protection, People regard it as a class spirit without any logical conception behind it. However the faith still prevails as they follow the traditional practice. (Dehon, p.22)

3.5 *Mischievous Spirits Of The Deed-Churils And Mua*

A number of malevolent spirits ate also recent dead from Kharia communities. These were spirits caused by abnormal deaths, either from their own of the communities. It is believed by the Sabar people the spirits of women are harmful especially of those died during pregnancy by violent means Mua as named according to the cause of death like stabling hanging beating etc.Thesewere isolated and free from human crowd(Bhowmick, 1994, p.34).

To Put it in short a number of spiritswere recorded among the Hill Kharias which were named according to different functional aspect, Among them Bhagwan, panmosor (Great God). DharamDeota (Sun God) lerang (Moon),

Basukimaata or Basuki (Mother Goddess earth). Pats (Hill sprits), individual spirits were noteworthy. Thakurani (Reversed lady), Gram devota (Village spirit), Barom or Baram (Jungle spirit) Barmsu or Jhanisal (Sacred) RakhaDashi or Rakhadubo (Protective spirit), BurhaBurhi and Man Massain (the ancestral spirit), DaurMasau (Deads of uplands), Bhaghi (tiger spirit), Churil (Spirit of pregnant women), Muas like KutalMua, BhokalMuaTangulMua, PagulMua, BhaghutMua (Spirit of violent death) and spirit of great figures. People of Hill Kharia satisfy above spirits through the traditional process of sacrifice. Owing to their deep faith, they believe that spirits were supposed to be controlled through ritual processes to bring social peace. But the belief and customary practice is by no means interfered. The name of a supreme deity is generally remembered either on good occasion or at the time of sufferings (Cobden Ramsay, p.305).

Thus the supernatural belief of the Hill Kharia was reflected in the spirit world. It is the spirit who brings natural calamities and causes great loss in the society. Through necessary sacrifices and observances, they were satisfied in respective festive occasions and some of them are frequently worshipped due to its repeated necessity. Worship or sacrifice before ancestral spirit is the duty of head of the family. Whereas all communal sacrifices either in village level or community level must be performed by recognized sacred priest of the society. But on the whole pleasing of the deities and spirits was the duty of the male folk specially the elderly ones as well selected persons of the community. After all the spirit world of the Hill Kharias and the impact of the spirit in day to day activities of the community reflect the character of spirits (Ota, 2014, pp.206-209).

IV. CONCLUSION

The religion of the Hill Kharias, as it has seen, though essentially a culture of 'Power', is not a religion of mere crouching fear of the baffling mysterious powers of the dark. In spite of a hunting fear of evil powers, the Hill Kharias's reverent awe of an inscrutable providence symbolized by the sun, and a modicum of something of the nature of filial devotion to the mother-Goddess, and of natural love and a feeling of respectful comradeship towards the Ancestor-Spirits, would appear to have elevated his religion to a somewhat higher level than that of the more primitive savage. As the natural imagery of the Sun god or the Sun-Moon the source of light and life symbiosis' the Hill Kharias recognition, however dim and undeveloped of the sublimity and beneficence of Divinity, and the application to them of the name "*Dharma*" (Virtue) or *Dharm Raja* ("Virtue-Lord") signifies the recognition of the Deity as the Ruler not only of the material universe but of the moral order of things so too, does the application of the closest and most endearing term of primal human relationship, that of Mother to the Earth Goddess (*Basuki-Mata*) and to the Mother Goddess (elevate the Hill Kharia's religion in refinement of sentiment somewhat above the level of crude primitive tribal faiths. Even though such as *Dharm Raja* and *Devi Maa* were obviously adopted from higher religions, this would appear to have been done only to meet an emotional demand, and the names themselves must have further reacted on their sentiments and helped to foster the feeling of filial love and trustful submission to the deities. Apart from the ancestor cult and a belief in a supreme creator, whether derived from the idea of a first ancestor or otherwise, the Hill Kharias believes in a host of spirits presiding over material objects such as hills, trees and plants, and even over living creatures such as cattle. Thus the religious beliefs and practices of the Hill Kharias of Mayurbhanj is a very interesting study to know the primitive tribal culture in Odisha of Eastern India.

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