

The Changing Sacredness and Taboo in Life Cycle Ritual: A Comparative Analysis among Migrated Tribes of Periurban Area

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ABSTRACT

Tribals are unique in their culture due to continued closeness to nature, forests, flora and fauna. They have different traditions, cultures, lifestyles, beliefs, food, languages, rituals etc. They are unique in their worship rites and sacraments of organized religions and cults, atonement and purification rites, oaths of allegiance, dedication ceremonies, coronations and presidential inaugurations, marriages, funerals etc.

Krushnanagar is a small village located in Chandaka tehsil of Khordha district in Odisha, India, having a population of 468 people, out of that 90% are tribal people and rest 10% are scheduled cast people. Bhubaneswar is nearest city to krushnanagar for all major economic activities, which is approximately 20km away. The people in the villagers have migrated from Mayurbhanj district to Krishnagar of ChandakaTahsil around 30-50 years ago, in search of better livelihood. I have taken two majority tribes in krushnanagari.eBhumij and santal for the study and observed that there has been socio cultural changes in tribal societies in terms of culture, religion, and economic aspects. They perform rituals very similar to Hinduism and very similar to the culture followed in nearby cities Bhubaneswar and Cuttack. This article, with an aim to describe the changing sacredness and taboo among the tribals of Krushnanagar village due to the impact of modernisation and close proximity to culturally rich city of Odisha. Primary data collected through census analysis and discussion with village headman and other villagers vis a vis literature available in this context have been made as base.

It is observed that the sanctity of most of the rituals are not being practiced anymore or some new rituals are being adapted. Now taboo is a different concept in all society. There has been a continuous acculturation process in the practices of life cycle rituals. Newly conceptualized stages have emerged, such as “bridal shower”, “baby shower”, “bachelorette party”, “empty nest”, etc. These celebrations are derived from evolving stages of life and signify progression and change. They can be culminated and categorized under traditional classifications of the life cycle rituals and represent the dynamic growth of society and culture in today’s modern and technologically advanced world.

KEYWORDS: Ritual, life cycle ritual, sacred, taboo, pollution, , acculturation,modernization

INTRODUCTION

The rites of passage for anthropologists are collective hierarchies, values, norms and believes in specific cultures. All the members are united through rites as members of the group(Van ennep,1966:170).There are always prescribed ways of carrying on religious act and procedures, ways of worshipping, praying,

chanting, sacrificing, making offerings and soon, that are called rituals." [Emile Durkheim in W.A. Lessa, 1958:134]

According to **Beals and Hoijer**, "Ritual is a prescribed way of performing religious act that is of praying, singing sacred songs, dancing to God, making sacrifices or preparing offering. A ceremony on the other hand involves a number of inter connected and related rituals."

The term ritual denotes those aspects of prescribed formal behavior that have no direct technological consequences. The "Prescription" or prescribed component in the definition, is ordinarily provided by cultural tradition but it may in some cases be a spontaneous invention of the individual. Therefore, the majority of "religious" and "magical" actions are ritual in this sense. Ritual actions are "symbolic" in that they assert something about the state of affairs, but they are not necessarily purposive, that is the performer of ritual does not necessarily seek to alter the state of affairs.

According to **Raymond Firth**, Ritual is "a kind of patterned activity oriented towards control of human affairs, primarily symbolic in character with non empirical reference and as a rule socially sanctioned."

Ritual expresses the personality, act, relationship, status and the way in which one behaves with others in most parts of the world.

According to Durkheim ritual has four functions namely disciplinary and preparatory, cohesive, revitalizing and euporic.

For anthropologists and ecclesiastics, the term Ritual always refers to social customs, traditionally sanctioned, but some psycho analytic writers use the term to include some prescribed and elaborated behavior that has been spontaneously invented by an individual, as by compulsion neurotics, for example. VanGennep analyses rites de passage. There are two types of rites:

(1) Rites that accompany the passage of a person from one social status to another in the course of his or her life and,

(2) Rites that mark recognized points in the passage of time (New Year, new moon, solstice or equinox).

[Mircea Eliade, 1987:308]

The term has come to be restricted to the former type, which are now sometimes called "life-crisis rites". Typical rites de passage in the modern sense is those that accompany, birth, the attainment of adult status, marriage and death.

Ritual is observed at planting, first fruits, harvest and other important occasion on the annual round of work. Chapple and Coon have called these ceremonial rites of intensification. The acting out the habitual relation has the effect of reinforcing or intensifying their habitual relation and thus series to maintain their conditioned responses. In the technical sense the performance of these rites prevent the extinction of habits to which the individual has been trained. [Edward Norbeck, 1961:98]

Van Gennep analyzed these rites into a sequence of three stages: (1) rites of separation, (2) marginal or liminal rites, (3) rites of aggregation or more simply rites of entry into, waiting in and leaving the intermediate no man's land. The three elements are not equally marked in all rites de passage, according to van Gennep, the element of separation is more important in mortuary or funerary rites, that of aggregation in marriage. The marginal rites, marking the period in which an individual is detached from one status but not yet admitted into the next, are most conspicuous in those initiation ceremonies that involve the participants in a long period of isolation, cut off from their normal social contact. [Mircea Eliade, 1987:386]

Life cycle rituals are category of rituals that mark in the life cycle of a person, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny: birth, reproduction and death. These ceremonies make the basic distinctions, observed in all groups, between young and old male and female, living and dead. This is through rites of passage that we are able to contemplate, to formulate and reformulate our ambivalent condition of animal and human. Biology dictates the fundamentals of our experience - birth, reproduction and death. Yet the ways in which we manipulate and modify these imperatives through cultural means are endless.

[Mircea Eliade.1987: 380]

Life cycle rituals are more or less same for all the society. But the variation is only greater or lesser degree of sacredness and taboo in the rituals. Even Hindu society is in practice of these rituals. But when we move to our indigenous people, there is something uniqueness in their culture. May it be those who are living in their own habitat and those who were migrated and living in the impact of urbanisation. Acculturation and modernization is there but still they are attached to their root tradition. The objective of the study is to show how the two tribes (Bhumij and Santal) living in a common village under the impact of urbanization and still maintaining their own tradition and culture. Another objective is to analyse the changing sacredness and taboo in life cycle rituals among the Bhumij and Santal.

ABOUT THE VILLAGE

In the field research, a heterogeneous village, called Aambopadia, was selected. This village has people belonging to different tribes like Bhumij, Santhal, Kolho etc. This place is located on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar situated approximately around 20 kms from Bhubaneswar railway station and around 17 km far from Cuttack Railway Station. This village of Aambapadia is well connected with urban area of Bhubaneswar through Chandaka-Nandankanan Road and is around 1-2 km from the road. The road to the village is a kuccha road. Regular bus service from Bhubaneswar and Cuttack up to Baranga is available. The village is about 6 kms from Baranga Bus stand and Railway Station.

There is no public transport system to the village and only personal vehicles are the means of transportation. The villagers either use their own or borrow other's vehicle for market or medical facilities.

This village mostly comprises of Bhumij and Santhal people along with some Kolho people as well. The village people majorly speak Mundari, Santali and Lalka language respectively. As the village is located close to the city of Bhubaneswar, most of the villagers speak quite good Odia language as well.

TABLE SHOWING TRIBES POPULATION IN THE STUDIED VILLAGE

Tribe	Male	Percentage of male	Female	Percentage of female	Total
Bhumij	84	48.27%	90	51.72%	174
Santhal	22	42.30%	30	57.7%	52
Kolho	5	45.45%	6	54.54%	11
Ho	2	50%	2	50%	4

In the village of Aambapadia, there are a total of 40 Bhumij families which includes 84 male (48.27%) and 90 female (51.72%) i.e., a total of 174 Bhumij people and 12 Santhal families, a total of 52

members, out of which total male members are 22 i.e., 42.30 % and female members are 30 i.e., 57.69% out of the the total Santhal population.

METHODOLOGY

The whole village consists of 55 households according to the census analysis conducted. Out of it, a little more than 50% sample are taken on a random basis. The data were collected through quantitative and qualitative method. Following a structured questionnaire. From 55 households in depth interview were conducted in 30 households. The interview guide included questions related to all the practices done during life cycle rituals by both Bhumij and Santal tribes. The life cycle rituals of the society can be best explained with reference to the reality status enjoyed by the people of the community. Therefore, the study also takes in account, the opinion, attitude, social relation, wellbeing of the people living there. Numbers case studies were collected on different rituals from these two tribes. Quantitative method is used only for census analysis.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS OF BHUMIJ TRIBE: -

Pregnancy and Childbirth: -

Birth of a child marks an important occasion in every family, in every society. But prior to child birth, the pregnant women go through some restrictions. During pregnancy, women are not allowed to cut their hairs. The husband also does not shave his head or beard. Women are restricted to come out during solar and lunar eclipse as it might affect the growth of the fetus. They are also not allowed to burst or boil eggs and eat meat of sacrificed animals or birds. Both husband and wife do not wear any kinds of new materials including clothes, accessories, etc., until a puja takes place called “*Kukuda Puja*”. This puja happens during the 3rd or 5th or 7th month. On the puja day, maternal parents bring a country chicken to in-law’s house along with new clothes and fruits for their daughter and son-in-law. The country chicken’s nail is cut from one of its fingers and is reared by the daughter. This chicken and its children cannot be eaten by the daughter and her husband but can be by other family members. In-laws house also present a country chicken which is sacrificed during the puja. The maternal mother and paternal father both worship and congregate their family deities and sacrifice the creature. The chicken is then cooked and eaten by the family and village members.

Midwives help during childbirth in the lying-in room. After childbirth, the umbilical cord is cut by a sharp object and is buried on the left side of the main entrance door from outside. The placenta is buried in a pit in the lying-in room. All these activities are done by the midwives and in return she is given a new sari, rice grains and a sum as well.

Apart from this, after childbirth, birth pollution remains for 9 days. During this period, the house is said to be unclean. The mother does not cook, and no food is exchanged with neighbors. Guests do not visit during the period and if done they return and immediately wash themselves up. On the 10th day, both father and mother and the child are made to take bath. The purificatory rite is called “*narta*”. Name or “*ngutum*” is also given during this time or on the 21st day and preference is mostly given to both maternal and paternal grandparents as well as joking relations.

Another ceremony is held after 1 year of the child which is called as “*LuturKul*”. During the ceremony, the child’s ears are pierced respectively by the couple whose name is given to the child. This happens for both boy and girl child. Gold earrings or “*kansi*” and silver waste chain or “*naame*” are given as presents to the child. If the piercing is not done in this occasion, it can also be done during MakarSankranti.

4.2.2 Puberty: -

On a girl's menarche, she is confined to a room for 7 days. She is restricted to enter the kitchen or do any household chores. She is not allowed to talk or see any male members. She is neither seen by any male member as well. She does not touch any kinds of plants or perform religious rituals. Purificatory bath is done on the 8th day at dawn when she is applied turmeric paste and mustard oil. The old clothes are disposed, and new clothes and accessories are gifted from maternal uncle side. The feast takes place during the evening where invited guests and village members come with presents for the girl. The grandeur of the feast depends on the family on how big they want it to be conducted or if wished the event can also be done simply by distributing sweets to the village members. It is almost same as in our society.

4.2.3 Marriage: -

Due to long term interaction and staying with odia people the marriage system of this tribe is very similar to that of Odias. They have the same marriage rituals and practices like "nirbandha" (engagement), a brahman priest chanting mantras on "bedi" (mandap), and. Bride price is usually present in this tribe but on asked many people of the village denied and said they only practice dowry. Only few agreed to have bride price. Marriage in same clan or "gatra" is strictly prohibited. The system of widower remarriage is present but no widow remarriage is seen there. Levirate and sororate marriage is also practiced in this community. Presently exogamy marriage is also accepted here.

The different types of marriage found in this community are as follows: - "Baha" - marriage by negotiation, "Sinduribaha" - marriage by capture, "chaudalbaha" - marriage by intrusion, "ganambaha" - marriage by elopement, "gharjamaibaha" - marriage by service and "sangabaha" - levirate or sororate marriage.

Firstly, negotiation takes place. If both the families are interested, they move on to "nirbandha" or engagement ceremony. On this ceremony, fathers from both sides bring "gua" (arecanut) and exchange as a part of ritual. The girl is gifted with presents and sweets and a brahman priest is also called, "dandia" or matchmaker arranges the marriage. After looking into both the party's gatra, an auspicious day is selected for the marriage to take place. A day before marriage "Badhua puja" takes place where they worship the anthill.

Same day, during evening, haldi ceremony takes place in boy's place. The same haldi is sent for the girl to be applied on the next day that is the marriage day. The groom party arrive to bride's place by evening and marriage usually takes place in the midnight as per the time and date decided by the priest. The groom is first brought to the mandap by bride's father and then the bride. The priest then chants mantras and later vermilion rite takes place along with the groom tying a "mangalsutra" (necklace worn by married woman) around bride's neck. Other small rituals that happen on this day are "hatoghonti", "Khoipuda" etc.

Later, returning to groom's place rituals like "kadoghati" (bride and groom must play in a shallow mud place). Same day groom wears a "katuri" (a metal bangle worn by married women) around the bride's wrist. After all the rituals and formalities, the newly wed bride and groom go to bride's place after 2-3 days and after a small gathering in the house and eating and drinking they return immediately.

Head - Mr. Baidhara Singh

In this family, the subjects are, Mr. Baidhara Singh and Mrs. Banita Singh in the case study of exogamy marriage. The husband belongs to Bhumij tribe while the wife belongs to Khondayata caste. The

husband's family accepted the girl and there was no serious case in the village whereas in the girl's village, her family had to pay a fine of Rs 30,000 and she was outcasted from her family, her village as well as her caste. Earlier she was not allowed to participate in any ceremonial activities in her maternal home or village but now she is only visiting her family members.

4.2.4 Death ritual: -

Locally, death rite is known as "*Goe Jana*". Children below 12 years or 18 years of age are buried. The burial practice is also for pregnant women and people who die from pox diseases. While the rest of the people are cremated. After a person's death, the body is kept in a direction with head lying towards the south. The corpse is anointed with mustard oil and turmeric paste and a coin is kept on the mouth. The body is lifted by 4 paal bearers, locally known as "*maldaring*", one of them being the person who light the pyre.

The body is then taken to be lit by the eldest son of the person or the closest kin. The son must make three rounds around the body in anticlockwise direction with a pot held on shoulders with a small hole and water dripping from it. The pyre is lit by keeping the burning wood near the mouth. After the body gets burnt, water is sprinkled on the ashes and people present their bend forwards and brush the smoke towards them. The ashes and scalp bones are collected by the son which are later immersed in a river.

The party then takes bath sanctified with Tulsi leaf water. Death pollution goes on for 10 days and rice cooked with neem leaf is eaten during the time period. During this period, people do not eat non-veg food, or any kind of food added with spices or oil. On the 10th day, purificatory rite or "*hayanalaah*" is held. The son shaves his head along with closest male kin members of the deceased and male members of the same descent. Female members cut their nails and do not go to the pyre area. The evening feast is held on 11th day, clothes are given to the deceased family members and the feast is always accompanied with "*handi*", a type of local liquor and "*mahuli*" as well. Usually in this tribe, no death ceremony takes place but because of assimilation, people have adapted new changes like "*shradha*" (a yearly death ceremony in Odia Community).

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS OF SANTHAL TRIBE: -

Pregnancy and childbirth: -

During pregnancy, both the husband and wife do not cut their hairs or nails. They are restricted in participating in any funeral ceremony or touch the corpse or even weep for them. The husband is not allowed to participate in hunting activities as well as not allowed to kill any type of animal or bird in the house. While a mother is not allowed to burst eggs and if required, it can be done by other family members. The mother is not allowed to touch hearth or "*chulhi*" or do any kind of heavy work. She is always accompanied to go to the jungle. She is also restricted to look at any kinds of animals or birds as they believe it might affect the child's growth.

Mukhi helps in delivering the child. The umbilical cord is cut by a sharp object and is buried in the middle of the door of living room while the placenta is buried in a pit by "*Dai budhi*" called as midwife. Purification rite takes place on the 7th on 9th day. The mother and the child are made to take bath by the midwife. During the birth pollution, the mother is not allowed to cook or touch hearth or any kind of household materials. She is confined to a room and is not allowed to eat any kind of food added with oil or spices. During this period, as the house is considered unclean, people mostly do not visit the house and food is also not exchange with neighbours and if done people go and wash themselves immediately.

On the last day, all family members take bath, clean the house by smearing cow dung and used clothes and earthen pots are thrown and head is cleaned by soil called as “*nadkahassa*”. Same day “*ngutum*” or name is given to the child by the preference of both paternal and maternal grandparents.

Puberty: -

In Santhal tribe, most importantly during a girl’s menarche, she is not allowed to cowshed or “*bhitar*”, a sacred place for worship in the house. The pollution goes on for 7 days, but she is not confined to any room. She can do all the household chores except religious rituals. On the last day, the house is cleaned by smearing cow dung.

Marriage: -

Marriage system in this community is different from Bhumij tribe. Marriage or “*bapla*” within same clan and cross-cousin marriage is strictly prohibited. Levirate and sororate marriages are permitted by the community and there is no age problem. The bride may be younger or older or same age as the bridegroom. There is presence of bride price or “*gonong*” and it maybe in cash or cattle, but 3 saris are a must, one for bride’s mother, one for paternal grandmother and one for paternal aunt.

Different types of marriages are found in this community and they are as follows :- “*Sagunbapla*” - marriage by negotiation, “*SangeBariyat*” - marriage accompanied by many, “*Haram Bariyat*” - marriage accompanied by old men, “*Gurdaongapam*” - marriage by elopement, “*Ipitutbapla*” - marriage by capture, “*Dikubapla*” - hindu type of marriage in temple, “*Ghar de jamai*” - son-in-law in house, and “*Apagirbapla*” marriage by mutual consent and without informing parents.

Usually, marriage negotiations are started from boy’s side. “*Raibar*” is the middleman who shares details and bring information between both the families. If interested further rituals and customs like “*olahduarnge*” (visiting houses), “*horohchinha*” (engagement), “*taka chal*” (groom’s family must pay meager money to bride’s) and “*newta*” (invitation) takes place.

After that an auspicious day is selected and marriage takes place. The first invitation always goes to the “*majhi*” or headmen of the village. Marriage generally takes place in the bride’s place but in case of marriage by mutual consent, it takes place in groom’s place.

The vermilion rites are important and after this rite the groom wears a “*merhedsakom*”, (a special kind of bangle worn at the time of marriage only for married women) around the bride’s wrist. This bangle helps in identifying, if one is married or not. Another custom called “*daramgande*” takes place when bride has elder unmarried sister. It is to pay her respect by presenting her clothes. At the end or mid of every marriage, bride price is collected.

4.3.4 Death ritual: -

In this community, both burial and cremation practice take place. It depends on the deceased person’s wish or will of family members as to how the corpse is either to be buried or to be cremated. After a person's death, the body is anointed with turmeric paste and mustard oil with head lying towards the south direction. Relatives are informed and after the grievance, the body is either taken for burial or cremation. In the burial place, women accompany men but in the place of cremation, women are not allowed to go.

In a burial place the belongings are also buried with the dead person and after the person is buried large stones are kept over the burial. While in the cremation place the body is burnt by the eldest son or

closest kin by moving around the deceased, three times in anticlockwise direction with a pot held on the shoulders with a small hole and water dripping from it. After the pyre is lit, the scalp bones are collected in a small earthen pot which is sealed and buried under a tree. All the present members take bath and return. After that a ritual called “*rum daka*” takes place where family members ask the deceased spirit if his/her death was natural or not and other questions.

Death pollution continues for 2-3 days. During this period, family members do not eat any kind of food added with spices or oil. Some people do not even comb their hair. On the last day, a death ritual called “*Tel nahan*” takes place. The eldest son gets his head shaved along with closest kin members while women cut their nails. Clothes are brought for the deceased family members and feast is given accompanied with local liquor - “*handi*” or rice beer and “*parua*”.

The purification rite is called “*bhandan*”. It takes place later, before or after MakarSankranti. The small earthen pot which was buried is taken out and then immersed in the Gaya River. The procession is called as “*DamodarJatra*”. It can also be immersed in the ghats of nearby river. A grand feast is given on the last day and all the death rituals are hereby complete after this.

CONCLUSION: -

The major tribes living in this village are Bhumij and Santhal. These people have mostly migrated from Mayurbhanj district in search of a better place to overcome food and land problems. Because of frequent contact with different cultures, most of the rituals are not being practiced anymore or some new rituals are being adapted.

Whereas in developed countries, as people live longer and become more affluent, there has been a shift in the practices of life cycle rituals. Newly conceptualized stages have emerged, such as “bridal shower”, “baby shower”, “bachelorette party”, “empty nest”, etc. These celebrations are derived from evolving stages in a life and signify progression and change. They can be culminated and categorized under traditional classifications of the life cycle rituals and represent the dynamic growth of society and culture in today’s modern and technologically advanced world.

Traditional rites have also been revived and expanded, specifically due to the influence and development of the women’s movement demanding equal rights. Geffen states that this has resulted in mothers, as well as fathers, demanding inclusion in birth, adolescent and marriage rituals for themselves and for their sons and daughters. Such practices encourage unity and equality within society. They also shun previously held beliefs of the male sex being dominant and superior, and instead encourage more practices that celebrate the female sex on equal footing.

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