

LIFE AND CULTURE OF THE BAIGA TRIBE IN THE WRITINGS OF ELWIN WITH ITS MODERN RELEVANCE

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Abstract

The present paper attempts to explore the tribal life and culture of the Baiga tribe of central province with special reference to Verrier Elwin's magnum opus "The Baiga" which reflects their life and culture magnificently. Elwin's exploration of tribal life, culture, archetypal beliefs, dance, songs, and various literary forms prevalent among the tribes of central India. Baiga tribe is clearly belongs to one of the oldest strata of race in India. Baiga tribal life is full of proverbs, tales and rituals. The paper mainly focus on their life style such as marriage and death ceremony, religious beliefs, clothing, dancing, songs, ballads and social formation which make them unique. Surely, they have a strong cultural heritage, which is beyond price. Their culture and life is resplendent and efficient. The cult of bewar, magic, the diagnosis and cure of disease, the knowledge of the legendary past, the art of recreation and the art of love, is the most important part of their life. They have strong affiliation with the nature and earth and this is reason they still want to live in the forest area. There are number of anthropologist and scholars, who have done work on the socio-cultural life of the Baiga tribe, but it is still needed close scrutiny and analysis along with make them familiar with the modernity and advance technologies without rooted out from their own place. The paper further aims to talk about its modern relevance to the society. The study of tribal life and culture is very vast and varied. Through the deep study and documenting their culture, we can keep their cultural alive and give the contribution to the upliftment of the society.

Key words: Elwin', socio-cultural, technologies....

AND CULTURE OF THE BAIGA TRIBE IN THE WRITINGS OF ELWIN WITH ITS MODERN RELEVANCE

- Sangeeta Shyam

Elwin explores tribal life, culture, archetypal beliefs, dance, songs, and various literary forms prevalent among the tribes of central India. Baiga tribe clearly belongs to one of the oldest strata of race in India. Baiga tribal life is full of proverbs, tales and rituals. The paper mainly focus on their life style such as marriage and death ceremony, religious beliefs, clothing, dancing, songs, ballads and social formation which make them unique. Surely, they have a strong cultural heritage, which is beyond price. Their culture and life is resplendent and efficient. The cult of bewar, magic, the diagnosis and cure of disease, the knowledge of the legendary past, the art of recreation and the art of love, is the most important part of their life. They have strong affiliation with the nature and earth and this is reason they still want to live in the forest area. There are number of anthropologist and scholars, who have done work on the socio-cultural life of the Baiga tribe, but it is still needed close scrutiny and analysis along with make them familiar with the modernity and advance technologies without rooted out from their own place. The paper further aims to talk about its modern relevance to the society. The study of tribal life and culture is very vast and varied. Through the deep study and documenting their culture, we can keep their cultural alive and give the contribution to the upliftment of the society. Simultaneously it will be benefited the further research students. The study is mostly running with following methodologies, such as textual analysis (critical reading of available text "The Baiga" by Elwin, comparative study, journals and scholar's views.

The Baiga tribe of central India is one of the pioneering tribal communities in central province of India. Madhya Pradesh has vast area with many forests inhabited by tribes such as Gond, Pardhan, Baiga, Bhil, Bharia and Kol etc. The Baiga are the real inhabitants of forests. Retaining and holder of the customs and traditions, which is handed down by their ancestors. Genetically, it appears they linked to the Indo-Australian aboriginal group. The Baiga are the real protectors and worshippers of the forest and nature. Their sacred beliefs prohibit them from ploughing the land as this is perceived as injured the Mother "Earth". Therefore, they adopt the slash and burn form

of shifting cultivation, constantly remaining on the move. The Baiga seldom prefers to interact with other tribes, often avoiding formal settlements, formal education and formal trades or work. The Baiga making tattoo themselves in very elaborate and colourful manners using different sorts of elements and materials from the forests they live in. This is One of the most important customary that is practicing among Baiga tribe is making tattooing in their different parts of the body like hand, leg, neck and forehead. Tattoos are generally seen in parallel lines and dots in their foreheads. In addition, the other part of the body they make different kinds of things like moon, triangles etc. The Baiga culture is the unique one, which is full of proverbs, tales, fables and riddles. They occupied in different states of India such as Madhya Pradesh, Uttar-Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Baiga tribe follow different kind of customs and rituals no doubt they are less educated but their less literacy did not signify that they don't know about the living styles even the fact is that they are most civilized among all of us. Tribal people kept everything in their mind they have wonderful knowledge, which is in oral tradition. They are the extraordinary people with tremendous knowledge. They have wonderful knowledge regarding folk medicine and they still following these folk treatment in their personal life. There are different categories in Baigas such as:

Bhinjwar Baiga

Bhinjwar Baiga is a big proprietor in the baggage of Rajgond. They have the importance of being a dynasty of most fame and gourds in the Mandla, Balaghat and Dindori districts. Today our country has reached in the twenty-first century and several types of tools have been discovered but many tribes of our country are still unfamiliar with these technologies and one of them is the Baiga tribe. Even today, these tribes are unaware of the name of trains and airplanes. Their life, living, eating, drinking, colloquial, is very different from modern humans. Most tribals live in Madhya Pradesh only in the whole of India. There are many types of tribes in Baiga tribes like Bhumiya, Bhinjawar, Bharotiya, Nahar or Narotiya, Bhaina, Kondawan, and Mudiya.

Bhumiya Baiga- Groundwork means the owner of the land. It is believed that God had created Bhumiya Baiga as the first man on this earth and made them the owner of the land. Moreover, this is the reason that they call themselves bhumiya. Principally they reside in Mandla and Bhalghat. This Bhumiya caste is the most original and unique among all the Baiga sub-castes.

Bharotiya – Bharotiya Baiga came after Bhumiya Baiga. The habitat of this tribe is Baihar tehsil. All the customs and traditions of them are related to the Bhumiya Baigas.

This Baiga community resides with the Bhumiya Baigas in Baiga Chak. The word Bharotiya is considered as nourishes. This Baiga tribe still maintains its culture.

Bhinjwar - Bhinjwar caste is one of the most decent tribes of Baigas. Bhinjwar Baiga resides in north-west. It is said that there was an extension of this caste until the western part of Vindhyanchal in Mirzapur. These castes call themselves Vindhvar to identify among different types of Baigas from other sub-castes. This tribe pronounces many words differently, like Ra in place of L and bar in place of hair. This sub-caste is considered very decent.

Nahar or Narotiya- this sub-caste of Baiga resides in Baihar. People of this tribe worship Baghdev at the place of other Goddesses. The tiger is also called Nahar in this community and because of worshipping the tiger; this tribe came to be called the Nahar Baiga. This tribe has the specialty that resides separately from other sub-castes of the village.

Bhaina Baiga- This sub-caste of Baiga resides more in Bilaspur and Shahdol districts. This sub-caste has three distinctions- Dhudhbhaina, Kathbhaina, and Raibhaina. People of this sub-caste live like a Bhumiya Baiga.

Kondwan or Gondbhaina- Some Baigas also call it their sub-caste. They say that this sub-caste reside between the Kavardha and the Baihar tehsil. These tribes mostly reside in the jungles and by selling the jungle leaves and Mahua spend their life span. The Baiga that bends his forehead's hair is called Mudiya Baiga. This sub-caste is seen separately from all subclasses. The people of this tribe mostly live among Gond tribes. Therefore, living, tolerance, dress, dressing, customs and traditions of this tribe are all similar to the Gond.

The most backward sub-castes among all the sub-castes of Baigas are Bhaumiya and Bharotia Baiga. Regarding these subspecies, sociologists and government are being studied. Baiga tribe is probably the oldest tribe. Captain Thomson, the settlement officer of Seoni district in 1867 that the Baiga is the most ancient and the most densely inhabited forests. He wrote the first of these that they are dependable in the jungle, extremely shy, very flexible, and hunting with arrow. In the evening sitting on the side of the fire, these Baiga communities are eating various types of birds and animals. Their life is an open book and that is why their life is full of fun. After this, V.Raschel and Heeralal wrote a book having 24 pages with the title of *Tribes and Custom of C.Pand*

Barar which is published from London in the year of 1916. In this book Raschel and Heeralal highlighted on the economic, religious, social and various important aspects of Baigas. (Vijay Chaourasiya *Prakrati Putra Baiga*, p.4)

The Baiga tribe reminds of the early neo-stone era. Baiga is one of the oldest tribes of Madhya Pradesh, which is very backward in terms of development and in the event of final identification of its primacy due to social change, urban civilization and intense attack of physical means, the primitive identity of Baiga society has often disappeared. Baiga had their own language cultural heritage but with the rapid change, they are changing their ideas of life but still they have wonderful and precise culture. Because of this, a primitive tribe became almost deprived of its history, art and culture. That is the reason it could not see the remarkable pages of the entire life style, art, culture and history of Baiga. The myths of the Baiga tribe reflect the ancient traditions. In the myths of the world, the world develops directly from the primitive ocean and there is no indication of the existence of the world before. In most of these myths, the beginning of the story begins with the need for the creation of a new earth for the drowning of the earth and the existence of human beings under water. The tone of the beginning of the Baiga gatha (story) is quite classical: There are many perceptions regarding the origins of Baiga caste. It is said that due to protection from the invasions of the Dravidians, Indian Aryans and Mongols in different eras, they are sheltered in mountains and dense forests where it has been inhabited for centuries. According to the myths of this tribe, they call themselves the first man of the world, with earth building. In this context, they also have known as the main masters of the country. Rashel and Hiralal have written in their furl that God first created Naga Baiga and Naga Baigin. They lived in the forest and after some time they had two sons and both sons married their siblings, from which the mantra of the race was born in these two couples. There are numerous kind of culture exists among the Baiga tribes, which are unique, and the validity of their rituals is highly appreciable.

Birth Ritual

Albeit the Baiga have some acquaintance with certain aspects of reproductive physiology, they have few knowledge regarding morphological changes in the ovaries. The Baiga are well aware of the facts of physiological; they have their own rough and ready theories of the psychophysiology of sexual libido; their vocabulary of sexual anatomy is adequate for social, though not of course for scientific, purposes; they have carefully observed, and obviously devoted much thought to the process of gestation and

procreation. They completely thought that if only God wanted to give us child then only a woman begets the child. The intercourse and conception is solved by reference to Bhagavan- for the deity is for the Baiga an admirable refuge from exact thinking. According to them, the Bhagavan (God) apparently intervenes twice in the process and when the child first came on this earth the head of the village keep the name of the child. Naming is done based on the day, month, place, animal, bird, deities, and child's looks, colors, efforts. The head wash the child's feet with alcohol similarly; all people come and wash their child's feet with alcohol. After this, all female men drink alcohol and eat lentil rice. Keep the child's name as follows like Aghnu, Itwari, Ashadhu, Nanku etc.

Vivah Sanskar (Marriage Occasion)- Marriage practice is very different in the Baiga tribe. Marriage is of great social significance in the Baiga community. Socially and economically marriage is very important. The necessity of paying a 'bride - price' is an incentive to family thrift, and a stimulus to youthful labour. Baiga community has beliefs that there can be no economic progress without the creation of wants; marriage supplies one of the chief wants in Baiga life. In the Baiga caste, the boy can marriage his own maternal uncles daughter. The girls are also free to choose their own life partner in Baiga tribe. Baiga tribe considers sixteen-seventeen year old girl to be an adult. Adivasi society has created an impressive example in front of us where girls have given full independence to choose their own partner, which is not in the other society. A Baiga girl chooses her life partner in collective dance. In the markets, they understand each other well. The marriage talk starts between the village head or the boy and the girl's parents. Many types of marriages are prevailing in Baiga society like Mangli Vivah, Haldi - Pani Vivah, Lamasnai Vivah etc.

Religious Beliefs

Baiga tribe mainly worship Burha Dev, Thakur Dev, Dharti Mata, Burha Naag Dev, Bagheshwar Dev.

Burha Dev: Burha Dev consider as one of the most powerful God among the Baiga tribe of central India. Burha Dev is considered as the creator of the world. He worsiped as the kuldevta among them.

Thakur Dev: Thakur Dev is considered as village devta. Thakur Dev living in Semar, Mahua and Saal trees and protect the villagers from the every epidemic.

Dharti Mata: Dharti Mata is worshiped by the Baiga tribe and on every occasions and festivals liquor is poured on the earth (Dharti Mata) before drinking because it is believed that if they will not doing like this the Goddess Dharti Mata change all liquor as a poison.

Burha Naag Dev: It is also known as Nageswar Dev. This tribal God is blessed with Naagmani and this God protect villagers from snakebite. He is also worshiped at the time of bewar cultivation.

Bagheshwar Dev: Baiga tribe also worship Bagh (Tiger) as their important deities. He is bewar God. Bewar cultivation is very famous among Baiga tribes. Bagheshwar Dev is worshiped while reeling kutki (grain) in Bewer. Baiga tribe has deep faith on the paradoxes and it is believed to be at many levels. For example, in wild animals such as tiger etc., they also believe in divine power. Apart from these, the Baiga tribes worship some other gods and goddesses such as Sukha Dev, Marhi Devi, Marhi Devi, Agni Devta etc.

Clothing

Baiga men wear truss and cover their head with a piece of cloth, on the other hand women wear Lugra(cotton saari). In general, the baiga men often wear patka (langoti). Ladies wear sari, which is twelve or sixteen hand long sari. In addition, while working with the same lunga, you bind the child on the back with the same lunga and women wear colored blouse on body. During special occasion Baiga, men use to wear Haptops and Patka i.e. Shirt and Langot, Jacket and cover their head with Turban. On the very special occasion like marriage and festivals woem use to wear saari and they are fond of different sorts of ornaments.

Housing

Baiga tribe likes to be in the group. Eight or groups of ten houses have their full villages. Baiga uses wood, bamboo and grass to make houses. All the people in the villages help in making the house, which is called Bigar(working in a group). Indeed the Baiga houses are very simple, tumbledown and very dilapidated. The houses of the Baiga's are 6 to 7 feet in height. There are so many rooms we can find in the Baiga's houses like Hearth for cooking, stand for water-pots, Row of grain-bins dividing house into two rooms,

Hearth for fire used for light and warmth, Verandah, Grindstone, Rice-husker, Inner Room, Outer Room etc. Verrier Elwin quoted his very famous book *The Baiga*, the lines are- "Unless you put a pillar in the middle of the house, and poles on the side, can the gunia build it by his magic?- Baiga Proverb" (Elwin's *The Baiga* p. 28). Here he talks about the importance of the pillar and poles as well as the magic of the Baiga gunia.

Dance and Songs of the Baiga Tribe:

Dance: The Baiga dances are unique and melodious. They take their dance art very seriously and dress better for it. Men put few ornaments, tie big round turbans and stick peacock feathers on that turban, while girls put all kind of ornaments. They tie pretty red or orange shawls across their waist. They bind their hair and put tufts peacock feathers with colourful band called phundra. For the dance they used different sorts of music instruments like mandar, timki, gudum baja and dafli, flute etc. there are different kinds of dances performed by the Baiga tribe such as Karma Dance, Bilma Dance, Jharpat Dance, Tpadi Dance, and Sua Dance etc. these are the main dance of the Baiga tribe.

Karma Dance: It is religious and social dance. In this, dance boys and girls divide themselves into two groups. When girls and mens are assembled together one group begin singing and when they have finished their lines another group start singing and both the groups dance together.

Bilma Dance: Bilma dance is represent the marriage dance in the Baiga community. Bilma dance is quite different from other dances like Jharpat and Sua dance. The big Nangara accompanies Bilma dance. It is little bit confusing but it has lots of fun and excitement. The dancers gather near drum and they cry "kring kring" (kind of high music pitch) and after that as soon as the drum begin, everybody begins to dance.

Jharpat Dance: Jharpat Dance take place with little group of boys and girls. This dance is kind of development of Karma dance. In this, dance boys stand in the lines with holding hands of each other and facing the girls. The drummers leap back and forth between the two lines, which advance and recede by a simple movement. In this dance, the dancers usually bend as they dance, but from time to time stand still and sing loudly.

Tapadi Dance: Tapadi dance only performed by women of the Baiga tribe. It is formed in three ways. In a very first phase two lines of women face each other without holding hand of each other but clapping and blending low and moving their feet with very easy left right movements. In the second phase of the dance is – after a time one lines turns its back on the other, then both lines go down on their knees, and clap their hands vigorously and in the third phase finally both lines join together, and go round in a big circle, all facing inwards, bending down, and clapping their hands.

Sua Dance: Sua Song and Dance is celebrated with great fanfare in October. This dance is performed in circular. There are two groups of women in which it performs dancing by playing and clapping. When a group starts a song and dance, the other group repeats it. This dance is called Sua Dance because it places an idol of parrot in a pot of soil with grain and while carrying the basket, the group roams in the village.

Songs

There is, of course, no corpus of Baiga poetry. Their songs and music belong mostly to the dance, and sometimes are composed to suit to the day. Some of the songs are traditional and some of the love songs, doha songs, cradle songs, Sua song, Reena song, Karma song, Dadariya song etc. Dances and songs of the primitive festivals of the Baiga are commemorating glee on them. Baiga songs have the true expression of their forest life. The real form of traditions is found in their songs. Verrier elwin quoted a small song in his very famous book *The Baiga* that is – “*Sanjha sabere surta athai mor jodi ke nita duppar o sanjha sabere re*”. (Verrier Elwin’s *The Baiga* p. 437). it means in the evening and morning, comes a longing for my love, in the mid day and at evening and the morning.

Occupation

Baiga tribes mainly depend upon agriculture, they consider earth to be their mother hence they do not use to plough their lands, as they believe that ploughing will torn the breast of the mother that is earth. In place of ploughing they prefer shifting cultivation that is called bewar. In the process of bewar cultivation tribal first select the land with some small trees and they burn it leave for the rain and when it rained land is ready to grow the grain and after that they pour the different sort of seeds with help of some weapons. Finally, they cut the grain. Thus, the shifting cultivation, the firing of the forest, over-grazing, and the pollarding of the savannah, has largely destroyed the forest barrier. “Shifting cultivation also in practised in Assam with the name of *jhoom*. Dr.

Hutton writes- 'Although terraced and irrigated cultivation has been adopted by a few Sema villages on the edge of the Eastern Angami country, and attempt is being made with gradually increasing success to introduce it among the other Sema village father north, it cannot yet be regarded as more than an occasional and exotic form of cultivation, and the villages that have adopted it from the Eastern Angamis have generally either taken to Angami custom and dress entirely, like swemi, or are in the process of taking to them, like Hebulimi.....The genuine Sema method of cultivation is jhuming pure and simple". (Hutton's *The Sema Nagas* p.59).

It means the shifting cultivation is famous all over the country with various name. Bewar farming is often prevalent in all the provinces. It is a custom that is derived from the religious and social beliefs of the tribes. Bewar farming is still done in many provinces today, but it has already been considerably reduced.

Death Rites

Baiga community has different faith on the death. They have different sentiments and beliefs for the death. It is very famous lines on death that is Baiga Dadariya- *She lies on her bed, For her king has died* (Elwin's *The Baiga* p.289). Death is all too tragically common among Baiga people. Among the Baiga the dead people are buried, but the aged people are burnt as a sign of honour. Bodies are laid naked with their head pointing the south direction. A person of importance is buried with two; three rupees or cigarettes and tobacco are kept. On top of the grave, a platform is made on which a stone is raised. In times of trouble, his relatives worship the place. During this, all household chores are discontinued and their relatives provide food. A different set of rituals are followed if a tiger kills a man. When such an incident takes place, a Baiga priest who visits the spot where the incident took place he makes a small cone of the blood stained earth, which should symbolize either the deceased man or his relatives. The priest then goes around on his hands and knees and performs activities that indicate the tiger. He also takes a lump of blood stained earth in his mouth and the relatives standing at a distance approaches and strikes the priest with a stick on his back. This action means the tiger has been killed or has been left harmless and the priest then lets off the mud into the hands one of the relative. The mud is then placed in an anthill and a pig is sacrificed over it.

The social organization of Baiga is internally well organized and well systematic. Baiga has important place for family in the society. Baiga is a male oriented society Men's desire is paramount in the implementation of social custom but it does not mean

that there is no respect for women in this society but disrespect of women is considered disrespect to the society. The primitive Baiga society offers many kinds of autonomy, cleanliness and freedom to women. In Baiga society, the girl has the freedom to choose her own life-partner. It is mandatory to seek advice from women while making any decision related to marriage in this community. In addition to the works of the household, women cooperate with men in agriculture. The Baiga society system tied to the pivot panchayat. Judgments taken by the Panchayat in Bagga society are important and these practices are necessary to obey all the villagers. There are five members (panch) in the Baiga Panchayat like Mukkadam, Deewan, Samrath, Kotwar and Dwar. Mukkadam is the head of the village and their appointment is traditionally inherited. The government also recognizes that tradition.

The economy of this tribe is primarily, meant for wages in hunting, farming, animal husbandry, poultry, and forest. Dhanush-bana is their main weapon. However, while working in fields, they use spade and ax. Even today, development of the Baiga society has not happened completely. Even today, women handle the work of the household and agriculture and the men go outside the village to do wages. Baiga society works to make beedi with tendu leaves and sell them in the market and this is how they live. In this phase of change all the tribes have to undergo similar transition period. Therefore, the Government of India classifies the Baiga caste under the category of special Backward Primitive tribe. Accordingly to the basic facilities of their life, needs should be met. In order to create the first facilities for education, health, and rescue, Baiga Development Agency was formed in all the Baiga prominence districts, thereby increasing their purchasing power. By increasing income, their focus will be on the health, education, housing, cleaning and agricultural development of the family which will lead to their post-progressing progress? Thus, the opportunity to improve the quality of life of the Baiga tribes will also be created as soon as the basic facilities are determined. Their folksongs, dance and narratives reflects their collectiveness, sense of togetherness and wholeness therefore all the songs, ballads and folk-dances are needed to be preserve. They have a very vast cultural identity, which is unique and rich, and their validity is so strong. Any research can give the contribution to upliftment to this community. Baiga tribal cultural are still known as one of the oldest culture and their relevance are still engrossed in the society and these cultures are still appreciating. If their culture and tradition would be in written form it would be helpful for the future generation or the researchers.

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