

REASSERTING IDENTITY THROUGH RITUALS IN THE TRIBALS OF CHHATTISGARH

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Abstract

After the formation of Chhattisgarh state on 1st November 2000, there is a marked development and progress in the state, similarly, advancement in the consciousness of their originality and indigeneity of other backward caste, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes people of the state have taken place. The formation of multiple organizations and its celebrations on various occasions clearly shows that these categories of people have developed their social scientific insights in the modern world. The present paper aims to analyse the awareness of tribals of Chhattisgarh to link the present to past. The emergence of historical consciousness and feeling of a shared identity related to language and rituals represent the notions that tribals as 'adivasi' (first people), they are the 'indigenous' to India. Their claim is based on the traits and habitats. The present day adivasis or tribes are distinct cultural communities which are historically marginalized and are descendants of the original inhabitants of this country. The intellectuals among tribals use indigeneity as an argument to bring back the past in the present to reassert their identity. Their efforts are to bring change through political movement and reframe cultural heritage to contradict the prevailing ideas against adivasis in the historiography. Popular rites and rituals of tribals related to worship, celebration, marriage and funeral etc. express and reinforce certain beliefs about the world particularly about human relationship.

Keywords - advancement, indigeneity, organizations, scientific insights, historical consciousness, marginalized, reassert, contradict, relationship, compensatory, discrimination.

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The political significance of Tribe in Chhattisgarh state has paved way for reasserting their identity. The emergence of tribal as a political power in the state helped to form tribal movement. To be tribal plays an important role in identity conscious advanced by many castes among the tribe people. Coincidentally, these identity claims have been encouraged by the government. They are being given all substantial resources and facilities for their welfare and development.

Before exploring the reasserting identity among tribals understanding what is meant by tribe is essential? As per the Indian constitution tribals are the scheduled tribes categories of people. The caste categorization of Indian people was done during the British rule in India. Caste enumeration was initiated for the benefit of tax and political purposes. The process started in 1814 and continued till 1929. The accounting and enumeration of all caste was done to place caste (jatis) in four varnas or in categories of outcastes and aboriginals. The colonial state describes outcaste and aboriginals communities not to be the part of main stream society. It is said about the aboriginals that they were outside of caste hierarchy of Brahmins and were known as acephalous social organization. They were not the part of major religious traditions because they have their own unique sets of beliefs and rituals. They have their separate traits and habitat's. The majority of the aboriginal population was located in rural areas, few of them living in remote forests or in hills and on mountains. That is why they were termed as 'girijan' (hill people) and 'atavika' (forest dwellers). After independence aboriginals were termed as 'Adivasi' and recently designated as 'vanvasi'. These new terms are coined to appease the tribals and all social and political advantages.

As mentioned above listings of tribal population is based on the unique traits and habitats. Each tribe has certain special and unique social behaviour which are in the form of rituals. Actually, rituals express and reinforce certain beliefs about the world particularly about human relationships. There exist abundant rituals for every occasion but there are two ways of observing ritual in this modern age. One way is to preserve the old tradition and custom which they had in the past and another way is to seek out rituals different from what have in the past. The tribals of the present age wants to use rituals to fulfill the intellectual and emotional need of the society in one hand and meet out the political requirement, on the other hand.

The awareness of scheduled tribe regarding identity is taking in two fronts. Over the years many tribals have settled to urban environment mainly successful professionals employed in government and private services and day labourers. These sections of tribals have acquired proper education and have developed independent thinking. On next front, government efforts are to provide every facilities for the development of tribes. The governmental machinery not only provide qualifying members of this group for preferential treatment to get reserved seats in schools and in electoral bodies and in government jobs but also provide platform for the people to have their group registered in order to gain access to these benefits. Consequently there is ever increasing consciousness to acquire the political power in Chhattisgarh. Organizations representing tribal communities unite as 'Adivasi' (first people). The present day adivasi or tribes are distinct cultural and ritual communities which are historically marginalized and are descendants of the original inhabitants of a given territory. This kinds of general feelings have taken place in adivasi.

In order to merge this distinct cultural and ritual communities into Brahmanical social tradition certain organizations, agencies and NGO's like Banvasi Kalyan Ashram, RSS and other pro-hindu organizations are doing tremendous efforts at the ground level and far off places in rural areas. They organize collective marriage for the poor family's boys and girls, special camps regarding health and hygiene are common events. Bhagvad Katha and

Gayatri Yangya, many festivals and ceremonies organized to make religious involvement of tribal people.

The under current aim of all these efforts after post independent are to assimilate adivasis in main social current of Hinduism. The result is obvious particularly those people who have not converted to Christianity. Marriage ceremony is performed by a Brahmin in many adivasi family, is a common practice now. They have started worshipping the Hindu Gods and Goddesses. But parallel to this practice, a strong consciousness about indigeneity is also flowing within this community. Adopting adivasi identity is an strategic move for attaining political motive. There is a feeling that adivasi, no longer wants to become folk culture at its margin or to fit the romantic images of adivasiness. To spread this ideas adivasi link the present to past through rituals. The intellectuals among tribals use indigeneity as an arguments to bring back the past in the present to reassert their identity. The main focus is to bring change through political movement and reframe their cultural heritage to contradict the prevailing ideas against adivasi in the historiography.

The landmark development of unification and identification of tribes culminates in 'Adivasi Divas' and 'Adivasi Sammelans'. Every year on 9th August Adivasi Divas is organized at central and state level. Adivasi Sammelan is called on various occasion at different levels like block, tahsil, district and state. Though these celebrations are organized by political parties with power game plan but fully supported by social organizations of tribal communities. The content of deliberations are obviously their cultural heritage and past history how they have been marginalized from the main stream of the nation. They give message to unite and observe their rituals which are unique and distinctive and genesis for reasserting indigenous identity.

The rituals of Adivasi are rich and varied in its forms. There are two types of rituals; private and social rituals. The private rituals like sacrifices and offerings are performed by Baiga, a local village priest after wish fulfillment as recovery from illness and disease, relief

from charm and sorcery. Ankik Gudhna or the tattoo art generally incised on 'women's hand, leg, arms and neck. This Gudhna is done to mark the social importance.

The popular social or common rituals are like Sarna Pooja it is done in summer season. The village God and Goddess is worshipped for better rain and cultivation. After this worship ploughing fields and sowing seeds takes place. Karma; it is celebrated to mark the end of the rainy season and advent of the spring season. On this occasion a branch of a Karam tree is brought to home with proper worship and place it on the middle of courtyard and people sing and dance whole night around this Karam branch and in the morning it is immersed in the river. The Nacha a folk theatre is arranged for entertainment and create social awareness.

In rice harvest rituals the cultivated grains like paddy and pulses are given to the people those who worked in the fields during the cultivation period. After the harvest season is over Saila dance is performed. In this dance both men and women take part specially the young. Sua Nacha a ladies dance form, a symbol of Gaura is placed at centre and dancing circular way with clapping hands. This dance is identified with love and marriage. Haat Bazar or periodic market is most popular in remote rural areas. Actually this is a business centre of tribals. They sell and purchase all commodities for their daily use of life. Along with it some entertainment activities do take place in this haat bazar. During the social wedding's an invocation of trees are necessary and it is done for flourishing of family life just like a tree grows. All these cultural rituals are an integral part in the life of the adivasi. Now the question arises that how these rituals are helpful in reasserting identity in the tribals. To answer this question it can be said that these rituals displays the uniqueness of tribality and in contemporary public it tend to be romanticised imaginations that have acquired prominence due to specific historical and political circumstances. These rituals also provide the genuine platform to reveal the compensatory discrimination done by the government and pro-hindu social organizations. The politicians and intellectuals also utilize this opportunity to convince the people that their past was not

associated with the hindu culture and tradition. They are trying to reframe history by their cultural heritage. The past is perceived as a resource for securing community futures.

At this juncture a new question may take place. How are specific cultural rituals and practices harnessed to make claim about identity? How do these new forms of expression anybody continuity with the past as well as transformation? The present academic discourses reveal two opinions. The one argue that there is no sociological grounds on which a fundamental distinction could be made between caste and tribal, the another view is that tribals were the custodians of unique cultural tradition that were not just distinct but superior too. Until there is not denial of the distinctiveness of the tribes, no fear of being categorised as low caste Hindu and no rejection of traits and habitats of tribal, the efforts of reasserting identity among tribals are not liable, ultimately who will not like to be in upper strata of social hierarchy, at least in Indian milieu.

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