

Socio-Cultural Practices Of Paroja Tribal Women In The Post-Colonial Era – A Case Study Of Koraput District, Odisha

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Abstract:

In the last two or three decade's women topic became essential for the writers. Subaltern women are empowering themselves in all domain with help of education and western civilization. India as a whole is characterized by sharp gender disparities, although women's status varies considerably from region to region. Tribal women hold an important place in the socio-economic structure of her community. They are not unemployed or beasts of burden. They generally enjoy more freedom in different strata of society, because their basic needs are fulfilled by themselves, while the needs of other general women were fulfilled by their parents. Customary, traditional and tribal norms are relatively more liberal for women in tribal society. Women contribute to the national income and play a central role in all walks of life. They were engaged in household chores and agricultural sector workers since long time.

Keywords: Women, Paroja Tribe, Koraput, Socio-Economic, Socio-Cultural.

Introduction: The number of tribal people in India is the second-highest in the world. In india, the state of Madhya Pradesh and Odisha have the highest population of tribes respectively. There are total 62 types of Schedule Tribes living in Odisha, one of them is called Paroja. The word "Paroja" derives from a local Odia term "Praja" which literally refers to the "Commoners of the Kingdom". Paroja tribes are mainly found in Koraput, Semiliguda, Pottangi, Laxmipur, Nandapur, Lamataput, Nandapur, Dashmantpur, jeypore, Boipariguda, Kundra and Boriguma of Koraput district of Odisha.

Role of Women in Family And In decision Making Power: Tribal women donate wholly for their community, they are considered as grit of their fraternity. The importance of tribal women is very influential because they work harder as compare to other general women; the family management completely depends upon her. They play vital role in management of home and economic activities. They take care of their children and parents, they took important decision for development of her family and household expenses depend on her. The old women of Paroja society looking after small children while the other women of family went for economic activities. They make a good balance between their household

works as well as they earn money by doing their daily labour. The operation of paddy de-husking is done by women in pestle and mortar for their daily use. Opening of Huller mill in village reduced great burden of this operation. In their free time they make cakes of cow dung and leave it to dry in sunlight in a circle shape. Later they use it as a fuel. They keep themselves busy in the endless house hold works, for most part of the day till night. They had to look after all the domestic affairs as well as in all the economic activities. Most of them keep busy with their households for long hours a day particularly in the peak crop season. The role of women as home maker was not considered of any source of financial support. They manage their family and children well. They even took their children with them during their work period too. The daughter of the tribal communities is allowed to go to forest to collect different forest produce. They hardly get free time to enjoy leisure period. They used to make different oils for cooking and cure the disease. They used to make all different types of oil by themselves except kerosene (matitel) for daily uses; they used to buy kerosene from market. They make it for different use and for different purposes. Their products were mostly considered very useful and effective. Following are the different oil made by them

- Tala chikan- used to apply on their body part
- Jada chikan- used to apply on their hair
- Alasi chikan- used for cooking
- Kasam chikan- used to apply on hand, leg, hair
- Karanchi chikan- used to cure the disease (kachu kundiya)
- Kukud chikan- used to apply on burn body part

Housing Pattern: The Paroja live in large or small settlements with other tribes. Usually they live near the forest or in the foothills close to permanent water sources or river which are linked to footpaths from various directions. “The settlement pattern of the village does not follow any typical or regular model. In some villages, houses are scattered here and there but in other villages individual houses run in two parallel rows facing each other along a common street. In the open spaces between houses, sheds are built to accommodate domestic animals like cattle, sheep, pigs and fowls individual households have small kitchen gardens in front of the house (Mohanty, 1990, p.250)¹.” They were not nomadic in nature, even sometimes they had to move from their place from fear of attack of wild animals. To select new place, various ritual procedures were followed. They used to seek advice of village priest, headman and elders before finding a new place. During the process of laying the foundation of a new house Paroja people sacrificed animals for easy construction of house. After the harvest when paddy straw is available the roof is maintained by thatching the house once a year. The typical feature of Paroja housing is similar to other tribes of this region like the Kondh, Bathudi, Gond and Santa.

“The Paroja possess scanty household assets. Their utensils are comprised of earthen wares, gourd vessels to store drinking water and few aluminum utensils. Their winnowing fans, some bamboo basket and wooden mortar and pestle are kept in the living room. The mortar is apparently big in size and at a time two women can take part in pounding the food grains. Hunting weapons like bows, arrows, knife, spears and axes are hung on the walls of the living room. Grass mats, pillows made of wooden slabs are hung on a bamboo pole inside the room. A flat stone disc and a stone pestle are put aside the doorsteps to grind the spices the condiments (Mohanty, 1990, p.250) ².” Paroja women use cow dung and color soils for decorating their house. They draw beautiful design on the wall. Mostly they use white and red soil for decorating house.

Dresses and Ornaments: Their traditional dress patterns were very plain and simple. Little children hardly used to wear any cloth. Children aged between three to four years go naked. Later they wear a small piece of cloth. This barely covers their genitals and is called koupuni. The traditional dress of the Paroja tribe consists of loin and napkins for men and coarse and cheap sarees for women. They purchased it from local weavers or from traditional weekly market. They did not wash clothes regularly except for certain social event. In the tribal communities women are always put effort to beautify ones appearances in different ways. Women love to adorn themselves with beautiful ornaments in different occasions. Ornaments were usually made of silver, aluminum, brass and sometimes gold. Common ornaments worn by Paroja women are Bangles, Armlets, Bracelets, Necklaces, Rings, Hair pins, etc. A married women is bound to wear nose rings, earrings, bangles on wrist, chains, necklaces, a thinner type ornaments called khagla and khadu, unless she subject to social critique. Following were the different ornaments of Paroja women

- Labangakedi and dandi- nose ring
- Mudra or murma, puli, nagul- different type of earrings
- Mali or madi- neck less
- Jutiya and godbada- leg ring
- khagla- a heavy and broad silver ring is used as a necklace
- shamka- silver rings
- khadu- adorn the forearm and upper arm
- hakuli and gungur- on the toes they wear

But now the scenario has changed due to external contact, modern dresses have become popular like colored sarees, blouses, banyans, shirts, different types of colorful ribbons etc.

Tribal Tattoos and Their Significance: Prevailing tattoos was widely popular among the tribal people of Odisha. The orissan culture has been nourished by the tribal traditions from

the ancient time. The tribal people have their own desire for the decoration of their own bodies. Different tribal communities of Orissa have tattooed on their body part with variety of symbols showing their religious beliefs. The tattoos were done by experienced tribal tattoo artists. These tribal tattoos indicate individuality, status, religion and art etc. Designs are different for women and man. Tattooing was popular among the girls and woman of the tribal communities, women preferred to tattoo on visible parts of their bodies. “It is believed that the origin of tattooing was being sought in the fear of abduction of women. On the other hand, it is seen the tribal people believe they will memorize their ancestor after death by the similarities of the tattoo marks they have. The instruments tattooing consists of some tools of pricking the color pigments and the healing medicine. Colour pigments are prepared from the juice of different forest plants (Mohapatro, 2013)³.” Tattooing is very popular among many tribal communities of Odisha like Sabara, Gond, Kandha, Paroja, Juang, Gadava, Bathudi etc. Tattooing is quite prevalent among the Paroja women the girls above five years have tattoo Mark’s on their body parts. They believed that if they made tattoos, they will memorize their ancestors after death by the similarities of the tattoo mark they have. But now days due to the effect of urbanization, the tribal’s have forgotten their own traditions and tattooing is practice less number by the tribal’s. Now tattooing considered as fashion and it is use for elegance only.

Food Habit and Drinks: The Paroja are non vegetarian. Ragi and rice were there staple diet. Roti was excluded from their food. They used to eat flesh of different animals and birds. They ate animal meet like goat, pig, deer, pig, rat, sheep etc. Beside this they eat birds meat like gunduri, pandaka, Neulo, para etc. They were fond of eating fish. They used to catch fish from rivers, hill stream etc. Vegetables they used to grow by themselves in there garden. They collected different food item from forest like fruits, leaves, vegetables, hunted animals, hunted birds etc. During festival they also made different type of sweets like mandiya pitha etc. There are some kinds of beverages or drink which are commonly consumed by the Paroja tribe. Both Male and female member of this tribe consume alcohol. Large population of Paroja society are addicted to alcohol especially men. “Use of liquor is a customary practice in all magico-religious rituals, feasts and festivals. They drink various kinds of liquors such as mahua liquor, millet liquor (landha), rice beer, palm wine (salap) etc. landa and salap are the most favourite drinks (Mohanty, 1990, p.256)⁴.” Landa has less effect as compare to other alcohol. Both men and women chewed tobacco. One of the small pleasures for tribal women chewing tobacco or a pungent cardamom seed, both male and female member of Paroja society smoke self made cigarette called pukka. Tribal Women loved to smoke hookah and cigarette. Especially old women are addicted to drinking too.

Dance, Music and Folklore Elements: Dancing and singing are main elements features of paroja tribe. Paroja women are well versed in different kind dance such as dhemsanacha, dundunganach and laga gita, etc. Usually boys in their free hour play different types of

musical instruments and sing song. Young and old women performed Dhemsanach to entertain themselves. “They compose their own tribal songs suitable to particular occasions and fix the tune and rhythm of the dance and song. The finer and beautiful elements of nature like the sky, stars, sun, moon, rain, wind, hill, streams, trees, flowers, birds, animals which influence and appear in their song and music (Mohanty, 1990, p.257)⁵.” The folk lore song of Paroja people divided into two parts.

1. Premo, Pronoya and Biraha (for entertainment)
2. Krushi, Fassala (related to agriculture)

The folk song of Paroja tribe is full of moral ethics, honesty, sincerity, associated with different life cycle etc. All those show a high tradition of their cultural life. Every human society has its own folklore, which includes of cosmology, origin myth, anecdotes, proverbs, riddles, tales etc. The folk elements carry with them some beautiful meaning which is known to them but unknown to others. Folklore is the oral literature of the simpler societies that transmitted from generation to generation. There is usually no technique of teaching connected with the making and singing of songs: To understand a tribe, one should go through their folk lore; it is the reflection of life of the people who live in a more or less. The folk lore of the tribal's covers folk tales, myths, legends, folk songs, riddles, proverbs and stories.

Folklore elements are like an inborn quality of tribes. Folklore of Paroja tribe is full of human values and essential lore of the culture. Paroja used to sing and listening to song in order to avoid sorrow or pain or deep regression in their mind. It is a way through which the soul of people expresses in a colorful way. Folklore also reveals the desire and hidden reactions to social sanctions. The oral traditions of ‘Paroja’ mostly revolve around hills and forest like other tribal's. Thus folk lore is a set of cultural which stands for the blue prints of human societies everywhere. Women play an important role in their folk lore preservation. Actually, the folk lore of every tribal group are preserved and propagated by the women members in the society. The women would not sing unless the situation or an atmosphere is created, only a few old ladies who were above 60 had to strain their memories to sing the songs. Folklore can be discussed and categorized under four major items such as

- Folk literature
- Folk arts, including songs and dances
- Folk beliefs and customs
- Folk crafts and language

Traditional Treatment Methods: During that time tribal society has Disari, Beijus, Siras, for their treatment. When they get fever or any type of disease, they never go to hospital. Instead of hospital the Paroja people go to Disari for treatment. They use many herbs to make

medicine. The disari pretend to encounter the influence of black art too. The tribal people used to sacrifice animals to different deities for free themselves from the disease. They use many herbs which are scientifically proved to be very useful. Following are some of the commonest herbs uses by tribal people of koraput to cure the diseases.

Traditional Village Council: Paroja society has their own traditional village council, which works as autonomous unit. The villagers are appointed in different post. They remain in charge of different internal and external affair related issues of their community. The largest hut in the village is youth dormitory, a centre of tribal society for men. It has three walls, profusely decorated with symbols of animals. This hut is leisure place to chat and relax after hard day's work. Public matters related to the welfare of people are discussed here. In Paroja community women are not allowed to participate in political issues. Generally it is dominant by men, in some rare case they are allowed to be present.

Conclusion: Tribal women enjoyed an independent life compared to other women at large in society. They do not stay within the four walls of a house because they have to work hard to better manage a family; they make all decisions on behalf of the family. They take part in making decisions on various important matters of their family like getting married, building a house etc. Meanwhile, the decision of the older male members is accepted in most cases. The tribal teenager enjoys greater autonomy. They spent money on jewellery, clothes, travel, etc. they usually preferred to buy things from fairs and traditional weekly markets. However, there are many drawbacks that we can see, such as they had no properties. They are unable to use their hard earned money to improve their family ties because sometimes their money has been snatched from their husbands. Throughout their life, they may experience unhappiness and frustration, poverty, sickness, etc.

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