

## Impact of Modernisation on Tribal Religious Customs and Traditions : A Case Study of Rourkela



**Dr. Neelu Kumari**  
M.A., Ph.D. (Home-Science)  
B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur (Bihar)

### ABSTRACT

The objective of the study was to measure the impact of modernisation on the religious customs and traditions of the tribals residing in Rourkela. The study was confined to the four major tribes, viz. Kisan, Oraon, Kharia and Mundas, who reside in different settlements located in Rourkela. A major issue that the study reveals is the large-scale impact of modernisation and urbanisation on indigenous tribal areas of Rourkela that is rapidly eroding the age-old customs and traditions of the tribal groups. The government policy of industrializing remote areas has led to the emergence of high-tech industries and modernisation in the tribal belts. The first and major impact which tribal population faces is in the shape of loss of tribal identity through the establishment of industries that brings in development in the form of technology and its concurrent side-effects. Tribal customs and traditions come under pressure, due to contact with the town culture and a consequent change in the attitudes of the tribals in Rourkela can be seen. It can be seen that tribal religions are no longer in practice and dominant religions like Christianity and Hinduism have taken their place. Magical cures and herbs that the tribals practiced are considered archaic today. Tribal crafts and cultivation have also steadily declined. Yet, on the converse side, the benefits of modernisation also cannot be ignored which has aided the tribals from exploitation and provided them better living condition including education and health care.

**Keywords :** Modernisation, Indigenous, Tribals

### Introduction

The English word tribe has come from the Latin word 'tribus' which signifies a particular type of common and political organisation which is alive in all these societies. The name 'tribe' refers to a category of people and designates a step of development in human society. As a type of society the term signifies a set of typical features and as a point of advancement it connotes a definite form of social organisation. (Behura, 1990). Tribal population is found in almost all parts of India and Odisha claims to be the second largest leading tribal state in the country. About 68 million people of the state of India are members of Scheduled Tribes and one of the most studied tribal religions is that of Odisha (Census 2011). Of all the states of India, Odisha has the largest number of tribes, as many as 62. Tribals of Odisha are known as Adivasis, Vanabasis, and Girijanas. They are described as aboriginals of Odisha in anthropological literature. The Adivasi (aborigine), Vanabasi (forest dweller) and Girijana (mountain dweller) represent an impressive 22.13% population of Odisha. Government of India has notified 62 endogamous tribal groups of Odisha as Scheduled Tribes. Surrounded by these 62 local indigenous groups have different sub-tribes who have continued to preserve their original harmony. Government of India and census of India have been enumerating all tribal inhabitants and classifying them into 62 tribal groups.

Amongst these Sundergarh district is one of the majority densely settled tribal regions in Odisha according to the "Revised paper presented in the Census Data Dissemination Workshop, "Status of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Odisha (Community Wise): Census 2001" organised by Directorate of Census Operations, Odisha and SC ST Research and Training Institute, Govt. of Odisha, at Bhubaneswar on 29 August, 2007.

### **Tribes of Rourkela**

1. The Kharia Tribe The three sections of the tribe lie at three diverse stages of economic scale: the Hill Kharias handle to live on food gathering and hunting, the Dhelki Kharias on agricultural work and the Dudh Kharias on settled agriculture. Some are linked with the work related categories of transportation, storage and communication. The remaining workers engage in mining and quarrying, construction, trade and commerce, household industry, etc. Fishing is a secondary and rare economic pursuit for the Kharias. Commonly Kharia women make mats out of date palm and splits of bamboo for their own use. The Kharias make ropes out of sabai fibres and the leaves of the aloe plant. A number of religious ceremonies are celebrated among the Kharias. Their religion is a blend of the ideas and rituals of Hinduism, tribalism and Christianity. They worship the deities of Nag Deo, Jal Deo, Gram Deo, Dharti Mai, Brun Deo, Thakur Deo, Fire God, Burha-Burhi Deo etc.

### **The Kisan Tribe**

In most of the parts Kisans mainly belong to an agricultural community. They have not yet engaged themselves in paid employments like usual service, trade and commerce to a major extent, but still mostly they depend on crop growing and farming work. They gather fuel, green leaves, fruits, mohua flowers and seeds mainly for their own use, and kendu leaves for sale. Hunting and fishing have become pastimes. As regards household industries, women have knowledge of making mats and broomsticks from wild date palm leaves, while many men know brick-making and carpentry.

### **The Munda Tribe**

The Mundas engage in agriculture and as labourers in mining units. Mainly Munda people follow the Sarna religion, believing in a god called Singbonga. Still almost one-fourth of them have adopted Christianity. The surname of a Munda defines their identity. Many surnames are frequent among other tribes with slight variations. Surnames are based on natural elements, trees, animals birds or any nature related object which are often found in Chotanagpur region.

### **The Oraon Tribe**

The Oraons are described as an agricultural society. Tradition on agricultural work is less surrounded by the Oraons, while the involvement working in mining, quarrying, and manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs within the industrial sector has shown an rising trend. They also have a considerable quota of workers in household performance.

### **Research Problem**

Tribals in Rourkela are economically and socially very backward (Socio Economic Profile - National Portal of India, Census 2001). More than 3/4th of Scheduled Tribe women are illiterate. They have high dropout rates in proper education, resulting in extremely low representation in higher education. They have very low levels of nutrition. The percentage of Scheduled Tribes is under the poverty line to a large amount which is higher than the national average. Usually the tribals are engaged in low-skilled, low-paying jobs, especially in primary sector. The Constitution of India incorporates a number of special requirements for the support of educational and economic interest of Scheduled Tribes and their protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. After Independence, it was thought that tribes are backward due to their isolation from the mainstream.

### **Research Objectives**

The main objectives of the present study are:

To examine the extent to which modernisation is affecting the religious customs and traditions of tribals of Rourkela. → To identify the key differences existing between the religious customs and traditions of indigenous tribal groups of Rourkela. → To study the differences in religious practices existing between the Christian and Hindu tribal groups of Rourkela.

Modernisation is the require of the time, and almost all of us would agree to this, but modernisation at the cost of the rich cultural heritage which has been passing on from ages by tribal ancestors would absolutely is not the answer to the above question, To a certain extent modernizing their thoughts and accepting the changes would be helpful to the tribal society. The tribals in Rourkela have undergone a remarkable change in their religious practices and customs with the changing time, not only to be a part of the modernized world but to be acceptable to the society as well.

The results from the study show that most of the tribals have converted themselves to Christianity or Hinduism. Some have transformed themselves due to situation, some due to outside force and some from the influence of the society and some have transformed for their betterment, and some, just because it is more acceptable to the modernized Indian society. The seminal book *The Tribes of Odisha: the Changing Socio-Economic Profile* (1989) by B.C Ray notes that the Kharias once used to worship the deities of Nag Deo, Jal Deo, Gram Deo, Dharti Mai, Brun Deo, Thakur Deo, Fire God, Burha-Burhi Deo etc. And the Kisans revealed their beliefs in soul, super human power, mana (cultivators), Bonga (dancing around campfire), natural objects, different Gods, Goddesses and spirits etc. The Munda people followed the Sarna religion, believing in a god called Singbonga. The Oraon Adivasis also followed the Sarna Dharam (Sarna religion) which has views similar to Hindu religion.

## Conclusion

It is concluded from the study undertaken that due to the tread of modernisation in these tribal villages, the tribals' perceptions, thoughts, food habits, daily life styles, dresses, festivals, rule and rituals, the eco-friendly, nature related culture etc., are all deteriorating due to the impact of modernisation. As modernisation has entered tribal lifestyle, there is a chance to lose the traditions and tribal uniqueness in the long run, in the changing scenario. Tribal religious customs and traditions are clearly not easily definable as Islam and Buddhism or any other religion, (Chaudhuri, 1965). Yet at the same time it is not so easy to distinguish between tribal culture and certain type of popular Hindu practices. Hinduism is of course not the only ideological force which has brought about fundamental changes in tribal cultures, as Christian missionaries have also been active in tribal areas, with the result that a majority of the tribals have been converted to Christianity. The controversy here lies in how these indigenous people will merge with the homogenous Indian society, the so called advanced Indian society with its linguistic religious and caste division which has been never uniform.

## References :

1. Anburaja, V. & Nandagopalan, V. (2012). Agricultural Activities of the Malayali Tribe for Subsistence and economic needs in the mid elevation forest of Pachamalai hills, Western Ghats, Tamil Nadu, India. *International Journal of Agricultural Research, Innovation and Technology*, Vol 2, No 1 (2012), Retrieved on April 30, 2013 from <http://www.ijarit.webs.com>.
2. Ibid.
3. Beck, P. and Mishra, B.K. (2010). Socio-Economic Profile and Quality of Life of Selected Oraon Tribal Living in and Around Sambalpur Town, Orissa. *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences* 2(6): pp. 340-349.
4. Behera, C. (1996). Situating the Tribals in Orissa. Retrieved on March 12, 2013 from <http://chittabehera.com/Rehabilitation/Orissa%20Displaced%20Study/Orissa%20Tribal%20Ch-2.pdf>.
5. Ibid.
6. Behura, N. K. (2004). Tribes of Orissa. Bhubaneswar: Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute. Chaudhuri, N.C (1965). *The Tribal Problem in All-India Perspective*. Education 31(1): 40-47.