

Persistence and Reflective of Tribal Narratives on Art and Craft: A Curatorial Study on the Particularly Vulnerable Tribes of Odisha

Banita Behera

Anthropological Survey of India, Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India

Abstract: *The displays of ethnographic specimens in the museums are primarily redundant to indicate their potential role to the persistence of cultural values of the communities who are very rich in the oral literature. This is equally true for the curators as a penchant who tries to collect various fussy objects without paying importance to the objects that narrates the rich engravings of oral literatures of the communities. Anthropological and Museum studies on the oral narratives of tribal communities have a very distinct place that throws light into the connectedness of the intangible heritage with the tangible aspects of culture. The curators, as a museum practitioner, however adopt some key indicators to create brownie points for representation of tribal narratives that are reflected in their Art and Craft. This paper is an attempt to describe and illustrate the contents of rich tribal literature which are preserved through oral transmission and the invisible role of curators who plays a vital role in expanding and preserving their literatures that remain concealed in the Art and Craft traditions. The paper deals with museum documentation among the PTGs of Odisha especially on the collection of Kapadaganda- embroidered shawl of Dongaria Kondh and Majang- the youth dormitory of Juang tribe. The reflections of their oral narratives in these material aspects of culture are filled with astounded traditional wisdom and the paper examines the empathetic ties between their narratives and its tangible reflections which persist in the contemporary changing situation and cultural practices among these PTGs of Odisha.*

Keywords: tribal narratives, worldviews, reflection and expressive tradition, Art & Craft, PTGs

1. Introduction

In the subject of anthropology the anthropologist while documenting a culture always suspicious about the narratives. Why people wanted to tell that story especially the tribals which are an inseparable part of their culture. The anthropologist special reference to Museum Anthropologists while displaying and documenting an art object like a cameraman has made a conscious choice of to shoot; the narratives and hidden myths behind the object. It is the same as at a zoo audience are more excited to see the Tiger behind the cage in comparison to other animals since that roars much. In the museum the curators always try to showcase historical and cultural narratives depicting different facets of tribes and folk communities in habiting in different parts of India. As an amalgamation of anthropological provenance and sociological relevance of different cultures, customs and rituals of indigenous peoples, the museums especially the ethnographic museums have a rich repository of traditional aesthetics and artworks. The indigenous tribal people of India along with their culturally rooted aesthetic principles and associated moral and religious values and narratives through their arts and crafts as a unique one. As an innate and inseparable part of culture and society, the art and craft produced is styled in culturally patterned ways. There are many traditional art and crafts of tribal people, which are now on the verge of extinction. It is need of the hour to preserve and revive their culture which is gradually decaying. A Whole hearted effort is to be made by adopting various measures and technologies to preserve and revive it or else this great cultural tradition will be buried under the sandy-shore of time.



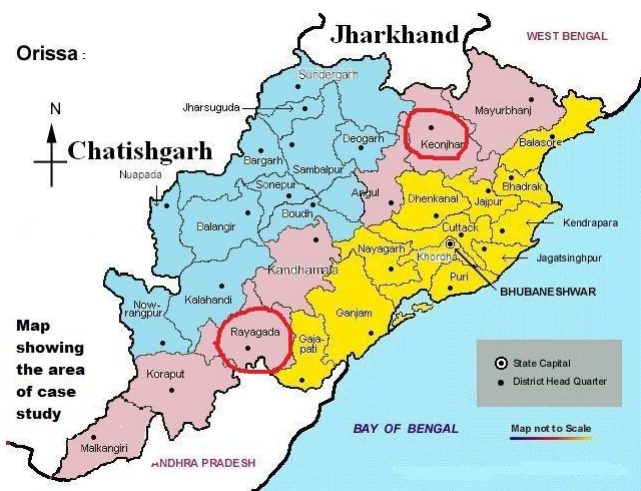
“Aesthetic as science of Expression and General Linguistic” - Croce

Taking in to consideration the Odisha state as study area which is with 62 numbers of vibrating tribal communities' holds first position in India for varieties. The indigenous tribal people of Odisha along with their culturally rooted aesthetic principles and associated moral and religious values emphasize their adornment pattern, art and craft as a unique one. There are 13 numbers of particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups scattered in different districts of Odisha which is highest in India.

Since time immemorial the available valuable remaining graphical drawings and paintings designed by man in prehistoric caves and rock shelters depicts the human

expression of thought and thinking. Painting among the tribal people are the virtual showcases accentuating their ritualized lives, customs and tradition. Among the tribes of Odisha especially the Saorwall painting is a sacred enclosure to pay respect to their ancestral spirits God and Goddesses, whereas the Warli painting is a common practice among the Warli community of Maharashtra during auspicious times like wedding and installation of their deity etc. Traditionally the concept of paintings among the tribal communities was only a partial activity of the specific persons of their communities. But now because of great value of such paintings these genuine talents are replaced to common one by commercial substitutes. These aspect specifically the expression of narratives how reflects on the art and crafts of the tribes of Odisha are the concept and creation in this paper.

A classic example of two PTG tribes such as Dongria Kondh and Juang are concept of narrative expressions matter of discourses.



Map showing the Case study area

Case Study -1:

Kapdaganda, the embroider shawl- a token of love and inheritance of narratives

Kondhs, numerically the largest and quite famous for *Meriah* sacrifice in history, hold a unique position among 62 vibrant tribes of Odisha. Dongria Kondh, refer them as Jharania and are the primitive sub section of the tribe. Living in the close conjunction of a perennial hill stream of Niyamgiri Hill, they have established themselves as a skilled horticulturist, famous for the production of turmeric and jackfruit. With innate craftsmanship the expression of their world view in a piece of embroidered textile is worth mentioning with regard to their cultural context. The exquisite bright embroidery work with great social-cultural significance, it displays a peculiarity in indigenous art form recognizing them as distinct from other communities. Woven with excellent craftsmanship, this shawl is specifically regarded as a token of love and symbol of affection to strengthen their consanguine relations. Aesthetically embroidered designs and motifs with excellent colour combination unfold the social beliefs and religious practices of the community.

This paper aims to highlight the instinctive urge and dedication of the Dongrias to keep their age old traditions alive through the artistic expression including their idealistic characteristic. Besides all, this paper also examines the expressive tradition in earlier context when they executed such incredible designs and indigenous technology in their mind without any formal training.

Embroidered with colourful motifs and designs on both sides, *Kapdaganda* is a prestigious shawl of Dongria Kondh tribe, who inherits their custom, tradition, believes generation to generation in it. Woven with excellent craftsmanship, this shawl is specifically prepared by the spinsters of *Dhangidibasa* (female dormitory) during leisure hours. It is used by Dongria Kondhs of all ages irrespective of gender. Kapdaganda is gifted by the Dongria girls to their beloved ones as a token of love. It is also presented by them to their brother and father as a symbol of affection to strengthen consanguinal relations. Aesthetically added designs and motifs in the shawl unfold social beliefs and religious practices.



The maiden doing embroidery on shawl

The Socio-cultural significance it holds

In general Kapdaganda is gifted as a token of love to the beloved ones which also includes family members. Kapdaganda plays vital role in mate selection. *Kedu/Meriah* festival of Dongria provides an opportunity to the youths for mate selection. Throwing of the shawl by the boy over a girl shows his willingness to marry the girl. In return the girl shows her consent by accepting or rejecting the shawl. Pertaining to the above customs this shawl inherits these customs among the Dongarias as action-oriented Craft. Colours used in the shawl carry lot of significance.

They believe that red, green and yellow are the most auspicious colours. Red signifies blood, sacrifices and revenge while green symbolizes their fertile mountain ecology. Yellow symbolizes the origin of the Kondh. It also represents prosperity and profuse turmeric cultivation. Other colours are expressive of their ingenious craftsmanship and aesthetic sense.

Significance of colours
 in used in woven-designs
 Red – Kambiti, Green-ka,
 Yellow- hinka, Black – kadit,
 Orange- digit, White- dingi



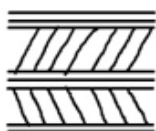
Dongria believe that red, green and yellow are the most auspicious colours. Red signifies blood, sacrifices and revenge while green symbolizes their fertile mountain ecology. Yellow symbolizes the origin of the Kondh. It also represents prosperity and profuse turmeric cultivation. Other colours are expressive of their ingenious craftsmanship and aesthetic sense.



The picture showing motifs and designs on village deity

Traditional designs and motifs as a reflection of narratives

The off-white coarse cloth used as raw material for *Kapdaganda* is procured from the Domb, a local schedule caste community by bartering harvested crops. The designs are embroidered on the cloth by a needle using threads.



“*Watta*” –The three straight lines running at the bottom of the weave-designs represents the imaginary boundary wall of their habitation. It symbolizes social security and also marks as a symbol of protection from the evil forces.



“*Karlikanna*” the axe shape design symbolizes the blade of an axe which indicates the aggressiveness, revenge, energy, power, territorial fights and proves that they are the real protectors of their “*Dongar*” (mountain).



“*Keriwatta*”- The design is derived from tamarind leaf. Being forest dwellers, everything learned by them from the forest is culturally expressed in this design.



“*Kuddilinga*”- the triangular design symbolizes the abode of their household deity worshiped by them in all important rituals and ceremonial occasions.



These traditional designs are also manifested in other material culture like- bangle (*Paja*), religious observation-*Kudilinga*, *Jhakerpenu* and *Dharanipenu*.

Kotiyawali, village deity, Dongria Kondh

Techniques used

The white thread is procured the local Domb community. The threads are dyed according to the colour requirement. They use turmeric, bean leaves and wild seeds to colour yellow, green and red respectively. To prevent the colour fading they boil the banana flower in water and dip the coloured threads in it. To check the result they hold and press the thread in the arm and dry it on a bamboo pole. This technique is now almost extinct and is replaced by the ready-made colour threads.



Threads dyed according to requirement



coloured threads boiled along with banana flowers to strengthen colours.



Evaluating the end result



threads are left to dry on bamboo

Case Study 2

Majang (a youth dormitory): *A tangible reflection of oral narratives*

Juang are one of the identified Particularly Vulnerable Tribe confined to Gonasika Hill range of Kendujhargarh district of Odisha. Categorized in two sections Hill and Plain, the Juangs follow both shifting and settled cultivation respectively. Uniquely designed with carved wooden pillar Majang, the youth dormitory highlights itself as gateway to the Juang cultural, social as well as political beliefs. Its potential role in Juang Political organization is in the process of disintegration now-a-days due to the impact of both internal and external forces. Opening of the area with more and more outsiders and developmental interventions by Government and NGOs have induced severe changes in their living style as well as in dormitory constructions. The tradition of dormitory among the Juang tribe is in the verge of extinction from some of the areas of Odisha. The community house Majang with its carved wooden pillars, mud walls and beams richly engraved with beautiful animal

and human figures are now have been replaced by simple houses laid with cemented walls.

Customs like burning the sacred fire day and night throughout the year in *Majang* has gradually lost its importance which according to their belief marks their origin and inherits the customs and traditions with associated dormitory songs and dances. As per their sayings making of Majang brings harmony and strength in community participation. The associated dances and songs that important characteristic features of the Juang dormitory life reflect the geography of the culture, the values of the culture, and the history of the culture, are losing its importance because of Government interventions. The Majang, as an institution of the Juang tribe represents one of the traditional aspects of their culture which is filled with astounded traditional wisdom in the perspective of vernacular architecture. It is a center for all their activities relating to social, economic and cultural spheres. The structural design of Majang and its associated motifs plays a very significant role in guiding the youths to maintain social solidarity and loyalty to their customs and traditions.

Associated Myth

According to the Juang mythology *Bhima* and *Kanchuni* (a sage and his wife) had twelve sons and twelve daughters who lived in a single house. As the children grew up, **Rusi** thought it indecent to sleep with the grown up children in one house. To avoid this disturbance **Rusi** made a plan and made a separate house named *Majang* (dormitory). And to engage them he made a musical instrument called *Changu* and thus invented the *Changu* dance. The children, every night started dancing with Changu till they were exhausted, and slept quietly in their own house. The Juang origin myth portrays Changu as a key factor leading to the rise of a culturally important social institution-*Majang*. It is believed that the reverberation of Changu in the hills of Gonasika represents the supremacy of the *Kangerki* (unmarried male) in the dormitory while beating it.

Socio-Cultural Significance

- Believed as sacred and connected with the deities, this place is kept as sacred at the centre of the village with the antlers fitted in the walls which narrate the story of bravery to the youths of their community.
- After attaining adolescence the young boys get full membership in the *Majang* (dormitory) & have to perform some rituals during *AamNuaParab* (new mango eating festival). During three phases of this ritual, worshiping of Changu by the young boys in dormitory is a significant part. And on the first beat of *drum* the boys start running around the Majang by making seven rounds to confirm their membership



A Juang male plying changu inside Majang



Inside view of Majang with Rusi Dhuni (sacred fire)

2. Conclusion

While formulating the creative compositions like oral narratives, folklores, song & dance etc. the tribal artists should modify the content of composition or pattern of expression in order to gratify the need and demand of the common people of the community as well as broader society. The performers of the Tribal/Folk Arts and Culture should continually upgrade their creative flair and operational skill so that they themselves can play a proactive role in bolstering the foundation and ensuring the sustainability of Tribal oral narratives and literature in their Arts and Culture. They should adopt a proactive stance in carrying the rich cultural legacy of India and proceed forward in pursuit of functional. This present paper explores the dimensions of cultural importance of the two PVTG tribes with its persistence to their contemporary changing situation. It is noteworthy that this particularly vulnerable tribe with special reference to Odisha Province, India has a special role to offer in the context of Arts and Crafts.

References

- [1] Elwin, Verrier. 1935, Songs of the Forest, London. 1950. Bondo Highlander, London.
- [2] Elwin, Verrier. 1949, Myths of Middle India, Indian Branch, Oxford university Press.
- [3] Naik T. B. 1973, The Tribes of Central India, In The Tribal People of India. Ministry of I& B, (Publication Dvn.) New Delhi.
- [4] Nayak, P.K. 1989, Blood, Women and Territory- An analysis of clan feuds of Dongria Kondhs, Reliance Publishing house, P-45
- [5] Nayak, R, 1990, The Kondhs, A handbook for Barbara, M.Boal& development, Indian social Institute, Nabor

Soreng 10 Industrial Area, Lodhi road, New Delhi, PP-38-42

- [6] Nayak, R and Others. 1993, The Juangs, A hand book for development, Indian Social Institute
- [7] Dougal, C.W. 1963, The social structure of the Hill Juangs. A Precis, Man in India, Vol.23, Ranchi
- [8] Elwin, Verrier. 1968, The kingdom of the young, Abridged from The Muria and their Ghotul, Oxford University Press.
- [9] 1948 Notes on the Juang, Man in India, Vol. XXVIII, No. 1-2
- [10] Hasnain, Nadeem, 1990-91, Youthl Dormitory, Tribal India Today, Harnam Publication, 4378/4B Ansari road, New Delhi PP-63-66.

