

# TRIBAL SOCIAL MILIEU OF KBK DISTRICTS

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## Introduction: Great and Little Traditions

The social set-up of the KBK Districts in the period of survey, i.e. A.D. 350-1350 exhibited features of both continuity and change. The aboriginals, generally called Tribal, had social organization – certain features common to various tribes and others peculiar to each or a few of them – which they retained in the early phase of the period. With political organization i.e. establishment of royal states in about 350 A.D., different Hindu Castes came to be settled, a few sub-groups or sub-castes of the aboriginals also came to be formed. Thus, two broad streams, which in modern sociological parlance called Little (Tribal) and Great (Hindu Castes) Traditions developed simultaneously with ramifications in the society. The Traditions did not remain secluded or watertight in their own frameworks of ethos but there was interaction between the two, leading to inter-correlation. The inter-current produced in the one showed itself in interdenominational interconnection. All through the intercourse, however, certain features, as told earlier, remained static. Thus, continuity and modifications have flowed through the millennium. The features were a hallmark of the KBK social organization. The basic ideas in the approach are called “civilization” and “social organization of tradition”. The former is based on the evolutionary view that civilization or the structure of tradition develops or grows in two stages, first: through orthogenetic or indigenous evolution and, second : heterogenic contact with other cultures. The “social organization” had taken place at two tiers – first, among the indigenous, unlettered masses and, secondly, among the lettered or the elite or the ‘reflective’ few. The cultural processes in the former comprise the Little Tradition and those in the latter constitute the Great Tradition. However, a constant reaction continues between the two levels of Traditions.

The KBK Districts had an indigenous civilization which had been fashioned out by pre-existing regional culture. Great Tradition came to have its impact on the Little Tradition at a later date, probably from the time of formation, and with the patronage, of the Royal State(s) in 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. The Royal States played a role to make both the Traditions to become continuous or run parallel in its diverse sub-regions, villages, castes and tribes. The comingling or contact was ‘a product and cause of a common cultural consciousness and ethos’. That in a hinterland, comparatively secluded in the time under survey, cultural continuity with the past is so great that acceptance of ‘progress’ could not bring about a pronounced change in cultural aspects. It resulted rather in the ‘traditionalizing’ many of the institutions of the society.

## Sanskritization

Another hallmark of the society in the millennium under survey, was the process of cultural mobility in the traditional social structure. It was the process of acculturation, for which M.N. Srinivas<sup>1</sup> has used such term as ‘Brahmanization’ or ‘Sanskritization’. Certain requirements of the State made it compelling to bring some of the indigenous tribes into the fold of the *Varṇa* model of Hindu society. For Example, for war and protection of country, the State required army. To be recruited into army, the personnel must belong to *Kṣatriya varṇa* which, according to the norms of the *Varṇa model* society, had the eligibility for war and administration. The State with the assistance of the *Brāhmaṇas* carried out the process of bringing able-bodied tribal youths into army. That process continued unabated during the entire period of survey. The society witnessed emergence of different castes and changes in caste hierarchy and its norms from time to time. It is observed:

The specific sense of Sanskritisation lies in the historicity of its meaning based on Hindu Tradition. In this respect, Sanskritisation is a unique historical expression of the general process of acculturation as a means of vertical mobility of groups.<sup>2</sup>

Sociologists explain two levels of meanings – ‘historical specific’ and ‘contextual specific’ conditions of Sanskritisation. The first refers to the processes leading to changes in the status of various castes and its cultural patterns in different periods. The second refers to the processes of imitation of the norms of the higher *Varṇas* by the lower or the tribals. In different times and places, the higher castes adopt the tribal ways, which has been called

‘tribalization’. However, “beyond this a process of cultural interaction between the Sanskritic and other orthogenetic traditions such as those of the lower castes and tribe has always existed in India : this renders it difficult to define the exact nature of Sanskritisation.<sup>3</sup>” One such, for example, was political power or dominance which led many castes to higher positions ‘either through royal decrees or through formation of political power’. Thus, such dominant tribes of KBK area like Kondh, Gond, Śavara, Gadabā, Binjhal etc. have ascended high in the scale of royalty. A number of kings, *zamindārs*, *umrās* and *maufidārs* (fief-holder), *gauntias* or *mukhias* (headmen) of villages had been holding positions till the merger of States of KBK areas in Odisha province in 1948 from an unknown date.

### Genesis : Tribes and Castes

References of mostly the *Brāhmaṇa varṇa* and a few references of *Kṣatriya* and *Vaiśya* are made in epigraphic records of early time and, an idea of the *Varṇa* model society could be obtained to a small extent. As far as the tribes are concerned, there is no reference at all in the epigraphic records. Of course, scant references are found in *Purāṇas* and some other varieties of literature. The genesis or the time since when the tribes came to inhabit KBK districts could not even come to the realm of guess. Whatever facts we have gathered for the purpose of investigation come from prevalent or other tenable traditions, the traditions recorded by either British officials’ records or from present time’s literature. Of course, some references to tribes are found in Puranic literature. All those are not always dependable. The observations of continuance of certain customs, manners and religious beliefs etc. - based on the above traditions – will be depended upon for reconstruction of a picture of the social set-up.

Attempts have been made to investigate into the origin and the course of development of the social set-up of the aboriginals as well as other tribes from the early times, the places of their migration and habitation on the basis of historical, anthropological and language or dialects. Those are verified as far as possible, with inscriptional and archaeological evidences, geographical context, and importantly, puranic and such other literary allusions, folk lore and oral traditions. The inhabitants represent different groups, viz., Austro-Asiatic, Dravidian, Indo-Aryan and mixed groups. Some of them have maintained their distinctive features, i.e., retained the continuity as such whereas others have passed through stages of socio-cultural changes during the early historical phase under investigation. The features of continuity are hallmarks of a tribe and contribute substantially to our knowledge of its history. The cultural profiles which explain religious practices, festivals and ceremonies, mortuary rites, importantly – family, village and group life, crop production and technology etc. go a long way to trace the outline of the evolution of social organization at different points of time.

### Hill Tribes

The population that has been classified as ‘Tribal’ consists of three-fourth of the population to-day, which may be classified into three main classes. Firstly, there is the great Dravidian family, represented by the Kondhs, the Porojās, the Gonds and the Koyyās. Secondly, there is the Munda or Kolarian race, of whom the Savaras and the Gadabās are the chief representatives. Thirdly, there are tribes and castes whose origin and affinities are uncertain, but whom tradition pronounces to be settlers of many centuries. Such are the Bhumiyas and the Mattiyas, whose name proclaims them to have sprung from the soil on which they live, and the Bhattodas. With these classes also have been included the Ronas and the Gauds, who are known to be immigrants from the plain lands in Orissa, but many of whom after centuries of residence among aboriginals have adopted their neighbours’ ways of life and so have come to be classed as ‘backward tribes’.

Between these different classes of aboriginals there are considerable differences in regard to their religious beliefs and ethnic origin; but the hill tribes as a whole vary but little in their social organization, their economy of life, their vices and their virtues, but are as the poles apart from the Hindus of the plains. The hillman cares little for his individual rights and cannot conceive existence outside the tribe to which he belongs<sup>4</sup>.

The tribal man lives in his society and dies in it, among his brethren. He considers that his life has its worth and meaning as a social entity. That has been the unique feature which ensures the existence and the continuance of hill tribe-society. The second feature is the gods and goddesses – mostly different aspects of nature represented by hills, forests, trees and animals amidst whom he lives, who sustain his existence with physical needs like food, clothing, shelter. He is a denizen of hills and forests which has been colouring his work, musings, beliefs, rituals, life-styles. Thirdly, he maintains all those, despite all interaction with other Hindus, to a great extent. Last but not

the least, have been the simplicity, credibility, truthfulness which he preservingly carries as essential ingredients of nature.

### Classification : Tribes and Castes

The classification, however, was made on the basis of certain specific features of each community, and not by religion or language or any other strand of ethos. A considerable part of those classified as 'Tribal' worship Hindu gods and goddesses also and, has been accepted in the Hindu fold. The tribal population consists of two groups, firstly, certain castes which are considered to be backward – which have been categorized as 'Scheduled Castes', 'Scheduled Tribes', 'Other Backward Classes' in present day – are "not necessarily original". For example, *Doms*, *Pāṇas*, *Ghāsi*, *Chamār* etc. of the first variety; *Bhottoḍās*, *Bhumiyās*, *Gaṇḍa*, *Raṇā*, of the second variety; *Chasā*, *Kulta*, *Udia* etc. of the third variety, which are quite numerous, are not necessarily aboriginal. The *Kondh*, *Gadabā*, *Parajā*, *Bhunjiya*, *Benjhāl* etc. are aboriginals. These tribes have been taken in the category of Little Tradition. The *Brāhmaṇas*, *Kṣatriyas*, *Vaiśya* are the three communities which primarily belong to the Great Tradition. The Śūdras – the community made up of different castes and communities belong to both the Hindu and the Tribal groups.

### Aboriginal Races (Wild Races):

#### Accounts of Origination and Typology

D.F. Carmichael (1869, p. 84) has quoted:

In his Essay on the "Classification of the Turanian languages", MAX MULLER has shown that, from the most ancient times to the period of the Purāṇas, there are everywhere indications, more or less distinct, of two races brought into contact in the Indian Peninsula, viz., the Aryan settlers, and the aborigines, or *Nishādas*, which is the oldest name given by the Brahmins to their non-Aryan neighbours. It means 'Assidui', and is therefore the most appropriate designation for people who occupied the soil of India, before they were dispersed by the Aryans. The Aryans included only Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaiśyas, for though the Śūdras formed the fourth caste, and therefore had rights as well as duties, they are distinctly said to be non-Aryan. They were in fact the most docile and intelligent of the Aborigines, who after providing themselves as useful allies and faithful servants, were admitted into the body politic as the last caste; and he observes that, in spite of all the changes and social commotions which have since occurred, the traveler in India to the present day, though he would look in vain for the distinctive features of a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya, feels the conviction irresistibly growing upon him, as he passes along the streets of cities or the roads of villages, whether north or south of the Vindhya, that everywhere he is brought in contact with two races of man, distinct in mind as well as in body. "The high forehead, the stout build, and the light copper colour of the Brahmins and other castes allied to them, appear in strong contrast with the somewhat low and windier heads, slight make and dark-bronze of the lower castes."

But over and above this fourth caste, there were numerous Aborigines, who continuing without the pale, are described in the Vaidic hymns by various complimentary names, as *Rākshasas* (devils), *Yātudhānas* (goblins), *Kravyādas* (eaters of uncooked meat), *Amādas* (raw-eaters) and even *Asutripas*, or cannibals. Later, in the Purāṇas, we obtain a description of their physical peculiarities. In the *Vishṇupurāṇa* the type of his *Nishāda* is given, - "a man being of the complexion of a charred stake, with flattened features, and of dwarfish stature." The inhabitants of the Vindhya mountains are called his descendants. According to the *Matsyapurāṇa*, they were as black as collyrium. According to the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, they had short arms and legs, were black as a crow, with projecting chin, broad and fat nose, red eyes, and tawny hair. The *Padmapurāṇa* adds a wide mouth, large ears, and a protuberant belly, and particularizes their posterity as *Kirātas*, *Bhillas*, *Bahanakas*, *Bhramaras* and *Pulindas*."

A generally received opinion regarding origin of the Natives or wild races prevails as follows:



A certain king in Hindustan, named Veṇa, dying without heirs, the *Rishis* or sages, by the power of incantations pronounced over a jar of oil, which they stirred about with the thigh-bone of the deceased monarch, endeavoured to create a proper successor. The being they summoned into existence was, however, a monster rather than a man, and they forthwith exiled him to the south of the Vindhya mountains, where he became sovereign of the hill tracts. His name was *Niṣāda*, he had five sons, GAITA, MUKA, MANYA, KONDA and KODU, and from intermarriages between the descendants of these brothers, the following castes were formed:

Koyā, Chencu, Śavara, Yarakala, Maddu, Bāsa, Roṇā, Goṇḍ, Joḍiya, Pangu, Nogalā, Boṭṭaḍā and Boṅkā.

### Lingual-Ethnic Evidences

The lingual and ethnographic evidences go a long way to prove the connection of the Tribes with the aboriginal races of India. D.F. Carmichael (op.cit., p. 85) has observed:

We have procured vocabularies of the Gadba, Khond, Mountain Khond, and Saura dialects, and placed them in juxta-position with one another, and with Telugu, the meaning in English being in each case prefixed; and as the largest vocabulary alone will not suffice, a grammatical outline of each language, so far as it can be deduced from a number of phrases written down and compared with one another, has been subjoined. Enough, it is believed, will appear to convince the philologist that the languages under notice are Turanian, according to the proofs required by MAX MULLER. First, the grammatical structure is built up from pronominal elements; secondly, in regard to their syntactical character; - the subject precedes the finite verb, the adjective precedes the substantive, the number precedes that which is numbered; there are no prepositions governing a noun, and conjunctions are not used, the construction of sentences being marked by gerunds.

The aboriginal as well as other tribes speak different dialects. A few have lost their own to local dominant languages.

Nilakanta Sastri writes:

The languages of south India fall into three main groups – the Indo-Aryan represented by Marathi, the Dravidian represented by Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam besides Gondi and other minor dialects. Gadaba of the north-eastern portions of the Deccan, the Kurku of the western district of Madhya Pradesh. Though the Indo-Aryan vocabulary traces of Munda influence, the number of Dravidian loan-words in it much larger and the conclusion seems inevitable that the Dravidian group of languages is more recent than the Austro-Asiatic which is usually recognized as pre-Dravidian. There is no doubt that at one time the Munda languages spread over the whole of North India, for they form the basis of a number of mixed languages along the Himalayan fringe from the Punjab to Bengal. But the Dravidian languages have also left survivals in north-western India, including the islet of Brahui in Baluchistan in an ocean of Indo-Aryan. Hence this group of languages may have prevailed in the north-west at the time of Indo-Aryans arrived. If the view is correct, throughout the bulk of India, Dravidian speech was preceded by Austro-Asiatic and followed by Indo-Aryan. Fuerer-Haimendorf, with good reason, questioned the correctness of this view, and held that the Dravidian speech never prevailed in India outside its present area. Branui in Baluchistan, he thinks, can be explained by a migration of Dravidian speakers on land or by sea along the coast from more western land (*AHistorySouthIndiapp*. 61 ff).

### Principal Aboriginal Languages

The languages of the KBK district form “a veritable Babel.” Details regarding mother-tongues were not available. But Census Reports of pre-Independent India reveal that out of every 1,000 people in the districts about 500 have Oriya as their mother-tongue, 200 Kui or ‘Kondh’, 50 Savara, 40 ‘Poroja’, 30 Gadaba, 20 Koyya, 20

'Konda', 20 Jatapu and 10 Gondi. Of the remaining eight, six speak other aboriginal tongues, namely Dhruva, Jhodia, Pareng and Pengo.

Oriya as spoken by the hill tribes in the KBK Districts differs so much from the Oriya of other parts of the province "as to be almost unintelligible to a new-comer."

"The language has a strong admixture of aboriginal words and phrases, and the idioms in various parts of the district differ to such an extent that it would be a difficult and unprofitable task to attempt an examination of all the local varieties."

But the Oriya of the upper classes is by no means a corrupt language, and that spoken in the open country of the districts of Rayagada, Koraput, Nawarangpur is akin to the language of Ganjam. But the Oriya of both the area has some noticeable peculiarities which distinguish it from that of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore districts. The honorific plural *apana* is scarcely ever used, and the form *tumbhe* is used when addressing a superior or an equal and *tui* to an inferior. RCS Bell<sup>5</sup> has observed:

A number of words are current, which in the old Orissa Division of Bengal had passed out of polite usage years ago. Such words are *ghoita* for husband, *rāṇḍi* for a widow, *aṇḍirā* for man, *māikinā* for woman or wife, and *pāṭi* for work. The explanation seems to be that the Oriya now spoken in Ganjam and Koraput is the form of the language which was generally spoken in Orissa a century ago. The Oriya of Cuttack has been influenced by literary experiments and so has tended to discard words which had humble associations or were considered to be characteristic of the lower classes. Koraput has long been isolated from the influence of modern Oriya literature and has thus retained the old form of the language unchanged.

Telugu is most spoken in the Gunupur taluk, where considerable numbers of plainsmen from Vizagapatam district are settled. Its speakers are also numerous in Rayagada and Pottangi. In Rayagada there has been settlement of Hindu Telugus from the plains, while in the Pottangi taluk Telugu is the mother-tongue of some of the hill tribes, such as Konda, Doras, Jatapus and Muka Doras, and of the untouchable Paidis, who live on the eastern edge of the 3,000-foot plateau. Telugu is of course a Dravidian language, and its characteristics are well known. Balangir district area is comparatively free from any extraneous influence. Similarly Kalahandi in general remained insular amidst KBK which continues till date.

No requisite survey has ever been made of the aboriginal languages which are spoken by about 40 per cent of the population. Grierson's Linguistic Survey did not extend to the Koraput district. The following notes are based on the experience of officials and others possessing no specialized knowledge of the subject.

The language called *Jatapu* may be classed as a dialect of the Kondh language, 'as it is well known that the Kondhs and the Jatapus are closely related tribes.' 'Konda' is the language of the Konda Doras (sometimes also described as Konda Porojas), and although specimens of this language show little resemblance to the Kui of the grammars, yet it is undoubtedly a Dravidian language and it would be fair to class it as a Kondh dialect. There has, however, been practically no research into the language as spoken in this district, the only publication being a grammar and vocabulary compiled by the Rev. F.V.P. Schulze of Salur, which deals with the language of the Kondha of the eastern slopes of the Pottangi taluk (Koraput) among whom Telugu influence has been very strong. According to Mr. H.W. Alderson the dialect that is spoken by the Kuttia Kondhs of Bissamkatak differs strikingly from the Kui of the Kondhmals. The Kondhs of Kalyana Singapur (Rayagada district) maintain that they cannot understand the language of Kondhs in the neighbouring taluk of Bissamkatak. Probably there are some half a dozen different dialects of Kondh spoken in the undivided Koraput district, but the data available is at present quite insufficient "to allow an attempt to distinguish between these or to define their localities. As is well known, the language of the Kondhs is Dravidian."

*Gonḍi* is spoken by the Gonds in the north of the Nawrangpur taluk, and Koyya by the tribe of that name in the south of Malkangiri. The two are related, being dialects of the language of the Gonds of the Central Provinces, and Dravidian in origin.

Śavara and Gadabā (also known as Guṭob) are the principal Munda languages spoken in the district. Antoine Meillet in *Les Langues du Monde* classes the Munda dialects among the Austro-Asiatic languages, and conjectures that their speakers were driven southwards from the north-east of India by the pressure of Aryan immigrants.

“The principal features of the languages are the existence of semi-consonants, which are imperfectly articulated and indistinct, the copious use of prefixes, infixes and suffixes, and the use of the dual case in addition to the singular and plural.”

The Gadabā has certain resemblances to □ Savara. Like other languages of the Koraput plateau it has never been studied, except in an amateur fashion by officials of the district, who generally have had neither the time nor the training necessary for a scientific inquiry.

‘Poroja’ undoubtedly covers a variety of entirely different dialects:

The term (derived from the Oriya word *prajā* meaning a raiyat or cultivator subject) is applied by the uninitiated to all kinds of aboriginal tribes having no relation with each other. There is, in fact, no such language as Poroja, but quite distinct languages are spoken by the following tribes to whom the title ‘Porojā’ is usually given:- Boṇḍā Porojā, Jhoḍiā Poroja, Dhruva Porojā, ‘Konda Porojā’ (also known as Konda Dora), Pareng Poroja, Pengo Poroja and Didayi Poroja. Of these the languages of the Bonda, Pareng and Didayi Porojas belong to the Munda branch, and the remainder are Dravidian. The Konda language has already been classed with Kondh, and the languages of the Jodias and Pengos, regarding whom more will be said later, are probably more distant derivatives Kondh. ‘Dhruva’ is, however, evidently unrelated to Kondh, except for its Dravidian origin. Possibly it is a derivative of Gondi. Rao Sahib G.V. Ramamurti states that there is a remarkable resemblance between Pareng and Śavara. Two languages of the Bondā and the Didāyis have obvious affinities with that of the Gadabās.

A fact which has yet to be explained is that a section of Gadabās, known as the Ollaro Gadabas, speak a language which is unmistakably Dravidian, though judging from their appearance and customs this tribe would seem certainly to come of the same stock as the other Gadabās of the district who speak a Munda language.

W. Francis<sup>6</sup> in his *Vizagapatam District Gazetteer* has noted:

No trained philologist has ever worked at these less known tongues or their dialects, and a wide field is awaiting exploration. It would probably be found that Koyā and the dialect of the Bhūmiyās of Nawarangpur and Jeypore taluqs which are usually classified as forms of Goṇḍi, are in reality nothing of the kind; that ‘Porojā’ which has long been classed as a separate language, resolves itself into a series of dialects of recognized vernaculars, and that of Gadabā is not a Kolarian language.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Caste in Modern India*, pp. 13-21.
2. Singh, Y. : *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*, p. 6, Jaipur, 2004.
3. *Ibid*, p. 7.
4. *Ibid*.
5. *Orissa District Gazetteers, Koraput*, p. 57, Cuttack, 1945.
6. *Vizagapatam District Gazetteer*, pp. 61-62,