

“ETHNIC AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY” “A STUDY OF THE RITUAL DRAMA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DEATH RITUALS OF THE ABORIGINAL (ADIVASI TRIBES) OF PALGHAR DISTRICT OF MAHARASHTRA STATE IN INDIA”.

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ABSTRACT

Ethnic refers to characteristic of people, especially a group (ethnic group) sharing a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, or the like. On the other hand cultural diversity is the quality of diverse or different cultures. The phrase cultural diversity can also refer to having different cultures respect each other's differences.

Cultural diversity is important because our country, workplaces, and schools increasingly consist of various cultural, racial, and ethnic groups. As people from diverse cultures contribute language skills, new ways of thinking, new knowledge, and different experiences the study becomes more important.

Folklore has a strong influence on culture and society. It is through that we learn about the knowledge, beliefs and culture of people who have gone before us in all parts of the world. Even within contemporary folklore, we can experience the attitudes and values of people from different regions within one's own country or from nations near and far.

In the olden day's folklore was a means of explaining natural occurrences in nature such as lightning, the phases of the moon, the tides, seasons and other phenomenon. Folklore enabled people from one generation to another to understand cause and effect and the long-term implications of their actions. Many people who are considered important to our culture and society have been inspired by folklore or have made contributions to our folklore.

In Hinduism the folk religion may explain the rationale behind the local religious practices, and contain local myths that explain the existence of local religious customs of the rituals.

Ritual is the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. It is a specific observable mode of behaviour exhibited by all known societies. It is thus possible to view ritual as a way of defining or describing humans.

The UN Encyclopedia Britannica states, "Ritual behavior established or fixed by traditional rules has been observed the world over and throughout history. In the study of this behavior the terms sacred (the transcendent realm) and profane (the realm of the space and cause and effect) have remained useful in distinguishing ritual behavior from other types of action."

Key Words: Adivasi, Aboriginal, Folklore, Stories Mangod, Death rituals, God Mahadeo, Goddess Gangagauri, Reincarnation

INTRODUCTION

India is a unique country with great diversity in ethnicities, race, religion, language, culture, cuisine and in every other aspect of the human society. As India has such a diverse cultural demographic, it makes sense that the country is also incredibly linguistically diverse.

Given this diversity, it is difficult to generalize wildly about the folklore of India as a unit. Folk religion in Hinduism may explain the rationale behind local religious practices and customs or the rituals.

It is believed that death rituals do not end with the elimination of the body. There is still the safety of the soul to look after. To ensure the passage during its voyage to the other world, 12 days ritual called Shradha is performed. It consists of daily offerings of rice balls, called Pinds, which provide a symbolic, transitional body for the dead. During these days, the dead person makes the journey to the heavens, or the world of the ancestors or the far shore. On the 12th day, the departed soul is said to have reached its destination and joined with its ancestors.

The religious beliefs of the Aboriginals (Adivasi) can be said to stem from their mythic knowledge of death. Death is not the end of human existence but another beginning.

The death rituals of the Aboriginals are narrated in folklore story form by the Mangod (Bhagat) who dramatizes the entire ritual process.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

1. To study the influence of folklore on culture and society.
2. To study the different rituals performed by the Aboriginal (Adivasi tribes) on different occasions.
3. To study the death rituals performed by the Aboriginal of Palghar district of Maharashtra State in India.
4. To study the myth of death and creation
5. To study the impact of modernization and globalization on the tribal communities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

1. Folklore is associated with many social sciences as it contains many other subjects. Social science studies various aspects of social life. In the folklore there is the invention of traditionally driven population. So folklore is important material for social science.
2. Sociology is studied with the help of human society. It involves human behavior, customs, customs, traditions, signs, and democracy among those communities. Sociologists need to study folk literature in relation to all these factors. The personality of a community is reflected in public life. Therefore, the study of folk and social sciences is intangible and interactive.
3. The absence of ignorance and biology in the tribals has created many questions in his life. Today, the biggest question in Palghar district is malnutrition. It also lacks ignorance, poverty, blind belief and lack of education.
4. Due to Modernization and Globalization, there is lot of distraction among the tribal community. The tribal customs and traditions are slowly diminishing. It is necessary to identify their cognitive life and to preserve and conserve the folk culture and documentation of folk literature. Hence the study is significant.

RESEARCH PROBLEM



There are 85.77 lac Aboriginal (Primitive Tribes--Adivasi people) living in Maharashtra State in India. This is 80% of the total Aboiginal population of India. In the rituals the stories are narrated. The story of the tribal's is the story of the creation of the universe. This is a story that explains how their caste, customs, and rituals are produced.

Liberalization, Modernization and Globalization is ruining the religion, customs, traditions and beliefs of the tribal people in India. There is a need to save and conserve the folkloric people of their customs and traditions. We find a lot of research on Folklore, Folksongs and Folktales but there is minimal research done on Adivasi Ritual Drama especially in the region of Palghar District (dominated by the Schedule Tribe) which is a part of Maharashtra State in India. Hence this research is carried to bring about awareness among the present generation and conserve their customs and traditions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Field Survey and Personal Interviews
2. Structured Elements (Functions)

Population as per Census 2011 (Palghar District)

Sr. No.	Tehsil	Total Population			ST Population			Percentage
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
1	Vasai	7097+71	633631	1343402	48921	49377	98298	7.32
2	Palghar	288514	261652	550166	83424	84728	168152	30.56
3	Wada	91990	86380	178370	51160	50549	101709	57.02
4	Dahanu	199574	202521	402095	135842	142062	277904	69.11
5	Talasari	76417	78401	154818	68699	71574	140273	90.61
6	Jawhar	69333	70854	140187	63280	65182	128462	91.64
7	Vikramgad	68489	69136	137625	62646	63722	126368	91.82
8	Mokhada	41691	41762	83453	38246	38596	76842	92.08
Total		1545779	1444337	2990116	552218	565790	1118008	37.39

Source: <https://palghar.gov.in/about-district/>

The total population of Palghar Districts is around 29,90,116. The district has a total of 8 talukas, Viz Jawahar, Mokhada, Talasari, Vasai, Vikramgad, Palghar, Dahanu and Wada. It has a total 1008 villages and 3818 sub-villages as well as 477 gram panchayats. The literacy rate in the district is 66.65% .

1. Field Survey and Personal Interviews.

For the purpose of Field survey i selected and Interviewed 15 families from 15 sub villages of Palghar Tahsil, 10 from Dahanu and 05 from Talasari Tahsil. In all 30 sub villages and 30 families were selected for the purpose.

Death rituals of the Aboriginal (Primitive--Adivasi Tribes) were personally surveyed by me in these areas and Personal Oral Interviews were conducted. Photographs of the rituals being performed are taken and stories of the same have been recorded. The stories were being told in their dialect which have been translated into standard literature by me.

2. Structural Elements.(Functions)

Vladimir Prop a Soviet folklorist and scholar analyzed the basic structural elements of Russian folk tales to identify their simplest irreducible structural units. Based on his analysis of 100 folktales there were 31 basic structural elements (or 'functions') that typically occurred within Russian fairy tales. He identified these 31 functions as typical of all fairy tales, or wonder tales [skazka] in Russian folklore.

I have referred 14 Structural elements (Functions) in my analysis of the death rituals of the Aboiginals of Palghar District.

They are:

1. Creation of the Universe :

The death rituals of the Aboriginal are narrated in the form of stories contained in more than seven volumes. The Mangod (Bhagat) narrates the stories playing on a small drum or a metal plate(brass) and a stick. The stories describe the creation of the universe by God Mahadev and Goddesses Gangagauri.(God of Aboriginal) . The mangod explains how different creatures like animals, birds, trees, mountains, air, water, sun, moon stars and human beings were created on the universe by God Mahadeo and Godesses Gangagauri (God of Aboriginal).

2. **Hero and Heroine :**

Since the universe was created by God Mahadeo and Goddesses Gangagauri, they were considered as Hero (God Mahadeo) and Heroine (Goddesses Gangagauri).

3. **Load on the Earth :**

When man was born he was a godly person and well behaved. With the passage of time he changed his behavior and became lazy and behaved like animal. The earth could not tolerate this inhuman behavior of man. On the other hand the earth was also getting overcrowded with the increasing population of different creatures. All this became unbearable, and so the earth approached God Mahadeo for a solution.

4. **Transformation :**

God Mahadeo sent Goddess Gangauri to learn the art of black magic. In order to do so Goddess Gangagauri transforms herself into an ordinary human being.

5. **World engulfing flood (thrice)—reference also found in the Bible—Noah ark and in the Quran—Ark appears as Safina.**

God Mahadeo brought an engulfing flood and cleaned the entire universe and made it beautiful. He then recreated the different creatures as before.

6. **Novelty :**

There is a novelty in the creation of the universe. On one hand there is humanization of the sun, moon, sky, constellation, trees, animal husbandry, mountains and rivers and on the other hand all these creatures are bestowed with super power.

7. **Beginning of Death on the Earth**

The earth was saddened due to the increasing population of all the creatures. She approaches God Mahadeo and demands death of the creatures. The first death of mankind on the earth was given to emperor Pandu, brother of goddess Gangagauri. In the meeting of all the Gods it was unanimously decided that goddess Gangagauri be assigned the work of killing emperor Pandu.

Accordingly Goddess Gangagauri planted a berry plant to execute the job. The plant bore good berries and got ripened. Gangagauri plucked a red coloured ripened berry containing a pest and offered it to her brother emperor Pandu to eat. As soon as emperor Pandu ate the berry, the pest in the berry transformed into a poisonous snake. The snake bit Pandu who died instantly. This is the beginning of death on the earth.

8. **Creation of Religious Customs and Rituals :**

After the death of emperor Pandu his children tied his dead body with a rope and dragged it and dumped it at a place where the cattle's dung was collected. Goddess Gangagauri then asked his children to perform the rituals according to the funeral narratives. Today the same rites and rituals are practiced by Aborigines after the death in the family.

9. Sacrifice :

The ninth function is the breaking of the earthen pot carried during the funeral, putting off the lighted lamp, and sacrificing all the personal belongings of the dead person. All these rituals are carried out in a particular sequence and termed as sacrifice.

10. Journey of the Spirit :

The journey of life of a human starts from the time of their conception. After his death his spirit continues to survive and transforms into a ray. It travels across different places through villages, cities, Mountains, lakes, rivers, sea, and finally arrives at the place where the rituals of the dead person are being performed.

11. Cheating :

God Mahadeo transforms Goddess Gangagauri as wife of Mangod Kadru (Bhagat) and sends her for 12 years to stay with him and learn the art of black magic. This is cheating as Mangod Kadru is not aware of this act.

12. Birth of Black Magic :

Goddess Gangagauri learns the art of black magic from Godman Kadru during her 12 years stay with him as his wife. She becomes the first woman on the universe to have learnt the art of black magic.

13. Conversion

During this period of twelve years both the gods forgot their identities and travelled in the opposite direction. Goddess Gangagauri reveals her true identity to Mangod Kadru and tells him how he has been cheated by God Mahadeo.

Goddess Gangagauri had drunk the white water from the roots of the date plant and quenched her thirst. She got intoxicated by drinking that water from the roots of the date plant. She did not disclose this fact to God Mahadeo and gave him the same water from the roots of the date plant to drink. God Mahadeo too got intoxicated and then both the god and goddess took the responsibility of keeping the Cowherds away from drinking this intoxicating water from the roots of the date plant. The same water was then taken away by the river Ganga. Goddess Gangauri gets conceived for the first time due to the drinking of the white water from the roots of the date plant.

14. Villain and Vampire

God Mahadeo deputed Goddess Gangagauri to learn the art of black magic and he himself carries out the work of breaking the earthen pot of the dead. So he is considered as a Villain. On the other hand Goddess Gangagauri is unanimously assigned the job of killing her own brother emperor Pandu by all the gods. All the rituals after the death are performed as per the instructions of Goddess Gangauri. In this way she becomes the creator of death and considered as Vampire.

FINIDINGS

1. The death rituals of the Aborigines are narrated in the form of informative stories that explain how the religious customs and rituals were created.
2. God Mahadeo and Goddess Gangagauri have described the origin and composition of the creation and its destruction in the form of folk stories.
3. All the death rituals of the aborigines have been originally created by God Mahadeo and Goddess Gangagauri. These same rituals are being followed and practiced by all the Adivasi tribes till date.
4. The story narrator –Mangod (Bhagat) uses humour while giving contemporary references. The narrative styles of different mangod may differ but the contents remain the same.
5. There are similarities in the evolutionary principles in the description of creation of universe and fire. (Bible and Kuran)
6. The death ritual stories of the aboriginal are about the myths of death. Death is a symbol of reincarnation as death takes birth from a new soul. The death ritual stories of the aboriginal are dramatized and narrated in an interesting way.
7. The death ritual stories of the aboriginal are the dramatic stories of the religious rites of these tribes. There is no written code of these stories but only oral text.
8. The rituals are performed in the house courtyard. Relatives and villagers are invited for the ceremony. The invitees assemble in the courtyard. The mangod (Bhagat) conducts the rituals in their presence. Thereafter he narrates the the rituals in a story form. A yesman is seated besides the mangod to support his narration positively. The mangod narrates the story in a question answer format keeping in mind the interest of the audience. He also dramatizes the story by fluctuating his voice. From this the creative pattern of the rituals is proved—Ritualism and Ritual drama.
9. The trends of the tribal has increased towards accepting the tradition of hindu deity rituals.
10. Tribal people who have accepted Christianity have abandoned their old tradition.
11. There is a change in the tribal mindset for expenditure on rituals. They go to the extent of borrowing money from private money lenders or taking loan from the banks for ritual expenses. As a matter of unwritten rule the villagers contribute towards the death ritual expenses voluntarily.
12. The rate of performing the traditional rituals has reduced considerably due to urbanization, migration and increase in the level of literacy.
13. There is shortfall in the contribution to the folk literature due to the reduced ritual performance by the tribal.

14. Due to modernization since last 20 to 25 years the methods of narrating rituals through stories have literally vanished from the cities. But they are still visible in villages. We cannot deny the fact that there would be further decline in the performance of traditional rituals among the village tribes due to further modernization and urbanization.

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1. Preparation for Performing the Death Rituals.



2. Narration of the Rituals in the form of Stories



3. Use of a Small Drum (Aauj) during narrating the Rituals



4. Use of Small Bronze Plate (Thali) for Narration



5. Small room in the Penndel for performing the rituals



6. Actual Performance of the Rituals

