

BLOOD AND BELIEFS IN THE KANDHA SOCIETY OF ORISSA: A HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract: The Kandhas perform various rites and rituals to appease the supernatural forces in order to attain peace, prosperity and development for the individuals and the entire community as well. There is a belief of this tribe that all wishes will be fulfilled if they offer animal sacrifice, which ultimately led them to believe that blood is the best means to appease the gods, goddesses, and other forms of spiritual power. This paper chiefly deals with how the Kandhas appease the supernatural power offering blood as a means. To study this objective, the present paper examines certain rites, ritualistic beliefs of the Kandhas society of the state of Orissa.

Keywords: Belief, Blood, Kandhas, Kedu.

Introduction: The Kandhas were once infamous for their practice of human sacrifice.⁽¹⁾ They are also known as the Khond or the Khandha or the Kond, according to the usage of the term in vogue in different place where they belong to. But whatever be the terminology, it refers to the same tribe. The community is well known as Kandha which is a result of their contact with the Oriyas. So, the author prefers to use Kandhas here.⁽²⁾ There are several types of Kandhas in Orissa, i.e., Kutia, Dongaria, Desia, Kuvi etc.⁽³⁾ The Kandhas are numerically the largest among the tribal communities of Orissa.⁽⁴⁾ They are extremely conservative, ignorant and superstitious. Their socio-religious susceptibilities are deep and peculiar. They prefer polytheism over monotheism which has turned them into animists and polytheists, and as a result they have conceived a large pantheon of supernatural beings that control their whole life. Their religion has two inter-related constituents, beliefs and practices. They pay gratitude to some deities who are reportedly held responsible for illness, misfortunes and unusual happenings in the village. They followed a number of cruel practices like human sacrifice and infanticide during the 1st half of the 19th century. Mr. Russell was the first person to prepare a report about these gruesome practices of the Kandha tribe in August, 1836 and presented it to the Madras Government. Lt. Col. Compbell and Captain Macpherson popularly known as Kyamal Makmel Sahib are accounted for the abolition of human sacrifice after which they started sacrificing buffaloes.⁽⁵⁾ According to W.W. Hunter (1872)⁽⁶⁾ the religion of the Kandhas was essentially one of blood. They believed that sacrifice was essential for every ceremony, to appease every God and Goddess. The main concern of this paper is to present the rites, rituals and beliefs of the Kandha society⁽⁷⁾ and their conviction that sacrifice and blood are highly essential for various occasions. The whole paper is divided into three parts: while the first part deals with how the Kandhas appease the supernatural elements as a community, as well as individually. The

second part sheds light on religious ceremonies of the Kandhas, especially of Kedu Parab and finally, the paper provides some details about the persons who preside over every ceremony and the processes of the celebration.

A few studies are available on the rituals and lifestyle of the Kandhas. The Kandhas of Nayagarh have peculiar ways to showcase their rites and rituals. D.K. Samantaray,(1970)⁽⁸⁾ has found different types of negotiations during the marriage ceremonies in the Kandha society. *Duna* is very special wealth for each family, the family head used to keep *Duna* with the roof of the house it is used only in the critical situation of Family. P.S. Daspatnaik,(1970)⁽⁹⁾ in his study found that *duna* is specially kept for the daughter, and it is handed over to her only after her marriage so that she can use it to lead a new life. Oath and Ordeal constituted a redeeming feature in the Kandha society; those are mostly used for settling the disputes. In his study on the Nayagarh Kandhas, Patnaik (1990)⁽¹⁰⁾ observed how and in which situations the people take Oath and Ordeals in order to save the family as well as society. The Kandhas perform several religious ceremonies. According to Swain (1968)⁽¹¹⁾ the Kandhas worship 84 types of deities during sowing and other ceremonial occasions. On the top of all the Gods, deities and spirits, stands the *Darani Penu* (the Earth Goddess). She is highly respected as the creator of the world because generally she does not cause any harm to men, enlivens as well as protects them from pestilence, depravity and evil. She is installed in a hut at the entry point of every village, called *Kuddi*, represented by three elevated stones placed horizontally. The Kandhas used to sacrifice humans to *Dharani Penu* with the belief that the victim's blood would make the earth fertile and reward them with a bumper crops and prosperity of the society. In the following section, some light has been thrown on the deity-worship by the Kandhas and the practices associated with them. The Kandhas used to worship the village god and house hold spirit as well. The

Kandhas perform 84 types of god and goddess among them here we can see few of them in the following section how they are appeasing to the god and goddess through the blood of animals.

Worship of the Village Gods and the house hold spirits is very important of Kandhas society, in very first *the important god is Jatrakudi Penu*, next to Kotebali Penu he is a male god installed on the outskirts of the village, and resides under a bamboo shade at the western end of the village. He is considered to be very arrogant and even for a trifling error or negligence; he brings natural calamities to the village. To cool down him, the Shamanin worships him in every month with adequate sacrifices. Apart from these gods and goddesses some other deities are also worshipped within and outside the village. They are placed hierarchically by the Dongrias kondhas. **Lahi Penu** is an another male god, otherwise known as *Dongar Penu* who neither have any shrine nor is represented by any object, but is worshipped appropriately by the Shamanins during April-May (*Baisakh Lenju*) after which trees are felled in the swidden. Prior to it, neither the trees can be cut nor can logs be brought home for firewood purposes. For the supply of natural manure and increase of the fertility of the soil, he is worshipped with adequate sacrifices after which "felling of trees" ceremony takes place. **Takrani Penu** She is an important female god supposed to reside at one end of the village, and is responsible for the occurrence of accidents, infectious diseases, contagious diseases like small-pox, cholera etc. as well as animal diseases. She, therefore, is communally worshipped in the month of November (*Pandu-Lenju*) with elaborate rituals and sacrifices. Votive offerings are made to her by an individual who suffers from such diseases.⁽¹²⁾ Here lastly the **Lada Penu** is believed to save the villagers from wild animals; this forest god resides under a banyan tree at the entrance of the forest, and is worshipped along with *Lahi Penu* in the month of May before the commencement of communal hunting.⁽¹³⁾ Customarily, the villagers go to the forest on this occasion, offer a leaf to her as a token of reverence to be saved from any possible mishap in the forest.⁽¹⁴⁾ While going for and returning from hunting expedition, she is properly worshipped with adequate sacrifices by the *Jani*. Next in the **Household Spirits** it has been mentioned earlier that a wooden post (*Tuli Munda*) inside the sleeping chamber of every house is representative of the "Ancestor Spirits". Household spirits are mostly named after their ancestors who are also known as *penu*, (god) who can be dreadful if not appeased properly. These ancestor-spirits are generally worshipped by the *Bejuni (Priest)*. But, all these spirits are also invoked ceremoniously by the *Jani* during the *Meria* festival. For each of the spirits, a

separate icon is prepared with sundried rice powder and a lump of sundried rice is placed over which blood of a chick is sprinkled. With this offering, they are supposed to remain satisfied and save the household members from all odds and evils. They are periodically invoked by the *Bejunis* and appeased with different types of sacrifice. Each *Bejuni* invokes her own spirits to be helpful in curing various diseases while attending to patients. Besides the benevolent spirits, there are dreadful spirits like *Mieli-Penu*, *Buru Penu* and *Suku Penu* who intentionally harass people with different diseases and cannot be controlled by the Junior *Bejunis* thus the Pat-*Bejunis* (Head of the *Bejunis*) are called in, who with their profound knowledge of the art, are capable to control these spirits.

From the above section what is very obvious is that the presence of multitude of gods and goddesses is indicative of their strong belief and fear of not getting cursed by them. Every deity has his own essence in the harmonious and prosperous life of the community. This is what makes them propitiate the deities by means of sacrifices, be it bloody or bloodless. Apart from that, some people being ignorant about the cause of the sacrifice, they are made a part of the tradition thereby compelled to practice it. In addition to this, a belief prevails that a woman during her menstrual period if glances at her, suffers from spirit-possession. Therefore, all the deities are either installed in a one-sided enclosure or on the outskirts of the village. The general idea is to keep the common people away from the deities so as to save them from their curse. This is nothing but their superstitious belief and fear of being cursed. The same could be the reason for worshipping household spirits. The following section provides details about various religious practices followed by the Kandhas. Hence, the religion of the Kandhas was essentially one of blood, while the Lord Harding abolished the human sacrificed for the Kandhas. Afterward they started again inhuman thing like the buffalo sacrifice and still vogue as a **Religious Practices** The Kandhas perform certain rites and rituals to appease the supernatural forces in so as to attain peace and prosperity for the individual and the community as well. The religious functionaries worship the gods and goddesses on behalf of the community on several occasions. These rituals indicate their social solidarity and thereby maintain the existing sentiments necessary for the social cohesion. The divine powers are invoked through rituals, offerings and sacrifices and thereby to solicit their blessings for the people. Invocations are sung in chorus by the *Bejunis*. Animals, such as buffaloes, cows, lambs, pigs, and birds like cocks, fowl and pigeons are mainly sacrificed.

Buffalo sacrifice is a major ritual which is a part of the *Kedu* festival of the Kandhas of Orissa. While performing the sacrifice, the Kandhas apologize to the deity for not being able to offer a human in view of the prohibition. The Kandhas still regard human sacrifice as the proper method of propitiating their gods, and the buffalo sacrifice as a less effective substitute.⁽¹⁵⁾ This buffalo sacrifice is in vogue now. This festival is usually held on the last Sunday or Tuesday of 'Pausha' or 'Chaitra' month. The day varies from place to place. The Kandhas of Kalahandi celebrate it on the last Sunday of *pausha* whereas the Kandhas of Koraput and Baudha-Kandhamal perform it one of Tuesdays of *Chaitra* decided by Jani. And varies name also i.e., In Kalahandi it is Taki Parab, Chaiti Parab in the Kandha tracts of Koraput whereas *Kedu Parab* in Boudh-Kandhamal.⁽¹⁶⁾

A male buffalo is arranged for sacrifice. Since its birth, it is set free as a wandering beast. Especially, for this purpose, buffaloes are reared, set free, grazing on crops and food offered by people. But only one buffalo is sacrificed in a year for one *mutha* (a group village comprising 4 and 5).⁽¹⁷⁾ Sacrifices are initiated and arranged every year by the *Jani*, he fixes the day of the worship. As it is decided once, invitations are sent to all the members of the community of the neighboring villages of this region to take part in this *Paraba*.⁽¹⁸⁾ Every village has specified places of worship. The place of sacrifice is about five furlongs to the east of the village at the foot of a hill and is marked by a heap of small boulders. After constant search in the forest, they choose a healthy tree, without any hallow or deformity wherein no birds should have built their nests.⁽¹⁹⁾ All houses are cleaned and clothes washed prior to the ceremony. On the morning of the ceremonial day, the buffalo arranged for the sacrifice is put to intoxication and taken from door to door by the *Jani* accompanied by some Kandhas. During this journey, the housewives felicitating the buffalo with lighted earthen lamps and incense sticks, offer food on a plate. The animal is finally brought to the *gudi* (alter) accompanied by a band of musicians beating drums and Mukhabina.⁽²⁰⁾ The housewives bath the buffalo with turmeric water on the *gudi*, garland it and put kumkum and sandal on its forehead. Soon after, the *Jani* starts chanting *kui* slokas with the beating of drums. The buffalo tries to run and gets scared; meanwhile the *Jani* cuts off a small piece of flesh from the back and head of the animal to bury it at the shrine of the goddess.⁽²¹⁾ As soon as he signals, the people rush to the animal with knives and cut the flesh from its body leaving the head intact. Every piece of flesh is quickly removed leaving behind the skeleton for worship. The intact head, the bones and the stomach are burnt in a ceremony at the foot of the stake or buried in the bloody pit.⁽²²⁾ They take away the flesh in great haste

and bury with utmost care on the periphery of the villages and the plots of the respective tenants.⁽²³⁾ The invocations are the same as those used to be chanted at the human sacrifice.⁽²⁴⁾ In religion proper, the attitude of the Kandhas towards the Supernatural Powers is one of the reverential fears in the presence of certain mysterious Supernatural Powers. Dependence, conciliation, propitiation and playful submission are various means to appease such Supernatural powers regularly to get good, remain healthy, and live a normal life for themselves, their progenies and their livestock. From this section, it can be deduced that for the Kandhas, sacrifice is highly essential for saving the society from the curses of deities, and sprits as well as to bring prosperity. It means both fear and hope factors are there which lead them to perform sacrifices. Every religious ceremony performed by the various priests.

The religious functionaries- *Jani*, *Lamba*, *Bejuni* and *Pujari*, are the specialists and intermediaries between gods, goddess, spirits and such other entities on the one hand and the people on the other. The materials and objects required in connection with all rituals are almost standardized. These consists of such simple materials, as-turmeric power, husked rice, vermilion, incense power, wicks, molasses, liquor, leaf-cups, flowers, birds and animals for sacrifices depending on the nature of the ritual.⁽²⁵⁾ The next section deals on the priests associated with the ceremonies like *Jani* is the ritual head of the village. Each village has its own *jani*, but at times one *jani* may attend to functions in 2-3 villages. This post is hereditary, passes from the father to the eldest son. In case the *jani* having no son, his younger brother gets the chance. He performs all village rituals and is given a special share of sacrificial animals. *Lamba* is also another nomenclature of *Jani* who specially officiates at the rituals of *Meria* festival. For performing the *Meria* rituals, the *Lamba* does not charge exorbitantly but takes only one-fourth of the total quantity of grains collected for the festival, four heads of the sacrificial animals, like-goat and lamb and a good share of the sacrificial meat. Next the *Pujari* the post is hereditary. In every village, there is a *Pujari* who presides over *Meria* festival along with *Jani*. But he has multiple roles. He prepares an umbrella out of a bamboo collected from the forest in the dead of night, unnoticed by anybody. In the *Meria* procession, he dangles that umbrella to ward off the evil-eyes of the pernicious spirits. He too chants spells with *Lamba* and other *Janis* of the *Mutha* in the *Meria* festival. He is the man who first strikes on the head of sacrificial animal followed by others. In other religious functions, the *Pujari* also presides along with *Jani* and *IchanJani*.⁽²⁶⁾ Last one is *Bejuni* they are shamanins or specialists in divination. In each village there are two or three shamanins especially Dongria

society shamanins are more. Each shaman or shamanin has their own spirit to whom they regularly worship and appease to get help during their occult practices. Through divination, prayer and rites, the shamans/shamanins get into trance, during which they are believed to visualize and talk to the spirits who are responsible for causing harm to the people. Jani, Lamba, Pujari and Bejuni all are intermediaries between the people and gods. It appears as if these people are given some special authority and power to invoke the gods which is a result of the sheer ignorance of the people. And here we can see the all the priest getting flesh of animals that's clearly saying that the Kandhas need blood for every ceremony.

Conclusion: From the above discussion it can be concluded that the Kandhas are very much ignorant,

superstitious and fearful. They worship numerous gods, goddesses, stones, mountain and trees. No ceremony is complete without offering blood of animals or sacrifices. Therefore, their religious belief is typically associated with that of blood. Even though the human sacrifice was abolished in 19th century, they still continue with the buffalo sacrifice which is the one best example. Jani, Pujari, Lamba, hero of the ceremony they are getting especial share of the sacrificial meat on every ceremony, that ultimately showing that no ceremony complete without blood. Blood is the essential part of the ceremony of Kandhas. The main cause of this is their illiteracy, ignorance and not being mainstreamed of the society. Proper education can prove a panacea for them to help them give up such superstitious beliefs.

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