

STUDY OF TRIBES AND THEIR FESTIVALS, FOLK CULTURE & ART OF BANKURA DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL: A DESCRIPTIVE REVIEW

Aparna Misra*

ABSTRACT

Several districts of West Bengal have been well-established on the festivals, cultures, and Folk art from the ancient time. A descriptive review was done after compiling historical perspectives, geographical features, and Folk art & culture of Bankura district, West Bengal, India. Interestingly, it was found that cultural activities and Folk art are closely depending upon historical and geographical features of Bankura district. Moreover, tribals are the most important population where traditional knowledge is transferred to craft technology and they enjoy for producing the craft and paintings with the help of local resources. This review may help the academicians, researchers, media personnel and Government authorities to encourage their technology for their household industrial development. Further research is suggested for the socio-economic benefit related to these folk, festivals, culture, and crafts productions through proper trading. In Indian perspective, still various districts of West Bengal are potential for folk music, dance or art which can be evocative to the rich Indian culture.

Keywords: Tribal Culture, Folk Art, Festival, Local Resources, Natural Resources, Craft and Painting.

Introduction

According to Dalton (1872), it was established that Bengal has diverse ethnological importance. Different states of India harbour the indigenous people called as "tribes" and "tribes" regarded as a social establishment have been identified in two traditions mentioned in the report of Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha (2013) in which one is found in a stage in the history of evolution of human civilization while other is a society organization based on bonding of association that empowered them to be a multifunctional grouping. In India, tribals are defined with respect to the cultural practices of certain groups where mostly Hindu cultural practices are observed (Basham, 1997; 2004; Nair, 2018). Additionally, the landscape of area is depending upon the cultural aspects among local communities (Malik, 1975). However, it was mentioned that exchanging perspectives related to the Vedic age, is provided the essential phenomenon on geographical as well as biological environment before proceeding to the first state of human cultural activities in India (Majumdar & Pusalker. 1951).

Generally, tribal, and folk arts are closely interrelated. Most of the tribal's art & culture is Folk art & culture, but Folk art & culture can also be developed in non-tribal group. The Folk art & culture also depends upon the geographical features of the specific area. The traditional arts, opinions, rituals, myths, and tribal handicrafts are main factors that enrich the Folk art & culture. This develops an ethnic nature among the tribals (Singh, 1994a; b).

The Folk art & culture forms creativity through Folk song in the regional language. Sometimes, the power of survival depends upon the Folk song, and this may be the process of their worship as the part of Folk art & culture. Interestingly, the creativity of Folk art & culture has no difference between the actor and the spectator. The songs also contribute the dance, which observes for several occasions such as religious dances, agricultural dances, hunting dances, marriages dances, festival dances, etc. It was found that the ceremonies from birth to death are not completed without dance and music (Singh, 2000; Mohanta, 2011; Ganai, 2017; Nair, 2018).

* State Aided College Teacher, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Bijoy Krishna Girls College, Howrah, West Bengal, India.

In the eastern part of India, there are also working songs that create a rhythm, which is closely harmonised with the rhythm of the work, e.g., “Jhumursong” among the “Oraons and Mundas” which are sung during the planting of paddy and creating craft to develop the actual technique contained by it. The making of mat, ploughing, making of basket, etc. are the parts and parcel of simple folk songs (Singh, 2000; Ganai, 2017).

Objective

In the present study, it was attempted to compile historical perspectives, geographical features, and Folk art & culture of Bankura district, West Bengal, India.

Historical Perspectives of Bankura District

In Santali, the word “Lar” means “thread”, the word “Rarh” means “tune” and the word “Larh” means “snake”. On the other hand, original “Austrian word” the “Larh” means “dry forest region” employed by the Jain and Greek investigators, which was incredibly challenging to retrieve that time. The word “Larh” is also derived from “land of red soil” (Sarkar, 1981). The popularity of “Manasa worship” in which the “Snake-Goddess Manasa” is worshiped shows the opinion that could have some consequence for worshipping. The researchers diverge their opinion about the etymology of the name “Bankura”. According to the Kol-Mundas, the word “Orah” or “Rah” means “habitation”. Many places of “Rarh” have been nominated further “Rah” at the end of the name. One of the most powerful Gods of the district namely “Dharmathakur” is termed as “Bankura Roy”. The first name from this word, the name of the district might have come. Moreover, Linguist Suniti Kumar Chatterjee considered that the name is originated from the word “Banka = zig-zag” and its word-exploitation “Banku”, which entails exceptionally beautiful and have to be loved. In 1979, the word “Bancoorah” was originated in the map of Renal. In 1863, Gastrel referred this region as Bancoonda (Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha, 2013).

Bankura has an ancient past having glorious historical heritage. Its historical period is remarkable in the sixth century B.C., when the last Jaina Tirthankara, Mahavira came to the “Rarha” country (Chudhuri, 2000). Various architectural and sculptural activities showed the evidence from the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries A.D. The Susunia hill engraving, palaeographically fit in the 4th century A.D., implies to “Maharaja Singhavarman” and his son “Chandravarman of Harisen’s Allahabad Prasasti”. The “Pushkarna” has been named with “Pakhanna”, a village of this district. The kingdom of “Kotatavi”, stated in “Sandhyakar Nandi’s Ramacharita” has been found with “Koteswara” of this district. With the growth of “Mallas”, the history of the district appeared into the most glorious period. The “Mallas” relished the suzerainty underneath the Mughals and the Bengal Nawabs. The “BirHambir” was the supreme ruler of the family (Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha, 2013).

Geographical Features of Bankura District

The district Bankura lies between the latitude of 22° 38’ and 23° 38’ North and between the longitude of 86° 36’ and 87° 46’ East. This district is a connecting link between plains of Bengal in the eastern side and Chotanagpur Plateau on the western side, which is showing low lying area of Alluvial plains and gradually rising to form undulating surface following rocky hillocks (O’Malley, 1995). As such no marking of ridge of hills in this area is seen while the hills namely Susunia and Biharinath are larger in size and a low hill viz. Mejia hill or Karo hill is situated within the district outlines of the Chotanagpur plateau. There are five rivers namely Damodar, Sali and Dwarakeswar river in Onda and Bishnupur area while other two rivers viz. Shilabati and Kangsabati river flow from Purulia district. The most distinguishing geological feature of the district is the area of laterite and allied rocks of sand and gravel. It is also recorded in some places about hard beds of laterite. According to local people, the “ferruginous rock” is termed as “*kankar*” and the calcareous compactions generally used as important sources of lime, are termed as “*ghutin*”. The climatic conditions of this district are mainly dry and hot summers but moderate level of monsoons while winter is very cool (O’Malley, 1995).

Folk Art & Culture of Bankura District

- **Tribal Types**

It has been recorded that in the western part of the district is densely populated by tribals, particularly in Chhatna and Susunia regions. In this region, among tribal population, Santhals are the chief tribes and other tribes such as Mal Pahariyas, Munda, Oraons, Kol, Kora Mudi. Mal/Malhar or Dhokra Kamars are seminomadic craftsmen who have been established in several parts of eastern India in which Bankura district observes one of the clusters. Scheduled castes are included Bagdi, Bauri, Jele, Hadi, Dom, etc. There are a few Saraks found in this area (Rahaman & Karmakar, 2015).

- **Tribal Festivals and Performers**

Few studies have been reported about different types of festivals and involvement of performers (Mohanta, 2011). The major tribal festivals viz. "Basulimela" of Chhatna and "Dharautsab" of Susunia are organized alive with songs and dances. "Bhadu" and "Tusu" are mostly common folk festivals, which are originated from Puruliadistrict and expanded within the "Rarh", which are renowned for songs and wide contribution of women (Singh, 2000; Mahato, 2016; Ganai, 2017). The performers such as "Bhadu – Singha family, Tusu – Barui and Lohar family, "Jhumur" – Karmakar and Sahis family, "Natua" – Soren and Hansda family and "Raban Kata Nach" – Barik family are well studied. Bankura is also well known for "Jhapan" – a festival dedicated to the snake goddess "Manasa". It is equally crucial for snake charmers and local men. The pictures of "Manasa" and "Manasachali" are replicated to form distinctive terracotta sculpture as per small character or a group of three characters in the middle, with rows of snake hoods whiffing out in a semicircle shape and these are made for the occasion (Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha, 2013).

• Folk Crafts and Painting

The potters of Sonamukhi and Panchmura are rolled off on Manasachali. From Bankura district several numbers of terracotta items, most famous and popular being the high-necked terracotta horse are produced. This has been celebrated for its "sophisticated posture and unique idea of essential values" and is developed as the symbol of "All India Handicrafts". The primary sites such as Panchmura, Rajagram, Sonamukhi and Hamirpur and other sites like Bishnupur and Bibardawhere terracotta horses, elephants, dolls, and pottery are produced and performed through its own local style. But the terracottas from Panchmura are considered the best. It was also noted that decorated conch shell as important bangles for married women called as "Sankha" and other shell products viz. hair clips, small toys and dolls are also produced in several sites namely Joypur, Bishnupur, Bankura town, Patrasayar, Hatagram. An interesting craft from bamboo, which is introduced in the state is chiefly from Kenjakura, Sonamukhi. Other crafts like Patachitras (scroll paintings) of Bankura display a local style of Bengal scroll paintings comparatively different from scrolls of Medinipur, Birbhum or Murshidabad. Among tribals, the prevalence of Jadupata or Chakshudanapata conveys the subject matter of the tribal life. Beside these, another part is "Chouko" or "Square Patas" in which different themes are depicted for goddess Durga and her family, Durga's Mahisamardini theme, Radha Krishna, etc. The decorative and ritualistic materials are called as "Dhokra", produced by crafts men. The stone carvings are called as "Bikna" and "Dariyapur", a new craft skilled by Bell metal artists of Susunia, wood sculpting is mainly found in Bankura town, Simulberia, Jagdalla, Dashavatartaas/ Ganjifa or painted playing cards. The Malla kings of Bankura began the folklore mainly through painted playing cards in their prospering periods during 800-1200 A.D. and this is produced around Bishnupur. The Bishnupur harbours Fouzdar family, who are basically Sutradhar (community based on wood sculpting) and they are renowned in their jobs and obtained national awards. Bel mala – an incredibly old craft of Bankura in which beads and strings are made from wood-apple shells both for religious and fashion purposes same as rudraksha beads is produced in Molian and Bamundanga. Bell metal – being an alloy of copper, zinc, and tin are chiefly found in Susunia, Kenjakura, Salbedia, Bankura town, Mogra, Molian (Kansa shilpa), and also decorative Lanterns made of tin is found. The terracotta architecture in the temples of Bankura district is the unique development of folk culture (Gramin Vikas Seva Sanshtha, 2013; Das Chatterjee, 2014).

Conclusion

The present study is a compiling of few studies related to folk culture and art of Bankura district, West Bengal. The historical perspective and geographical features are found closely related in different types of activities of folk culture and their eminent art, which are developed for various folk crafts among local tribal population. Government must take initiative to encourage 'Traditional folk art & culture' as a forthcoming industry by constructing cultural resources with an adaptation of scientific and technological knowledge to local events as well as forming alliances between local and global bodies. Further research is suggested for the socio-economic benefit related to these folk, festivals, culture, and crafts productions through proper trading. In Indian perspective, still various districts of West Bengal are potential for folk music, dance or art which can be evocative to the rich Indian culture.

References

1. Basham, A. L. (1997). A cultural history of India. Publisher: Oxford University Press, USA.
2. Basham, A. L. (2004). The wonder that was India. London: Picador.
3. Chudhuri, R.M. (2000). History and culture of Bankura's people. Pharma K.L.I Private Limited, Kolkata.

4. Dalton, E. T. (1872). *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing.
5. Das Chatterjee, N. (2014). Role of culture in the process of resource creation: A case study on temple town Bishnupur, district Bankura, West Bengal, India. *Journal of Social Review*, 3(1), 90-100.
6. Ganai, B. (2017). Folk tourism elements in Rarh Bankura, West Bengal – A descriptive study. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 4(3), 203-206.
7. Ghosh, B. (1976). *Paschimbanger Sanskriti*, Kolkata. Prakash Bhavan, Vol 1, pp. 327-359.
8. GraminVikasSevaSanshtha. (2013). Evaluation study of tribal/folk arts and culture in West Bengal, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhatisgrah and Bihar. Project Report submitted to SER Division Planning Commission, Govt. of India, New Delhi.
9. Mahato, S. (2016). 'TusuParab' ('The Tusu Festival'). UGC-SAP III, DRS Phase II, Department of English, Vidyasagar University.
10. Majumdar, R. C., & Pusalker. A. D. (1951). *The history and culture of the Indian people*. Mumbai, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.
11. Malik, S. C. (1975). *Understanding Indian civilisation: A framework of enquiry*. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla.
12. Mohanta, B. (2011). Tusu festival of the Kudumis of northern Orissa: Origin and causes. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology*, 2(1), 23-29.
13. Nair, J. D. (2018). Indian folk culture: A conceptual framework. *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences*, 8(3), 674-681.
14. O'Malley, L. S. S. (1995). ICS, *Bankura*, Bengal District Gazetteers, pp. 1-20, Government of West Bengal.
15. Rahaman, C. H., & Karmakar, S. (2015). Ethnomedicine of Santal tribe living around Susunia hill of Bankura district, West Bengal, India: The quantitative approach. *Journal of Applied Pharmaceutical Science*, 5(02), 127-136.
16. Sarkar, P. R. (1981). *Rarh - The Cradle of Civilization*, Ananda Marga Publications, Kolkata.
17. Singh, M. (2000). Women society in Bengalies Bhadu song (1st phase). *Lokayot Sanskriti*, 72-74.
18. Singh, P. K. (1994a). Ethno-peasantry system: A case of the Kurmis. *Man in India*, 74(2): 169-179.
19. Singh, P. K. (1994b). Folk festivals of Jharkhand with special reference to the Kurmis. *Man in India*, 74(4): 359-369.

