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AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY OF TOTEM AND TABOO IN *ORAON* AND *MUNDA* TRIBE OF RANCHI DISTRICT IN JHARKHAND

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Abstract: The present paper is purely based on the field work. In this paper an attempt has been made to study the age old practice of totem and taboo and to know its significance in the daily lives of the tribal communities Oraon and Munda of Ranchi District, Jharkhand. The present study envisages the impact of urbanization on the tribals and how totem and taboo are interrelated. It also throws light on how various totemistic groups originated into clans and describes the various climatic factors such as flora and fauna which directly affects the totems of the tribals.

Keywords: Totem, Taboo, Urbanization, Clan, Tribal Communities.

INTRODUCTION

It was fascinating to see that now also when people are destroying nature so brutally, there are some people who love nature, worship and protect them from degeneration and therefore deliberately or unknowingly they are preserving nature and thus maintaining a harmony in flora and fauna .

Totemism (derived from the soot- oode-in the Ojibwa language, which referred to something kinship-related, C.F. Odoodem "his totem") is a religious belief that is frequently associated with shamanistic religion. It is derived from the American Indian word. A totem is a being, object, or symbol representing an animal or plant that serves as an emblem of a group of people, such as a family, clan, group, lineage, or tribe, reminding them of their ancestry (or mythic past). In kinship and descent, if the apical ancestor of a clan is nonhuman, it is called a totem. Normally this belief is accompanied by a totemic myth. They have been around for many years. Therefore a Totem is a stipulated ancestor of a group of people, such as family, clan, lineage or tribe. Totems support larger groups than the individual person. In kinship and descent, if the apical ancestor of a clan is now human, it is called a TOTEM. The totem is usually an animal or other natural figure that spiritually represents a group of related people such as a clan. The act of practicing a totem is known as Totemism.

Totem word was first used by an American J. Long in 1791 taken from North

American Chippewa Red Indians. It was J.F. Maclinn who first understood the importance of Totemism. Totemism was a key element of study in the development of 19th and early 20th century theories of religion. It was mainly practiced in Australia and then in America. The most common tribal society is *Arunta* of Australia. Few thinkers or the great anthropologists have worked immensely on it. Such as "Durkheim" According to him Tribals in order to make alive this heritage & maintain nature balance forms totem and then to keep alive their totem, they practice the art of tattooing. Levi Strauss said, "Totems are chosen arbitrarily for the sole purpose of making the physical world a comprehensive and coherent classificatory system. Similarly the other aspect of Totem is "Taboo" Taboo is interrelated to Totem. It means any inhibition or restriction imposed on a particular society and the violation of a particular taboo can result in punishments. It can also result in embarrassment, shame and rudeness. Together both forms an integral part of a tribal society however no universal Taboos have been found.

Taboo is a strong social prohibition (or ban) relating to any area of human activity or social custom that is sacred and forbidden based on world judgment and sometimes even religious beliefs. Breaking the taboo is usually considered objectionable or abhorrent by society.

The term comes from the Tongan word taboo, meaning set a part or forbidden and appears in many Polynesian cultures. In those cultures a taboo (or *tapus* or *Kapu*) often has specific religious associations. When an activity or custom is taboo, it is forbidden and interdictions are implemented concerning it. Some taboo activities or customs are prohibited under law and transgressions may lead to severe penalties.

Taboos include sex, death, dietary restrictions restrictions on sexual activities and relationships etc. No taboo is known to be universal but some occur in the majority of societies. Taboos may serve many functions and often remain in effect after the original reason behind them as expired.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To know the practical application of totem and taboo.
2. To find out Impact of urbanization on these practices.
3. To find out consequences if Taboo is violated.
4. To find out mythological stories behind totemistic groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is a theoretical research paper based on the fieldwork, here both primary and secondary data have been used for the analysis. The primary data was collected by interview, participant observation, schedules. Simple random sampling has been applied for the selection of respondents. Besides this, secondary data was collected from internet sources which was ratified during field data collections.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

TOTEM

Totems as seen and understood by a tribal point of view is merely a title similar to *gotra* or clan which is given by their ancestors to retain their identity and which they give to their offspring so that they could get a legitimate status and identity in position. In the villages of Ranchi mainly there were tribal families scattered all around was that of *Oraon and Munda*. They were known by different totemic names or surnames and each totem had its different identity some carried the name of an animal, fruit or any natural object. However, the mythological stories behind each was not discovered due the lack of knowledge and interest among the tribal people.

Let us know more about Totem of *Munda and Oraon* separately-

MUNDAS

Though the *Mundas* were less as compared to the *Oraon* in the villages yet they enjoyed the most respectable position in the village i.e. of *PAHAN* (priest) The different Totems acknowledged along with their meanings were-

HEMROM : A kind of Snake, **NAGVANSHI** : Species of Snake, **BHUTKUAAR** : A kind of Soi meaning Sol fish, **HASSA**: goose.

SANTHALS

They have the totem **MURMU**: A forest based wild cow, **CHANDE**: A lizard, **BOYAR**: A fish.

HO

They have the totem **BAGE**: A tiger, **HANSDA**: A wild goose, **JAMUDA**: spring, **TIYU**: A Fox.

They consider their Totemic animal sacred and never eat them and think that they are their saviors. However the totemic myth behind each totem was not found yet a single mythological story behind the *Nagvanshi's* was found.

MYTHOLOGICAL STORY BEHIND THE ADOPTION OF NAGVANSHI AS TITLE /TOTEM

It was told that in ancient times when the *Mundas* did not come into existence there was girl of a tribal community, regularly she went to a river for washing her clothes. Her beauty and work was keenly observed by a snake named *Sheshnag* living underwater. He was impressed by the girl and decided to marry her. With this purpose and motive he disguises himself as a man and comes in front of the girl and proposes her to marry him. The girl give the consent and both were married. After few years they had a son and still the lady does not knew that she had been married to a snake. One day the mother(girl) sees that the tongue of her son is like that of a snake. The lady understood everything and asked her husband who are you? Then the man took her to the river and came in his original form of *Sheshnaag* and told her the whole story. Thus from then, their descendants became *Nagvanshi* and the whole community got the totem of *nagvanshi*. This story is also known as *Mundaon ka Uday*.

ORAON

The villagers were mainly inhabited by *Oraon* tribal society. There were number of Totems were found only along with the meanings. The myth behind them was not discovered. These are **TOPPO**: A long tailed bird commonly found in forests, **KACCHAP**: A tortoise, **KHALKHO**: A sub species of a fish. It is known for its calm behavior, **MINJ**: A fish found in marine water and ponds, **EKKA**: A tortoise, **LINDA**: A fish or earthworm like worm or a kind of eel, **SAUR**: Big fish with red eyes, it is believed that their eyes are upon their respective community, **TIGGA**: monkey, **GIDHI**: The eagle, **TIGA**: Field mouse, **ALIA**: The dog, **HARTU**: the monkey), **TATENGA**: the lizard, **DHIDMA**: a bird, **LAPOUNG**: A small bird, **BARWA**: wild hog, **XAXA**: crow, **XESS**: corn, **KOKRO**: cock, **BANDO**: fox, **RAWANA**: vulture, **BESHRA**: A name of tree, **CKIGALO**: Jackal, **GODO**: A water creature, **KUHU**: Cuckoo, **KANHAR**: vulture bird, **BAGHWAR**: The tiger, **KHOYA**: Jackal.

IMPACT OF URBANIZATION

The impact of urbanization and globalization can be clearly seen in the villages of Ranchi. They have changed in all aspects. Talking about Totem and Taboo, they have forgotten and even not bothered to know about the fascinating reasons behind their particular totems. They have totally adopted the urban lifestyle not only physically

and socially but psychologically too. The young as well as the older generations did not knew about their original cultural beliefs. The art of tattooing their respective totems which was mandatory in ancient times as it was believed that tatooning opens the doors of heaven and is the only way to reach God. It has now become just a superstition and matter of jokes and laughs.

It was seen that they are just carrying their totems for the sole purpose of exogamy. It was very astonishing to know that not a single person knew the actual reason behind opting their Totems. Also they do not hesitate in changing their totems, they perform and celebrate the religious ceremonies but they are totally unaware about their cultures and norms which has given them their identity as tribals in the society of common people therefore totemism was thoroughly influenced by the impact of urbanization and has lost its value and identity as it was in ancient times.

TABOO

Taboo basically means any prohibition or a strong objection or a Ban/ restriction imposed on anyone or a community. With the advancement of time and knowledge they have changed their livelihood and considered taboo as just an ancestral saying yet there were some taboos which were strictly followed by them irrespective of the myth or logic behind it. They are imposed right from the birth till the death of a person mainly imposed on women and men were free to do anything. The most important and universal taboo for all men and women was that they are not allowed to kill or destroy their totem animal or plant or any natural symbol related to their sentiments. Some taboos related to the different stages of the life cycle are-

TABOOS RELATED TO BIRTH

With the commencement or prior to delivery of a child, there were many restrictions imposed on the child as well as on the mother, Such as - a pregnant lady is not allowed to go the graveyard or any cremation area. It is believed that as soon as foetus comes in mothers womb both should be avoided from evil deeds. It is a taboo for them to eat certain vegetables such as- *Aloo*, *Baigan* and *Kaanta Saag*. It is believed that these vegetables spread evil strength which could be harmful for both. A pregnant lady is not allowed to see the Solar Eclipse or Lunar Eclipse as it is believed that harmful rays can affect the child. Before and after the birth of a child mother and the infant both are not allowed to go out or even take bath for 5 to 6 or upto 9 days. The lady after giving birth is not allowed to enter into the kitchen and fields as they are considered to be impious. They not allowed to enter into the temple and are prohibited for worshiping or performing any rituals, *mundan* ceremony of a child is prohibited until unless he is one month old.

TABOOS RELATED TO MARRIAGE

Various taboos were witnessed during the marriage of a tribal community such as-

same clan marriage is strictly prohibited as they believe that same clan persons are brothers and sisters. As soon as the ceremony starts a band is tied on the forehead of a boy and a girl and then from that moment boy and girl both are not allowed to get out of their houses and on the day of marriage the bride has to keep fast for the whole day. The complete marriage is done on an agricultural weapon and it is a taboo that they are not allowed to get down on the land until the whole marriage finishes, also unmarried girls and boys are not allowed to see a ceremony of *sindurdan*. The spouse is not allowed to put *Sindoor* from front, unlike other religion he has to come back behind the woman and then put it. After marriage, the elder brother carries her outside the house and then it is prohibited for the elder brother to touch the bride or his sister. During marriage ceremonies, there is a ritual of making *Barri* (made of spices & pulses) in which unmarried girls and boys are not allowed to participate. Only the married women are allowed to attend. After marriage the spouse has avoidance relationship with his sister in law and elder sister of his wife. They are prohibited to talk and follow the brother sister relationship. The bride also has avoidance relationship with her brother in law. It is a strict prohibition for her not to talk touch even wash her brother in laws clothes open her hair or even come in front

of him. It is the most commonly followed Taboo. One of the astonishing taboo was that women even after number of remarriages was not allowed to participate in any ceremony, festivals or any pious rituals. Widows were not allowed to put *Sindoor* even after there remarriage. They were also not allowed to wear bangles made of glass even after remarriage until her brother gives her immediately the bangles at the time of cremation of her first husband.

TABOOS RELATED TO DEATH

with the onset of last stage of a person and after his death their were many taboos imposed on their family and to them like- While doing cremation rituals only the same clan people can participate. At the cremation area neither the pregnant lady nor her husband are allowed to go and after cremation, the people who attended they are not allowed to enter the houses until they take bath and put oil, turmeric on them. It is believed that by doing this they get free from evil spirits. Those who expire due to unnatural condition or accidentally, they are not allowed to bury as they believe that they should be cremated so that their soul could go to heaven. Unless the dead body is kept in house, they are not allowed to lit their hearth or cook food. Those who participate in the cremation they had to prepare food without using oil and turmeric.

There is a taboo of *shudhikaran* for the unmarried girls.

TABOOS RELATED TO RELIGIOUS CEREMONIES

Oraon tribe is mainly known for its religious aspect. They possess their identity with these pious rituals. Some ritualistic taboos found are- They sacrifice animals on every eve whether its happiness or sorrow. Therefore this privilege of sacrificing is only given to men and it is a taboo for women. At the time *Sohrai puja* women are not allowed to participate and are strictly prohibited to worship on that day. Weekly people do worship called as *Sama* on Thursdays. It is a taboo for them to eat non veg food on this day. New fruits and vegetables are prohibited to eat until all the people participate in *Sarhul* festival. *Matra or Pitra Pujan* (worshipping done for there ancestor) is only done by women and it is a taboo for men. The person who does main worshiping of God in their festivals are not allowed to drink *Hadia* (a form of Rice Beer) until the worshiping is complete and then he takes it in form of *prashad*. While going through menstrual cycle women are considered to be impure and they are not allowed to worship and even cannot enter into the kitchen. *Bhagtaiyan* (Witchcrafts) are not allowed to eat anything outside there house, in adverse conditions she can only eat food made by an unmarried girl. At the time of *Sohrai* festival, *biryani* is made which is only for men and women follow taboo to eat it as it is believed that they come from another family. The sacred *Karma Pedh* is allowed to touch or use only by the members of their respective villages. Other village people are not allowed to touch it.

SOME OTHER GENERAL TABOOS

Taboos which were followed in their daily life. Such as- Girls and women are not allowed to plough the field though they can sow the seeds. Women are not allowed to do the overhauling of roof or *Chappar Chana* of mud houses. Women are not allowed to carry water utensils above their shoulders, however they can put them on their waist. At the time of any epidemic women are strictly prohibited to

take part in any welfare program carried by *Pahan* (priest) and the men. At the time of *Janishikar* which takes place after every 12 years, in this men are prohibited to go out of there houses and only women dressed up as men can go out to celebrate. While going through menstrual periods women are neither allowed to go in fields nor they can do gardening. A brother is not allowed to take the name of his younger sister in law.

CONCLUSION

Totemism which was once the basis of the social and political organization of the *Oraons*, still forms an important feature of their social organization like in kinship, marriage and relations of the sexes are concerned .

Mainly Totemism was significant for purpose of exogamy, the whole tribe is divided into a number of clans or *Gotras*. The flora and fauna of their past and present habitats naturally supply the bulk of names. It shows that the importance of Totem still prevails in these tribal communities.

Similarly Taboo also has its present significance as people follow some of the norms made by their ancestors however they are completely unaware of the logic behind it.

Due to the impact of urbanization, the significance of Totem and Taboo is on the verge of extinction. It was found that people knew their totem, follow the art of tattooing but they do not know as to why they follow them. Neither they know the mythological story behind it nor they are interested. However they follow taboos which is flexible and tend to change to suit their livelihood unlike past when violation of any taboo is considered to be a heinous crime and severe actions were taken against it. Thus it was seen that Totem and Taboo were merely a fact and gained importance either in books or in the life of ancestors of these society. Today totem is just the name or title given to them and taboo is just an ancestral norm which needs to be followed just for the happiness and well being of the family.

Tradition testifies to the former recognition by the *Oraon* and *Munda* clans of the principle of collective responsibility as illustrated by the law of the blood. But at the present decaying stage of totemism, practically the only trace of the old solidarity of the clan as a whole exists in the recognition by every member of the clan, however unrelated, who may happen to require his hospitality. Individual *Oraons* have no totem badges or taboo marks nor any difference in dress or in the mode of wearing the hair to indicate their totem. Nor is there any division of labour between different clans. They perform no ceremonies for the multiplication of the totem nor indeed is it considered the particular duty of a clan, to seek to multiply its totem.

The *Oraon* do not observe any totemic ceremonies in which the flesh of totem animal or fruit of the totem tree may be eaten. There were indeed no traces amongst the *Oraon* of any custom of eating the totem. A man is not regarded as partaking of any of the qualities of his totem. Any unintentional breach of the totem-taboo by an *Oraon* though regarded with social approval is no longer generally believed to entail any serious consequences. But the older people will always tell such an infringement is not safe. Thus at the end it can be rightly concluded that Totem and Taboo which was believed to be one of the important aspect of the Tribal Identity has been partially extinct and forgotten by these communities. They just know that Totem is title and its only importance is in marriage and similarly Taboo is nothing but a superstitious and orthodox nature or the behavior of their ancestors which was due to the lack of sufficient awareness and complete knowledge. Thus Totem and Taboo are depleting day by day.

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