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Human Sacrifice Among The Tribes Of Bastar

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Abstract

This research paper is related to the history of evil practice of human sacrifice in Bastar. Under the present state of Chhattisgarh, human sacrifice was prevalent in the Bastar division, which was known as Mahakantar and Dandakaranya in ancient times. This practice was patronized by Chhindak Nagvansh and Kakatiya rulers of Bastar. This practice ended after a long struggle during the British rule. Due to the ban on this practice, the tribal did the Meriah rebellion, which lasted for the longest time (1842 – 1863 AD) in the rebellion history of the tribal of Bastar. Meriah is the person chosen for the literal slaughter (human sacrifice).

Key words: Bastar, Dandakaranya, Meriah, Hele, Fitkur, Hidma Manjhi, Danteshwari Devi etc.

purpose of study

From this research paper we will be able to know that-

1. The special culture and ancient history of Bastar, the tribal region.
2. Circumstances responsible for the origin, peak and end of the practice of human sacrifice in Bastar.
3. Efforts of British rule in the context of stopping human sacrifice.
4. Expansion and impact of Meriah Revolt starting from 1842 AD.
5. The role of Chhindak Nagvansh and Kakatiya rulers of Bastar in relation to the practice of human sacrifice.
6. The tribes of Bastar opposed the interference of outside elements in the culture of tribal.
7. To know about Madhurantak Dev's Rajpur copper plate and Rakshapaldev's Rajpur Oriya copper plate, Dantewada inscription.

Introduction

Sacrifice is a religious ritual in which a special and dear object is offered to a divinity. According to the British anthropologist Sir Edward Burnet Tylor, it was a gift to the gods to gain their favor or reduce their hostility. Sacrifice of human is the gift of priceless life of man to the deity. The core of human sacrifice is the recognition of blood as a sacred life force. Man's sacrifice is part of an effort to communicate with God and participate in the divine life.¹

The meaning of human sacrifice is to slaught human beings in front of the gods and goddesses. At present the practice of animal sacrifice is visible but human sacrifice has ended. Its history is very old. The first known historical dynasty in Bastar was the Nal dynasty. The practice of human sacrifice is not known in the records and copper plates of the Nal dynasty, but this practice appears to have been established in Bastar since the time of the rulers of the Chhindak Nagvansh. That is, human sacrifice was prevalent in Bastar since medieval times. Human sacrifice was prevalent in the Danteshwari Devi temple of Dantewada, formerly known as Manikeshwari Devi.

Before 1947 AD, there were 565 princely states in the country of India which were attached to the British rule with the terms of treaties and agreements. Chhattisgarh had fourteen princely states, in which the Bastar princely state was the largest in terms of area.²

This land is a sparsely populated area, it is geographically located in the south of India. This is also considered as the Dandakaranya area of Tretayuga. This princely state was given the status of division on 20 March 1981.³

The princely state of Bastar is situated between 17°46" to 20°35" north latitude and 80°15" east longitude to 82°15" east longitude. It is about 180 miles (289 km) long from the northern border to the southern border and 125 miles (201 km) wide from the eastern border to the western border. The entire area of the princely state is 39,144 sq km. is.⁴

The northern boundary of this princely state was Dhamtari district, in the east Jaipur princely state of Madras province and in the south Godavari district was located.⁵

The empire of Nalas who ruled in Bastar region was huge. Chanda district extended to East Bhandara, Balaghat, Durg, Raipur, North Bastar, Kanker and Rajnandgaon."⁶

Human sacrifice at the time of Chhindak Nagvansh rulers

Mother Goddess Danteshwari is considered almighty in Bastar land. The practice of sacrifice does not seem surprising in the forest dwellers of Bastar. Sacrifice of animals and birds to please the deities is still considered a religious act in rural areas. Apart from animals and birds, there is also a long history of human sacrifice in the forest-dwelling region of Bastar. This practice was also patronized by the kings of Bastar. In those days, there was a terrible provision of human sacrifice in the temples of the family gods and goddesses of the rulers. The subjects also used to perform the ritual of human sacrifice separately in their Devgudis.⁷

Temples of Manikeshwari Devi and Danteshwari Devi, the clan goddesses of Chhindak Nagas and Chalukyas (Kakatiyas) had provision for human sacrifice in those days. According to the Rajpur inscription of 1065 AD, the Chiindak Naga ruler Madhurantaka Dev had offered a village named Rajpur to the temple of Manikeshwari Devi for human sacrifice.⁸

It is known from 'Rajpur copper plate (1065 AD) that Bastar was the main center of Kol practice. The kings of Chakrakot were associated with the branch of 'Pashupat sect of Kapalika Shaivas'. The Kapalikas were notorious for performing human sacrifices. For this reason, Madhurantaka Dev had donated a village for the sustenance of those who performed human sacrifices. ⁹

Human sacrifice during the time of Kakatiya rulers

Annam Dev established the Kakatiya dynasty in Bastar by ending the Chhindak Nagvansh. The Kakatiya dynasty ruled Bastar for a long time. His native area was Warangal. In his time, many new customs were included in Bastar, but the practice of human sacrifice continued in Bastar even at this time.

In 1324 AD, Annamdev attacked Bastar and established the kingdom by defeating the Gond (Chhindak Nagvansh) king Harishchandra Dev. King Annamdev ruled from Barsur for some time and settled in Dantewada. He brought the idol of Danteshwari from Barsur and installed it in Dantewada. ¹⁰

According to the epigraphic evidence of the Eastern Chalukyas, the rule of Chalukyas, in Bastar begins from 13th century. Most historians refer to them as "Kakatiyas". The genealogy of Eastern Chalukyas is given in Dikpaldev's Dantewada article, according to which Prataparudradev's brother Annamraj came to Bastar. The son of Dikpaladeva was Rakshapaladeva, from whose Oriya copper plate of Rajpur it is known that some Brahmins from Bramhapura had come to his kingdom. Human sacrifice was also prevalent in his time, which is confirmed by the "Meriah" human sacrifice.¹¹

It is known from the Dantewada inscription that in 1703 AD, Dikpal Dev had organized a sacrifice ceremony in the joy of winning Navrang area (Orissa), due to sacrifice the water of the confluence of the Dankini and Shankhini rivers remained bloody for five days. ¹²

Human sacrifice in English report

Vitthal Rao Dinkar was the governor of Chhattisgarh from 1790 to 1796. He was a subedar of the Maratha ruler of Nagpur at Ratanpur. European travelers J.T. Blunt came on 13 May 1795 during his reign.

Captain J.T. Blunt was the first English traveler to visit ancient Bastar. On the basis of authentic facts regarding Bastar and while roaming around the border of Bastar, he had heard about human sacrifice from a person named Gosai. He says that human sacrifice takes place in Bastar, due to which its deities become pleased. Human sacrifice is done only from among the captives. They are so cruel that they kill even the beggars.¹³

After the control of Bhonsla administration of Bastar princely state started, the British officer of Chanda district came to know that human sacrifice is given in Bastar princely state. He sent a spy to Bastar in the form of a cloth merchant to get the right information. On September 23, 1825, at 12:00 in the night, he secretly saw the dangerous scene of the human sacrifice ceremony in the Danteshwari temple. 15 humans and 600 goats were sacrificed in front of the fire pit of the temple. According to the details of the intelligence, during the reign of Mahipal Dev, the human sacrifice ceremony was held every 3 years and in each human sacrifice ceremony, certainly 15 men were beheaded.¹⁴

British Superintendent of Chhattisgarh Col. P. Vans Agnew has also mentioned in his report (1820 AD), that "to please the gods and goddesses, the evil practice of human sacrifice still exists among the Gonds. By catching criminals and prisoners of war or sometimes innocent people, Gonds sacrifice them in front of the goddess. The same evil practice of punishment is prevalent in the king of this tribe, according to which the criminal was asked to bow down before the favorite deity and when he bowed his head, he was hit from behind. By doing this his throat was cut. ¹⁵

Richard Jenkins, who presented a report (1827) on Bastar during the time of Mahipal Dev, has mentioned that the evil practice of human sacrifice was prevalent in the Danteshwari temple of Dantewada, Bastar. Human sacrifice for Goddess Danteshwari in Bastar is prevalent even today and has been happening openly with the permission of the king. Prisoners of war, criminals and sometimes even innocent people were sacrificed before the goddess. It was a simple method of punishment of Gond kings that the guilty person was taken to pray before a god and as soon as he bowed down to prostrate before the god, he was beheaded. ¹⁶

Col. Agnew and Jenkins have similar views regarding human sacrifice.

Efforts of British rulers to stop human sacrifice

From 1830, the administration again came under the Bhosals. The British got information that the practice of human sacrifice is prevalent in Karaud and Bastar. The British administrators wanted the Nagpur king to abolish this practice. The Nagpur ruler also assured that he would work with full readiness to eradicate the practice of human sacrifice. The British agent was given full authority of police and criminal justice. Army troops were sent to Bastar and Karaud. ¹⁷

In 1842 AD, the Bhonsala ruler of Nagpur called Bhupal Dev to Nagpur to appear before him in the case of human sacrifice. The king sent his brother Dalganjan Singh along with Diwan Jagbandhu to Nagpur to keep his favor due to eye disease. The Maratha government suspected the practice of human sacrifice in Bastar after questioning Lal Dalganjan Singh. In 1842 AD, a group of security soldiers was appointed around the Dantewada temple by Bhonsla ruler so that human sacrifice does not happen. When the Maratha ruler accused Bhupaldev of the evil practice of human sacrifice, he feigned ignorance and promised that if such practice existed, it would be ended soon.¹⁸

McPherson was appointed to investigate the human sacrifice at the time of Bhupal Dev. He presented his report in 1852. Bhupal Dev promised to end human sacrifice soon.

Meriah rebellion against the abolition of human sacrifice

Since 1842 AD, the English administrators had put pressure on the Maratha ruler to end this evil practice. That's why joint efforts of Maratha ruler Raghuji III and English rulers took place and army was sent against human sacrifice. The tribal of Bastar rebelled considering it a disturbance in their culture. Which is known as Meriah Rebellion.

The primitive tribes of Dantewada revolted against the Anglo-Maratha rule in the nineteenth century. It was a rebellion against the intrusion of external and foreign forces in Bastar. It was a rebellion against the interference on their tradition and customs. The British administration was unfamiliar with the customs and manners of the tribal.¹⁹

Ban on human sacrifice prevalent in Dantewada temple became a major reason for tribal rebellion in Bastar.. According to Grigson, "The British Government had ordered Raja Bhupaldev of Bastar to end Meriah or human sacrifice in Bastar. After 1857 AD, he was getting continuous information that human sacrifice was prevalent in Bastar.

Bastar was a terrible area for Tantra practice. It has been a general opinion among the people that human sacrifice used to take place in Dantewada. Even after this, the legal issues of human sacrifice in Bastar could not be resolved. In 1842, Nagpur king's action on Bastar State was based on information from Khond-regions of Orissa. In this, it was said that people from outside Bastar were caught for the sake of sacrifice and at least 20 people were sacrificed together. ²⁰

In 1842 AD, Diwan of Bastar Laldalgañjan Singh went to Nagpur. He accepted that human sacrifice is prevalent in Bastar, accordingly a security detachment of Nagpur Raja was appointed in the temple of Dantewada for a period of twenty-two years from 1842 AD to 1863 AD. This army was sent with the aim of stopping the human sacrifice. Due to this act of the British government, the tribal understood the external interference on their tradition and they revolted. It could never be proved by investigation, that this type of human sacrifice is done. ²¹

It is believed that the tribal had superstitions towards human sacrifice. It is said that the heinous rites of human sacrifice prevalent in the Dantewada temple were prevalent. The British government ordered King Bhupaldev to end this ritual. The Raja of Kalahandi was also warned along with the Raja of Bastar to stop the human sacrifice.

Shyamsundar Jia was the priest of Danteshwari temple. He had a big reputation in Bastar. He opposed the steps taken by the government in relation to human sacrifice, as well as he instigated the tribal for this heinous and reprehensible act. He reasoned before the tribes that if human sacrifice was abolished from Bastar, the goddess would be displeased. The British rule will take Bastar under its authority and the tribal will become dependent.

The Mariya tribes under the leadership of Hidma Majhi demanded that the soldiers be withdrawn for the sanctity of the Devi temple. On the orders of Vamanrao, the Diwan of Bastar, the soldiers tortured the Mariya tribes. Many Mariya villages were offered to the fire. Tribal women were treated indecently. The rebel leader Hidma survived. The army of Raipur brutally suppressed the rebellion.²²

In the Dantewada temple, the army detachment of the Nagpur king was kept for the year 1842-1863 AD. Maria tribes were tortured by Muslim soldiers stationed in Dantewara. The priest of the temple, Shyam Sudar Jia, incited the people, which inspired the tribes to revolt. They started attacking the soldiers secretly. This rebellion seems to have been done to protect its traditional policies and to save outsiders from interference in Bastar's internal beliefs and regions. They wanted to protect Bastar from outsiders.²³

The agent for the hill areas of Orissa, Captain J. McVicar traveled to Bastar in 1855 AD. He met the king and his dewan Dalgañjan Singh. He also went to Dantewada to know about the situation. The areas he visited, he realized had the dreaded terror of Goddess Danteshwari. A person in his camp also admitted that recently the organizers of the human sacrifice had tried to capture him for the purpose of the sacrifice. From the survey, they came to know that a woman was also wanted to be caught for the sacrifice. It was also reported that six years ago a man was sacrificed on the orders of Lal Dalgañjan Singh. Even after this, McVicar did not have any solid proof.²⁴

The Meriah rebellion was a rebellion related to the religious beliefs of the tribes. For a long period, the army was stationed in Dantewada, whose main objective was to exploit the tribal. During the British rule, the first rebellion against the British took place in 1824-25. This is a clear proof of the fact that discontent against the British had started growing in Bastar. The process of uprooting the kings, landlords and tribal by the British was starting. Traditions were being attacked. Danteshwari was getting impure. The soldiers had no knowledge of their traditions and customs and were humiliating the culture of the tribes. If the soldiers had tried to understand the symbolic structure of Meriah, this mutiny would not have had such an adverse outcome. The British government tried to end this wonderful culture of Bastar. Due to the fear of Danteshwari Mai, the tribal did not help those soldiers. ²⁵

In 1859, Eliot informed the commissioner of Nagpur province that the practice of human sacrifice may have been prevalent in Bastar before the British rule, but no information was ever received about it from the British rule. In 1862 AD, Glassford wrote that the guards should be removed from the Dantewada temple. In 1863, the police guard was removed from the temple and after five years the Chief Commissioner of the Central Provinces said that human sacrifice was never prevalent in Bastar.²⁶

In 1862 Glassford, Deputy Commissioner of Sironcha also visited Bastar. Glassford gave his report on Bastar human sacrifice and told that army is stationed in Danteshwari temple since 1842, in this situation human sacrifice is not possible.

Search for skeleton in the reign of King Bhairamdev of Bastar

In the reign of King Bhairamdev (1885-86) too, there is information about human sacrifice in the temple of Danteshwari Devi. There are 2 code words related to human sacrifice in Halbi - "Hele" and "Fitkur". The practice of human sacrifice is prevalent till date.²⁷

There were definitely rumors of human sacrifice in Bastar, but no evidence was ever found regarding its practice. The stories of human sacrifice were fabricated in Jaipur. The king here was the enemy of the king of Bastar. In 1885-86, the issue of human sacrifice again reached its climax. A tehsildar named Sher Khan took away the administration of Bhairamdev and he was told to stay in Raipur until the investigation regarding the human sacrifice was done. As a result, Bhairamdev was taken to Raipur in 1885 AD. In 1885-87 AD, investigation was done in relation to human sacrifice. Excavation around the temple was done under the leadership of Superintendent of Police, Raipur. A large quantity of bones was extracted from here. The people were made to admit that there was a practice of human sacrifice. Temple priest Shyamsundar Jia expressed his ignorance in this regard. He had to bear the tortures of police terror, but he was silent, because if he had spoken a single word in favor of human sacrifice, the kingdom would have been taken away from Bhairamdev forever. In the end, he was taken to Raipur while roaming Kalahandi (Orissa) and the judge acquitted him innocent after not getting evidence against him and Bhairamdev was again given the right to rule in 1886 AD.²⁸

Grigson, writing his memoirs, said that the police had made futile excavations around the Dantewada temple to find skeleton and had to be disappointed. It was often the statement of many villagers that the king was given a lot of trouble regarding this episode. Even today there is no such person who can say that human sacrifice was prevalent here in ancient times.²⁹

conclusion

The end of the extremely inhuman practice prevailing in Bastar for many centuries became possible due to British reform efforts and strict policy. After the first half of the nineteenth century, there is no evidence of human sacrifice in Danteshwari temple and anywhere else in entire Bastar.

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