



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Case Study of Keslapur Nagoba Jatra or Fair: A Socio- Anthropological approach****Sanjay B. Salunke**

Department of Sociology

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Aurangabad-431001

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**\*Corresponding Author****Sanjay B. Salunke****Abstract**

India has ancient tradition of fairs and festivals ceremonies in the names of the Gods. This tradition is observed in both tribal and non tribal communities. Fairs or Jatra perceive the traditions and entertain the people. Gond is the largest populated tribes in India. Raj Gonds are found in majority in the states of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. The annual fair of the God Nagoba (Serpent God) of Gond is held at Keslapur in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. The present research has carried out qualitative analysis of this fair. For this participant observations and intensive interview methods are adopted. The impact of the age on the fair is analyzed.

*Copy Right, IJAR, 2014. All rights reserved***Introduction:**

Fair has been the Centre of Folk culture since ancient times. There are fairs or festivals held in India by the names of God or Godless. People try to preserve culture, folk-dance, music and traditions through fairs. These fair are found deep rooted in both tribal as well as non tribal communities. Varadpande, (1992:194) speaks about fairs; 'Fairs have been dramatic in historical aspect or related to any cult'. This it has been proved by most of the scholars that Jatra originated from the annual religious festivals initially (H.K. Das 2006:166,171) Vatsayan (1973:173) gives several contradictory remarks about the origin of Jatra in Bengal. These Jatras are held annually or periodically. Gods are in majority of tribal population in India. Fairs have been symbol of traditional culture. Tribes are also believed in many Gods like Hindus. They have many Gods related to Nature. Many Gods are common in Hindus and Aviaris. This is remarkably true in agricultural Hindus and tribals. Tribals also believe in post-mortal life of person like Hindus. Mahadev is prominent and common God to Gonds. (Durga Bhagvat 1968: 27,106) Mahadev is called Persapen or Baradev by Gonds. Gonds from Adilabad i.e. Raj Gonds says Persapen to Mahadev. Gonds use 'Persapen' for Mahadev, who is usually found near the farm or near the colony. Persapen is worshiped once a year in the month April or May. Persapen is usually situated below the tree of Mona (*Madhuca log folia*). All the people take part in this festival. Proceedings take place outside the village and reach the place where Persapen is situated. They carry the hegoat which is supposed to be offered to god. Earlier this god was offered young ones of cow. The young one was supposed to be killed in one attack. But Dube (1967) in has observation in Adilabad declared that cow slaughtering is banned, hence tried to stop. According to Fach (1963:3) earlier cow was offered to God. Persapen is central in the traditional worshipping system of Gond. Some tribals worship Narayan dev who is considered the sun by some of the tribes (Crooke 1926: 5, 74). Cobra is around the neck of God Shankar which is forever within God Shankar like that Gonds live in the forest of and often meets snakes poisons snake bite cause death of person. Hence, many tribes treat snake as God.

**Methodology:**

Intensive interviews, participated observation method, Interview scheduled are used for the data collection and research. Nagoba day is a five day annual Jatra or fair celebrated at keslapur Nagoba temple in Indrarelli mandal of Adilabad district in Andhra Pradesh. This fair is earlier studied by CVF Haimendrof (1948) and Setu Madhavrao Pagdi (1949).

**Tradition of Jatra:**

Nagoba is famous pilgrimage of Gonds where in every month of January (paush) the fair is held. This fair is believed to have more than 500 years. Some 500 years ago, a God devotee called Pedyoru went to temple for worshipping the Nag God 'devata' but he was not allowed to enter. But pedyoru did not listen to them and touched the throne worshipped the God when Nagdev entered the Naglok they smelt something different. They sensed that somebody had entered the Naglok. Then the watchman told them Pedyoru had made the holy throne unholy. The Naglok got angry and decided to punish pedyoru. Pedyoru asked for excuse and he was excused then Nagoba said that he will visit the place every year.

Nagoba has to be worshipped with milk, curd, honey, fruits and cereals. Also he should be bathed with the water from Godavari pedyoru did all this and it becomes the tradition.

Everything in 'Jatra' takes place as per the tradition. Gond's take the leading role everybody from any caste can participate in the 'Jatra'. Nagoba is family god of Gonds Clan Meshram. People from Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, come to the 'Jatra' only 22 Meshram families enjoy the right to perform worshipping pooja. They are called 'Meshroor' Temples are open to all when they complete their pooja worshipping.

**Taboo:**

There are several rituals in the worshipping. There are some Negative and positive aspects of rituals of the Gonds. So those things which are avoided are known as taboo (Sigmund Freud 1999:18). Taboo is derived from English. There is possibility that taboo might have been used in English after Captain Cook studied those tribes. Taboos are classified into two types, 1) Consenting taboo 2) Boycotting taboo, former is about what should be done while later is what should not be done all the religions have such taboos (Sigmund Freud 1999:18). Wundt (2011:217) describes that taboo as the oldest human unwritten code of laws.

The holiness of holy person, place, articles etc. should be maintained by observing all the permitted rituals. Also, the women with their periods or those who have lost their family members just 10 days before are not allowed to enter the place of worshipping. These rules are strictly followed by the people. If someone violates these rules then Nagoba gets angry.

The beginning of 'Jatra' starts 8- 10 days before all the people come there by bullock carts which are parked under the holy Bunyan tree at kesalapur. There is a 'kund' under the tree. The water of this 'kund' is considered pure water 'Nirmal yer'. This water has special importance in pooja.

Government of Andhra Pradesh has provided all the transportation facilities for this Jatra. Also, Government provided information about all the schemes to the people in this Jatra. Necessary security is also provided.

Sometimes ago the Gond king used to organize his assembly here for all the public purposes like giving justice etc. then, government started providing all the decisions from here. But, the assembly has been stopped for the last two years due to increased terror of naxalite activities. MLA, s MP, s and ministers also do not visit the place now day due to security concerns.

**A History of Temple:**

Trees are the temples of The God for the Gonds. Gonds believe that Persapen lives on trees. Earlier, there was just a platform; later in 1956 a temple was built. Govt. of A.P. built two cement concrete temples in 1999. The inauguration ceremony (kalash ceremony) was held in the presence of ministers and govt. officials 'Kalash' (apex top) ceremony was done in the traditional way. But in the beginning Gonds were not happy with the ceremony after they performed it in their traditional way.

**Nature of rites in Jatra:**

There are several rites, rituals in the jatra now a day the nature of various rituals performed in jatra is not as traditional as it was earlier net, they are performed in traditional way following are the rituals performed in jatra.

**Holy water of river Godavari:**

Water is called 'yer' in Gondi language. The water required for the Jatra is brought one day before certain 8-10 persons are given the task of bringing water. Other can also accompany them if they wish. People have to walk bare feet to bring the water they got used for bringing the water pot is called 'zari' which is made of five metals and kept secure tied at the edge of bamboo. Zari is never put on the ground. Women are not allowed to touch the zari even their shadow is forbidden. The water is used for bathing the God and then zari is placed in the temple.

**Marching towards Gowad:**

All the devotees arrive two to three days before and stay under the Bunyan tree. On the day of pooja, all the devotees with priest march towards Gowad. There are three lamps used and castor oil is used for the mashal (light batten). This oil is not purchased from the shop, but homemade several musical instruments are used like drum, Shehnai, trumpet etc. Some women take the water from tank 'Kund' and cow dung in their hands and follow

the persons who walk with those mashals. All the Women wear new sarries and have white coloured dupafta over the sarrie. All come to Gowad were Gowad is ritually worshipped.

**Entry in Gowad:**

The entry in Gowad is as per the ritually. All those privileged women from Meshram families live at Gowad which is fenced from all the directions. The first worshiping right is given to Katoda (priest). Worshiping articles include coconut, water, incense sticks, mungdal, jaggry etc. Gowad has now strong brick compound, earlier fencing was made by branches of tree perhaps the reason behind this might be protection of women from wild animals. There is 'Naivedya' (food for god) prepared at Gowad. The 'Naivedya' prepared outside is not allowed. Women have to place their post, at certain place in Gowad. After sometime, the place is cleaned and also given the layer of cow dung. The women worshiped the stones and pray. The women prepared 'Naivaidyam' on hearth (soddel) where men are not allowed to enter. Those 'pradhans' are also given specific place to stay; Gowad is surrounded by all the men. Women of Madavi are given privilege in the fair because daughters of Meshram are daughters in law in Madavi families.

**Kanya Prasad:**

All the devotees meet each other and prepare a Prasad of kanya (rough flour of Jawar) make balls and distributes in all family members now only such a prasad is given to a devotees instead of meals.

**Bhawla (Making of Mud House):**

After the cleaning of Gowad all the women except recently married ones bring the water in traditional way, and proceed to the temple. All the post of water and plates full of cow dung are placed in row and all the devotees take their seats in rows. Then 'Pradhans' start blowing trumpets 'Ligo or Lingad Rahud' are believed to have made 16 Dhemsas and 18 vajang by the people.

All the drums are played in the rhythm. Pradhan plays the 'Kikri' which is known as Hirasuka Kikari or Hirabai Kikari in Gondi language (Hirasuka was a pradhan who sacrificed himself for the freedom of Gonds. He used lingo for winning the heart of Shambhumama. Hence in this effort Hirasuka died). This Kikri is used only in the pooja.<sup>2</sup>

Later, sons in law of Meshram come with sharp sticks and dig in the ground. Then these holes are filled with cow dung and water by women. The mud prepared is used for making idol of Goddesses Satik. Priests help in placing those idols to the women.

Here, pradhan and Gond have their separate waruls (Mud House). The mud house of pradhan is considered inferior to those of Gonds. Nagdev is supposed to stay in that mud house. Bhawala is considered tomb of Nagdevata.

There is a myth in this context. There lived seven brothers with Nagoba. The eldest was married but his wife was not faithful who become tiger and killed her husband. In this manner, all the six brothers were killed. But when Nagoba was to be killed, Nagoba punished her she ran away from the place and where she stays there is organized the fair / jatra.

**Neki:**

The goddess 'Satik' is said to be 'Sati' is a Hindu goddesses. But here seven women were died Hence in the memory of those seven women dance is performed and this dance is known as 'Neki'. In this dance, 'Kotwal' directs all the performers.

Here, the dance performed is found to be traditional. It is observed that dancing among women is out of fashion now days. We rarely find women from Gond tribes dancing. But here as part of pooja these women dance for 10 minutes.

Every woman takes the blessings of satik, after the dance. Women offer money to pradhans. The money is thrown on the piece of cloth placed there. All the devotees offer money, coconut and other articles.

**Bhetikoryad (bhetsuna):**

All the women who are married recently meanwhile prepare Naivaidyam (food offered to deity) and provide meals by Kotada's (priest) wife to 22 Meshrams and take rest after the meal.

**Second Bath of God:**

This bath takes place after the break. This bath is the chief bath of God. In this ritual all the devotees are asked to stay away. Watchmen keep the watch on devotees so that they cannot enter the temple. Only seven Meshrams are permitted to enter the temple. Women are prohibited. Holiness and purity are given the top priority among Gonds.

These seven Meshrams observe fast on this day and remain away from other. Even researcher was not allowed to attend the warship pooja. People believe that 'Nagdevata' shows his presence in this ceremony and eat the naivaidyam.

**Meeting of Recently Married Girls and God:**

All the girls who are married recently are directed to march toward the temple. The time is generally 2:00 clock in night. All these girls are asked to take darshan of Nagdevata then, these girls offer the blessings of the God become 'Bhetsuna'. In this ceremony all the girls from Meshram family take the blessings of the God. There are 28 recently married girls (14 couples) who take part in it. They are dressed in white clothes. They cover their faces by white clothes. After the blessing they can uncover their faces. Only such women are said to be legal daughters in law. If someone dies in the family then daughter in law from that family does not come to God unless she takes the responsibility.

All the couples of girls one brought in the temple. They offer several things to the God. If single girl comes to take blessing then it is considered bad omen. All the girls come in couples. Daughter and son in law of Meshram are privileged to sit in this ritual. All other relatives offer something to them in terms of money or other things. Here daughter of Patilal and Katoda are offered some articles.

All these women are given white sarees through the offerings given by people. Now newly married girls are allowed to take the blessings, there girls after the blessings offer money to Pradhan. This money is not more than Rs. 10. The song 'Dere Hari Dena Dena' is sung by Pradhan on the Kikari this is called 'Nagobal Bhids' in the language of Gond this is song of Nagoba.

All the women dance after the pooja of Satik. This dance is called Satik chal. The main feature of this Jatra is that nobody is possessed by Nagoba and Satik power and nobody is permitted to claim such. Other Gonds Gods enter some one's body and communicate with devotees but Nagoba is exception to this once a woman showed that Nagoba entered her body but she was warned and it never happened again.

#### **Community Pyanchyat (assembly):**

All the people get assembled early in the morning under the guidance of Patilal, Pradhan is to introduce new people and grievances redressed also provide information to new persons in the assembly. One case of panchayat was on follows once, some people went at house of the dead person. When these people did not get due respect hence they were unhappy. Hence the he goat brought by the family was not accepted until the family apologized.

#### **Sherani (food made of Jiggery):**

This is the food or food item given to devotees by the people who keep their promises to the God.

#### **Pooja of persapan (worship of persapan)**

After the taking blessing of the God, the process of slaughtering he goat to the God begins. The he goat which is offered the God is given by the girl. Every girl has to give a he goat and 2-5kg wheat flour and Rs 125. This condition is relaxed to those poor girls.

Another ritual is that person from the family in which somebody has died offers he goat to the God at this time. This is called 'Tum'. If someone is not able to give the he goat, he then offers cock. If person is non vegetarian then he offers Rs 125 and 2.5kg Jowor flour. The meat of the he goat is cooked at two different places. But the meat which is cooked in earth pot is cooked traditionally. Others are not allowed to touch that earth pot on the reason of purity. Katoda (priest) cooks the meat indecently and this meat is given to those 22 privileged persons who eat in a separate row. They keep fast for one day before they eat. Women are not allowed to dine with male. The male drinks liquor in large quantity in this time.

#### **Masai (mahsoba):**

There is a God at the entrance of Nagoba God temple. This God is saffron in colour. Some people call it Masai or Mahsoba. This God is said to be watchmen of the temple. So everybody take the blessings of Mahsoba when he/she takes blessing of Nagoba, people offer money or food to Mahsoba.

#### **Mandagajling (Marriage of God):**

In the morning the girls carry water in earth pot to Gowad where the God is performed pooja. In the evening, all the articles collected in the temple of Satik are collected and distributed equally among the people. This process is known as Mandagajling. After the Mandagajling people start moving to shyampur because Indrani died at there after having been punished by Nagoba. People celebrate the joy of death of Indrani.

#### **22 priviledged Meshrams (KIItta) of worshipping of Nagoba:**

There are 22 Meshrams who have the right to perform pooja of Nagoba. This right comes from family tradition. Everybody of them get opportunity of performing pooja they are as follows.

1. **Katoda (priest):** Katoda is devotee of the God. He keeps fasting and holds all the Gods with him. He looks like hermit and behaves also like that. He follows all the rules & lows strictly.
2. **Patlal:** He is the chief of worshipping (pooja). He supervises entire ceremony. Everybody follows his instructions orders strictly.
3. **Nayakwadi:** He is a type of potter. He provides all the post to ceremony. He keeps the entire place clean and decorates the place.

4. **Ramkhamb:** He decides the place for performing pooja and decides the setting arrangement of each God. He also decides where to keep the Gods.
5. **Aarke:** 22 privileged women of Meshrams participate in the pooja with new baskets. Aarke has the job of keeping the God in every basket. Nobody is allowed to perform his job.
6. **Wadir:** Wadir has to perform the jobs which are done by carpenter. He makes idol of God from the wood. He also provides a large wooden spoon for cooking. This big spoon is known as Sukudu.
7. **Gaykir:** This man used to keep the cows and bulls (bhodum) of the God. He is also known as cow herd. He keeps watch on cows.
8. **Zopalir:** He moves all the cows of the God in the Gowad and keeps patrolling.
9. **Zadyalir:** Zadyalir is said to be housekeeper of temple. He keeps the temple and premises clean and hygienic.
10. **Bande:** Bande keeps all the bull carts in proper manner. He parks them and keeps watch on them overnight. He takes care of all the belongings.
11. **Yewati:** There is goddess called 'Satik'. The pooja of 'Satik' is performed by women called Yewati. Yewati keeps all the articles offered to Satik with her.
12. **Empillir:** He foretells about all the devotees who visit the temple.
13. **Sapalir:** He protects all the idols, weapons of God and other things.
14. **Bejelkar:** All the messages and instructions given by the Gods are known to him and pass on all the message and instruction to the devotees.
15. **Garudi:** Garudi chants all the mantras on the day of pooja. He defalcate the power of all the people who catch snakes and protects the God Nagoba.
16. **Daf:** He plays the drums in the ceremony. He plays various rhythms of drums.
17. **Hawaldar:** Hawaldar has given instructions to the devotees regarding pooja.
18. **Sankpayala:** He blows the 'Shankh' (conch shell).
19. **Udrapurya:** He keeps the maintenance of all the idols of the Gods. Earlier, Gonds used to make idols of woods. These wooden idols are protected from the insects and other worms.
20. **Kotwal:** kotwal is not a Gond but Pradhan. Kotwal is also known as King priest kotwal tech all the religious traditional songs narrations to the people in the form of songs.
21. **Boddiguda:** No information is available about him.
22. **Dahaklir:** No information is available about him. Perhaps he plays Dahaki (musical instrument).

### Conclusion:

The traditional nature of jatra has been changing rapidly. Education has now become a part of among Gonds. Due to this women are realizing their independence rights and are using cosmetics and modern means of communication. There takes place exchange of ideas between Gond and other persons. Women have started using all the modern costumes for being beautiful. They use new cosmetics like other women from urban areas. They wear various clothes, sarees, garlands etc. Now we seldom find women wearing round sarees. Gond of Uttanur, Laxtipeth, Sirpur from A.P. are more traditional than those of Gonds from kinwat. Various ornaments are available in jatra people buy them. Women prefer earrings, rings etc.

Various articles made manually are available for sale in the jatra. Also, necessary items are also available for sale. Beggars also visit the Jatra. They are of different castes. Gonds do not usually beg. They consider themselves superior to other and consider it is better to die than to beg. Gonds are now becoming Hindus in the culture. They are now following the Hindu culture in their life. Some people still maintain culture of Gonds. They think that we are different from Hindus. On one hand, there is traditional way Gonds are trapped between the two situations.

### Notes:

1. Dhemsas is a popular traditional folk dance of Gond Tribe. It is believed that Lingo Dev started it. There are sixteen styles of dhemsas and is played in eighteen types of rhythms.
2. Kikri (The Fiddle) is a holy musical instrument. It is used in religious worshipping. It has religious importance. There are strict rules about the use of it as when, how, who, and where Kikri can be used. Thoti Tribe has the right to play it.

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