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RESEARCH ARTICLE

GOND FESTIVAL; THE RITUAL THEATRE.

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Abstract

Gonds of Adilabad, have their ways of expression and living, they have their psychological and spiritual reasons behind why they keep doing what they do. They never looked for a reason to escape or discard what they have been doing until now, whatever they do seems to flow naturally to them. If we read or research about their festival Nagoba Jatara, we can see in them a true surrender to their commitments and beliefs. In spite of every hardship, they make sure that their ritual breathes life. On one side there is an importance attached to their ritual, and on the other side, there is a theatricality to actions they exhibit during the process. In this paper, we try to research the connection between their ritual and theatre. Of all the activities that they do in Nagoba Jatara, only a section is taken here for study and applied to the Whole.

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Introduction:-

Ritual Theatre: Ritual theatre quite simply is the enactment of a myth or archetypal story with the intention of bringing about healing— usually to resolve an issue, to deal with a difficult life experience, to restore depleted energies or to ease a transition.

Retrieval from <https://ritualtheatre.wordpress.com/2011/12/01/what-is-ritual-theatre/>

The greatest weight.—What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence - even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"

Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?

From Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*, s.341, Walter Kaufmann transl.

Retrieval from <https://www.theperspectivesofnietzsche.com/nietzsche/nrecur.html>

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In the first part, there has been a mention about healing, restoring depleted energies, issue resolving, difficult life experiences and ease of transition. In the second part, there is a mention about this eternal hour glass of existence and the fear of dealing with this concept. What have above two parts got to do with the Nagoba Jatara and theatre? Very soon we will talk about it.

Methodology:-

Associational and Conceptual research

Main body

Nagoba Jatara is definitely a feast for anyone's eyes. Many tribes from different states assemble to worship their God Nagoba, and the ritual is the direct adaptation and improvisation of the events from their divine story (The Myth), which was passed on to them by their ancestors. Every year, the ritual is followed meticulously.

The Jatara is segmented into many activities, and out of which there is an activity called Bodum Pen Jatara, this is done in reverence to their God Bodum Pen (an Ox), and when researched, a story about an Ox was revealed. It goes thus, this ox wandered at nights and went to sugar cane fields for cane, the cane field owner decides to catch hold of the culprit and then the episode ends with the ox getting killed and mutilated in the hands of a person who looks after the fields. This Ox during his living days was deemed wise by its keepers. After his death, an intimation of his death reaches its keepers in the form of a dream, then the keepers rush to the place only to discover that he is killed, but in spite of the unfortunate series of events, this episode was seen as Divine Providence, and from then on this ox is worshipped along with their main Gods.

There is a place where this Bodem Pen (the divine ox) is worshipped, and there is a way in which this worship happens.

Bodem Pen Temple: Uttoor Mandal in Adilabad district is where Shampur is located, and the Bodem pen (the divine ox) temple lies in an open ground. This is a temple erected on a concrete pedestal which is few feet above the ground, the main shrine is at the center and its roof extends in three directions, these extensions are held in position by four pillars extended till pedestal. Three steps to the front, and two steps each to the right and left side of the whole structure lead to the upper surface of the pedestal. The main shrine houses a lump like rock believed to be the stomach part of the divine Ox Bodum Pen, and it is smeared with orange color paste. At the backside of the temple there are few more rocks, and they too are believed to be the body parts of Bodum pen. The area on the pedestal has one more lump of rock and it is seen as the head of the divine ox. There is a wooden pillar at the front of the temple and a pathway from the grasslands leads to the Temple.

Worship procedure: There are 22 kittas or 22 sects or groups of people in these Gonds, and they are Patel, Katoda, Pradhan, Jaadya, Jopavaade, Gayki, Naykiwaadi, Pen Kothval and others. All of them halt after building tents over the open space before the Bodem Pen temple. On that night, many activities like worship of the Lamps, offering salutations to the temple and inviting brethren from different kittas for dinner happens. On the next day, women from different kittas get water from a nearby water pump, and this is done with pomp by playing musical instruments. The water so collected is used to wash the idol smeared with previous year orange paste, and then the clean and dried idol is again smeared with the freshly mixed orange paste by few kitta people, different naivedyas (offerings) are given and then it is received as Prasad. Later, all the Kitta people assemble outside the temple and offer salutations, they are sprinkled with holy water, and again a small ritual of pouring and collecting rice is done. At the end of this Bodem pen ritual, a few Kitta people assemble all things in their carts and resume their journey to the place where further activities await.

This is only one part of the whole Nagoba festival; i.e. Bodem Pen Jaatara. If the whole festival were to be mentioned here, then definitely most matter would be deemed unnecessary for the present paper. If we follow all the activities of these Gonds throughout the festival, we can see that there are many repetitions like doing and undoing things as indicated in the above paragraph. The salutations part occupies major portion in the repetition section, though it be to the fellow mates or to the temples these Gonds visit during Nagoba Jatara Festival. In this paragraph, we can see that much attention is gained by the concept Repetition.

The above concept can be explained in the present context of the paper using the quote of Nietzsche and the text before it. Nietzsche said that if some entity were to reveal the existence of something so normal with repetition and

without escape, how would the society react, may be it is in the form of these repetitions. But before going further, there is a need to mention few words from two published articles;

Adivasi education is getting affected because of these Adivasi's discrimination towards the Lambadas, the conflicts between them have resulted in lock out of schools in some places, and it took the form of opposition to the Lambadi teachers from entering the schools in some other places. Recruitment channels have been severely affected, and its impact is on the precious learning of these Gond children, so the village heads are expressing their grief over the valuable time of the children getting wasted.

Retrieval from <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/ground-report-agitation-costing-ativasis-adilabad-their-kids-education-84177>

The main occupation of the community is farming, and fortunately only few have risen to the level of land owners, their work goes on and off because of the uncertainty of the rains or monsoons and their stores are full sometimes and sometimes not.

Retrieval from <https://www.everyculture.com/wc/Germany-to-Jamaica/Gonds.html>

Now, If one is seeking escape, where lies the escape from all this? Given situations, if not exactly like these, but when given, some urban societies might resort to intoxicants, but that is mostly not the case with these Adivasi, they have their group activities, rituals and festivals to occupy their emptiness and certainly one most important and bigger one from these is, the Nagoba Jatara. It is only a five day festival, but its proceedings begin and end a month before and after the 5 day celebration. There are areas in the ritual where issues are resolved and mental diseases are healed with companionship, Endurance tests are present where Gonds get up as early as 3.am in the mornings of chilling winter and would walk upto 50-100 kilometres to reach places. This ritual is a transition from their normal life to more disciplined form of living, their all depleted energies from their day to day transactions are restored in the spirit of this festival and this eternal hour glass of existence as mentioned in the quotation of Nietzsche, is filled by them with the repetitions of exhibits in the ritual. Their actions were dramatic and obedient to their ancestral text "The Myth", so looking from the view point of the text mentioned in the Introduction part of this Paper, this ritual has met all the parameters mentioned in the text. So, it is definitely the right thing to say that this festival or the huge ritual of Nagoba Jatara is a Ritual theatre.

Here is another attempt to explain more about Theatre, coming to its definition; Theatre or theater is a collaborative form of fine art that uses live performers, typically actors or actresses, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage. The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance.

Retrieval from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theatre>

As in the above paragraph, it is definitely rude to say these Gonds are acting, but in this cosmic array of events when one observes them for a long period doing and repeating the same things again and again in the name of ritual, one may not escape but to quote this;

All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his time plays many parts, his acts being seven ages.

By William Shakespeare

Retrieval from https://www.brainyquote.com/authors/william_shakespeare

If things are asked to elaborate, few comparisons can be done this way.

Play –

The Ritual

Script –

Their ancestral text from where all activities follow

Actors –

22 kitta people

Settings and scenery-

Natural settings, temples and places they have visited

Music –

Musical instruments played like Pipri, kikkri, Kalikom and others

Stage manager –

Katoda

Announcer and Director –

Pradhan

Audience –

Press people and tourists.

If these type of comparisons are made, then a pattern can be created in the same way trying to make similar point in every ritual ever existed, yes it's true, but, of all the rituals, there definitely are very few rituals like this Nagoba jatara with so many repetitions. Since, the subject of research and study has been Nagoba Jatara, the attempt to explain things have displayed a greater connection to the actions of the ritual in the light of theatre and crystallized the point. So, it is authentic to stick to the view point of comparing this, as most patterns of the Jatara are meeting the parameters of the Ritual Theatre.

Conclusion:-

So here is how lots of repetition has necessitated meticulousness, and out of this obedient resort to Ancestral text there are monotonous strides. Due to all this, at some point the piety seemed to have taken a back seat dissolving the very essence and resulted in a cosmic play. There is an important end point needed to be mentioned here that all this paper is being written out of curiosity to bring out something new, but in any way otherwise, in some parts of this text, though things may seem to have been represented in a straight way, there is definitely a love and consideration for the rituals and practices of these Gonds.

Notes:

1. Pipri and Kikkri and Kalikom: musical instruments used by Gonds
2. Kitta: Group or sect of people
3. Katoda (priest): Katoda is devotee of the God. He fasts and holds to all the God idols. He looks like hermit and also behaves like them. He follows all the rules strictly.
4. Nayakwadi: He is a type of potter. He provides all things post the ceremony. He keeps the entire place clean and also decorates the place.
5. Gayki: This man is the keeper of the cows and bulls (bodum) of God.
6. Kotwal: kotwal is not a Gond but Pradhan. Kotwal is also known as King priest
7. Jadya: Jadya is said to be housekeeper of temple. He keeps the temple premises clean and hygienic.
8. Zopa: He moves all the cows of the God in the Gowad and keeps Patrolling
9. Pradhan: The person who narrates the story and guides the entire ceremony.

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