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An observation on tribal burial belief system and megalithic burials in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

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Abstract
Megalithic culture is notable for its burial construction. Belief system of Megalithic community is always represented with certain customary practices. Present tribal communities in Andhra and Telangana also had their own burial rituals with specific belief system. Beliefs in life after death, fear of dead, evil spirit are the some of the beliefs followed by the megalithic people and some of the tribes in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

Keywords: Index terms, burial construction, beliefs- ritual practices, Mana-Bonga-Animism-Jagen festival

1. Introduction

Indian mythology is a source for various beliefs and cultural practices of Indian society. The belief system of the communities who are spending lives in remote areas or forests is different from the civilized society. Various tribal communities which are far away from different technologically developed societies maintain their peculiar practices and beliefs towards life and death also. It is witnessed in the cultural practices of Megalithic culture all over the world. Megalithic culture is known for its burial practices, customs, construction, and beliefs also. Beliefs and cultural practices are not only pertain to the tribal communities, they also part and partial of civilized people also. As part of the present article an observation was made to understand the similarities in the belief system of present tribal communities in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana and Megalithic culture.

Some of the tribal beliefs Andhra Pradesh and Telangana

There is different religion process have been adopted by the tribal communities of India, such as fetishism, worship of nature, animism and worshiping their ancestor, there religiosity culture is the alloy of all those processes. Main motive of beliefs is to bring happiness and ensuring security to their community from any types of evils. These tribal communities believe in sacraments relating their ancestor and totem and various ceremonies relating with their taboos. If they do not get proper outcome then they start a process of praying supernatural power. Supernatural power is always in the minds of tribal people and it is visible in the belief of tribal communities.

In India, almost all tribal are having a blind faith in ghosts, deities and a spiritual power. They also have a faith that deities and supernatural power stays in different forests, mountains and also in rivers, ponds or any streams. They also have a faith in 'Sun God' because they also believe that sun is the supreme power of God and sun is also the originator of this universe. Most of the tribal communities of Andhra and Telangana believe that sun as their God and male by gender and Earth is the mothers. These tribes also believe that they are the children of gods.

People of many tribal communities claim that they have come from the same origin and same ancestral lineal, accordingly they used to consider them as brothers and sisters so the marriage amongst them is forbidden. In the present scenario, many tribal have started mixing with their Hindu neighbor and due to impact of modern life styles the transformation of their conventional life patterns have begun. They started worshiping Kali Mata and Durga Mata and other God and Goddesses also. But, still many people from Munda and Ho and Santals tribal believe in 'Sun God'.

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The most significant matter of different Advasis in India is to believe witchery is an influence that is bewitching quality or effect, and in detail Witchery adds witchcraft and nature magic to mine craft, the large metal pot, brooms and its stick, circle of ritual, magical brews, a bit of necromancy and voodoo for good measure; all topped off with a fetching pointy hat'. 'Sorcery is a very ancient form of magic. Its practice date back to prehistoric and pre-Columbian religions, as well as those of the Middle East and ancient Egypt; by the Middle Ages it referred to the practice of malevolent magic, or black magic, generally, the make use of hypothetical supernatural power by the agency of evil spirits called forth by spells of any persons with a desire for malice often motivated out of envy or revenge to save them from evil spirit or ghosts.

Many tribals visit Ganga, Damodar and Narmada to celebrate holy rituals for the betterment of agriculture production and social life. They try to visit two times, first they visit before harvesting session to take blessings from God and after harvesting they offer little harvested paddy to the God. All patterns of celebration are always linked with dance, music and beating special type of drum called as '*Madal*' and a pattern of flute called '*Bansi*'. Each and every festival is accompanied with 'Handia' a type of country liquor. They celebrate different festivals which are linked to agricultural operations, social life and religious beliefs & customs. Celebrations are organized either in group or individually. Almost all celebrations are accompanied by dance, music, playing of various musical instruments; above all, taking of local liquor is called *'Handia'*.

There are few terminologies, applications of which are very significant to control the tribal society and lifestyles of tribals. Such terminologies are Mana, Bonga, Animism, Animatisms, immortality of soul, and faith in rebirth, faith in magic, Totem and taboo in addition to that Ersim, Harialism, Jamtala Bonga, 'Ashadhi' or 'Bihuda' Parva, Karama Parva, Makar Parva. This terminology is not related to a specific community. It is a common terminology used for various tribal beliefs in various parts of India.

Mana

Mana is a type of force differs from any physical power that generally tries to control the bad evils, it also controls the disturbance faces the people. D N Majumdar and Trilokhi Nath Madan told that the" Entire life of the primitives is born out of their belief in certain understandable, impersonal, non-material and the individualized supernatural power which takes abode in all the objects, animate and inanimate, that exist in the world. They also told that Mana is a type of belief of tribals, who are in assumption that it is impersonal and material things caries some supernatural force that controls the society and generate peace amongst members. Many social Scientists have given different views on Mana, such as Max Muller, the great philosopher opinioned that Mana is impersonal and natural power exists in non-living objects like river, trees and may be mountains. As part of Mana practice tribal

communities believe life in every material in the nature. It is the reason why they claim that tree, stone, water, wind, fire etc. also extra natural powers.

Fig 1: Urn Burial (Source: Dr Anil Kumar)

Bonga

Bonga is considered to be the supreme deity of tribals. The maximum numbers of worship, though, comes under the court of spirits, which is called as *Bonga*. As per the belief of tribals, Bonga is a mysterious power exists on the rain, thunder, cyclone, flood and earthquake. Bonga is a supernatural power and also is the malefactors that are primarily responsible for different calamities, ailments and is also destroying the natural life of people. They also believe that Bonga controls all types of life activities in the span of life. This term is commonly used by *Monda, Ho* and few others tribals, exist different parts of India.
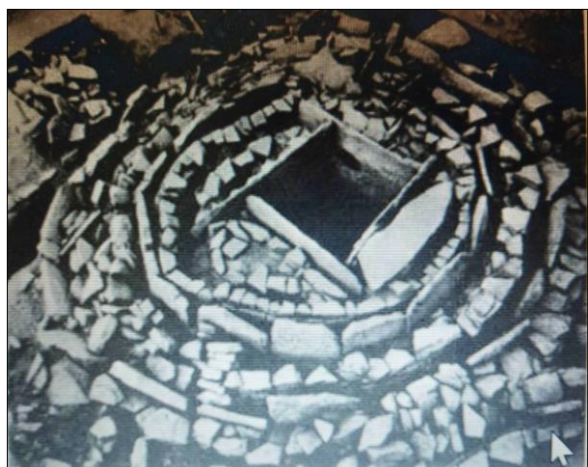

Fig 2: A Cist Burial with more elaborative construction (Source: ASI)

Animism

Animism is the one of the important features exists in the people. Founder of this term is Taylor; its creativity was

also described by Taylor, who precisely told that "Animism is the belief on some natural material objects having souls from very ancient time to that civilized man". It is believed that soul is supernatural power is connected with human beings and is control social life of tribals by applying different process. Many tribals also believe that there is life after death so there is a possibility of rebirth of each human. Tribal people believe that many of the objects have lives. Those objects are the creator of heavy rains, flood and storms and because of that many tribal worships them after adopting different process.

They believe that different objects have different types of activities and different duty, and for that reason they control the nature and daily life of the tribal society. They also believe that each God has been assigned a particular duty; therefore, tribals worship different deity in different situation and time. Many tribals worships different object in different places to control that abnormal happening to life. There are diverse kinds of worships performing different tribals but out of those the most significant is ancestral worship of Santhals and Oraons. Many of the places they satisfy the God by sacrificing animals, but on the contrary many tribals worship different animals also, they feel that the different Gods or supernatural power are residing in their soul.

Fig 3: Legged Sarcophagus (Source: Tilok Thakuria)

Animatisms
Animatisms are the broadest thought of tribals. There are few impersonal powers in non-living materials apart from the living things. "Animatism is a term coined by popular British anthropologist. The term animatisms was first coined by Robert Marett (1899) in response to E. B. Tylor's (1871) well-known description of animism as a form of religion used by early humans and their modern "primitive" counterparts to explain the universe by personifying all phenomena with animate power. As indicated by animatisms that there are few materials powers behind each material thing. It is clear that tribals world has had fear for few of the materials or objects, because they have and had idea that those materials have some magical power and used to change nature as well as life processes of human being miraculously.

Conclusion
Megalithic burial excavational reports in India projected that Megalithic grave goods are vary from burial to burial. Megalithic burial grave goods describe that majority of the Megalithic communities believes in soul, ghost, super natural power, ancestral worship and life after death. Stuart Piggot (1959) [11] credited that Megalithic burial builders are the *Missionaries* of Megalithic religion to various generations. Various researches proved that majority of the Megalithic burials are secondary in nature. A skeleton

identified in sitting posture with cross legged visible in *Padmasana posture* has been reported from Kodumanal (Tripathy and Rajan 2015: 545). The cairn circle at Yeleswaram identified with two skeletons which are placed one over the other (IAR 1962-63:2). At Perumbair a complete skeleton is in seated position was identified, and the hands of the skeleton are placed on the knee (Rea 1915; Darsana 2014: 66).

In the Megalithic burial ceremonies dead body is treated with many special rituals and customs. Trepanning, cut marks and also applying of red ochre might be part of death rituals. Some of the megalithic burials were found with wide characteristics. There are some burials where the lower parts of the dead were missing. Megalithic burial excavations at Kadambapur (IAR 1974-75: 3-5) Satanikota (IAR 1979-80:3-6), Ramapuram (IAR 1980-81: 7), and Mahurjhari (Sawant 2015:233) it was identified dead bodies without lower parts. It assumes that the feet of the dead were deliberately removed. This intentional activity might be done to avoid the ghost or spirit of the deceased from walking back to their residences.

As part of the burial beliefs and rituals some of the similarities could be identified between present tribal communities of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana with Megalithic culture. In many megalithic sites, the burial floors were very neatly arranged with rubble packing. At some of the megalithic burial sites thick ash bed and lime was used to cover the uneven floors, and over this arranged bed the dead body with funeral offerings was placed. The evidences of ash bed were identified at Hunur, Nagrajunakonda, (IAR 1968-69:21), Uppalapadu (IAR1978-79:65), Chagatur (IAR 1977-78:11), Satanikota (IAR 1979-80:5), Ramapuram (IAR 1981-82:6), and Damnalinga (IAR 2000-01:102). Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka and Maharashtra megalithic burials are specially represented with ash bed which is absent in many megalithic sites in India. Decorating the burial slabs, keeping the valuable goods inside the burials is also representing the important nature of the burial.

Preparing the burial with utmost care, keeping the goods, objects, and interments in the burial as grave goods explains that the megalithic people believed that the deceased person is so powerful. It also says that the Megalithic people scared about the dead person. In some of the burials it is also found that the arrangements were made for the comfortable life and sophisticated environment. Burial interments not only speak about life after death but also economical, social, and religious status of the deceased person. In some of the cases gigantic size of the burial also speaks the importance of the dead person. It could be assumed that the wide range of ceremonies, rituals, burial goods, unique a feature of a burial is belongs to a special person in the community.

It has been observed that almost all tribals, not only in India but also in the world wearing bones, stones, wood chips and feather to save themselves from notorious soul and many have a belief that wearing these materials will bring the peace and success in the life. Mothers used to tie the beads thread to legs and hand. In the present world, many astrologers of different parts of India also make a link with this mystical power and advising the customers wearing those materials.

Many tribal communities of Andhra and Telangana are had believed that sometimes deceased person can become extra natural power. Mana, Bonga, Animism, Animatism keeping

the various goods and tools in the burials shows certain resemblance with the belief system of Megalithic people. Preparing the burial, erecting the memorial stones, performing special ceremonies, belief in life after death are following by the tribes of Andhra and Telangana even today. Bhuiyans and Orans burial practices also had certain similarities with megalithic burial beliefs. Though, there are similarities in the burial practices, beliefs, customs of Megalithic people and present tribes of Andhra and Telangana, it cannot be concluded that there is direct relation and ethno archaeological features in it. It is very early to conclude the direct relation between megalithic people and present tribal communities of Andhra and Telangana. More archaeological excavations, explorations, and analysis is need to understand the relation between megalithic cultural beliefs towards death and present tribal communities.

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