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Echoes from a Tribal Land - Malkangiri: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Culture, History, Ecosystem, Ethical Dimensions, and Beyond

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Abstract

The tribes represent the nativity of the culture; they withhold the power and essence of the development of the nation. The tribes all over the world have their own traditions, culture, beliefs, language, literature, customs, and institutions, which distinguish them from the life of mainstream society. Through the literary study of the tribals and their environment, it paves a way for the whole world to understand and uphold the view towards the marginalized society. The harmony of the deep-rooted forest land with the life of the humans depicts the arrogant elegance of the life of the tribes, which runs coherently with the sacred rivers, giant hills, serene nature, festivals, etc. Uprooted in traditional customary and cultural practices, the tribes of Malkangiri hold the principle of egalitarianism, where men and women hold equal power and strength. Bangaru Devi: The Warrior Queen of Malkangiri, represented in the poetry collection Echoes From a Tribal Land—Malkangiri fought bravely along with her Koya army against the king Ramachandra Deva III of Jeypore and also the mighty British rule. The paper delves into the discussion of how humanitarianism contradicts the apathy and negligence faced by the indigenous people of Malkangiri.

Keywords: Marginalization, Egalitarian, Humanitarian, King, Queen, Environment, Ecosystem, Indigenous.

Introduction

Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society, is the definition given by the British anthropologist, Sir E.B. Tylor (1832–1917). During the early period, Malkangiri district was very famous for the temples of Lord Shiva. The name of the place Malkangiri got its origin from the name Mallika Nagari, which means the place of lord Mallikeshwarar (Lord Shiva). Malkangiri is less populated with a vast, dense forest. The vast landscapes, cultures, traditions, and lives of the people are seemingly simple, spiritual, and intellectual. The artistic culture of the artisans is well brought, suggesting a deep connection between the shrine, the geographical location of the land, and the indigenous art. The folk of Malkangiri are rich in ethical dimensions in preserving the earth and nature, whom these people were the subjects of lord protector.

Flora

Malkangiri is a land of rich biodiversity. Podia block of Malkangiri is covered with dense forests that are rich in wide varieties of plant species like teak, sal, bija, sisu, and bamboos. The minor forest products of Malkangiri are mahul, tamarind, hill-brooms, etc.

Its fragrance weaves through the evening air,

A promise of warmth, a treasure rare.

Mahul symbolizes the widespread impact of wildness and spirituality, which endures to perpetuate through changing seasons and natural life cycles. Dual sustenance of wine and oil is extracted from the flower of Mahul, which bestows the indigenous folk with food, drink, and economic growth, where the tribal people depend on selling these forest products. Mahul flowers are consumed by the breastfeeding tribal women as they are rich in sugar content, which provides one with adequate energy. The residual cake left at the end of the extraction process of oil acts as a snake repellent and in poisoning fishes. The wine extracted from the Mahul flowers and palm juice is edible and helpful for people whose lives are stricken with poverty. Despite the rich biodiversity, the climatic condition is not suitable for the people to thrive in good health condition. As the land is encircled with dense forest, there is no proper network of communication in the interior regions. The folks in Malkangiri are pursuing agriculture as their major source of income. The indigenous folk are very reverent towards their agricultural practice. According to them, farmers are the noblest part of mankind, and crops are the noblest of farmers. The geographical area of the Malkangiri district is 579,100 hectares. Out of which 142,550 hectares are cultivated land. The agriculture of the Malkangiri depends on the normal annual rainfall and irrigation facilities from the Potteru Canal System. Irrigation is the most important medium for the growth of agriculture. There are two major modes of irrigation systems in Malkangiri district, namely the Potteru Irrigation Project and the Satiguda Dam. The following is the excerpt from the poem The Jewel of Satiguda, which brings forth the life support of the indigenous people of the district and acts as the great supporter to the town by supplying pure and fresh water.

To Malkangiri town, it brings life's precious flow,

A gift from nature's bounty, in every drop that flows.

Oral Culture

The air fills with music, a melodious blend,

As dancers step lightly, their spirits ascend.

Dwelted in an age-old customs and traditions, the indigenous community of tribals is upheld in preserving their cultures and the significance of life being enrooted with the mother earth through the folk tales. The folk tales of the indigenous people of the Koya and Bonda tribes are still echoing in the caves, mountains, and deep interior jungles of Malkangiri. The song sung by the community people for the wedding ceremony of the bride and groom shows community feeling, where the whole community is celebrating the feast with laughter and cheers. This eventually tends to create a collective history of the living of indigenous people, which brings out the communal feeling through pagan or oral culture. Here, every human being becomes the author, the editor, and the creator, which leads to the loss of individualism and the original script. The art of storytelling is integral to human life. It helps bridge the gap between the cultures; it has the power to connect the human beings and illuminate the complexities in the world of man. Man found solace in words of poetry and fables; the man's life begins with the humming of the lullaby. In most cultures, especially with the tribal cultures, poetry and folktales are what introduce the children to learning. Traditionally speaking, writing is considered the primary activity, and speech is the secondary activity. The Swiss linguist, semiotician, and philosopher Ferdinand de Saussure, who laid the foundation for

structuralism and post-structuralism, just inverted the theory and concluded that speech is more important than writing. In the contemporary world, both are given equal recognition, importance, and acceptance. In the world of tribes, the histories, facts, moral virtues, vices, and knowledge are passed to the further generations through the medium of poetry and folk tales. Sir Philip Sidney in *An Apologie for Poetrie* says poetry is more superior than history and philosophy. The poets serve the nation by inculcating moral virtues and a higher form of knowledge in an individual by amalgamating history and philosophy. In this stand, the tribal oral culture of poetry and folk tales improves the lives of humans in realizing high truth, value, and order through history, philosophy, and verse.

Gandhi of Malkangiri

Laxman Nayak was a folk hero, a great freedom fighter, and a brave tribal leader who fought against the British, being inspired by the call of the great personality of the Indian independence movement, M.K. Gandhi—Do or Die.

*Against the tyrants who reigned with fear,
He stood as a symbol, bold and clear.*

Loyalty and bravery are innate parts of a warrior culture. The characteristics of patriarchy, loyalty, and bravery are attributed to the great warrior and martyr Laxman Nayak. Laxman Nayak, who believed in the principles of M.K. Gandhi enroute to the path of non-violence, truth, and peaceful non-cooperation movement, was eventually sentenced to death in Berhampur jail on 29 March 1943 by the British. British are characterized as fragile rulers, oppressors, and colonizers.

Bada Jatra

Every community around the world has their own festivals and ways of sermons. Bada Jatra is a famous communal festival in Malkangiri, as various tribal communities do engage and participate in the celebration. These kinds of festivals attribute to the development of traditional cultures and languages among the indigenous people, where the innate culture is on the verge of extinction due to modern influences. It holds the significant meaning of culture and extravaganza, as it attracts the people around the world. It allows people from various parts of the world to study their culture and language and society, both present and past.

The Koyas

The Koyas are tribal people who live in the southern part of the Malkangiri district. The Gazetteer (1945) once described the history of the locality as follows: “The history of the land is the history of the primitive tribes who have made it their home. The earliest inhabitants were the wild Kolarian tribes, which still inhabit the hilliest parts of the district and are still most tenacious of their old customs.” The brave and last queen of Malkangiri, Bangaru Devi, is the daughter of the Koya tribe, who ruled between 1855 and 1872. The queen, along with the Koya warriors, fought bravely against the malice and the evil of her nation, upholding the value of unity and egalitarianism among the indigenous people of the district.

Eco-Tourism

*By the bank of Satiguda Dam, where waters gleam,
Lies an ecotourism park, like a traveler’s dream.*

The water in the Satiguda Dam is gleaming and reflecting the sun’s light on the surface of the water, which emphasizes the beauty of the nature. The blue-colored water of the dam, which extends far and wide, parallels the long-stretched sky. The depth of the water intersects the high sky with its nature of high nobility in serving the people in irrigation facilities and for drinking purposes.

Malkangiri is a wonderful spot for promoting ecotourism. The nature and the serenity of the district allow the visitors to enjoy the high spirit of the nature. It is considered valiant to promote eco-tourism in Malkangiri. The concept of socio-economical privilege of the indigenous people is well improved in promoting such activities in the district. It helps both the insider and the outsider in a way, where it enables the individual to improve the sensory and cognitive skills and the literacy. All modes of learning and experiments are happening in nature.

Eco-tourism bridges the gap between the two distinct natural worlds of humans and other species of the world. The district of Malkangiri offers various eco-tourism programs, including waterfall visits, bird watching, tribal village interactions, trekking, rock climbing, etc. Such activities harmonize the thrill of adventure with the most important necessity of preserving

Nature and tribal culture. In promoting sustainable practices, ecotourism helps protect the delicate ecosystem and also enables fostering the upliftment of the indigenous population by creating economic opportunities. Eco-tourism serves in enlightening the travelers as well as the hosts in enriching the knowledge system about the interdependence between the world of humans and nature. As there are challenges in the change of climatic conditions, the threat of habitat destruction, and the loss of biodiversity intensifies, the concept of eco-tourism becomes prominent and emerges as a beacon of hope; it exhibits how travel and journeys can have a mutual cooperation with conservation.

***Here in Satiguda's embrace, where the dam meets the shore,
Nature's splendor and human touch blend, and spirits soar.***

The phrase "Satiguda's embrace" is personified to bring out the embracing & nurturing entity that offers delight, comfort, and high spirit to one's soul. Satiguda Dam is depicted as a place of spiritual, physical, and emotional retreat that bestows one with relaxation and joy. The existence of a dam and park together portrays the balance between the god of nature and human development.

The triumph of ecotourism rests ultimately in the hands of each and every traveler. It becomes vital for an individual to make conscious decisions and embrace legal obligations in travel practices; it can eventually minimize the ecological footprints.

Conclusion

India is a land that encompasses diverse cultural, lingual, and geographical phenomena. Dr. P.K. Padhi, in his *Echoes From a Tribal Land—Malkangiri*, brought out the serene beauty of the landscape of the district of Malkangiri, the innate faith and the communion, the artistic and the reverie, and the culture and the festive of the indigenous people being the symbol of peace, bravery, loyalty, and martyrdom. On the whole, the tone of the poem is mystical, reverent, celebratory, heroic, patriotic, and inspirational. The rhyme and rhythm of the poem make it lyrical and descriptive, which has the capability of making the reader immerse in the land of the tribal world. The contemporary world of the history of the indigenous culture of Malkangiri speaks through the rich visual imagery employed in the writings of these poems.

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