

Belief, Identity and Socio-Cultural Practices among Lanjia Saura of Odisha

B.K. Jena & Devi Prasad

Abstract

The Lanjia Saura (alternative names include Sora, Saura, Savara, Sabara, etc.) is a Munda ethnic group from eastern India. They are one of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) and live in the remote areas of the southern region of Odisha (eastern ghat). On the one hand, the paper examines the identity, myth, socio-cultural beliefs and practices as well as how a few stakeholders like idaimar (conventional idital painter), kudanboi (women priest-cum-healer) and gamanga (head of the village) keep substantial roles among Saura. On the other hand, the article also attempts to study the problematic ethos of conversion, especially how the traditional belief system and cultural heritage of Saura has been endangered by the missionaries in the Puttasang panchayat of the Rayagada district in Odisha.

Keywords: Christian Missionaries, Idital, Lifestyle, Religion, Shaman, Tradition

Introduction

Saura are one of the particularly vulnerable tribal groups (PVTGs) of Odisha. Traditionally, their faith was based on 'animism'. They have a hoary tradition of assimilation and tolerance, which are reflected in their welcoming and humble behaviour. However, the local missionaries have been converting and changing the ethos of the Saura tradition into a new way of life from the last few years. These missionaries have been playing a pivotal role to construct, reconstruct and reconfigure the old beliefs. Now, the new generation of Sauras has been adopting Christianity widely. They are forgetting their cultural heritage and social traditions. It appears that their indigenous knowledge (wall paintings, medicinal practices, etc.) is under threat.

BIKRAM KUMAR JENA, Assistant Professor & Head, Department of Anthropology, Model Degree College, Deogarh, Odisha 768108, India. Email: iambikramkumarjena@gmail.com

DEVI PRASAD, Research Associate at NIRD, Hyderabad and IPE-ICSSR-Doctoral Fellow, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad 500046, India. Email: dpsocio@gmail.com.