

Representation of Meriah Songs

A Dissertation

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DECLARATION

I hereby state that the work entitled “**Representation of *Meriah* Songs**” is my original work for my final year thesis at National Institute of Technology Rourkela, in the academic year 2013-2015. It has not been reproduced from any other source except where due reference or acknowledgement is made explicitly in the text.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Representation of Meriah Songs” submitted by Prasann in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in Development Studies submitted to the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology Rourkela, is an authentic work carried out by him under my supervision. To the best of my knowledge, the matter embodied in the thesis has not been submitted to any other University/Institute for the award of any Degree or Diploma.

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Abstract: The thesis focuses on the folk songs on Kondh tribe; this thesis aims at exploring the subject of human sacrifice. It emphasizes on the significance of human sacrifice in various cultures around world since pre-historic times. Blood for its recognition as the sacred energy of life had been used as an offering for appeasing or recognizing debt towards god. These appeasements were mostly out of fear of natural calamities, diseases, wars and disasters which were believed to be the wrath of god for certain human activities, be it agriculture or hunting or usage of natural resources and bedding gratitude in certain cases for protecting from the same. Common throughout different cultures, the meaning of these ritualistic killing varied depending on the custom and religious beliefs.

Indian Vedic culture too comprises of this custom. Yajurveda has numerous hymns dedicated only to sacrifice. Shakti worshipers, Thugs, and Fakirs were other such notorious illustrations of involving the same tradition. Sacrifices were executed as thanksgiving for providing good crops, curing diseases, blessing their families and tribe to flourish, to prosper and protect them from preys and woes. Kondhs too had their specific custom of practicing human sacrifice as a community obligation. In spite of the criticisms and restrictions, human sacrifice still exists and there are seldom occurrences of it for the pre-existing reasons.

Keywords- Human sacrifice, ritual, religion, *Meriah*.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1. Human Sacrifice

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Human sacrifice is an offering of the life of a human-being to a deity. The occurrence of human sacrifice can usually be related to the recognition of human blood as the sacred life force. Bloodless forms of killing, however, such as strangulation and drowning have been used in some cultures. The killing of a human being, or the substitution of an animal for a person, has often been part of an attempt to commune with god and to participate in divine life. Human life, as the most valuable material for sacrifice has also been offered in an attempt at expiation” (2015). We may describe human sacrifice as a performance of ritualistic killing of human(s), which is often an offer to a divinity, in order to propitiate or appease the god to achieve certain desire. Its occurrence can generally be related to the acknowledgement of human blood as the blessed force of existence. Human sacrifice is a process to commune with god and to take part in divine life. The process is carried out primarily by buying of victims and sacrificing them or sacrificing the captives and enemies, chiefly for the purpose of material gains from the spiritual / supernatural world.

The word ‘sacrifice’ consequently means offering something, especially a life to a deity as an act of tribute. There are several reasons for which sacrifices are made. Depending on cultural and religious beliefs, its meaning varies to those who practise human sacrifice. In many ancient cultures human sacrifices were carried out after the death of a king or a high priest or great leader, to ensure that they had their family, servants and loved ones by their side in their afterlife or next life. In such cases, this involved killing majority of their household in order to fulfill this idea. Some other reasons behind human sacrifice were, some cultures believed that natural disaster such as earthquake, volcanic eruption, famine, drought, etc., occurred as the result of their misdoings causing the wrath of god. It is presented as a religious obligation. In numerous other cases, human sacrifice was carried out as a way to attain blessings of gods or to regain their good favor with the gods.

2. Human Sacrifice and World Cultures

Human sacrifice has existed in different cultures throughout the world since ancient times. Different cultures shared the practice of human sacrifice in their own specific ways; broadly for the same reason of appeasing or recognizing debt towards god. Many of the pre-modern societies had human sacrifice as an essential feature at different periods of their growth. However, views and customs differ from each group of people and culture; blood played an essential role in most of the customs and ceremonies. From a lowly servant to a king or priests, most commonly, sacrifices could be performed by anyone. Although the Aztec, the Carthaginians, the Inca and the Maya with completely different rituals and beliefs existed at different times, blood was an important part in many of their rituals.

The Aztecs (500 A.D. - 1500 A.D.) consider sacrifice as an important part of their religion. They practiced human sacrifice on a large scale with the belief that the sun needs strength for giving food, to battle darkness and rise in the mornings and set in the evening every day. The waters also need to be attended to or they would reduce and dry. They believed themselves to maintain balance of cosmic system. The Aztecs practised wars and combats on a grand scale chiefly to obtain victims for the purpose of sacrifice and had it named 'flowery wars'. At rare instances they consumed human flesh from their own polity. However it was the elites who were involved in eating of human flesh, mostly for the purpose of gaining status and protein. The practice of heart sacrifice was the most prevalent in Aztec tradition.

The Carthaginians (814B.C. to 140 B.C.) are paradoxical in that they were one of the wealthiest and most influential civilizations in the ancient world but were still engaged in infant sacrificial killings. They had been habituated to sacrifice their finest sons to their god, especially during times of severe natural calamities, disasters or wars and afterwards they secretly practiced buying and fostering kids to fulfill their purpose of sacrifice. Certain sources imply that they carried out sacrifice in such a way that babies were heated on the bronze statue until they died. The process involved placing these sacrificial children on a bronze statue of Cronus. The idol was in such a way that it had its hands extended over which the sacrificial children were placed and was very hot that having placed the victims, they died of the heat. It caused their mouths to open and limbs to contract leading to a painful but sure death. It is estimated that about 20,000 children were victimized of this sacrificial ritual from 800 BC to 146 BC.

The Inca (1200 A.D. to 1572 A.D.) believed that having offered their kids to gods they may avert natural mishaps and were thus involved in the practice of human sacrifice. They believed that natural disasters and calamities were controlled by gods and offerings or metaphorical feeding of these sacrifices was must to appease gods in order to avert these mishaps. They carried out a ritual named as “capachucha” to rejoice their maize yield phase, or an Inca’s loss or crowning. They followed this ritualistic belief that children with best physical vigor were best suited for sacrifices and chose the most beautiful ones from the four directions of empire. These kids were taken to the center of the state where they were symbolically matched and wedded. Further they would be robed in new garments, equipped with essential domestic objects and led back to the places they belonged with a priest and confidants accompanying them. Upon their reaching their place a party was thrown and later they were acquainted with maize beer or drunken stupor (chichi). At the completion of the celebration and rituals they would be buried at a holy place (huaca) within town and for five days the place would be delivered with chichi with help of a hose.

Shang Dynasty from ancient China (1600 B.C. to 1046 B.C.) also had the common practice of human sacrifice. We get to know, on the basis of the archaeological proofs, that human sacrifices were practiced on a grand scale, for Shang Dynasty is the first Chinese dynasty with written records. The sacrifices were carried out mainly for two purposes, viz., political control and religious communication.

The ancient ‘*Hawaiians*’ also carried out the practice of human sacrifice. In order to appease and gain the favor of their deity of war and defense, Ku they offered him sacrifices of humans. They believed these offerings would have their deity, Ku pleased and they would be blessed with victory in wars. These practiced these offerings in their temples known as *Heiau*. The process of sacrifice involved hanging the victims inverted on wooden shelves. Having smeared the priest with the sweat of the victim, the victim was beaten to death. The flesh would be beaten until turns smooth, eviscerated and once disemboweled, cooked or consumed raw by the priest or tribe head. These victims were usually the captives, particularly chiefs from other tribes.

Canaanites (3500 - 1100 B.C.) presently existing as Israel, Lebanon, and portions of Syria and Jordan, were involved in practicing human sacrifices where they offered lives of children to their god Moloch.

The word 'halal' means 'permissible' in Arabic. In Islamic culture, human sacrifice is a sin. Even the food (meat) they consume must be slaughtered strictly using halal practices, by a Muslim who must perform the task by invoking the name of god. Dhabihah is an example of the prescribed manner of slaughtering animals. The method of slaughtering involves making a swift but deep incision with a sharp knife that cuts the throat in such a manner that only the carotid artery, windpipe and blood vessels is cut without having cut the spinal cord. The last process involves draining of blood from the veins of the slaughtered animal. These rules are based on Islamic laws that must be followed in order to consume it. The slaughter should strictly be performed by appropriate ritual, that is, upon reciting Islamic prayer, 'in the name of god' that is, utterance of 'Bismillah' followed by 'Allahuakbar' for three times.

In Bible there is no human sacrifice performed. However, in the first book of Bible, Genesis, Abraham prepares to sacrifice his son to god. According to the book God asked Abraham to offer the sacrifice of his only son Issac in order to prove his faith. Believing it to be a commandment and thus to prove his faith in god, Abraham does the same. He takes his son to an altar on a mountain in order to have him offered as a burnt sacrifice to god. It was only when he puts the dagger on his son's throat to perform the sacrifice that he hears God tell him that it was only a task to have his faith tested. (Genesis 22:1-18) He thus burns ram as an offering to god.

3. Human Sacrifice in Indian Context

Most primitive proof of human sacrifice in India is known from the Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilization. The importance of sacrifice has been marked since the beginning of and had been depicted even in the Vedic scriptures. *Prajapati* was defined as the personification of sacrifice. As mentioned in the Rig Veda offerings were carried out to honor somebody and accordingly the rituals were organized depending on those favours. Sacrifices were of five different types during the initial Vedic age. These practices were called *brahmajajna*, *devayajna*, *pitriyajna*, *manushyayajna* and *bhutayajna* which stood for sacrifices to Brahman

(highest in the hierarchy of castes), to deities, to fore fathers, to humans and to all living beings respectively. They followed two etiquettes of performing offering, either the *shrauta* rite which was carried out by the Vedic priests or according to the *shruti* rules or *grihya* rite which was carried out by a normal man, of which many were assisted by his wife.

Until around the initial modern age human sacrifices were carried out in association with the worship of Shakti and it existed in Bengal till around the early 19th century. Major portions of the Hindu culture criticized such practices but even then some tantric cults were involved in symbolic and real human sacrifice. These tantric cults were ritualized performances, which sometimes took a few months for their completion. Some of the other cults involved in similar practices were bandits, *thugs*, *phasingars* and *fakirs*.

Thugs were a notorious group of men who were ill-reputed for their practice of ceremonial sacrifices. They organized these sacrifices as an offering to goddess Kali. Goddess Kali is known to be the god of renewal and destruction and this shaped the foundation of their actions, that is, Thugs were helping Kali by killing to maintain the balance of good and evil in the world. For centuries thugs roamed around the country in its length and width and had their sacrifices organized to appease goddess Kali.

In order to get more sacrificial victims for their offerings, Thugs often joined travelers. They used to travel with their lot and gain their trust, for attacking travelers could be a risky business. The Thugs attacked these fellow travelers once having attained their trust. They attacked in the darkness of night and suffocated them with a handkerchief; looted them of their valuable possessions on having them killed and buried them to cover up their tracks and get rid of any proof. This particular way of looting and killing people led them to be called as Phansigars. Banditry was a criminal activity in British India. It involved robbery by groups of armed bandits. Dense forests, areas with ravines and such were the suitable place to live and avoid maximum human contact. In order to eradicate the bandits, the East India Company established the Thuggee and Dacoity Department in the year of 1830, and formulated the Thuggee and Dacoity Suppression Acts, 1836-1848. Chambal and Chilapata Forests, were ill famed for having resided by dacoits or bandits.

4. Suppression of Human Sacrifice

Kondhs were labeled notorious for their barbaric custom of human sacrifice. This was the major reason due to which they came into notification and were highly criticized by the British officials. Notwithstanding the notorious reputation of Khonds, Madras Government, in the 1860s, started major operations for the suppression of *Meriah* culture. It was only then that Kondhs were known to general mass and many of the writings had portrayal of their culture and practices. Late 19th and early 20th century had most of these writings and works published. Under the jurisdiction of Sudder Court, British government formulated special unit with superior powers for the suppression of *Meriah* practices as it did not fall directly under British legislation. Colonel Sleeman was appointed as the agent for suppression. The main work of the suppression was done by Lord Dalhousie. In the process, the Khond villages and possessions were devastated by the military intervention. In 1864, British administrators used legal forces according to which Khonds, without any actual sacrifice of humans, may resolve their practices and rituals. After rigorous attempts and legal enforcements, the Kondhs accepted buffalo sacrifice as replacement to human sacrifice. This replacement had them insert a stanza in their sacrifice songs stating that Earth goddess shall blame the Sahibs (Major Macpherson and Major General John Campbell) for it is them who banned the practice of *Meriah* some 150 years ago, and they (Kondhs) can no further offer sacrifice of humans.

The suppression attempts were in two forms initially, that is, threat of severe punishments in case of denial of abandoning the custom of *Meriah* and endeavoring to reason with Kondhs by educating them about the inhuman customs and scientific absurdness of having believed in sacrifice culture to appease their goddess.

From the many attempts of the British officials responsible for the suppression of human sacrifice, Captain Macpherson, in the hill tracts of Orissa, offered a trade to the Kondhs for discarding their tradition of human sacrifice forever, He offered to provide them with superior legislations to arbitrate betwixt different tribes, and betwixt tribes and land lords. This idea of Macpherson had worked wonders when put into action and the practice of human sacrifice came to its absolute termination.

5. Contemporary India and Human Sacrifice

Blood was worshipped for it was supposed to have some mystic power as it could mean the difference between death and life. From the beginning of time until the present, in some way or another, blood ceremonies have been an important part of all the cultures. While practice human sacrifices have long been abandoned, some religions, still participate in animal sacrifices as a way of healing, such as the Santeria.

Although human sacrifice is illegal, reports show that it is practiced in secrecy even in present days. Sacrifices were confidentially carried out in connection with the worship of Shakti. Animals are sacrificed to appease goddess Shakti for killing of humans for rituals are long banned but there are rare instances of human sacrifices as well. However large sections of Hindu culture do not accept this practice, certain tantric cults perform human sacrifice until around the contemporary time.

It is not rare that we come across news of such incidents in newspapers stating that practice of human sacrifice still prevails. We learn of the existence of such people who are indulged in practice of human sacrifice such as human witch-doctors and *tantriks* even in present time. They believe human blood is the purest and most powerful, on special days like *purnima* or *amavasya*, etc to drive maximum celestial power and appease gods. They believe to pay the sacrifice of human(s) for the greater good. Children and women are the preferable victims of such practices. Sacrifices still continue for the unorthodox beliefs such as finding hidden treasures, for better crops and recovering ill health and misfortunes.

Methodology

This thesis is based on secondary data particularly the interpretations of the primary texts such as *The Awakening Wind* and *Staying is Nowhere* by Sitakant Mahapatra. I have included in my study various historical and anthropological texts and materials to validate my argument on the traditions of human sacrifice as represented in the *Meriah* songs. The thesis revolves around the human sacrifices and its interpretations. My work presents a picture of the cultural significance of human sacrifice in the world's historical contexts, in Indian contexts with specific reference to the Kondh tribe and their *Meriah* songs. Moreover, the

study also includes certain essays, critical works and comparative texts in support of the argument.

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Chapter 2

Kondhs and Human Sacrifice

We may come across Kondhs in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, largely in Koraput and Phulbani districts of Odisha. Kondhs initially practiced hunting and gathering methods for their livelihood and survive on forest products as roots and fruits which they collect during their usual practice of group hunting. They use forest plants and herbs as medicines and use oil prepared from sal and mahua seeds to cook their food. As the adaptation and habitat changed, so did their livelihood methodologies and they started to depend on agriculture. At present, agriculture is their main source of food.

The Kondhs are notorious in the folds of history for their practice of human sacrifice which is an essential part of Kondh ritual. As guided their rituals, the victims of these sacrifices were bought and must not belong to their polity. According to the belief of Kondh culture death is only a passage from one mode of being to another and is not considered as the absolute end of life. Residing in hill and forest areas Kondhs were attached to nature and have a sense of debt towards mother earth. For the very reason they practiced human sacrifice as a thanksgiving for having them facilitated with good crops, curing diseases, a family, and tribe to flourish and live in prosperity. Their ritual of human sacrifice falls under a few measures, that is, the sacrifices are carried out as a community obligation for their relation between god, men and their land; seeking the guidance and blessing of their ancestors and safety against threats and danger and/or extinction due to offences to nature; protection from natural calamities that pose threat to life and existence of their tribe and evil-eye and sorcery practices and such.

The victim was consented to live a normal life till the time of sacrifice and have a family, and land in order to do the same. These victims were known as *Meriah*. Kondhs procured these victims from the *Meriah* sellers called Doms (or Pans). However there are instances, seldom though, when Konds sold their children to other Konds in order to carry out the sacrifice. This happened mainly due to such circumstances when the *Meriah* seller is destitute or due to British suppression of human sacrifice. In principle these *Meriah* were selected irrespective of their sex, caste, age, or race and were non-Konds almost always. To appease Earth goddess

the sacrifices were conducted on full moon nights. Various activities of Kondhs displayed their belief of supernatural occurrences and believed god to be their reason of existence. In Kondh, God is called as Pennu.

They believed that practicing their culture of human sacrifice is beneficial for mankind and would do their community good. This justifies their belief of appeasing Pennu by offering human sacrifice for they had believed that wellbeing of mankind depended on them. Kondh have many songs for various cultural occasions of theirs and thus have a few dedicated ones for sacrifice. Having sung these dedicated songs on any other occasion is assumed to be a social taboo in their tradition. The sacrifice songs are the most significant invocatory song. These songs for appeasing earth goddess Dhartani as discussed earlier. It is divided into three parts. The first song that is '*purchase song of the Meriah*' is sung by the villagers on the day of sacrifice at the house of village chief or headman for that is where the previously acquired *Meriah* is let to live and nurture. The further process of sacrificial ritual involved symbolic purchase of the *Meriah*, who is later taken to the place decided for the ritual to take place and is tied to a pole. Observers recite poems in the prayers and pleas to TariPennu, earth goddess. The village priest, *Jani* leads the recitation of the second sacrifice song followed by villagers and he is the first to stab the *Meriah*, with a pick-axe. The third song is the invocation to *Dhartanior Jhakar*, Earth goddess for providing them with forests and a life of prosperity, to avoid natural calamities and tigers and deadly diseases, to live a life in peace and crops to flourish. The *Meriah* sacrifice is a three day festival. 10-12 days before the day of sacrifice, the victim's hair is cut, he is kept unshaven erstwhile. The victim is kept for fasting from the second day evening. Feast is organized at the same night. On the third day, the *Meriah* is bathed and taken to the *Meriah* grove where the priest invokes the goddesses and prepares her for sacrifice. The *Meriah* is worshipped a few days before sacrifice. When kept in bonds, it is made sure that the victim doesn't die and precautions are also taken that he does not escape. The *Meriah* when slaughtered, the festival reached its crescendo. The chief gave a pig or buffalo to the priest and the *Meriah*'s seller, concluding the event. Each of the participating villages' representatives took a strip of the corpse's flesh and departed for their settlements where they shared it with their village members who buried the flesh in their fields.

The famous custom of *Meriah* sacrifice involves community participation. Kondhs are famous for their inheritance of their cultural values and respect for nature. This mainly

involves prayers offered to ancestors, invoking their spirits and offerings made to gods. They believe that they are constantly under watch by their ancestors who also bless them. Similarly their life was dictated by the traditions and religious beliefs which they followed with great reverence. The Earth Goddess finds a special place among other Gods in their culture. Most of the ceremonies were conducted which had a primary goal to please either their ancestors or their divinities by offering them sacrifices. They made human sacrifices to propitiate earth goddess. Their actions reflected the strong beliefs on Gods and their benevolence. They believed these human sacrifices were necessary to ensure a good harvest, healthy and sufficient cattle stock, disease free life, avoidance of mishaps and long life. They have invocatory songs for all the special ceremonies. Songs dedicated to offering of sacrifices, generally known as *Meriah* songs are most significant of them all. They were intended to increase the fertilization of agricultural land.

Some sacrificial songs of the Kondhs are-

1. THE MERIA SONG

Purchase of Meria

(a) O village-head,

Our eldest,

Have you got

Baby fowls, baby peacocks?

Have you got sons?

Magh is here,

Pous is here,

Give us baby fowls,

Baby peacocks.

We will pay the market price.

The first stab by the priest and the overture

(b) Here we sacrifice the enemy,

Here we sacrifice the meria,

*The gods eat up this sacrifice,
The enemy is thus worshipped.
Let there be no collective loss,
Let not tigers prowl;
The gods need so many bribes,
So many offerings.
Let there be no dark forests,
No calamity,
Let all be happy,
Live in peace.*

(c)Invocation to Earth (the Dhariti or Jhakar) Goddess

*Let no famine
Visit our land,
Plague our people.
Our land and the world-
Let them be in peace.
In plenty,
Like the siali and gulchi creepers,
Our crops flourish.
This offering we make
To thee.*

*The hills of Kandarani, Tinirani,
Rekamali, Kulerpani,
Kodihinmadi, Sobahanmadi,
Pandramadi, Dandramedi,
Bayamadi, Hatimudi,
Guamadi, Andamadi,
Pasapatia, Sodtatia,
Lenjuwali, Raskakota,
They are our home,
So many offerings.*

*Let onions grow well,
Garlick grows well.
We commit no sin,
We have no guilt.
We only feed the gods.
To you, our gods,
This offering.
Let no creepers enmesh the head,
Nor thorns prick,
O god.
This rope you have made
To tie the meria,
This sword and the axe you have made-
They eat the meria.
We have no sin,
We have done no wrong,
No crime have we committed.
Your blacksmith has fashioned
This axe,
Durga eats,
Durga eats everything.
Below: Dharti, the quiet ancient earth;
Above: Dharma, the god of justice;
And we offer
Only a small offering,
Insignifacant.
The land will be happy,
The god will be happy.
Let them prosper.
The lance eats (the sacrifice),
O God, we offer you
So many bribes.*

2.THE RITUAL OF DEATH

This we offer to you.

We can,

Because we are still alive;

If not,

How could we offer at all,

And what?

We give a small baby fowl,

Take this and go away

Whichever way you came.

Go back, return.

Don't inflict pain on us

After your departure.

3.LAMENTATION FOR THE DEAD

Did some evil spirit

Devour you, eclipse you?

Alas! Alas!

What justice! What pain!

Did some sorcerer kill you?

Alas! Alas!

Or did we ourselves

Kill you?

Where did you hide, dear one?

We do not know

Who killed you, ate you.

Let our sight, our curse

Be on his head;

Let him die accused

Like you.

4.INVOCATION TO GODDESS CHITA GUDI (SITA GUDI OR SITAMA)

*Mother Sita Goddess, mother elder sister,
Mother Laxmi, elder sister,
Thou, the protector of the house,
Thou, the goddess of the house,
All my blessings and wealth
Due to you,
All my health-excellence
Due to you,
Mother, the earth goddess below,
Dharma above,
We, all your sons,
Are in peace due to your blessings.*

*Toe sharp parka grass in the forest,
The swarming tigers in the forest,
The fear of tigers in the forest,
The fear of snakes in the forest.*

5.THE SLOKA TO EXORCISE DISEASES

*Earth goddess below,
Dharma above.
Black cow, red cow,
Dikirai, Paikrai.*

*Go away, green,
Go away.
Sixteen horns,
Sixteen worships,
They survived
They sang.
Witness is Masutrai.
He could,*

He breathed.
He said:
Two girls,
Two mattresses,
Thin thread,
Red rope.
When alive, counted;
When dead, remembered.
Manguduguru, Anguduguru,
I will cut him.
I will shrivel him up.
RepuPijli, PatuPinjni,
Kula dara, Manamej.

There are five songs dedicated to *Meriah* practice, namely, purchase of *Meriah*, the ritual of death, lamentation for the dead, invocation to goddess Chita Gudi, and the sloka to exorcise death. The first song is about the procurement of the victim for the purpose of sacrificing and offering him to deities. The process of sacrificing the victim incorporates the first stab carried out by the priest followed by the invocatory song of earth goddess. The second song is the offering of the victim who has been sacrificed; the third song expresses sorrow over the sacrificed victim, the fourth song is invocation of goddess Chita Gudi and extending their gratitude towards her, and the fifth song incorporates slokas to exorcise diseases.

The *Meriah* song is divided into three parts. The first part incorporates symbolic representation of the sacrificial victim by baby fowls or baby peacocks. As says the song

“O village-head,
Our eldest,
Have you got
Baby fowls, baby peacocks?” and
“Give us baby fowls,
Baby peacocks.
We will pay the market price.”

It is during the ‘magh and pous’ time of the year that the village chief is asked for the *Meriah*. And that the market price shall be paid for the purchase of the *Meriah*, for the victim according to their *Meriah* rituals must be bought. It’s taken care that these sacrificial victims must not be of the same community. The selections of victims are regardless of their age, race, caste or sex. There are certain occurrences when the victim for the sacrifice or offering are Kondh children sold to another community for the sake of the ritual to be carried with disruptions. Otherwise these victims could be anyone. Kondhs encountered such circumstances because of the suppression of human sacrifice by British or in cases when the *Meriah* seller went destitute. The *Meriah* victims are young boys or girls who are acquired from the *Meriah* sellers known as Pans or Doms. Once these victims are bought, they are brought to the community and are allowed have a normal life like others in the polity until he reaches the crescendo, i.e., the time of sacrifice. They are given land and animals to spend a normal life of Kondh. They may even have a family and children. The victim resides in the house of the village elder or village chief until the victim is ready to start a life of his own and live separately. Special care of victim’s health is taken and made sure he/she does not die of a disease or elopes.

The second part of the *Meriah* song describes of the victim being sacrificed and being offered to god. They seek blessing of god for protecting them from tigers, natural dangers and calamities, and to sanctify them a life of peace and happiness and thus are the bribe extended. Kondhs believed God to be the source of all the natural resources and reason behind the mishaps. They believed worshipping them and offering the greatest sacrifice is the only way of maintaining peace and prosperity and as well bidding their gratitude for all that they were blessed with. Following lines describe well the situation and belief of Kondhs.

*“Here we sacrifice the meria,
The gods eat up this sacrifice,
The enemy is thus worshipped.
Let there be no collective loss,
Let not tigers prowl”*

The third part of the song further describes the appeals of the Kondhs for their crops to flourish and their wish for a disease-free life and free of natural disasters of any kind.

*“Let no famine
Visit our land,
Plague our people.”*

These lines illustrate the same. They seek blessing of god to grant them a life of peace and affluence and larger harvests. As states the song

“Let them be in peace.

In plenty,

Like the siali and gulchi creepers,

Our crops flourish.” And thus are the offerings made. The Kondhs live a life dependent on nature and natural produce. The following lines from the song further describes the numerous hills they reside in,

“The hills of Kandarani, Tinirani,

Rekamali, Kulerpani,

Kodihinmadi, Sobahanmadi,

Pandramadi, Dandramedi,

Bayamadi, Hatimudi,

Guamadi, Andamadi,

Pasapatia, Sodtatia,

Lenjuwali, Raskakota,

They are our home”

The Kondhs believed that offering *Meriah* to god is beneficial for mankind and would be favourable for their community's good as well.

“The land will be happy,

The god will be happy”, and

“We commit no sin,

We only feed the gods”

Lines such as these describe the same and that it's not their fault for having sacrificed victims and offers it to land, and god. Similar connotations could be deciphered from the second song, *The Ritual of Death*. According to the song, the offerings are made in order to elude mishaps and god is believed to inflict this pain upon them for their misdoings. *“Lamentation for the Dead”* is the third song. This song expresses the mourning over the sacrificed victims. It says the accusations to be on the sacrificed ones and no evil shall lie upon them. *“Or did we ourselves Kill you?”* And *“Let him die accused”* represents the same as stated earlier. The fourth song is the *Invocation to goddess Chita Gudi*.

“All my blessings and wealth Due to you,

All my health-excellence Due to you” and

“We, all your sons,

Are in peace due to your blessings.” these sentences from the song represents their gratitude towards goddess. The fifth song, *“The Sloka to Exorcise Death”* is chanted to get rid of the evil spirits. *“Go away, green, Go away”* clearly translates the fact stated.

The village head or the priest decides when the ceremony of sacrifice to take place. From ten to twelve days in advance to the day of sacrifice the victim is kept unshaven and a day prior to the day of the ceremonial sacrifice the victim’s hair is cut. The victim is kept for fasting from the second day evening. Feast is organized at the same night. On the third day, the *Meriah* is bathed and taken to the *Meriah* grove where the priest calls upon the deity and prepares for the offering. In the days prior to the sacrifice, the *Meriah* is worshipped. When kept in bonds, it is made sure that the victim doesn’t die and safety measures are taken to avoid his escape. These songs are very significant. The Kondhs are remembered for their culture of human sacrifice. Although ill-famed, the custom of offering human sacrifices has made this tribe famous in folds of history. It is unique in its own manner and so are the songs. These songs are dedicated to the *Meriah* culture and are not chanted on any other occasion for their significance and sociological value.

It is necessary to have a comprehensive understanding of the beliefs behind the rituals of *Meriah* custom in order to understand its importance and its representation. This thesis examines the representation of human sacrifices in *Meriah* songs. The representations vary on the basis of its interpretation. Its nature of variance depends on its historical, cultural or situational ethnology. The songs present significant correlation of *Meriah* songs with agricultural measures and potentials, availability of cattle, and protection from natural mishaps. In addition to this, there are significant correlations to burden of population and resources.

Meriah celebration is a communal custom among Kondhs. These sacrifices seek to narrow the incoherence between individual desire and cosmic orders. It explores how offering of human sacrifice is being utilized by Kondhs to encourage them to protect their mode of existence and practices. The significance of these practices is contrary in the present view of sociology of religious beliefs.

The *Meriah* sacrifices were voluntary. The victim was sacrificed at his individual desire and it was taken as fundamental. The victim was convinced for the offering and made to believe

his journey to heaven in his afterlife. As it is stated in the song that anthropological discourse on sacrifice accepts that it is only the victim who is a guilty, bears the sin or pollution and that the cult of human sacrifice is a way of purifying the victim and the moral sins. The practice is thus essential for the performance of offering human sacrifice but its motive is not to kill a victim. The victims therefore, must learn to substitute a desire for objects with a desire for heaven. A system of elimination is not the foundation of the logical structure of these human sacrifices but it is the beliefs of the Kondhs and the succeeding encompassment.

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CONCLUSION

The literary world of the tribes incorporates many customs and traditions. These traditions incorporate many indigenous ideas, beliefs, customs, folk songs etc. These traditions and

information were passed on from one generation to other in form of various folk songs and rituals. They portray the tangible expression of tribe's artistic culture inheritance.

The thesis represents the significance of *Meriah* songs of Kondhs. Sitakant Mahapatra in his 'The Awakened Wind' has integrated those folk songs. His songs have paved way in documenting information pertaining to the Kondh tribe and their customs of human sacrifice. It also helps in understanding the cultural traits of Kondhs. Sitakant Mahapatra's work is the first correct representation of Kondh folk songs through which we gain information about the Kondh and their customs in general. These folk songs are representative of the sacrifice being undertaken during the colonial period.

Major General John Campbell's report (1841) characterized Kondhs as sophisticated people with creative ideas and not an illiterate, barbaric community who just celebrated the custom of human sacrifice as depicted by the British. With regards to this, Sitakant Mahapatra (1983) explains more about the Kondh villages and culture by narrating a character with the assertion given by Campbell in favor of the different actions of the Kondhs and that they were often misjudged; his observations on their practices were rightfully particular. It is very difficult to obtain information about an indigenous tribe such as the Kondhs. Therefore, Sitakant Mahapatra's work acts as an important resource for the ethnographic study.

Offering of human life to deities is often described as one of the most barbaric acts carried out in the name of religion and custom. Sacrifices were carried out by most of the cultures in history for their different beliefs. In fact, offering human blood to deities was considered a holy task to maintain order and also became one of the most common ways of appeasements. It was only during the colonial period that such practices were discovered, in particular, of the Kondhs.

Subsequently, the British officials had regulated orders regarding the suppression of such abominable practices through-out the country. Tribesmen caught celebrating such ceremonies were punished. The practice continued but, in a concealed manner. It was only after Captain Macpherson approached the Kondhs, in the hilly areas of Orissa, and proposed a bargain for discarding their tradition of sacrifice forever and in turn offered relaxations in legislations with respect to other tribes and land lords. He believed that the interaction and bargain must be carried out very carefully.

There were more communities with similar practices which include Thugs, bandits, Phasigars and Kali worshipers. They had religious reasons defending their act of killing. Such sacrifices are even practiced today. It is still considered as one of the major ways for appeasing the goddess Kali. Contemplating the reasons for sacrifice, we may come across its social and religious significance.

Sitakant Mahapatra's folk songs of Kondhs are representative of the sacrifice being undertaken during the colonial period which has some continuity even today; by documenting them and reading them, we can learn the philosophical and social views for which such sacrifices have been made in the cultural context.

It can be concluded that the information gained from the extract of Major-General John Campbell's personal description of his experience of thirteen years in the land of Kondh tribe for suppression of human sacrifice, extract from General Macpherson's report on Kondhs of Orissa and work of Sitakant Mahapatra has become an important source of information about the Kondhs for anthropologists all around the world. As Kondhs is an entity of much curiosity in field of ethnology.

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