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Folk and tribal culture in transition: Exploring challenges and solutions

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Abstract

A person living in any society is identified by his culture. Food, lifestyle, clothing and language introduce a person, a region and a culture. Every country has its own cultural heritage. When we talk about culture in the context of a large country like India, every region has its own culture. That is why it is also considered a country with cultural diversity. But at present, due to increasing westernization, the youth are ignoring their culture and are getting attracted towards western culture, which is a big sign of cultural decline. Therefore, it becomes necessary that special efforts should be made to save the traditional culture. Refinement in culture with the time is necessary, but only to the extent that it does not harm the originality of the culture. The presented research paper discusses the challenges faced by folk and tribal culture and highlights such strategies through which folk and tribal culture can be preserved and promoted. This article highlights the need for a balanced approach that respects traditional practices while adapting to contemporary needs and supports the inclusion of the knowledge traditions of these tribes in educational activities so that these knowledge traditions do not get extinct in the fast race of modernity.

Keywords: Culture; Dance; Folk; Tribal

1. Introduction

India is a witness to great cultural traditions, which are manifested through the rich cultural heritage of the country. It is a land of vast cultures molded by many religions, languages, arts, and customs. With a history tracing back to ancient times, the cultural landscape of India is a fabric knitted from threads of different religions, languages, arts and customs. The country has so many religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, all which are embodied in a unique spiritual and philosophical ethos. This religious pluralism is reflected in the myriads of festivals celebrated throughout the year, such as Diwali, Eid and Pongal, characterizing unity in diversity. The Indian Constitution recognizes 22 official languages and more than 1,600 dialects spoken throughout the country, which is another important aspect of India's cultural identity. This linguistic diversity is a testament to India's pluralistic society, where regional languages and literature flourish along with Hindi and English. Various arts, including classical dance forms such as Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Odissi, and musical traditions such as Hindustani and Carnatic, highlight Indian aesthetic achievements.

Indian tribal culture represents the multifarious keynote of lifestyles, traditions and beliefs of more than 700 tribes spread across the vast country. Each of them uniquely shapes their identity due to its own unique geography, history and social structure, contributing much to maintaining the vibrant culture of India. It is primarily concentrated in northeastern states, central India and parts of western and southern India. Most of the tribal communities are attached to nature and the environment. Normally, tribes depend upon agriculture, hunting and gathering in the wild with traditional skills in tune with nature. This close contact with nature reflects in their arts and crafts also. Similarly, languages are also an important part of the culture of tribes. Most of the tribes have their own dialects and languages, which are entirely different and incomprehensible to people belonging to other communities. In fact, this linguistic

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diversity basically brings out their uniqueness in culture and also acts as a great constructor in preserving oral traditions, folklores and songs passed over generations.

1.1. Objectives of the study

- To study the historical and cultural significance of folk and tribal traditions.
- To identify the major challenges that threatens these cultures.
- To propose recommendations to preserve and revive folk and tribal cultures.

1.2. Relevance of the study

Examining the difficulties experienced by folk and tribal cultures not only increases our understanding towards these societies but also reveals strategies for their preservation and advancement. Urbanization and globalization pose dangers to many of these tribal communities, which may result in the extinction of traditional knowledge, languages and traditions. We can create plans for revival and preservation by researching these issues. Examining the difficulties promotes cultural integration, sustainable development and community empowerment.

2. Folk and tribal culture

Folk refers to the general public, who have a collective identity rather than an individual identity. Folk culture is usually formed from the traditional practices, beliefs and customs of a specific community or region. It includes various forms of expression, including music, dance, art and oral traditions, which reflect the everyday life and experiences of the people. Tribal culture reflects its distinctive lifestyle. Tribal cultures often retain ancient practices and knowledge systems passed down through generations, thus forming a rich heritage. Folk and tribal cultures are an integral part of the cultural landscape; together, they provide scope to the richness of human expression. Folk and tribal cultures are facing challenges in the modern world, especially when globalization, urbanization and westernization are threatening traditional lifestyles.

3. Historical importance of folk and tribal culture

Folk and tribal culture indicates cultural identity in regions with rich historical and social diversity. The historical context of folk and tribal culture has been very important and rich not only in India but all over the world. Since ancient times, human society has developed a variety of cultural practices to preserve its existence, beliefs and lifestyle. These practices reflect their daily life activities, religious beliefs and social structures. Folk and tribal culture has special significance in a culturally and ethnically diverse country like India. Many castes and tribes have settled in India for thousands of years, who have their own distinctive languages, art, music, dance and religious practices. For example, tribes like Bhils, Santhals, Gonds and Nagas have their own unique cultural heritage which they have been carrying forward from generation to generation. Folk and tribal cultures continued to develop even in the medieval period. Various dynasties, such as the Maurya, Gupta and Chola dynasties played an important role in the preservation and promotion of these cultures. Various folk songs, dances and art styles developed during this period. Such as Kalbelia dance of Rajasthan, Gond painting of Madhya Pradesh and Santhali dance of West Bengal. These art styles united all sections of the society and preserved the cultural heritage. Folk and tribal cultures faced various challenges during the colonial period. British rule affected tribal societies not only economically and politically, but also at the cultural level. Colonial policies in many tribal areas led to displacement and cultural loss. Despite this, tribal societies retained their cultural identity and kept their traditions alive. After independence, the Government of India implemented various policies and programs for the preservation and promotion of folk and tribal cultures. Since independence, the Indian Constitution has made special provisions to protect the rights of tribal societies. Along with this, various cultural institutions under the Government of India, such as Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), Lalit Kala Akademi, Sahitya Akademi, Zonal Culture Centers (ZCCs), National Tribal Research Institute (NTRI), Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya (IGNCA) and cultural departments of state governments have contributed significantly to the study and preservation of these cultures.

Even in modern times, folk and tribal cultures continue to be an important part of the social and cultural landscape. Despite globalization and technological advancement, these cultures have maintained their uniqueness and identity. Even today, folk and tribal cultures are celebrated through various festivals, fairs and cultural programs. For example, Bastar Dussehra in Chhattisgarh, Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, and Bhagoria Haat in Madhya Pradesh keep the rich history and traditions of tribal cultures alive. The historical perspective of folk and tribal culture helps us understand how different societies have preserved their traditions, beliefs and cultural heritage from generation to generation. It not only symbolizes their identity, but also reflects the development and diversity of human civilization. The study and

preservation of these cultures are extremely important for the present and future generations so that we can preserve and enhance our cultural heritage.

4. Challenges of Folk and tribal culture

- **Modernization and Urbanization:** At present, people are migrating from villages to cities in large numbers and are joining the race of modernization, as a result of which the traditional lifestyle is lost. Due to the process of expansion of cities, tribal land is often encroached upon, which not only affects traditional practices but culture is also widely affected due to displacement.
- **Decline in traditional knowledge:** Traditional knowledge consists of practices, skills and innovations developed by people in a community over generations, often transferred orally from generation to generation. This knowledge is an integral part of cultural identity, spiritual beliefs and sustainable management of natural resources by these communities. This traditional knowledge is diminished due to poor socio-economic conditions, rapid development in science and technology and lack of proper recognition of folk and tribal arts.
- **Environmental degradation:** Deforestation, pollution and climate change affect the natural resources on which many tribal communities depend for their livelihood and cultural practices but in such a situation they have to leave that place and move to another place which affects their culture.
- **Decline of religious beliefs and faiths:** The basic foundation of the culture of any region is its divine traditions and religious beliefs. The life of the people, customs, traditions, festivals and faiths has developed here on these bases. Due to modernity, the faith of the youth in divine faith and religious beliefs is decreasing, due to which the foundation of our culture is getting weakened. As a result, there is a danger of the decline of culture.
- **Social and political marginalization:** Indigenous communities often face marginalization and discrimination, which can limit their access to resources and political representation. This marginalization hinders their ability to protect and promote their cultural heritage.
- **Commercialization:** Performing folk and tribal dances through commercialization can get recognition but often traditional dances are simplified and altered for profit. When dance is presented as mere entertainment rather than cultural expression, its authenticity and true form is at risk of being lost.
- **Perception of dances being irrelevant:** In a world that is rapidly moving towards modernity, traditional dances are considered outdated or irrelevant by some community members. The younger generation feels that engaging in traditional dance is not in line with their aspirations which lead to a decline in youth participation and interest in preserving cultural practices.
- **Competition with other dance forms:** Folk and tribal dances often compete with other dance forms to attract people's attention. As modern entertainment options increase, traditional dances are increasingly failing to attract audiences and participants, making it necessary to find ways to showcase their uniqueness and cultural significance. While searching for new ways, many folk and tribal dances lose their original form, which is a serious challenge.
- **Social Media:** In today's era, a lot of information based on tribal life is available on social media. There is a race to get famous by uploading reels and videos and increasing likes and views, but through this, complete knowledge of tribal life, tribal dance, tribal arts etc. cannot be obtained. On the basis of this partial knowledge, people make assumptions related to a particular tribe which can create wrong notions for any tribe.
- **Inclusion of plastic and artificial materials:** In today's time, instead of original materials, plastic and artificial materials are being used as substitutes in folk and tribal costumes, jewellery, musical instruments, equipment, decorative items and items of daily use. Due to this, the identity of the costumes, musical instruments and other items is getting lost and the traditional costumes, jewellery, musical instruments, etc. will be reduced to mere symbols.
- **Display of mixed culture in tribal dances:** The basis of fairs and festivals has been the folk and tribal cultures of a particular region. Its purpose was to display the pure culture of that place but with the time mixed and modern music and dance started being included in these festivals, as a result of which the inclination of the youth started increasing towards mixed culture rather than pure folk culture. Most of the people who go to fairs and festivals are from the young age group who do not know the original culture. Therefore, their interest also increases in mixed culture and they start considering it as their culture.
- **Increasing trend of choreography:** The trend of group folk dance presentations prepared through choreography is increasing day by day in which folk and tribal dances of different communities are performed. At present, the objective of these cultural programs is to get the applause of the chief guest and the audience and to please them. For this, even if the style of folk dance has to be changed, they do not hesitate in doing it. Many times, even in these big events, the opportunity to display and promote the real form of folk and tribal culture is missed.

- **Importance to fast dances:** Nowadays, fast music is being given great importance in departmental programs. Due to the effect of remixing, the demand for fast dances has increased even in folk dances. That is why slow dances and music are on the verge of being left behind. Due to the increasing demand for fast dances, attempts are made to present slow dances in fast speed, due to which the original form of these dances changes.
- **Involvement of Administration:** Administrative officers play a special role in almost all government events and big festivals. Although committees are formed in most of the festivals, but being the chief officer, the interest of that particular officer can have some influence on providing opportunities for presentations in these events. Many times, due to lack of popularity of some tribal folk arts, they are considered very ordinary and are not given importance, due to which these remain limited to a particular area.

5. Solutions for challenges faced by folk and tribal culture

- **Enact protective laws:** The central and state governments should enact laws that protect cultural heritage and rights of folk and tribal communities. However, acts like the Forest Rights Act, 2006 have been made by the government but the rules and laws made for the protection of tribal communities need to be amended and made effective according to the need of the time and strict enforcement is a must.
- **Support for cultural preservation programs:** It is essential to establish and fund programs specifically designed to support the preservation of traditional arts and crafts. These arts can be promoted through grants to artisans, cultural heritage centers and state-sponsored festivals, etc.
- **Need to ban mixed culture in folk and tribal festivals:** Such rules should be made in folk and tribal festivals that only pure folk and tribal culture should be displayed there in which costumes, folk songs, folk dances and folk arts should be of traditional style only. Local culture should be given special importance in these festivals and if the culture of other states is to be displayed for entertainment, then folk dances and folk arts should be displayed in the same style.
- **Involve communities in decision making:** Local communities should be involved in the planning and implementation of cultural conservation and their perspectives and needs should be considered. Participatory approaches to governance and project management can empower communities and also increase the effectiveness of conservation efforts.
- **Capacity building and skills development:** Providing training and educational opportunities to community members helps to preserve traditional skills and practices. Programs that teach traditional arts, crafts and languages, combined with modern vocational skills can support the viability of cultural industries.
- **Integration of traditional knowledge in education:** Integrating indigenous knowledge and cultural practices into school and university curriculum can promote respect and understanding among the younger generation. Hence, these educational programs can preserve it.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Campaigns to raise awareness about the importance of folk and tribal cultures can garner public support for conservation efforts. Media outreach, cultural exhibitions and community events can educate the wider population and promote the value of cultural diversity.
- **Digital documentation and archives:** Using digital tools to document and archive traditional knowledge, cultural practices and artefacts ensures their preservation for future generations. Digital platforms can provide global access to cultural resources and support educational and research activities.
- **Identifying backward tribes and providing them tribal status:** Last year, tribal communities of some states were given tribal status by the Government of India. Tribal status has been granted by the government but there are still many backward tribes in our country. Many times such tribes become victims of politics or the government pays less attention towards them due to which they do not get tribal status, therefore such tribes should be identified and given status so that they can avail the benefits of assistance given to tribal communities and they can develop. On getting tribal status, land cannot be purchased in these areas due to which outsiders cannot interfere here. This will protect their life, traditions and customs.

6. Conclusion

Folk and tribal cultures are facing major challenges like cultural erosion due to modernization, urbanization and loss of knowledge tradition. Apart from this, these cultures are also affected by economic development, environmental degradation and mainstream cultures. Various strategies can be effective in preserving these cultures. For this, it is necessary that the whole community should unite and ensure its participation and the knowledge traditions of folk and tribal cultures should be given preference in educational programs. Digital technologies, social media etc. can also be used to some extent for cultural preservation. Preservation of folk and tribal cultures is essential to maintain human diversity and rich heritage. Since globalization and modernization are giving a new shape to the whole world, it is important to adopt comprehensive and suitable strategies to preserve these invaluable cultures. With integrated efforts

of communities and governments, these traditions can be preserved for future generations and at the same time can give a new identity to the culturally rich global society.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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