Gond’s Nagoba Jatara; Performance of Bheati Koriyal

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Abstract:
Nagoba Jatara is the biggest and ancient festival of Gonds with full of rituals. Gonds are aboriginal tribes of India who live in the Adilabad district of Telangana State. Amongst the many cultural practices of the Nagoba festival (Serpent God), Bheati Koriyal is an interesting ritual practice in this annual festival, young girls or women who are newly or previously married are introduced to the community members and their God (Nagoba). Then these brides are deemed eligible to worship their supreme God on their own. The present paper aims to understand the ‘Performance of Bheati Koriyal Process. Participant observation and interview methods were used in data collection. The documentation of ritual practices also done during data collection.

Key words: Gonds, Nagoba Jatara, Bride, Baja thri, White Saree.

Introduction:
Nagoba Jatara has been considered as one of the important festivals in the history of Gonds. Gonds follow rituals and annual feasts to honour their clan deities. These were findings are seen by the Tribal welfare department of Hyderabad in Gond Pamphlet, May 2002). Akipen (villagedeity), Nat Aawal (village mother), Siva or Dasuri Aawal (mother goddess), Polam Rajul (deity of hills and forests), Gouri Pen (goddess of tiger), Dodi Marke (mother of cowshed) And (Haimendrof 1948: 184, 240) Persa Pen, Satik etc. are some of the important deities (Haimendrof 1948: 39), (Sethumadhava rao Pagadi 1949: 1). The aboriginal Gond tribes (Raj Gonds) are living in Adilabad district of Telangana State. (Haimendrof 1979: 4), (Nadeem Hasnain 2007: 141) they call themselves in Gondi language Koitur (man of hills or mountains). (M.N.Vahia 2013: 29, 30), (Gond pamphlet, May-2002) In India Gonds are divided into four tribes: Raj Gonds, Madia (Maria) Gonds, Dhurve Gonds and Khatulwar (Khutwad) Gonds. (Gond pamphlet, May-2002), (Haimendrof 1979: 80,100) The Gond society is divided into four groups (Saga), those are Nalwen Saga (Four divine brother group), Seewen Saga (Five divine brother group), Sarwen Saga (Six divine brother group) and Edwen or Yerwen Saga (Seven brother divine group). (Haimendrof 1979:100). Among these four groups, Yerwen Saga has seven clans; Maravi, Purka, Korjeta Marskola, Pandera, Vedma, Mesram, and Taram. Of these seven clans, only Mesram clan Gonds Perform the Nagoba Jatara in Keslapur village of Utroor mandal, Adilabad district of Telangana State. Nagoba Jatara is an annual festival and Twenty two Mesram clan families of Gonds play main role, they are Pradhah, (Sanjay B. Salunke 2014: 1049, 1050) Katoda, Patel (Patlal), Nayakwadi, Ramkambh, Aarke, Wadir, Gayker, Zopolir, Zadyalir, Bande, Yewati, Empilir, Sapalir, Bejelkar, Garudi, Daf, Hawaldar, Sankpayala, Udrapurua, Kotwal, Boddiguda and Dahaklir. Nagoba Jatara begins in the month of Pushya Maasa (December to January), officially it is performed for 5days and on the whole for 30 days. The Mesram clan follow many cultural practices from the beginning of Nagoba Jatara, they are looking the Moon, ordering the new Pots, going to holy water, puja at Hastanamadugu, in village of Katoda, Pooja of Indhradevi, under Banyan trees, bringing the new pots, Thum, preparation of castor for God, entry in Goshala, Bheati Koriyal, Satik Puja, Persa Pen Puja, big Puja of Nagoba, Masai God, the Darbar, Shampur Bodem Pen Jatara, the God house, and the End of the Nagoba Jatara. Among all above mentioned practices, Bheati Koriyal (Introducing bride) is very important aspect to the Gonds community. It is said that if the new
brides are not participated they do not get the eligibility to pray the Nagoba (Serpent God). Only after the participation in Bheati Koriyal and introduction of bridesto the God and to the entire Gonds community the brides get eligibility to pray God hence the Gonds give much importance to the Bheati Koriyal.

Methodology:
Participant Observation, Interview Method and documentation of process were used for data collection during research.
Nagoba Jatara is one month festival and Bheati Koriyal which is a part of it, is one night practice which takes place in the temple of Nagoba. On Gonds, earlier studies were done by Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf (1948, 1979), Nadeem Hasnain (2007), Sethu Madhava Rao Pagdi (1949), Edger Thurston (1909, 1975) etc.
While Bheati Koriyal performance was happening I took shooting with video camera and when it not understand I wrote the questions on that time, after the performance of Bheati Koriyal I took Interview from the Gond elders Pradhan, Katoda, Patel, women of Gonds etc. and collected the primary data.

Performance of Bheati Koriyal:
In Mesram Kitta, girls after their marriage were taken to Keslapur Nagoba temple, and were made to participate in Pooja without miss. The Bride was introduced to the entire Mesram Kitta and God (Nagoba serpent), this is called Bheati Koriyal. There was an exception to this procedure; whenever a death takes in the family of the newly married or the married women, the women from these families were allowed to enter the temple and do puja only after ‘Thum (a kind of ritual)’. If any more deaths occurred in the same family after Thum, then those family women are ineligible to attend Bheati Koriyal. However, there is no restriction on males. On the night of 20th January, 2015, Gonds at ‘Goshala’ had their dinner and got ready to go to Nagoba temple. Some of the Male Gonds who were in Goshala, lit two ‘Mashals’ and the remaining Gonds were associated by surrounding them under the roof at the border. Their edible items, clothes and things required for Puja were wrapped in a cloth and kept under the same roof. In the open ground at the centre of Goshala, stones for supporting fire wood were present, they were from the previous day fire lit by the Gonds to make themselves warm as it was chilling cold, and out in the open the temperatures were quite low. With lit Mashals, ‘Kalikom’4 was played for alerting Gonds to the forthcoming event, then all the Gonds were ready, and sounds from other musical instruments got added to the Kalikom marking the beginning of Bheati Koriyal. Girls who got married recently and other women wore white saree leaving only a few who came in colour sarees. Newly wed brides covered their heads with white cloth and made sure that their faces were not visible to anyone till the completion of the ritual and the remaining women used white cloths not on their heads but on shoulders and they did not follow this not to seen rule particularly. Every newlywed bride was accompanied by some elder women from their family, together they all were being called as "sisters of Mesram". Of many women present, wife of Pradhan came with a plate full of thing (a small brass bowl with lentils, coconut, small clay pot with water and lamp), wife of Katoda (Jangubai) was beside her, and the remaining ladies too carried things like coconuts and rice puffs that are to be offered in the Nagoba temple. They were moving in a line, Patel’s wife, Patel and Katoda lead the group from the front and they all moved towards the exit which was facing the second entrance of Nagoba temple, for it being the shortest possible route from Goshala. After exiting Goshala they walked towards the second entrance of Nagoba temple and it was accompanied by the musical instruments, after reaching the second entrance they all turned left and proceeded towards the main entrance of Nagoba temple. They
walked on the path laid with white plated rough stones, which was under a tent like green cloth covering laid with pink edges, the borders of it were designed in curves, and it was supported by painted (white) iron pillars at the base. They passed through this setting, and soon reached the entrance of the Nagoba temple.

A stone to the right of main entrance, smeared with orange red Tilak is ‘Masai God’. Gonds follow the tradition of worshipping ‘Masai God’, before entering the Nagoba temple during Bheeti Koriyal once in a year. Everyone stopped, when they reached Masai God, Patel took the initiative and began the worship (Puja), he lit incense sticks, and kept them at the base of the idol. Salutations (Namaskara) were done twice to a coconut and it was offered to Masai God, after it was broken into two halves at its base, its water was collected in a brass vessel and ‘Naivedya’ was also offered. Rice puffs were sprinkled on the top of the idol. Patel’s wife was standing in front of the Masai God, concealing her hair with white cloth and with the Plate (full of things) in her hand. Patel took Brass vessel and brass bowl in both the hands and climbed up the steps (steps had steel railings for support on both sides of steps) at the main entrance. The People at the back, who were led by the Patels also offered salutations to the Masai God by bending down and touching the ground for two times and all through this process live music was played without halt. Then climbing up the steps, entering of wife of Patel into the temple followed by others took place.

After entering the temple, everyone was made to sit in an order by one of the male Members. They sat to the left side of Nagoba Temple in two groups leaving some space in between this place was inside the compound wall and beside the ‘Mud Platform’ and all the people were facing front space of the Nagoba temple. The Facilitator of this process was moving front and back and adjusting the people, in some time order was established. In the meantime, inside the room which is to the left of the room containing Nagoba idol, arrangements were being made. One lady each, from the house of Katoda, Pradhan and Patel were inside this and taking care of the arrangements. These three women were there along with others till the worship (puja) of Masai God, later when the seating arrangements were in process, these three entered this room. In Bhovla Vaatval (ritual), a straight frame, made of clay was installed on the pedestal above the ground, and two clay filled rings were made and installed to the left and right side of the room. The three persons inside the room arranged all the seven bases believed to be Mesram God’s (they are made out of clay in the form of balls and kept in seven lamp bases) on the clay frame. Then they were decorated using Marigold flowers and leaves, seven coconuts were kept in front of this frame. Patel’s wife, who has been carrying the Brass plate with articles and things, entered the room and kept those things to left side of the platform where these seven Goddess (Satik) were installed. Incense sticks in a holder and clay bowl were kept at the base of the plat form to its right. To the left of the platform two (consist seven nodes) bamboo sticks were kept. Outside this room, Pradhans were seated under the roof supported by pillars (Mandapa) they sat on mat spread in front of the room. Left to Pradhans seven members sat in a straight line on a mat each belonging to a Kitta. One of the Pradhans prepared the note of all the newly married people and started calling only the brides to the Mandapa (area under the pillars). Below this Mandapa, to the left of the Nagoba temple where all the people sat, a white cloth was spread on the space that was left in between the groups. Whomsoever were called they kept some money in change on the cloth as an offerings to the sisters of Mesram. The New Brides were accompanied by a woman from their family while they entered the Mandapa and then the Room. After entering the room they touched the feet of all the three women and then they also touched the hands of all the three. Later they did Namaskara and offered some change to each, a coconut was offered near the Satik Gods breaking it into two, rice puffs were also offered at the base, the three people inside the temple room are revered with a feeling that they are next to Gods. After the New Brides came back to Mandapa
they touched the feet of the seven people from seven Kittas sitting to the right side of the room and each person from the group was also offered some change. Like that Pradhan and all the Bajathri sat and holding musical instruments on the Veranda of temple, and offered some money. After all this, the new brides, along with the members those who were accompanying got down the Mandapa and sat in the positions from which they rose. Throughout this process they were covering their heads and faces. This process was repeated for all the newly married till each and every member sitting outside the Mandapa got their chance. Whoever entered the Satik room followed the same procedure and after some time, at the base of Satik Goddess in the room, there were heaps of coconut pieces and rice puffs. The venue or the place which was utilized for introducing all the newly wed to the Satik Goddess is called as Parichaya Vedika. Throughout this process, the people who lit Mashals in the Goshala followed the people to the Nagoba temple and remained in front of Nagoba God’s room. Two daughters of Mesram sat near the entry of the Satik Goddess room. The women inside were also called as daughters of Mesram, the money offered to Pradhans in reality was not for them but for their musical instruments like ‘Kikkiri’, ‘Pippiri’ Kalikom etc. and offerings were made separately to each musical instrument. Throughout this Parichaya vedika, people who sat inside the room also changed in numbers. Musical instruments were played on and off, as this ritual continued till morning. People who were not involved, sat all around the temple inside the compound wall. After all the newly married were done with the process by then the time was 3 AM in the morning of 21st January 2015. Then the Bajathri people (Musicians) played high notes with the musical instruments inviting all the newlyweds for the second half of this ritual which is dance. Then all the new weds gathered in a circle whereas the relatives of these people went inside the Satik Goddess room and offered salutations. The new weds began the dance by moving their right foot front and back and moving in a circle. From slow pace the speed got increased step by step even the people who were playing music started playing in very high notes and this continued for at least an hour. All the people were giggling and laughing in a jolly mood and everything got crazy at the end with loud noises and screams from dancing members. The dance has been practiced as a tradition from the new brides expressing delight over the possibility of seeing Nagoba God after this ritual. In the end, the music at high notes stopped all of a sudden by declaring the end of the dance.

Then, only new brides, along with their relatives, walked back to Goshala, and reached Goshala in the early hours of 21st January 2015. They arranged two firewood places with stones, and prepared Naivedya (Rice and vegetable curry) in two medium sized clay pots and two big Barrels. For preparation of Naivedya, all Gond women come together and shared their work like cutting vegetables, stirring etc. In some time curry items and rice were also ready, they have installed a new pot with water on the hay inside Goshala to be used for purposes (cooking) like these. Using Big Ladles things were kept under constant supervision. After they were done, they took a new basket and arranged Teak leaves at its base, the prepared rice was extracted from the barrels and pots using ladles, and the basket was filled with it. Some women collected things like five small pots (Muntalu), two brass water vessels, and other items required for puja i.e. incense sticks, Match box and leaves of Teak trees, when all this was done. With those all the Brides went to the Pooja place, outside of the Goshala. They all were in same dressing (i.e. white sarees), which they wore during the Parichaya vedika ritual. They reached the tents in a line and arranged themselves in a circle leaving some space in between. They were standing between Goshala and the compound wall of Nagoba temple where the second entrance was. After they got settled in their places, some women took the brass vessel and kept a lit traditional lamp inside it. This was covered with big Teak leaves to save the inside lamp from putting off, then four ‘Mothuku’ 10 leaves were spread on the ground beside this lamp with rice lumps and curry items extracted from
the baskets of Naivedya, five small pots (Muntalu) filled with water were to the front of vessel lamp. Gond women kept the basket full of rice and curry items, next to brass vessel filled with water and this was to facilitate the easy extraction of rice from the basket. After these arrangements were made they lit 4 incense sticks and kept them in front of the vessel lamp. From then on, the puja began one by one all the Gond women approached this place, sat before it, took water from the Small clay pot and sprinkled it before the lamp in a straight line and then a lump of rice was taken from the Motuku leaves and kept in front of the vessel lamp. Like this everyone from these Gonds women came to the vessel lamp’s place and offering salutations did the same thing and money in change was also offered by each and every one. Whenever any of those Motuku leaves or small clay pots got empty due to usage it got refilled from the basket and the Brass vessel kept beside them, a person was appointed only for this job. The positions from which these women came forward to offer their salutations were once again filled by the same persons after the completion of the process. Of the big group, a small group of women got separated from the main group and gathered to the left of the big group in a circle and with two steel carriers and two Motuku leaves they did the same puja. Incense sticks were burnt and rice lumps were kept on the Motuku leaves, but the lamp in the brass vessel was missing in this scene. Two groups of people parallel did worship (puja) in this place. After ascertaining that all the women were done with the Procedure. Two sisters of Mesram came and sat near the Puja place and collected all the rice and change in Polythene covers. The place was cleared of all the things, but only the brass vessel remained, one by one all the women came to the place again and did salutations touching their forehead to the ground, then collecting those things they returned to Goshala. Throughout this Puja, not a single male Gond was present. Then at Goshala, they went to the place where two big clay pots were kept on the rocks, these were the ones which were used for cooking, the surroundings in the Goshala were filled with other Barrels kept the same way on the rocks, they kept the vessel with lamp at the base of the big clay pots, Two small pots were kept to the front filled with water, and rice filled Teak leaf was spread before them. Incense sticks were lit and kept in between the main and small pots. A lamp was also lit and placed near the brass vessel. The basket filled with cooked rice and a brass vessel filled with water were placed to the right side of the pots. This time only the newly married who were clad in white sarees performed this ritual. One by one, they came to the Puja place, sprinkled water and rice taken from the leaf and small pot respectively. Money was offered, and in the end they did salutation by bending down and touching their head to the ground. The ritual came to a halt when all the women clad in white sarees were done with their turn.

Now the Gonds, especially Pradhan’s entered Goshala. An arrangement was made at the centre of Goshala. All the Pradhan Kitta people with the main Pradhan, sat on a mat spread on ground, and in front of it, two more mats were spread and all the Gond women sat on them in a semicircle, facing Pradhan’s. Pradhan sang about Parichaya vedika in the Myth, and it was supported by Kikkiri instrument played by himself, this continued for some time. The remaining people (Pradhans), who sat with the main Pradhan have done the chorus work. All the Gond women who sat opposite to Pradhan’s, listened to the songs of Pradhan, and after an hour or so the songs ended. Then Gond women stood up, and started offering money on the mat, where the Pradhan sat. Some of the sisters of Mesram who sat to the right of Pradhan on mat, spread a white cloth on the ground. Then the Gond women offered money in change even to them. After that the Bheati Koriyal ended.

Conclusion:
The Gonds (Mesram clan) strictly Performance of Bheati Koriyal is practicing and participating every year in the Nagoba Jatara. In the community some of the people are well educated though
they are following and encouraging their traditions of Jatara. Every Gond Bride is trying every year to participate in the Bheati Koriyal. If they completed the ritual they felt happy. Some of Gond women from 5 to 20 years they are trying to participate in that ritual but they are not getting chance, because of in their family members often deceased. And the Gonds are enjoying the Bheati Koriyal ritual performance.

Notes:
1. Thum (Pindaarpan) is a ritual followed by Gond’s for their dead members.
2. Goshala is a place for cows, it is Gond’s holy place.
3. Mashals are traditional lamps of God Nagoba.
4. Kalikom is a musical Instrument.
5. Masai God is a watch man of Nagoba temple, and this is the belief of Gond’s.
6. Naivedya means is many kinds of food item or fruits offered to the God.
7. Mud Platform is a part of Nagoba temple, where Serpent god holes looking like ant hills are made.
8. Kikkiri is traditional musical Instrument, it will play when telling story of Nagoba.
9. Pippiri is musical Instrument, it will play with other musical Instruments before starting Nagoba story
10. Mothuku leaves are weaved like plates for keeping Naivedya.

References:
- Gond (May-2002) Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute, Telugu Samksema Bhavan, Masab Tank, Hyderabad-28(Pamphlet of Tribal Welfare Department).

Photos of Bheati Koriyal Performance
1. This is the Satik Goddess room. These are Katoda, Patel and Pradhan Kitta women.

2. Sister of Mesram clan guiding two Brides, for Introducing to Goddess Satik and Gond community in the temple of Nagoba.

3. These are Brides, covered their face with the white Sari. While Performing Bheati Koriyal.