



THE "HO" AND THEIR DANCES

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I. INTRODUCTION

The word 'Ho' signifies three things to the tribe. First of all, it is the name of the tribe; secondly, it refers to a man; and thirdly, it also refers to a husband. The Ho tribe is also known as *Larks Kol* or *Kolha*. They live mainly in Singhbhum district of Bihar, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar district of Orissa. Those in Orissa are migrants from Singhbhum, and those in Singhbhum have been there for a long period. According to Singh (1994:404), the Hos are concentrated in the Kolhan area of the Singhbhum district of Bihar. They are also distributed in the adjacent areas of Orissa, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh ... they were once known as the *Kol* or *Larka Kol*. Their population in Bihar according to 1981 census is 536,523. According to Risley the Ho language was classed for linguistic purpose as the Kolarian but now this is regarded as belonging to the Kherwarian group of the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. The Hindi language and *Devanagari* script are used for inter-group communication.

II. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

The patriarchal system of India is no exception to the 'Ho' Adivasis. Father or husband is the head of the family. Family is the basic and the smallest unit in the 'Ho' social set up. The Hos are divided into a number of exogamous totemic clans such as Kunkel, Banra, Purti, Hemrom, and Hansda, etc. Kili (clan) is essentially a social unit and its authority is vested in the elders. It is also a means of social control. Each village is an independent entity. Different social groups living in a village are knit together on a socio-cultural pattern based on mutual obligations. *Munda*, the village headman and *Dehuri*, the village priest are the two important figures in the village. Adult marriage is practised and mates are acquired through negotiation and mutual consent. They have a custom of paying the bride price. They follow the patrilocal rule of residence. Divorce is permissible and may be sought by either spouse. Widows, widowers and divorcees are allowed to marry. Both,

nuclear and extended families are found in the Ho community. All the sons equally inherit the parental property. Women have a major role to play in the household economy. Man is the custodian of the family property. His livelihood is earned mostly from the land. Besides farming, Hos also work as daily labourers in mines and factories. Various forest-resources also constitute part of their income. The village co-operative system is still prevalent in the 'Ho' tribe. The Hos observe post-delivery pollution for nine days and perform the *chatia* (tonsure ceremony) of the child. Marriage takes place at the bride's house. The dead are buried and the death rites are performed on the ninth and tenth day.

III. POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The Hos in Kolhan area have a very strong and very well constituted socio-political governing body which was recognized by the British and the Government of India as an acceptable system. The following were the status in it :

1. Munda : the village head
2. Daku : the messenger
3. Manki : head of about 15 to 16 villages
4. Thahsildar : an assistant to Manki
5. Tin-Manki : a committee comprising of three members to settle disputes that are not settled by the Manki
6. Chawkidar : the one who reports various incidents like death, suicide, etc., to the police.

IV. RELIGIOUS ORGANISATION

Hos believe in the Supreme Being (Sing Bonga) who is the creator of everything. They also believe in gods and goddesses existing in the form of *bonga* (spirits). They are believed to be hovering around hills, forest, cultivated fields which are in the village premises. A particular village must have a *johera than* (permanent abode) for its *bongas*, usually a *sal* grove where sacrifices are offered. The Hos believe in the souls of the departed ancestors and give them a place in the kitchen, which is considered to be the most holy place in a Ho's 'Oa' (house).

Sacrifice plays an important part in a Ho's life. Usually sacrifices are to thank Singbonga when they are happy and to seek help from him when they are in difficulty. There are two types of sacrifices : One is offered at home on behalf of the family, and the other at the village level during feasts. Various ceremonies are observed at different stages of the life cycle of a Ho. The underlying belief behind these ceremonies is that peace and prosperity of a village be safeguarded by village deities. Regular offerings and sacrifices

keep them satisfied and free them from all evil and suffering. The Hos believe that the deities often visit the village with calamities if they are neglected. Hence, the village *Deuri* (priest) is charged with the grace of offering sacrifices on behalf of a Ho village community. Some of the important ceremonies are: Birth, namegiving, marriage and death, etc.

V. PHILOSOPHY OF THE TRIBE

The philosophy of the Ho regarding the world, man and Supreme Being is based on their creation.

1. Philosophy of the World : Nature is the world of a Ho. All the creatures are created by the Supreme Being. There is a close inter-relatedness among the Creator, nature and the creatures. This inter-relatedness and inter-dependence is very essential for the harmony and continued existence of the world.
2. Philosophy of Man: Man is the protector of nature, i.e., land, river, forest, and the entire cosmos itself. This responsibility is entrusted to him by Singbonga. Man is a rational being. 'T' designates the whole community. The experience of strangerhood (from the myth) in the life of a Ho makes him all the more to be one with his tribal community.
3. Philosophy of God: God is the Supreme Being, the Ultimate. He is everything and we are nothing in front of him. He is the life giver and everything depends on Him.

VI. DANCES OF THE HOS

(A) Ho Festivals : Since agriculture is their main occupation the seasons are divided and defined by the cycle of agricultural activities which start and end with rituals and festivals. This also indicates their closeness to nature. The life of a Ho goes smoothly and rhythmically with dances, songs and celebrations. Main feasts are Maghe Parab, Ba Parab, Hera Parab, Dasai Parab, etc. Among the Hos, dancing is found on all happy occasions such as births, weddings, feasts and festivals.

(B) Special Features of the Ho Dance: The main source of information for the Ho dances is Griffiths (1993:244). It is only the women who dance and not the menfolk. The men only play and sing. But it can not be universally claimed that men never dance. Certain areas may have the practice of menfolk also dancing. But in the Ho philosophy of life it is considered effeminate to dance, for eunuchs dance, and since Kols are men they should not dance. Among the Kols living close to other ethnic groups, such as the Gonds and even the outcaste groups, the men-folk dance.

(C) Types of Dances

1. The Dadra Dance: This is the main type of dance among the Hos. The dance is called by the same name as the songs sung with it: the dadra. On the basis of various rhythms and movements this dance has the following main forms:

- (a) **The Purani Chal** : This form of dance may look the same as the Dadra but there are certain variations and differences in the rhythm and the movement of the dances.
- (b) **The Shaitani** : The literal meaning of the word 'shaitani' is 'satanic' or 'devilish'. In this form of dance the words sung are very abusive and suggestive. On the occasions of such a dance with its accompanying songs, youths and maidens very often elope.

Griffiths gives a picturesque description of how the dadra dance is the most common and most popular among the Hos. On some occasions, men first gather around in the evening and sing and play for an hour. Then a few women, whose number ranges from one to six, put on the dancing costume over their saris. Without the dancing costume they do not dance. This costume consists of two pieces: a red and yellow *lahanga*, which is like a dress made of many folds and is tied at the top so that the bottom just sweeps the ground, leaving the feet barely visible. They cover the head with the second portion, the *chunariya*, a shawl made of the same material as the *lahanga*. The shawl is thrown over the head and is held by the left hand so that when the person is standing erect the face is covered. *Ghunghurstis*, the anklets making a jingling sound, are worn on the feet.

After the dancers have put on their dancing costume in front of the spectators, the dancers go round and stand facing the players. If there are many dancers they do not go there at the same time. When they start dancing they do not keep together in their movements. While one is standing the other may be whirling. It is customary for the dancers to keep silence for a few minutes in front of the players who are singing to them and coaxing them to begin their dance. Then, finally the knee is slightly bowed and the dancer begins to whirl. If the movement at first is started in a clockwise direction, that direction is followed by all the dancers. But if the counter clockwise movement is started, all follow the same. The dancers, on the whole, prefer the clockwise movement to the anti clockwise. But there is no hard and fast rule about it. The dancers turn a number of times, but there is no set of number of turns. The turn must fit into the song and that is all. The whirling is not rapid. After completing the revolutions the dancers stop, facing the drummers and the male singers, and begin the songs of the girls. The menfolk stop their singing, but accompany the girls on their drums. While singing the girls move by slow steps first to the left and then to the right, but not more than four or five feet in either direction from the original position. With the movement of the feet the legs are shaken so that the anklets make a jingling sound.

2. **Karma Dance**: The famous Karma dance of the Oraons, Gonds and some other tribes, is not performed by the Ho. One of the reasons is that in this dance both men and women participate and the Ho males as per their rule do not dance. They have often watched other tribes dancing the Karam dances. But according to Russell and Heeralal, as found in Griffiths, the Hos also perform the Karma dances.

VII. CONCLUSION

The Ho have a rich culture and customs of the traditional society as their way of life. But it is a well known fact that change is inevitable for any society at any point of time, at any place. It is caused by both, external and internal forces. The Ho society, besides its many adaptive changes was exposed to various vagaries of modern forces of industrialisation and urbanisation, long before independence. Therefore, we notice a lot of changes in their social institution, economic activities, political structure and leadership, religious belief and rituals, etc. Main agents of change are post independence developmental projects, Government and other Voluntary Agencies, and pre-eminence of Hindu impact on the Hos. The challenge before us is to help them to embrace and appreciate the good and meaningful values and practices in their culture so as not to lose their identity and to prepare them for adaptive changes for the better.

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