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An Ethnographic Manifestation of Religious Life of Gadaba Tribe in Its Changing Dimensions

Soubhagya Ranjan Padhi¹

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Abstract

The captivating tribal communities living across the length and breadth of the state of Central India and mostly in Odisha have enriched the cultural heritage of the region by their cultural diversities. Gadaba's religious life reflected through their rich folk traditions of songs, dance, music, rituals and festivals celebrated round the year adds colourful dimensions to their very existence. The amazing conglomeration of traditions, beliefs, sorrows and philosophies that together constitute and vitalize the religion of tribes has descended from antiquity and has been preserved unimpaired to the present day. Every dimension of their life covering round the year activities is intimately connected with religion and the world view associated with it. It is these aspects of their culture that give meaning and depth to their lives and solidarity to their social structure. However, in recent days many changes have been taken place in traditional religious life of Gadaba tribe. Against this backdrop, this paper has tried to explore some of that core structure of Gadaba's religious life as well as the changing dimensions of their religious manifestation.

Keywords Religion · Beliefs · Rites · Rituals and traditional practices

Introduction

Tribal religion is the most primary form of religion found in human society. Religion derives its authority from the supernatural belief and is observed as an effective agency of social control. In small-scale tribal societies, religion is the sole cognitive system and thus shapes the total world view of the people. Though the role of religion is significantly reduced in modern times, it continues to be a strong moral force exercising control over these tribal people's behaviour, especially in times of social and emotional crisis. The original purpose of religious rituals and festivals

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was to maintain order in society, found in almost every society. Religion along with its beliefs and rituals is inseparable part of Gadaba way of life. These are the regular events of Gadaba society followed from generations. Religion for Gadaba tribe is a concrete experience which is associated with their deepest emotions, especially with fear, awe or reverence. Gadaba society has a wide range of institutions connected with religion and a body of special officials, with forms of worship, ceremonies, festivals, rituals, myths, beliefs sacred elements and the like.

The Gadabas

Odisha has a great variety of tribal population. The Constitution (Orissa) Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes¹ Order (Amendment) 1976 enlisted 62 tribal communities, and Gadaba tribal community is one of the prominent tribes among them. The Gadaba is one of the primordial tribes of India. They are the speakers of Mundari or Kolarian language (Mohapatra et al. 2006). They are seen in adjoining mountainous tracts of Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh. In Odisha, they are distributed mostly in seven different districts, viz. Koraput, Kalahandi, Sundergarh, Ganjam, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj and Phulbani. However, Koraput, which is designated as a Scheduled Area² has the highest Gadaba population among the districts. They inhabit 3000 ft. plateau of Koraput region and are mostly found in the southernmost part of the state in the district of Koraput. In Koraput district, they are found in large concentration in the blocks of Lamtaput, Semiliguda, Potangi, Nandapur and Boipariguda. Gadabas, by nature, are docile, honest, diligent in their work, hospitable and untouched by gluttony, fraud, prevarication and greediness. Their economic poverty is the result of centuries of superstition, domination of upper caste and inaccessibility to the rudiments of basic education and primary health care. No precise theory is in existence to prove the origin of Gadaba community. Nevertheless, Gadabas are considered as one of the early settlers of our country. One may trace their origin to the time of Ramayana. It is believed that their ancestors emigrated from the banks of river Godavari and settled in Nandapur, the former capital of the king of Jeypore of the present Koraput district in Odisha. It is also said that the Gadaba had migrated from the Godavari valley to settle eventually in Gadabapada, a village in

¹ Article 342 of Indian Constitution declares tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which are deemed to be for the purposes of the Constitution Scheduled Tribes in relation to that State or Union Territory. In pursuance of these provisions, the list of Scheduled Tribes is notified for each State or Union Territory and is valid only within the jurisdiction of that State or Union Territory and not outside. This constitutional article says that only those communities who have been declared as such by President through an initial public notification or through a subsequent amending act of Parliament will be considered to be Scheduled Tribes.

² The Scheduled areas in the state of Orissa originally were specified by the Scheduled Areas (Part A States) Order, 1950 (Constitution Order, 9), dated 23 January 1950, and the Scheduled Areas (Part B States) Order, 1950 (Constitution Order, 26), dated 7 December 1950, and have been specified as above by the Scheduled Areas (States of Bihar Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa) Order, 1977 (Constitution Order, 109), dated 31 December 1977, after rescinding the Orders cited earlier in so far as they related to the State of Orissa.

Lamtaput block of Koraput, wherefrom they again migrated to different places of the district in search of land. Another migration theory is also currently suggesting that Gadabas, who once belonged to the Munda group of tribals, were originally inhabitants of the Vindhya hills. The name 'Gadaba' seems to have been derived from the word 'Gada', name of a brook in the region. Later, on dislocation of tribal population, Gadabas might have migrated to Visakhapatnam region and then to Koraput. According to Mitchell, the word Gadaba signifies a person who carries loads on his shoulders. Gadabas were also employed as palanquin bearers in the hills. Thurston and Rangachari say that Gadabas are the primitive tribe of agriculturists, coolies and hunters. They are also employed as palanquin bearers in the hills of the former rulers of Jeypore and thus known as 'Bhoie Gadaba'.

Broadly, there are two main types of Gadabas. One is 'Bodo Gadaba' or 'Bada Gadaba' and the other is 'Sana Gadaba'. They are found mainly in the blocks of Lamtaput, Semiliguda, Potangi and Nandapur in Koraput district. They have a dialect of their own called 'Gutab' or 'Gutob' (Pfeffer 1999), although they use the local Odia language as well. The 'Bada Gadabas' still speak the tribe's original 'Gutob' language of the Munda language family, whereas the 'Sana' and 'OlarolOllar' Gadabas converse in what they call the 'Olaro' tongue of the Dravidian language family. Most Gadabas can also speak 'Desia', the Koraput tribal version of Odia. So, mostly Gadabas are trilingual or bilingual.

Scholars also classify this tribe into five subdivisions, such as the Bodo Gadaba, the Sano Gadaba, the Parenga Gadaba, the Ollar Gadaba and the Kapu Gadaba. Among the subgroups, the Bodo Gadaba group is held superior to all other groups. Thurston and Rangachari (1909) divided the tribe into five sections, viz. (1) Bodo or Gutob, (2) Parenga, (3) Olar, (4) Kathithiri or Kathathara and (5) Kapu. According to them, the last two sections, which were found to be settled in the plains, originally belong to Bodo (Gutob) section. Ramdas (1931) also reported a number of classes of Gadaba. The names of the four classes found by him also tally with those mentioned by Thurston and Rangachari, but he has specially omitted Kathithiri (Kathathara) from his list, perhaps because, by then, they no longer associated themselves with the Gadaba. Furer-Haimendorf (1943) too has divided Gadaba into three distinct groups. He has excluded the Kathakari (Kathathara) and Kapu, and also the Parenga from being counted as Gadaba. He has, instead, included the Dedeng Gadaba of the hills surrounding Salur (Andhra Pradesh) among them. In the similar manner, Bell (1945) who wrote the first edition of Koraput District Gazetteer noted three subdivisions of the Gadaba in the district of Koraput, viz. the Bodo, Sana and Ollar. The Ollar Gadaba was described by him to be a small community, who spoke a Dravidian language, but to all outward appearances they were similar to other Mundari speaking Gadaba. Rao (1969) states about a different type of Gadaba, viz. the Khattri (non-Dravidian speaking) Gadaba who live near Bobbili of Andhra Pradesh adjacent to Koraput district of Orissa. Thusu et al. (1969) have added another group called Gurram Gadaba in the category of Gadaba community. Majumdar connects the Gadaba with Munda family. He observes that the 'Gadabas of Jeypore, Orissa,'³

³ 'Orissa' was the previous name of the present state 'Odisha'. The name of the state from Orissa to Odisha changed in 2011 through 113th Constitutional Amendment Bill, 2010 in Indian Parliament.

are the only representative of the Munda speaking people' and they are 'now a small occupational group of palanquin bearers, living east of Jagdalpur of Chhattisgarh state and whose cultural life may be distinguished from rest of the tribal stock'. He further goes on to write that the Gadabas belong to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic family (Somasunderm 1949). Though the division of Gadaba varies from person to person, on the basis of language they can be clearly divided into two groups: the Ollar Gadaba forms the first group being the Dravidian speaking people and the rest form the Mundari speaking group.

According to 2011 census, the total population of Gadaba tribe in India was 1,31,883. However, Odisha has the highest Gadaba population in the country. The Gadaba population of Odisha constitutes 64.22% of the total Gadaba population of the country (2011). It is followed by Andhra Pradesh (28.87%), Chhattisgarh (6.47%) and Madhya Pradesh (0.44%). Even though Gadaba tribe inhabits only in four states, it has many precious cultural traits and incredible heritage. Odisha has the highest number of Gadaba tribe. They inhabit in most of districts of Odisha. The total population of Gadaba in Odisha was 67,138 during 1991 census went up to 72,982 during 2001 census establishing a growth rate of 8.70 per cent over the decade. According to 2011 census, the population of Gadaba tribe in Odisha was 84,689 and in Koraput district alone, their population was 68,677. In other words, 81% of Gadabas of the State are found in this district (2011).

Religious Symbols and Practices

The religious practices of Gadaba community revolve around the pivotal components of the sacred meeting place—the *Sadar*; the village deity—the *Hundi*; belief regarding soul and supernatural beings; rites, rituals and traditional practices; dress pattern and ornaments; dance, music and others. One can also observe the symbiotic relationship of human being and nature in Gadaba's religion.

The *Sadar*—Sacred Meeting Place

The *Sadar*, or sacred meeting place, is used for the discussion of any socio-religious phenomena. It, also considered as the place of village council, is central to every Gadaba village. The *Sadar* is located at the centre of the village under the shadow of a *jadi*, pipal or banyan tree. *Sadar* is a platform-like structure with both flat and erect stone slabs. It is just like a stone lounge usually raised one to three feet above the ground. Large slabs of horizontal and vertical stones are placed irregularly in a rough circle nearby it. The *Sadar* is dedicated to Mother Earth or Village Mother, who is a female deity and an important agent of prosperity. Normally, the large outer circle provides smooth seating arrangements. Though *Sadar* is a sacred symbol, it is used for several social, cultural, political and ceremonial purposes. It symbolizes to a significant place, which preserves their community values and identity. Various disputes are settled down and important decisions are taken there by elder members of Gadaba community. Here, the elder members of Gadaba community give judgment

for different offences, plan the religious agenda and programmes for important festivals and distribute the responsibilities to village officials for the smooth running of village administration. In fact, they meet at *Sadar*, to settle various important matters of the village. They even use *Sadar* as a resting place and treat it as a centre for gossip. The children pass their leisure time in this place (Fig. 1).

Hundi—The significant Village Deity

Close to *Sadar*, the shrine of the *Hundi*, the village deity is located. In this place, one can find a heap of stones forming a dome-like structure called *Hundi* that represent the sacred village shrine. Gadaba people believe that the *Thakurani* (village deity) dwells in this place. Sometimes, either the stone or an iron rod is worshipped in the name of *Thakurani*. A sacrosanct vessel containing soils from three distinct sacred places (sometimes market places) and sands from river is also placed in the centre of the *Hundi*. Soil of different sacred places symbolizes wealth and good luck, whereas sand from river indicates vastness, harmony, tolerance and all other espousal capacity (Fig. 2).

Fig. 1 *Sadar*—the sacred meeting place of *Gadaba* village



Fig. 2 *Hundi*—the chief goddesses of *Gadaba* tribe



Even in recent days also visitor's eyes easily catch view of *Sadar* (the sacred meeting place), *Hundi* (a shrine of village deity) and *Gotar Munda* (ancestral commemorative place). The Gadabas keep their cattle in sheds, just next to the house. They enormously love their livestock and worship them during *Pusha paraba*. The boundaries of Gadaba village are made with stones of various sizes. Gadabas worship several deities to protect the village boundary. During marriage and other social functions of the village, the boundary of village is considered as an important stage of procession. Gadabas believe that the *Duma* (spirit) of a deceased roams around the village boundary and always want to provide harm to villagers. Therefore, they pray the village *Thakurani* to restrict the *Duma* to enter in the village. The cremation ground is situated at the west of the village.

Changes in Beliefs Regarding Sacred Meeting Place and Hundi

In recent days, the sacred meeting place as a decision-making place has lost its past glory as it has been largely replaced by modern Panchayat institution, but the religious importance of this is still intact. For any village-level religious celebration, the meeting for the preparation is still held at this place even today. In the similar way, *Hundi* is still very much relevant and worshipped with great reverence today. Gadabas in recent days also believe that *Hundi* is instrumental to bring all happiness and tranquillity in their life.

Beliefs Regarding Soul and Supernatural Beings

The Gadabas not only show their faith in supernatural powers but also worship their ancestors in several auspicious occasions. They believe that all persons possess the soul called '*Atma*'. When a person dies, the soul departs from the body. Unless the funeral rites are performed, the soul remains nearby and becomes a '*Duma*' (ghost) till they are performed gracefully.

The Gadabas also believe in the existence of the Supreme Being whom they call *Devta* or *Mahaprabhu*. Like many other tribal communities of the world, the Gadabas also hold an anthropomorphical view of God and they believe in polytheism. They worship different elements of nature to satisfy their religious needs. Some of the popular Gods and Deities worshipped by Gadabas are described in the following.

The *Nisani Munda* is the village God. He lives in a periphery of the village and considered as the most important God of Gadaba society. Before every festival, ritual or important function, villagers worship at *Nisani Munda*. The other Gods and Goddesses include *Bana Durga* (the deity of jungle), *Iswar* or *Mouli*, *Bhairavi*, *Jhakar*, *Satabhauni*, *Dandapatdai* (worshipped for epidemics), *Kamini* (Goddess of water), etc. The Goddess of water *Kamini* is worshipped before fishing and also on other agricultural festivals. *Dasmati* is the God of earth. She is the God of fertility of soil and is worshipped for more production of crops. *Dongar Devta*, who lives in the hills near the village, is an important God. While doing the cultivation in the uphill lands, shifting cultivation (*podu*), collecting forest food and other product,

they worship *Dongar Devta*. *Satabhauni* is worshipped for the good output. For epidemics, they worship both *Budhi Thakurani* and *Dandapatadei*. Before any ritual starts, the village deity is prayed first. *Jatkitara* is the God of thunder and *Bijalitora* is the God of lightning and cloud. *Patkonda* God and *Jhakar* deity live near an isolated place in the village. *Gangama* or *Gangi Devta* lives in the tree. In every *pus* month (January), they worship her. They also worship moon and sun during certain occasions.

Changes in Beliefs Regarding Soul and Supernatural Beings

The forces of social change have affected the practice of some of the Gadaba rituals and customs observed on the occasion of birth, marriage, death and other festivals. Influence in the ritual aspect has largely come from the high-caste Hindus. They consider the Hindu ritual practices as belonging to a dominant culture. Their assimilation with the Hindu religion has changed many of their traditional religious practices. Like all other aspects of social and cultural life, changes in religious beliefs and rituals among the Gadaba have been widely observed. Nowadays, certain festivals such as *Bag Puja*, *Kida Biru Puja*, *Gotar*, *Bandapan* and *Mandia Puja* have disappeared among the Gadabas of Semiliguda, Nandapur and Potangi blocks of Koraput district.

Not only various changes have occurred in the rituals for worshipping the ancestors, but also changes are observed in the worship pattern of village deities. Previously, for the worship of God '*Jhankara*' they had to sacrifice a cow in the month of November (*Kartika*). After this, a festival was observed which popularly called as '*Bagha Jatara*' (Tiger festival). This was observed to prevent the people and cattle from tiger attack. These days no such festival is celebrated by them. Only the worship of *Jhankara* takes place in the month of *Kartika* (November).

At present, the cattle and buffalos sacrifices have been stopped in the entire district due to the spread of literacy and influence of Hindu religion. Because of financial burden, most of Gadabas are not showing interest for celebration of *Gotar* festival. Traditionally they sacrifice buffalo in *Gotar* festival (for observing death rituals). But the cost of buffalo is very high now. This high cost also has unprovoked Gadabas to celebrate *Gotar*. Elaborate and expensive rituals connected with the annual festivals and life cycle of an individual are no more observed with their usual pageantry and grandeur. Instead, they have started to celebrate some of the Hindu festivals such as *Holi*, *Dasahara*, *Rathyatra* and *Diwali*. Influenced by modern values, some Gadabas are celebrating birthday of their children.

Under the influence of modernization the Gadaba, once a community of the earnest believers of *Duma* (ghost) and *Dissari* (medicine man) have started consulting local doctors and visiting nearby government hospitals for common illness. In some cases, relief from the diseases by the modern medical treatment has convinced them to gradually abandon the belief in the malevolent spirits. For diseases such as measles, chickenpox and smallpox, they worshipped *Dandapatadei*. She was worshipped in the sacred tree shrine of the village by *Dissari* (medicine man/astrologer) and *Pujari* (priest). A goat was sacrificed to the deity, and the hoisting of flag was done at the end of the village symbolizing that the disease has been driven out of the village. These activities are

no more observed in Gadaba villages. Due to the introduction of modern medication facilities and scrupulous vaccination, Gadaba people are now not taking the help of *Dissari* or *Pujari* for preventing these diseases. However, these changing traits are very much prominent in villages that are close to urban or industrial areas. But in remote villages, the deep seated religious belief has not been completely swayed away.

Rites, Rituals and Traditional Practices

Religion includes myths, rites and rituals that symbolically express them. In its broadest sense, rituals include all patterns of behaviour, from daily greeting and birth rites to death rites. Religious rituals are those thought which are considered as sacred and associated with the fundamental operations of the universe.

They perform many kinds of rites and rituals like rites of passage: birth, marriage and death and rituals related to land, man, god and *Dumas* (spirits) of ancestors, in appropriate time according to the annual festive cycles and in other auspicious occasions. The ceremonies are frequently performed by Gadaba priest, medicine man and other religious leaders, who make some remedies in order to control the crisis situation and establish order and stability in their society. Thus, rituals are observed to seek the blessing and cooperation of God, *Duma*, and other supernatural powers.

Rituals Related to Land, Man and God

Gadaba people have many agricultural rituals which are observed at different agricultural operations and availability of crops or vegetables. They observe certain rituals during some important agricultural operations such as preservation of seeds, ceremonial germination of seeds, ploughing, seed showing, protection of crops from various diseases, harvesting and new crop and vegetable eating. Ritual of liberate *Dumas* of ancestor through *Gotar* is another significant aspect of their rituals. For this, they observe annual sacrifice of animals (buffalos) and pray ancestors to provide their blessings and cooperations. Rituals protecting against diminishment is another sphere of their ritual pattern. Gadabas believe that various unnatural deaths such as being killed by wild animals, falling from tree, drowning and suicide cause pollution. In order to purify them, the whole village performs certain ceremonies. Rituals also performed to prevent evil powers who try to enter into the village. The evil elements should be immediately and effectively tackled; otherwise, they can spread diseases and other harms to the villagers. They believe that with an evil intention, some people can do witchcraft and sorcery and cause harm to other persons. They also believe in *Palta Bagh*, phenomena where the tribals think that some evil human being due to their witchcraft can turn to tigers and kill people and then change to human form (Padhi 2011b). To control these activities, Gadabas perform certain rituals with the help of *Dissari* and *Pujari*. In the religious and ritual life of Gadaba, worship of various physical environments of worship—viz. the image and the shrine; the materials of sacrifice—viz. wine, blood and grains; the general impediments of worship—knives, pots, leaves, sacred lamps, etc., are always

considered very sacred. The rice grains mixed with turmeric are used in many rituals and festivals as the most important sacred article. On many occasions, rice or millet flour is used to draw sacred line over the floor in rituals. They also use flower, branch of various trees, lamps, etc., for their festivals. Lamps are lit with either castor or *Karanj* oil. The earthen pots are most auspicious, and it has a special importance during their marriage and other rituals. Banana plants (*Musa sapientum*) are also used in marriage *bedi* (stage) as a sign of auspiciousness.

Birth Rites

Gadaba people previously believed in pollution which follows from a child birth. They used to observe it for 9 days. At the end of the ninth day, they worship *Jamaraja* (God of death), after which the name giving ceremony takes place. It is the *Dissari* who performs all the rites and selects a name for the new born which is thought to be auspicious.

Puberty Rites

The puberty rites of the Gadaba show a kind of rigidity. Irrespective of rich or poor, everyone observes the pollution and the rites are performed with great care. After a girl gets maturity, she is shut inside a room where no one is allowed to go. They observe the pollution of 9 days, and at the end of the ninth day, she is taken to the nearby river to have her bath. After bath, she wears a new cloth and the *Dissari* of the village is invited there to perform the rites. When the ritual gets over, a small feast takes place where only the adults are allowed to eat. The celebration comes to an end with a lavish feast in the evening where all are invited.

Marriage Rites

Russel and Hiralal write in their 'Tribes and castes of the central province' that a Gadaba girl is not permitted to marry until she can weave her own cloth. This rule was binding on them as they believed that Goddess *Sita* had cursed them to wear such handmade clothes (according to their myth). Previously, during the time of marriage the girl was supposed to wear hand-weaving cloth; otherwise, they believed that misfortune would ruin the family. During the marriage celebration, when the bridegroom is taken out in procession, his mother sprinkles rice over his body which is also believed to be auspicious from the point of view the couple's fertility.

Death Rites

The dead are buried with their feet to the West. On their return of the funeral, the members stop on the way and a fish is boiled and offered to the dead. An egg is

smashed and placed on the ground and pieces of mango bark are laid beside it on which the mourners tread. The house of the dead person is cleaned with cow dung by the children and women left behind. On the first day, food is supplied to the members by their relatives and in the evening some cooked rice and vegetables are offered to the dead. Thereafter, mourning lasts for 9 days; on the last day, cow or bullock is killed with the blunt head of an axe. Some blood from the animal and some cooked rice are put in leaf cups and placed on the graveyard for the dead man. The animal is cooked and eaten at the graveyard, and then, they return to the cooking shed and place its jaw bone under a stick supported by two others, blood and cooked rice being again offered. The old men and women bath in warm water, and all return to the place where the dead man breathed his last. Here, they drink *pen-dam* (rice beer) and have another meal of rice and beef which is repeated on the following day and the business of committing dead to the ancestors is complete. Liquor is offered to the ancestors on the feast day (Russell and Hiralal 1916).

Changes in Rites, Rituals and Traditional Practices

The Gadaba of sample area still believe in the pollution which follows a child birth. They observe it for 9 days as it observed before. However, some changes have been taken place in their birth rites. The affluent classes of the Gadaba society have started to imitate the modern kind of birthday celebration in which they celebrate with a birthday cake. Previously, the gift was given in kind which constituted paddy, chicken, goat, etc. These gifts were used in the feast, which resulted in less expenditure. But contrary to this, these days gifts constitute money in cash and various other fashionable items such as toys and dresses (Padhi 2014).

Though no change has occurred in the ritual part, the celebration on occasion of puberty varies from family to family with their economic status. Lavish feast, costly clothing is the preferences and privileges of the rich, whereas the poor families suppress their desires for such display.

One of the significant changes that have been observed in Gadaba marriage is the presence of a Brahmin priest in the marriage ceremonies of the Gadaba living in plains. This shows the acceptance of the domination of the *Brahminical* culture. But these are changes only on the surface level. The general beliefs associated with marriage rituals continue even now.

On the whole, death ritual is performed in the same way as it was observed before except some ritual changes. Previously, on the last date of mourning, the Gadabas eat beef which is an essential feature of their feast. But now in Gadaba villages the killing of cow is totally abandoned.

Another change is that of the extension of the mourning from 3 to 10 days. Of course, it varies from family to family depending on their economic condition. Affluent people prefer to celebrate it for 10 days, and at the end of the 10th day, the pollution gets over and a lavish feast follows in the tenth day. People who cannot afford the feast on the tenth day prefer to finish up the ritual on the third day with a small feast and postpone the '*Dasha*' (tenth-day ritual) to any time period within 1 year.

The 'Gotar' Ceremony—A Rite-de-passages for Transition of Spirit

The Gadabas are afraid of the *duma* (evil ghost). Every year their family members are worried about those *dumas*. They offer food and provide sacrifice to satisfy them. The *duma* goes away to other world permanently, when his [her] children/grandchildren celebrate 'Gotar' ceremony, do the sacrifices of buffalo for their 'moksha' (salvation). Hence, the *dumas* are transferred to the other world through 'Gotar' ceremony.

Gadaba's world view possesses a form of thought that influence the conception of their universe. They broadly divide the universe into three categories, viz. *Bhitarpur* (inner world or underworld), *Dhartan* (earth) and *Debata Desh* (the place of God, i.e. sky). After one's death, his spirit lives in the underworld known as *Bhitarpur*. In every stage of life, they have some short of beliefs and practices. According to their world view, they believe that death is caused due to the departure of *Jiv* (unseen power of life) after which the soul undergoes salvation.

They perform many kinds of rites and rituals during *Gotar* like other rites of passage, viz. birth, marriage and death. They perform these in appropriate times with the advice of *Gotaria Dissari* (the priest specializes for *Gotar* rituals). This ceremony is grandly performed by *Dissari*, who is supposed to bring some remedies in order to control the crisis situation and establish order and stability in their society. Thus, *Gotar* rituals are observed to seek the blessing and help of God, *duma* and other ancestors. Basically it is treated as a rite of passage through which evil *duma* gets salvation and becomes free from the painful life (Dash and Pradhan 2009).

Gadabas have a strong belief that unless and until the spirit gets *Gotar*, it roams here and there restlessly. Only after the completion of *Gotar* ceremony by his/her kin members, the *duma* (spirit) gets peace and enters the *Bhitarpur* (underworld—the land of death) with tranquillity.

In *Bhitarpur*, the spirit lives like a human being. In this world, the spirit leads its life as a cultivator.⁴ Therefore, the relatives of the deceased offer the spirit some agricultural equipment such as plough, rice and axe, along with some new cloth, ornaments and *pendam* (customary rice liquor) at the time of *Gotar*. They believe that spirit likes these things and after receiving these things the spirit will be very much satisfied in *Bhitarpur*.

In this *Gotar*, they sacrifice only buffalo because they believe that buffalo represents the deceased person. So if buffalo is sacrificed, then only *duma* will get salvation and live in *Bhitarpur* with peace. Feeding the dead through *poda* (buffalo) is the most sacred and required ritual which symbolizes rite of passage for Gadaba life (Berger 2001).

The Gadaba people express their satisfaction for having the opportunity to perform *Gotar* ceremony. Some Gadaba families celebrate collectively for their dead family members for whom 'dasa' (tenth day) rituals have not been performed earlier due to some difficulties. The celebration of this ceremony is highly expensive,

⁴ Gadaba tribe mainly considered as cultivators. Agriculture is the dominant source of livelihood for majority of Gadaba household. They are famous for their traditional indigenous techniques of paddy cultivation.

and thus, it is sometimes celebrated jointly by a number of Gadaba families. Ramadas wrote, 'Every Gadaba has to perform this great ceremony within three or 4 years after the death of his father. This ceremony is called the *Gotar*. The son or the brother of the dead man, after the corpse has been disposed of, picks up a stone from the place where the dead body has been disposed off and preserves it carefully for the *Gotar* ceremony' (Ramdas 1931).

When the family members of a deceased person are not able to perform the *Gotar* ceremony immediately, they go on saving a part of their produce every year. At the end of the 3 or 4 years, when the members of a Gadaba household accumulate sufficient agricultural produce for the ceremony, they send out invitations to their kith and kin living in village and even in far-off places, to attend the *Gotar* to be performed on a particular day. Among other terms of food and drinks, the sacrifice of a buffalo is a must. The brothers or relatives of the dead arrange a buffalo for the purpose. Other relatives, with their family members, reach the place a day or two before the fixed day to participate in this grand festival.

'*Gotar*' ceremony is a reflection of kinship ties. It is celebrated in many stages according to its traditional norms. In each stage, numerous rituals are performed with the cooperation of kin members. As *Gotar* is a very expensive festival, it is not normally observed by a single household individually. *Gotar* is celebrated in the month of *Magha* (mid-January to mid-February), because during this time Gadaba households have sufficient stock of agricultural crops. However, before a year or so the proposed date of the ceremony is declared by the *Gotaria Dissari* (the priest specializes for *Gotar* rituals). Normally in the month of July or August (of previous year), the villagers organize a meeting for the celebration of *Gotar* through the proper guidance of *Dissari*. Even though this meeting is arranged to declare the tentative date, it is sanctified by *Dissari* through number of rituals. *Dissari* sacrifices a crab or a pig at the doorstep of the person who has to tie *Kuti Poda* (the chief Gotar Buffalo). Once it is done, villagers beat *Gotar* drum, sing and perform *Dhemsas*⁵ dance in front of the Gotar doer and finally Gotar ceremony is celebrated in order to provide salvation of the deceased soul.

⁵ They are known for their *Dhemsas* dance, which is performed by women wearing their famous *Kerang Sari*. The main folk play musical instruments, while women dance. Their musical instruments consist of big drums, *Tal Mudibaja*, *Madal*, Flutes, *Tamak* and *Mahuri*. They compose their own songs befitting different occasions and sing these songs while dancing. Sometimes, they form a ring by joining hands all round and with a long hop spring towards the centre and then hop back to the full extent of their arms, while they at the same time keep circling round and round. At other times, the women dance singly or in pairs, their hands resting on each other's wrists. In every festival, Gadabas love to dance. During festivals, the women and cheery maidens wear *Kerang sari* reaching half way to the knee, great rings on their neck, rings on their fingers, brass bell on their toes, heavy brass bangles on hand and various necklaces in their neck and perform *Dhemsas* dance with music, while dancing they sing but usually when they are exhausted after dancing a lot they wish to sing. They sing melodious songs in either *Gutob* or *Ollar* language. These songs and dances bring integration among them in the field, forest and village.

Changes in Beliefs Regarding Gotar Rituals and Supernatural Beings

Though *Gotar* ceremony is celebrated by *Gutob* Gadabas, the type of handling the buffalo to recover coins from the rectum is no more practiced. In the present days, it is observed that this ceremony has been almost stopped in Gadaba society. Some Gadabas opine that the high cost of buffalo, influence of Hindu religion, restriction imposed by the government for animal sacrifice and bloody fighting among tribals during the celebration are the main factors that have affected the *Gotar* ceremony in Gadaba society (Padhi 2011a). They are also gradually realizing the extent of cruelty involved in killing of animals in the name of rituals. Spread of education and contact with other educated mass has enabled them to realize it. With the declining trend of such practice, the worship of ancestor's spirit is also lost its importance. These days they mostly worship their ancestors inside their houses on different auspicious occasions. On the whole, death ritual is performed in the same way as it was done before except some ritual changes. Elaborate and expensive rituals connected with the annual festivals and life cycle of an individual are no more observed with their usual solemnity and splendour.

Dress Pattern and Ornaments During Their Religious Celebration

Gadabas are usually physically strong and good-looking people. Young Gadaba women are often very pretty in their appearance. They have good average height and dark complexion. Their physical traits are also very distinct with the salient feature of round head, straight black hair, flat and wide nose, long eyes, prominent forehead, moustaches and beards. The young Gadaba women are very charming with their slim figure. Their simple, shy and enchanting smile is always very appealing. The art of cloth wearing, decorating their body and hair particularly during religious celebration is another remarkable cultural trait of Gadabas. Both men and women tie their long hairs with linseed oil and decorate it with forest flowers and different ornaments. Gadabas use very scanty cloths. The men folk use a small piece of loin cloth called '*lenguti*' with a flap which hangs down in front. This type of cloth the elderly people wear when they are in agricultural field or at home. They also use *Gamacha* (napkin). During religious ceremony, the women wear long strip of cloth commonly known as '*Kerang*' (prepared from *Kerang* fibre) tied round the waist and a second piece of cloth is worn across the breast (Figs. 3 and 4).

The Gadaba women are fond of wearing a number of ornaments during religious functions generally made out of brass or aluminium. Traditional peasant jewellery fascinates the Gadaba women for its eloquent design. Even the poorest Gadaba women also wear ornaments. In earlier period, Gadaba women were wearing earring made of long pieces of brass wire in a circular shape which hangs down from a hole in the ear. They were also wearing metal rings in their neck and necklaces to which a coin was attached as a pendant previously. Gadaba males prefer to wear rings in their finger, bracelets in the wrists and earrings (*Guna*). Women use different types of hair pins and wear ear rings, nose rings and finger rings made with coins. They

Fig. 3 A Gadaba woman with traditional *Kerang* sari



Fig. 4 A Gadaba man with traditional *lenguti*



use bangles which are made of brass. Some of the commonly used ornaments of Gadaba community are given as follows:

Hair clip (*Khosa Dang*), big silver neck rings (*Khagla*), nose ring (*Dandi*), black necklace (*Taitul*), red necklace (*Bandara*), long necklace made with *Ghunguru* (*Bid/Gagara*), etc. (Figs. 5 and 6).



Fig. 5 Picture of traditional Gadaba ornaments

Fig. 6 Gadaba women with traditional ornaments on the occasion of religious ceremony



Changing Pattern in Dress

However, modern education, urbanization and contact with outsiders have largely contributed towards change in dress and use of ornament. Changes in dress have been brought about by those who had gone to study or to work outside the village. Such people are found even in the most traditional villages (Padhi 2011a). Recently with all the modern market facilities around, Gadaba women have started to use synthetic fabrics. They are wearing *Kerang* sari only on the occasion of different festivals and sometimes at the time of marriage. The young girls are using frocks and *salwar* in recent days. The dress of women also varies with age and education. The young ladies now generally wear sari and blouse, petticoat and under garments. Unlike old and illiterate women, the educated young women wear sari covering the lower parts of the legs up to ankles.

The male folk have started to wear *dhoti*, *lungies*. While the younger generation prefers to wear jeans, shirts, trousers and T-shirts, the elderly people still use turban on the head and *lenguti*. Sometimes, peculiar combinations of traditional and western dress are also observed in Gadaba society. During the winter, they have started wearing woollen cloths too.

Change in the dress pattern is due to urban influence. The tribal hostels for boys and girls have also contributed a lot in bringing about changes in the dress pattern. One can observe now young girls' bobbed hair in government hostel. The warden in such cases is the master craftsman in introducing new fashions among his wards. Nowadays, it is difficult to differentiate a Gadaba people from other non-tribal people merely on the basis of dress or appearance.

In recent times, use of the traditional ornaments such as wearing metal rings in neck and various coins as necklaces is rarely found among the Gadaba women of the sample areas of the present study, viz. Semiliguda, Pottangi and Nandapur blocks of Koraput district. Usually, the ornaments of Gadabas are made of brass, copper or silver. But now the economically better-off families are using gold ornaments. Women of this category are wearing a heavy set of anklets. Gadabas were fond of tattoo marks, but this habit has decreased among the new-generation people. They have lost their traditional and distinct appearance as well. It is not possible now to distinguish Gadaba folk by observing their traditional dress and ornaments.

Dance and Music

Dance carries a lot of meaning in the socio-religious life of the Gadaba. They perform *Dhemsā* dance during every religious festival. In recent days, the Gadabas are performing the dance in the form of circle as a modern influence. But earlier Gadaba dance was a type of wild jump, screaming, loud sought, etc. In *pus parab*, they dance before *Mahārabhu* (God) as if they are taking him in procession in the form of various animals. During the treatment of a patient, the *Dissari* perform his convulsive dance or pathogenic dance. This dance is performed by *Dissari* to remove evil spirit from the body of a person. Music and dance is considered as a way of life in Gadaba society. These are important aspects of their cultural heritage. Dancing in the village *Sadar* provides them opportunity for collective rejoining as well as inculcates in them a sense of cultural solidarity.

The Present Style

Gadaba music and dance has undergone change in some aspects mainly due to the impact of education and urbanization. Music and dance is becoming less popular among the educated and urban sections of the Gadaba society. The traditional dance and music which contains one of the salient features of Gadaba religious functions is slowly being replaced by modern romantic songs of album and films (Padhi 2011c).

Conclusion

The religious ceremony is intended to bring together all the members descended from one ancestor (Das Connel: 1999). The gifts and exchange which take place among the Gadaba families during these ceremonies reflect their close social relationship. Through this ceremony, they strengthen their solidarity, so it has its implication for cementing the socio-economic bond among them. It also symbolizes cooperation and kinship fraternity in Gadaba community. In Robert Merton's perspective, religious festival's latent function is marked through the foundation of village solidarity. In fact, it is one type of unanticipated consequence, which is functional for their entire system. In Durkheim's framework, one can observe that people in this simple society go for rite of passage rituals. During this occasion, they just sing together, perform dance together and glorify their customary ideas together, but at the same time, this form of get-together enthusiastically promotes a sense of unity and solidarity among the members of community. Actions have both intended and unintended consequences. Sociological analysis is required to uncover the unintended consequences; indeed, to some this is the very essence of social reality and world view of a community living. Berger (1963) has called this 'debunking' or looking beyond stated intentions to real effects.

An analysis of customs and practices of Gadabas reveals that there have been some changes in their religious life. But the core rituals are observed either at household level or in the community. The Gadabas are passing through a transitional stage in the field of festivals and celebration of religious rituals. They have started believe in new gods or goddesses from whom they could get blessing for their well-being. Modernization has brought the formation of new identities and reconstructed meaning of religiosity. The influence of other religious practices is now evident in them. Their ritual is now a blending of old and new. They have not yet abandoned the old customs totally; at the same time, they have adopted some new rituals in the process of economic development and modernization.

Author Contribution This article derives primarily from my empirical work as a researcher and partly as principal investigator for two major projects by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and University Grants Commission (UGC) in the tribal regions of Koraput district of Orissa (India) which is predominantly inhabited by Gadaba tribal population. As I am a native of this place and disciple of Sociology/Social Anthropology, I have very intensively observed the ethnographic dimension of the cultural capital of Gadaba tribe in its changing scenario. My engagement in the religious life of this indigenous people is analyzed in the theoretical framework of socio-anthropological perspective. As an ethnographer, my passion for intensive field work with participant observation among Gadaba tribe led me to organize to learn the worldview of the community and the perception of their religious life. This particular essay emerged from nearly ten years of both active and passive ethnographic fieldwork with Gadaba tribe who are very religious and have an enchanting life very closely associated with a number of religious beliefs. I am enormously indebted to their hospitality and accepting a stranger like me though of late I became no more an outsider to them. I'm sure this work will provide certain valuable information about the cultural traits of the community which is day by day decaying considerably.

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