Ethnography of Jatapu Tribe Eastern Ghats of India

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Abstract – Jatapu tribal people are the inhabitants of Eastern Ghats of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa states of India. Very little number of these Tribal people are also settled in several districts of Telangana. The history of Jatapu tribal people is still not known. They claim themselves to be descendants of Janaka, a mythological king of Ramayana. The language of this tribal people is called Jatapu, but most of the people of this tribal community use Telegu language. Some of these people are also well conversant in Oriya language as well who are living in odisha. Even the Jatapu tribal can speak in various Oriya dialects too. The total population of Jatapu is distributed about (1, 41,729) that is (0.135%), in total Tribal population of India. The state wise sex ratio of population is Andhra Pradesh Males (60,811), Females (65,848), Odisha Males (7,231), Females (7,659), Telangana Males (94) Females (86).

Key Words Jatapu, Janaka, Ramayana,Kandha Tribe, kavi, Dhimsa, Shandi.

1. INTRODUCTION

India is the natural abode of hundreds of tribal communities. The tribal communities live in forests, hilly tracts and naturally isolated areas from the civilized urban society. That’s why in nature they developed their own cultures. They depend upon the nature for their food, shelter and livelihood thus the vegetation has much influence on the tribal life. The total population of scheduled tribes in India is 10,42 lakhs and constitutes 8.6% of the total population as per 2011 census report. The tribal population of Andhra Pradesh is 59.18 lakhs (5.7%), Odisha 96 lakhs (9.2%) of the total Indian tribal population. In this paper we have done an attempt has been made to present an ethnographic profile of jatapu tribe. Data were collected, using various ethnographic field work techniques, from tribal areas of Srikakulam, vizianagaram, koraput, ganjam districts of Andhra Pradesh, and odisha.

Introduction of Jatapu Tribe

They are known as Jatapu and have synonyms like Jatapu Dora and Samanthulu etc. Believed to be a civilized section of the Kandha tribe, now they are a distinct community and consider themselves socially superior to the Kandha. They claim themselves to be descendants of Janaka, a mythological king of Ramayana (Thuston 1909, Pratap 1978). According to Thurston (1909), the name ‘Jatapu’ is popularly believed to be an abbreviated form of Konda Jatapu Doralu or lords of the Kond (Kandha). He defined them as a civilized section of khond, who speak khond on the hills and telugu in the plains. They claim themselves to be a separate endogamous tribe with distinct socio cultural patterns. However, they do not remember their origin or history. Jatapu tribal people are basically agrarian people but some are also engaged as forest laborers, collecting and selling forest products. They grow chilies, peas, beans etc in their field. Their staple food is rice. Some earn their livelihood by selling products of pottery and other artifacts. People of this tribal community prepare baskets, earthen pots, bangles etc for their economic betterment. The jatapu tribe enjoys superior status to the neighboring Savara Tribe. They do not have comensal relations with savara and other living along with them in a few villages. They live in the hilly terrain and foot hills of undisvided Koraput and Ganjam districts of South Odisha and adjoining Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh.

2. AREA AND CLIMATE

Jatapu is an agrarian tribe mainly found in the Eastern Ghats of Vizianagaram, Srikakulam, Koraput, Ganjam districts of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. The habitat is hilly terrain, plain areas and foot hills. The average altitude of hilly terrain is around 500 ft to 3000 ft above mean sea level. Climate is temperate to warm ranging from 43°C to 13°C, low humidity, thin to medium forest cover and medium to above mean rainfall. The climate where Jatapu are living has its influence on the food habits, dressing, housing and cropping pattern. Climate plays a very significant role in the lives of Jatapu. Whenever there are changes in climate i.e., scanty rainfall or heavy rainfall it would directly affect the economy of the Savara due to low agricultural yield. The heavy and incessant rains of the south-west monsoon and the north-east monsoon lash the eastern ghats of the region feeding waters to innumerable fast flowing hill-
streams, rivers and rivulets. About 2/3rd of the rainfall is received from the south-west monsoon (June to September).

3. LANGUAGE

Language among these Jatapu is traditionally passed on, without written documents having their own dialect. Jatapu have their own dialect called ‘kui’ or ‘kuvi’ but they commonly speak Telugu in plains and Srikakulam hilly areas. They speak Kuvi - a Dravidian language spoken by the Kandhas of Koraput and Odia - the regional language of Odisha State. The Jatapu residing in boarder area adjacent to Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu to communicate with their Telugu speaking neighbours. But their mother tongue “Kuvi” is a Dravidian language closely akin to the Telugu language for which they are very conversant with Telugu.

4. DRESS PATTERN AND ORNAMENTS

Usually, jatapu men of older generations wear coarse loin cloth (gochi/koupinam) leaving the entire body bare. Women wear coarse handloom sarees purchased from the local weavers or from the nearest weekly market. They put on the saree above their knees to cover the entire body which is knotted on left side of their neck. At present both males and females are using modern dresses. Particularly on festive occasions, for visiting relative's house or on market days males use pants, shirts and banian and females wear mill made coarse handloom loin cloth (gochi/koupinam) leaving the entire body bare. Women, majority of tribal women do not wear bindi (red dot) on the fore head except some young girls of recent generations. Females anoint their body with turmeric paste.

FOOD HABITS

Rice, millets, pulses and wild edible plants are the main sources of food. In order to supplement their food requirement, the tribals gather edible tubers, rhizomes, leaves, fruits, seeds etc., from nearby forests in different seasons. Drinking of toddy and arrack is common among these tribes. Toddy tapped from Borasun flabellifer (Tadi kallu), Caryota urens (Jeeluga kallu) and Phoenix sylvestris (Eetha kallu) satisfy their hunger at times of scarcity. A kind of arrack prepared from the flowers of Madhuca longifolia (Ippa sara) is also a favorite drink to them. A very common drink prepared from roots of Plumbago zeylanica along with some other ingredients commonly known as ‘Maddi kallu’ is also a supplementary beverage for these tribes. These intoxicants along with country liquors are abundantly used during the times of festivals and marriages. They also consume alcoholic drinks like, rice beer, sago-palm juice and mohuli. Smoking of handmade cigarettes is common among men and women.

The pregnant woman is subjected to certain taboos for the well being of herself and her baby. She is prohibited to stand or sit near doorway or sleep alone and her husband is tabooed to kill animals or take part in hunting expedition. During the days of food scarcity they eat gruel made out of a powder consisting of dried mango kernels and tamarind seeds. Non-vegetarian food, which consists of certain preparations of meat, Domestic, forest animals and fish etc. and dried fish, are relished much more than the vegetarian food.

Usually they produce ragi, padadhan (a type of paddy), turmeric, zinger, kangu (a millet), kosla (a millet), alasi (nizer), janna (a millet), dangaranim, bodhei, kulthi (horse gram), biri (black gram) and red gram etc. They have some upland near the hill slopes where they raise kandul, maize, chilli, jhodung (cow pea) and semi (pea).

In their kitchen garden they grow brinjal, kumuda (pumpkin), kakudi (cucumber), chilli, lau (gourd), and varieties of other vegetables and green-leaves.

They are food gatherers. They depend on forest to collect varieties of seasonal forest produce like roots and tubers such as, karadi, sarenda, pita kanda, tarek kanda, sereng kanda, varieties of mushrooms, green leaves, fibers, fruits, flowers and medicinal roots and herbs, timbers, fuel wood, bamboo, fodders and grasses to thatch their roofs. Among the subsidiary occupations which they
5. SETTLEMENT & HOUSING PATTERN

They live near foot hills or hill slopes surrounded by forest and perennial hill streams that provide them drinking water throughout the year. The layout of settlements differs from tribe to tribe. The hamlets of Jatapus range from 5-15 huts each. The Savara hamlet is known as ‘Guda’. The Jatapus of the Srikakulam and Vizianagaram district live in linear shaped rectangular houses. Each settlement of Jatapu’s may consist of single row of houses or parallel rows of houses leaving a wide open street in between. At the village outskirts the shrine of their village deity Zankari Penu is installed under sacred trees. In each row of houses there may be 8-15 independent portions with a thatched roof. Generally, the houses are constructed with house building materials like Bamboo (Bambusa arundinacea), palmyra culms and other timber yielding plants. Grasses like Rellugaddi (Saccharum spontaneum) are extensively used in thatching. The walls are constructed with mud mixed with ash of burnt grass and are smeared with cow dung. These walls are also cleanly polished and decorated with clay and white coloured designs. Jatapu settlements are generally uni-ethnic and uni-clan in structure. In heterogeneous villages they dwell in separate wards maintaining distance from other communities and keeping their own identity. Now-a-days they also use bricks.

They generally construct their new houses after the celebration of Pongal festival. Their traditional priest- the disary is consulted to fix an auspicious moment to start the construction work. Preferably on Wednesday the centre pole is fixed ceremoniously at the house site. The bigger room is used as living room and to store the food crops and smaller one is used as kitchen. The house has no window for ventilation.

They keep their domestic animals in a separate shed in their backyards. In their rear verandah they construct a separate compartment to accommodate women during their menstrual period. They keep their surroundings neat and clean. They possess limited household assets. Their household utensils consisting of some aluminum pots, earthen wares and gourd vessels which are stored in the kitchen near their hearth. They keep their clothes, on a bamboo pole hanging on strings from the roof. Their hunting weapons like bows, arrows, spears and axes are hung on the walls of the living room. On their front verandah they keep their agricultural implements such as hoes, ploughs, leveler, yokes etc. Near the entrance of the living room they have their wooden mortar and pestle (paurani) on the floor for husking the grains by the female folk. On the rear verandah they keep a stone disc to grind the condiments.

6. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The society of the Jatapu tribal community is patrilineal and the women engage themselves in household works. Jatapu family is mostly nuclear. Adult marriage and monogamy is the norm but polygyny is also allowed. They follow patrilineal rule of descent and patrilocal rule of residence. Descent groups are classified as lohagond thari/bhagarulu consisting of agnatic descendants having right to inherit metal knife and axe, the property of the deceased kinsman and vamsa. The vamsa is again classified into three categories i.e. a) tainga (brother), b) tone-tainga (friend or bandhu), c) samading (son or daughter’s parents) affinal lineages.

The jatapu is an endogamous group which does not possess any sub tribe. However, their vamsa or phartry there exists several organizations are exogamous patrilineages which are totemic by nature and are named after plants, animals or objects. They revere their totem objects of vamsa and do not do any harm to it. Members of a vamsa consider themselves to be descendants from a common ancestor for which marriage within them is tabooed.

There are several exogamous vamsas i.e. kadraka (fowl), korada, bidika, kondagorre (sheep), pagoka, minaka, buala, padaka, toyika, harikanga (tortoise), itringi (a black bird), puridi (a yellow bird), lendruka (a tree called neradu), thandangi (plantain tree), thorika (wild fowl), madmangi (bull or cow), vali pitta (peacock), koalaka (arrow), kutraki (wild goat) and winka (termite), addaku (a leaf used to make meal plates), arika (a millet), prahka, neehka, moonika, agrigala (a millet) and winka (white ant),Jilakarra, korangi, kumbirika, meenoka, nimmaka, ootaka, oyyika, palaka, pathika, purvala, Thadangi, valiki, vullaka, etc.

Life cycle ceremonies

a. Birth

The child birth usually takes place in a separate lying-in-room near the rear the verandah enclosed for the purpose. They engage an experienced woman (dai-budi) of their own tribe or from Konda Dora tribe to assist the expectant mother for easy
Birth pollution continues for seven days and on the seventh day the mother and the new born baby takes purificatory bath. On the eleventh day the final purificatory rite is observed. It is conducted by their traditional priest the Disary and the name giving and the tonsure rites are also observed ceremoniously. Generally, the name of the ancestors are chosen for the new born baby applying rice divination method in which they offer arua rice to a cock uttering names of the ancestors and select the name on which the fowl picks the grain. On this occasion a feast is arranged for the kith and kin.

b. Puberty

They observe puberty rites for adolescent girl’s rites on their first menstruation. The girl is kept in seclusion for a period of seven days. During this time, the girl is tabooed to look at the male persons and enter into the kitchen. She takes her purificatory bath on the morning on the eighth day and her family hosts a nonvegetarian feast to the kinsfolk in the evening during which the latter offer presentations like new dresses and cosmetics to the girl.

c. Marriage

Marriage is a joyful incidence in Jatapu life. They consider marriage arranged through negotiation is ideal and prestigious. They prefer cross-cousin marriage like marrying one’s maternal aunt’s or paternal aunt’s daughter. Marriages are considered as a social custom and marriage in the same clan is strictly prohibited. Marriage by capture, by service (ilarakanon), by exchange, which are exceptions negotiations, mutual love and elopement are very common in these tribal communities. Arranged marriages are finalized after two or three visits from the groom’s side to the house of the bride. After obtaining the consent of the bride’s side, betrothal is undertaken observing the customs of bride price (woli), since payment of bride price is obligatory. It consists of presentation of certain amounts of cash, some gold ornaments and clothes to the bride and some jars of country liquor from the groom’s side. Then the village priest, Disary fixes the date of the marriage. At the time of marriage the ‘Bride’s Price’ usually known as ‘Oli’ is paid to the bride’s parents. If by any chance a woman leaves her husband to join herself to another, the other pays to the husband some price known as ‘Moganali’. Polygamy is observed but rather uncommon. In their society, the younger brother can marry his deceased elder brother’s widow. Similarly a man can marry the younger sister of his deceased wife. Remarriage of widow, widower and divorcees are permitted. Divorce is allowed on the grounds adultery and maladjustment in conjugal life. On the wedding day the groom goes to the bride’s place in a procession where the marriage rites are performed. Disary conducts the wedding rites by locking the hands of the bride and the groom.

After the marriage ceremony, the party, with the bride and the groom, returns to the groom’s village in a procession. The next morning the toe nail-cutting ceremony (Kalla gola sambranam) takes place. The priest attaches a kankanam (wrist thread), tying the wrists of both the partners together. Then the couple takes a bath in water fetched by unmarried girls. Finally, the groom’s family entertains the kinsfolk, relatives and guests with a grand feast with country liquor. They enjoy the occasion by singing, dancing and merry making.

d. Death

They practice burial or cremation to dispose of their dead. The news of a death is sent to the kith and kin soon to enable them to join the funeral procession. The corpse is bathed with turmeric water and put on a bamboo bier. The pall bearers carry the bier to the cremation ground accompanied by all the adults of the village in a funeral procession. The eldest son ignites the pyre. They return after the cremation is over and obstruct their path of return with thorny branches to prevent the departed soul to return to village and cause harms to the villagers.

Death pollution is observed for three days. During this period economic pursuits and household chores are suspended and the villagers provide food for the bereaved family. The death rites are held on any day after the third day of death, and a female sacred specialist, (Pejuni) plays an important role in performing the rites. The family offers annual sradha (panduku) on the honour of the dead on every Makar Sankranti. On this occasion a fowl or a goat is killed and cooked in the house, and a small portion of the cooked food is placed in a plate on the roof of the house in honour of the dead. A joint ceremony for commemorating the
dead involving all the tribemen of the village is also performed every twenty years.

7. ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

The Jatapus economy is largely influenced by the habitat in which they inhabit and level of knowledge accumulated about the natural resources and skills for exploiting these resources. The various tribal communities have different economic levels. Cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy. They depend mainly on slash and burn (podu) cultivation carried out on the hills around their habitat and also practice low land paddy cultivation (garavu) near foot hills. Those having no land have turned to working as agricultural laborers and wage-earners. Jatapus became agriculturists and domestication of cattle is their secondary occupation and also rear pigs, goats, fowl, etc., which play an important role in their economy. Shifting and Settled Cultivation: The main occupation of some of these jatapu tribes is agriculture. The shifting cultivation or podu cultivation is one of the ancient methods of cultivation practiced specially in the areas of forest and mountain tracts. They are basically shifting cultivators. Some of the Jatapu tribal groups especially those who live in the plains take up settled cultivation also. Mixed cropping pattern is practiced in podu cultivation. Method of Podu Cultivation: Generally Jatapus select such areas where there is a good growth of trees and bushes. After the selection of such land, they start clearing the bushes with sickle called ‘kodavali’ on an auspicious day. They sacrifice a fowl or break a coconut on this day to propagate Gods or ancestral spirits. They cut off the trees and the undergrowth with the help of axe and long sickle. As it involves a lot of manual labour, they commence this operation at the onset of summer. If there is a huge tree, which cannot be removed by them they dig holes around the trunk at the bottom and lit fire. The tree withers in a week and slowly falls on the ground. But they never cut any fruit bearing trees such as mango, tamarind, cashew nut, etc. When all the bushes that have been cleared get dried the Jatapus burn them and spread the ashes over the fields. When the monsoon is about to set in during the months of May or June, the tribals prepare the land for cultivation. They plough the soil with a ‘V’ shaped instrument with a long handle, appears to be a photo type of ‘plough’. When the monsoon sets in, the Jatapus start broadcasting the seeds. After one or two rains these seeds germinate. They erect ‘Machhe’ a temporary podu form shed, when the ear heads appear, to keep watch of the fields during day and night. Now and then the Jatapus beat empty tins with a stick to scare away wild animals or birds that destroy the crop. Generally, the Jatapus do not use either fertilizers or pesticides but they extensively use compost manure in podu fields. The traditional varieties of paddy, millets, pulses and vegetables were cultivated by them since several generations and they form the principal crops of their agricultural system. This traditional practice is a blessing in disguise and has conserved many primitive forms of crop varieties of millets, paddy and pulses. These primitive varieties are ecologically suitable, drought resistant and pest tolerant. They cultivate food as well as commercial crops. ‘Chodi’ or ‘Ragi’ (Eleusine coracana) is a staple food. They cultivate paddy (Oryza sativa) and also minor crops like Samalu (Panicum milare), gantelu (Pennisetum typhoides), jonnalu (Sorghum bicolor), korralu (Setaria italica). In addition, they cultivate pulses like green gram (Vigna radiatus), black gram (Vigna mungo), horse gram (Dolichos biflorus) and red gram (Cajanus cajan). The red gram grown in the tribal areas of Kurupam and Gumma lakshmi puram is of bigger variety and of fine taste commonly known as ‘konda kandulu’ (Atylosia cajanifolia). These are grown in podu patches only. The commercial crops like cashew (Anacardium occidentale), mango (Mangifera indica), chillies (Capsicum annum), tobacco (Nicotiana tabacum), 24 are cultivated and beady leaves (Diospyros melanoxylon) is also cultivated in a few pockets of agency areas. They too cultivate vegetables like brinjal (Solanum melongena), tomato (Lycopersicon esculentum), bottle gourd (Lagenaria siceraria), commonly known as ‘Doki anapa’. A wild legume locally called ‘karumchamba’ or ‘karuchamma’ (Canavalia gladiata) belonging to the family Fabaceae is cultivated for its fruits. In addition, they cultivate tubers like Manihot esculenta. Amorphophallus paeonifolius and Colocasia esculenta in their back yards.

a. Santha (Shandi)

The weekly markets are very popular economic institutions in Jatapu areas. It is known as Santha (Shandi) in this area. Usually the weekly markets are held at the foot of hills where bullock carts could reach. Male members carry the agricultural produce or minor forest produce on bamboo device called ‘kavadi’ and women folk carry on their heads. The weekly markets are organized at fixed places and at fixed timings on a particular day. In ‘Santha’ (Shandy) all kinds of articles, provisions, vegetables, clothes, salt, pots and eatables are sold. In view of long distance, they have to travel to reach shandies, tribes prefer to purchase and sell before noon and return back to their respective villages. These weekly markets not only serve as places of economic transactions, but these are also the important places where marriages by capture,
mutual love and elopement and ceremonial friendships take place.

b. Role of girijan co-operative corporation (G.C.C)

They usually sell the MFP to Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC) or to other private merchants. Jatapus living in forest areas collect Non Timber Forest Produce and Minor Forest Produce (MFP). The MFP or NTFP that are collected have commercial value in addition some are useful for their consumption. The MFP items that are procured by jatapus tribal include gums (Sтерculia urens), Soap nuts (Sapindus emarginatus), Amla (Phyllanthus emblica), Addakulu (Bauhinia vauhlii), Beedi leaves (Diospyros melanoxylon), tarmarind (Tamarindus indica), cleaning nuts (Strychnos potatorum), myrobalans (Terminalia chebula), roots, honey, tubers and wild fruits. Collection of beedi leaves (Diospyros melanoxylon) is the secondary source of income.

8. MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

a. Folk ceremonies religious customs:

At the beginning of any economic activity and before harvesting agricultural produce, they celebrate a festival. They offer ‘sacrifices’ to their Gods and Goddesses for better yield of crops and protection from diseases and calamities. The religion of tribal communities is a mixture of Animism and Hinduism and includes numerous deities and devils. Christianity is also found in some places. For well being of a family, worship is performed with traditional rituals in every human society. Jatapu communities have no exceptions to this. They too perform different types of ceremonies right from the occasion of birth to mourning a death. Apart from that, they also celebrate different festivals of their village Goddesses. They worship ‘Boda Devata’, ‘Sanku Devata’ and offer sacrifices. The way of offering and worshipping differ from region to region. Such rituals performed by Jatapu by tribal or rural people at communal level are called ‘Jatara’. During festivals and marriages plants like Cocos nucifera, Mangifera indica, Syzygium cumini and Azadirachta indica etc. are used. The Jatapus also participate in community dances during full moon days. DHIMSA dance performed by these communities is a visual pleasure and is one of the special attractions provided for special visitors by these people. These Jatapu tribes celebrate at least six to seven types of festivals in a year. Among them, part a king of the first fruit of the season. ‘Kotha’ is an important festival. ‘Kandi kotha’ (cutting of Cajanus cajan), ‘Korra kotha’ (Cutting of Eleusine coracana), ‘Mamidi kotha’ (Cutting of Mango fruits), 26 ‘Chikkudu kotha’ (Cutting of beans) are common festivals. The other important festivals are – ‘Agawa Panduga’ (new fruit eating festival), ‘Kadapandoi’ (Seed charming festival) and these festivals are followed by hunting festival. They also celebrate ‘Bali panduga’ (Sacrificing of animals and fowls to get good crops), Agam panduga to please their ancestral spirits. They play on musical instruments like ‘Dappu’, ‘Danka’ and ‘Thuduma during these celebrations. The culture of these Jatapu tribes too is based on several elements of dance, music, folklores and social customs and beliefs. Jatapu tribal community is basically the followers of Hindu religion. They worship a number of gods and goddesses. Jakeramma is said to be their native god and sometimes animal sacrifices are also made to conciliate the god. The Jatapu people, especially the women are very fond of ornaments and these ornaments play a major part of their costumes. They do their hair ornamentation with black tassels and also wear bangle, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and nose rings.

Jatapu religion is a mixture of Hinduism and animism. Their pantheon includes a number of deities. Some of them are benevolent and some are malevolent. They believe that some of the deities possess great powers to take quick action and some are less powerful. They install the powerful deities in the centre of their village street or at the village outskirts under shady trees in shape of oblong stones. The less powerful deities are installed in the house of their traditional head - Zanni.

They believe that there are supernatural powers who control the fate of human beings. Therefore they propitiate them with great reverence on festive occasions offering sacrifices of animals or fowls and country liquor seeking their blessings for their well being. Goddess Zankri Penu (Jakara Devata) is their principal deity. She is worshipped with the sacrifices of pigs, sheeps and buffaloes. After harvest of crops, it is ritually offered to her at first, before consumption. All other important community festivals are celebrated at the shrine. They also propitiate Goddess Goddali before the harvest of crops. Istha Debata is their household deity.

Their religious activities are primarily communal. Dissari, Zani and Pejuni maintain the relationship with the deities and supernatural beings.

Among the festivals, Pongal or Pondugu is the most important. Another festival called Bhagadi is observed in the month of Chaitra. They also observe all local Hindu festivals like Dasara,
Nuakhia and Sankranti and worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses.

b. Folk Traditional Healers

Attitude of the Jatapu Tribals towards Folk Medicines and Diseases Majority of Jatapu tribe collect and store medicinal herbs for use in indigenous medicine and also to sell them to Girijan co-operative society or in shandies or to the people living in the neighboring villages. The attitude towards diseases is practical treatment combined with superstition. The effect of the plant medicine is also based on the faith of the people in their system. The medical man carries with him the faith of entire community. Generally, they keep the source of medicine as a secret because they fear that it will not be effective if it is revealed to others. The older tribal doctors usually pass on the secrets of their experiences to their children or friends just before their death or when they are unable to move out. The Jatapus of this area possess good knowledge of medicinal plants especially plants used as antidotes for poisonous bites.

The Jatapu tribes use their folk medicines for all kinds of minor ailments. Many of them have adequate knowledge of folk therapeutic procedures. For the treatment of major diseases they first try their native medicines. If it is not cured by native therapy, then only they go for modern medicine. If they are not satisfied with modern medicines, they again turned to their own traditional medicine. Jatapu perform a folk dance called ‘Mayura’ which is an imitation of movement of peacock on every festive and marriage occasions in addition to their common dance known as ‘Dhimsa’ dance.

They adapt in hunting and fishing also. They are well versed in handicrafts like basket and mat weaving, oil extraction etc., They celebrate festivals called ‘Hira parbi (seed charming)’ Maha parbi (new mango fruit eating), Kumlla parbi (consuming maize and pumpkin products) etc.,

9. SOCIAL CONTROL AND POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Jatapu have their own traditional village council headed by Nayudu and a community council for each tribe is led by the head man. He is also called as Samanthi or Dora. He is assisted by Dissari- the astrologer, Zanni - the priest and Barik -the messenger. The posts of Nayudu, Dissari and Zanni are hereditary. The messenger - Barik is from other community and is appointed by nomination.

During the past, the political organization of Jatapu was headed by a muttadar appointed by the local zamindar, who was responsible to collect revenue and maintain law and order. Their traditional community council handles their customary intra-community affairs relating to family disputes, rape, theft, adultery, partition of property, divorce and other social matters according to their social norms and customs. It acts as guardian of their customary norms and traditions and the office bearers are respected. The Nayudu presides over the council meetings and before taking any decision, he consults with other office bearers and community elders. The offenders are imposed with penalty in cash and kinds according to gravity of their offences.

Changing scene

Since the remote past the Jatapu lived undisturbed in their remote sylvan habitat. In modern time, the rapid changes in administrative set-up and political climate of the country and their exposure to the external world have influenced their way of life.

After independence, the welfare Government has taken a very benevolent attitude towards improving the lot of the backward tribal people of this country including the Jatapus. Various protective, welfare and development measures initiated by the Government have resulted in exposing the tribemen more and more to outside contact with pressures of ever-advancing and powerful social, economic and political forces. They have been benefited from different tribal development programmes. In spite of that they have preserved their cultural identity.

Other distinct socio-cultural features

The Jatapu is divided into several exogamous totemic septs (Vansas) named after natural objects. They follow patrilineal rule of descent and patrilocal rule of residence. Negotiation marriages are common and cross-cousin marriage is the most preferred form. Other ways of acquiring spouses are by capture, elopement, service, and exchange. Junior levirate and sororate, divorce, remarriage of widows, wodowers and divorcees are also permitted.

They have no restrictions against polygyny though such instances are few. Bride Price (Oli) is paid in cash. Nuclear family is predominant among them though in few cases, polygynous and extended families are found. Generally they cremate the dead but bury those who die of unnatural death caused by snake bite, cholera, small pox, child birth, attack of wild animals etc. Death pollutes not only the
concerned family or lineage but also the entire populace of the village. Mourning is observed for three days and mortuary rites, on the fourth day. They worship Zakeri or Sakeri Penu as their Chief deity and village shrine. They have the cult of ancestor worship. Their sacred specialists are Disari (astrologer), Jani (priest) and Pojuri (Shamanin). At the village level Naik or Dora acts as the traditional chief.

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MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE