

## Tantrism in Jhargram: An Overview

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**Abstract:** *Tantrism prevailed in the tribal society before the coming of the Aryans in this country. Afterwards at first the Buddhists and later the Hindus accepted such techniques of magic from them and implying philosophical theories they have classified them into many branches. Tantrism has both good and bad practices. Good practices are related to white magic and bad practices are related to witchcraft. There is a difference between tantrism and witchcraft on the basis of their objects, but their methods are nearly same. Most of the people believe, by tantra, Supermen try to control over evil spirits and Ghosts. Number of birs (super power) as Baght, Narasingha, Sanyasibir etc. stay under control of the said supermen. In Jhargram district tribals as Santal, Munda, Bhumij, Mahali, Baiga, Lodha, Kurmi and most of the lower caste people of Hindu society as Hari, Dom, Bag, Bagdi, Keot, Kaibarta etc., have faith on the activities of ojha. To cure the patients from different physical and mental problems, the ojha applies different incantations and herbal medicines. But the Brahman, Sadgop and Mahishya like higher caste's people suffer in hesitation regarding its acceptance. Here, in case of snake bite, the role of an ojha is given more preference than a doctor. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, in spite of the unprecedented progress of modern science, how tantrism is prevailing among the people of Jhargram, is the object of this paper.*

**Keywords:** *Tantra, White Magic, Witchcraft, Prevailing, Jhargram.*

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On 4<sup>th</sup> April, 2017, Jhargram has emerged as the 22<sup>nd</sup> district of West Bengal after bifurcation of Medinipur. The specialty of this district is its natural beauty as most of the main areas as Jhargram, Jambani, Binpur-I, Binpur-II are covered with dense forest. In spite of comparatively alluvial soil found in the areas as Nayagram and Gopiballavpur I and II, most of its land is uneven and unfertile.<sup>1</sup> In such area we see numerous tribes such as Santal, Munda, Bhumij, Mahali, Baiga, Lodha, Kurmi etc. are residing.<sup>2</sup> Living away from modern way of life, these groups of people have tried to stick to their old culture carefully for thousands of years. Beliefs in different types of ghosts such as *jakhya*, *rakhya*, *prêt* etc., witchcraft and supernatural forces have prevailed in this society. Experts in these fields such as *ojha* (experts using incantations to ward off the danger from wild animals, snake bites, etc) and *Janguru* (having knowledge on witchcraft) are given prominence in this society to mitigate these supernatural challenges. These superstitious beliefs and dependence on these experts are however not limited to the tribal world, as away from the forest environment, in the plane lands and fertile agricultural lands of south east, the lower caste people of Hindu society as Hari, Dom, Bag, Bagdi, Keot, Kaibarta etc. too have also gone with the activities of *ojha* with magic of incantations and medicines prepared from herbs whereas people of the higher castes such as Brahman, Sadgop and Mahishya are seen to be hesitating to accept these practices while in danger. *Ojha* is preferred to the doctor here in case of snake bite. Hindus of upper castes also call for *ojhas* when the baby's stomach cramps or in the case of the vomiting of milk just after taking it and in *tarka* (twisting of body and eyes unnaturally).<sup>3</sup> Such system is familiar with the name of *tantrism* which prevailed in the tribal society before the arrival of the Aryans in this country. Afterwards at first the Buddhists and later the Hindus accepted such techniques of magic and philosophical theories from them and processed them into knowledge of many branches.

The essence of Hindu and Buddhist Tantra is the practice of some secret method of taking the body as an instrument. The pursuit of the body by mixing with Buddhism and Hinduism was took birth as *buddha tantra* and *hindu tantra* respectively.<sup>4</sup> There are both good and bad practices of *trantism*. Good practices are related to white magic and bad practices related to witchcraft. There is a difference between *tantrism* and witchcraft on the basis of their objects, but their methods are nearly same.<sup>5</sup> Through *tantra*, various evil spirits like *Rankini*, *Goria*, *Chandibanga*, *Daursini* and ghosts like *Bonga*, *Gomua*, *Chandabhut*, *Jnaka*, *Chirkin*, *Mahadania* and *Kunandra* are controlled by the supermen such as *Dian & Daini* (witch), *Ojha*, *Gunin*, *Janbaba*, *Bhelkipurut* (*lodha backra*) and *Nagmetia*. Number of *birs* (super power) as *Baght*, *Narasingha*, *Sanyasibir* etc. stay under control of the said supermen.<sup>6</sup> Here, the word *daini* is related to witchcraft. Very inauspicious, sage- like vision, eyes reveal as shaft of death, appearance looks a little different from a normal man or woman, such type of octogenarian, deprived from relatives, divine power oriented old men or women are considered as *Daini* or *Dan*. Lodha- Kurmis believe, they have a dangerous deadly looks in their eyesight, evil appearance in walking which spreads rapidly throughout the village. For this, according to the advice of the *Gunin* or *Ojha*, they are killed or driven out from the village.<sup>7</sup> But there is a good sight of witchcraft. Here the *dainis* think of their own welfare not of others. Therefore they are

deprived from much social support.<sup>8</sup> Nowadays it is seen that in spite of the unprecedented progress of modern science, *tantrism* is also prevalent among the tribes as well as in many lower caste Hindu of Jhargram. To overview on the said subject prevalent among the people of Jhargram is the object of this paper.

The tribes of Jhargram as Santals, Oraons, Lodha Shabar, Munda, Bhumij, Koliya etc. not only believe in *tantrism*, the system has been practiced here also. The uses of incantations are specially seen in the Santal, Oraon, Lodha Shabar and the Nagbanshi Mundas of Jhargram. In case of snake bites, within the 12 *gotras* of the Santals, *Pauria* and *Bedia* are related with snakes and it is also become integral part of their lifecycle. They catch the snakes, show their game and even eat them. They claim that they can treat the person bitten by snake. By their incantations and techniques, the snakes come out from their holes. They believe the snake bitten person can be cured by the use of *jaributi* (medicines prepared from herbs) and incantations. Their first teacher of such learning is *ojha kambaru* (Kamrup). Dalma and Santali named famous myth oriented mountains are their place of culture of the said learning. Preceptors of such incantations are called *jharni* and *gunia*. The snake bitten patient is treated by the *ojha* by *phnu* (exhaled air from mouth with loud sound) and handful of dust after uttering incantations, thrown on the body of the patient at the same time. Sometimes they take the help of bodiless power which is called *Bir*. Oraon worship *siz* tree or *ghot* (a small pitcher that used as the super soul of the deities following some certain manners) as goddess Manasa. Tradition of offering soil-built burned elephant or horses are also prevalent in them. Catching of snakes and showing their play are their family profession. From this snake centric activity a large and complex system of *gunins* and *ojhas*, has created in their society. People who are expert in such activities are called *Guru gosain* or *Nagmatia*. Like Santals, their teacher is also *kanri gosain*. In the *mantragriha*, he is given to sit on a snake's head painted *pinri* (a small wooden seat used for sitting) as a protected seat. The Koliyas and Dravidians worship snake. They also eat them. *Gunins* (experts on snakes) are seen at Jhargram. Their caste oriented profession is the catching of snakes, showing their play to others as well as selling of the snakes' skin. Their experience is much better than that of the others in their society. They give their identity as of *kashyap gotra*. They said, they took birth after sexual relation of Kashyap, the sage and Kadru, the mother of snakes. According to the colour and poison, they classify snakes into four categories, as *sada* (white), *tentulla* (colour of tamarind), *mattya* (colour of soil), and *kala* (black) that stand similar to the categories of Brahman, Khatriya, Baishya and Shudra respectively. To them, *Dudhe Gokhra* is Brahman. It bears foot print of the king of snakes on its head. In spite of having dangerous poison, it is calm in nature and live in old houses. Furious and vengeful snakes like *keute* and *kharis* are of Khatriya category. They wander fearlessly on wetland and bushes. Snakes named as *Boras*, *chiti* are of Baishya class. They lie on grassy land and wet land soundlessly. They bite also soundlessly without lifting their heads high. *Dhora*, *Dhemna* and *Jalgete* are oily and have no poison. These are of Shudra category. The said tribe can identify any snake. Besides, they have named many other snakes.<sup>9</sup>

Munda, Bhumij and the Koliyas live in the forest areas of Jhargram. Four months as

*Ashara*, *Shrabana*, *Bhadra* and *Ashwin* are time of torrential rain. Snake-families become active then. Bisbedia-Shabar, Malbedia, Oraon, Santal and Munda keep snakes into their *jhanpi* (bamboo or cane made basket having lid of the same thing). Snake-expert Ojhas teach incantations to their disciples and collect *jaributi*. Snake related worships and festivals are held in the houses. In frontier Bengal, *rohini parab* is celebrated on the month of Jaistha. In this auspicious day, plough in the field starts as well as the worship of snake is also arranged. *Jaistha Sankranti* is also known as *rajashwala sankranti*. Ojhas start teaching to their students on the knowledge of snakes. They collect soil of *rohini parab* and smash it on the snake bitten patients. On that day, the *ojhas* teach their pupils the process of neutralizing poison, technique of breaking poisonous teeth of the snakes. On the day of *Bhadra Sankranti* the goddess Manasa is worshipped as the symbol of *siz* tree in every house. Milk, banana and ripe jack fruit are offered to the goddess. *Ashwin Sankranti* is *dak sankranti* and also known as *Nal Sankranti*. Pupils complete their learning which has been continued for four months. The students become *gunin* and practice their education independently. Snake centric knowledge is shown by such *ojha* and *gunins* wearing various *nagalankar* (ornaments look like snake) on their body. Jhapan festival is observed on that day.<sup>10</sup> Jhapan is not prevalent in the entire district now-a-days. The surroundings of a village named Chorchita of Jhargram where jhapan was prevalent in earlier days see the practice of Jhapan being stopped as a *gunin* died by snake bite in this programme.<sup>11</sup>

To continue such practices there are a number of *akhara* (study center) seen in Jhargram. *Ojha*, the teacher, teaches his followers the incantations for driving out witches like *Daini-Jugni*. He also gives knowledge on snakes, different types of *phnus* as well as incantations and wild herbs, leafs, roots by which they treat the diseases in addition to the process of how to identify the thief by *tel para* (burned oil), *nun para* (fried salt), *bans chala* (movement of bamboo) etc. On *Rohini Sankranti* in the month of Jaistha, *Shrabana Sankranti* and on the *Dak Sankranti* in the month of Shrabana the followers or disciples of the *ojha* start learning at the *Manasathan* and *Baramthan*. In Jhargram, a few places are known for the study centers of witchcraft. These are at Guptamani of Lodhashuli of Jhargram, *Kalua snar's than* of Nayagram, *Bhairab Manasa's than* of Kankrajhor of Binpur etc. As learning places of witchcraft, *Manasathan* (worshiping place of the goddess Manasa) is very popular. Number of disciples come there to get knowledge on snakes due to professional need. *Ojha* teaches them carefully incantations of curing the patients from the poison of snakes. Learners show their patience and to utter the *mantras* purely recite repeatedly.<sup>12</sup>

In course of learning witchcraft they follow some secrecy. Enthusiastic women, who want to learn, come to the preceptor at night of *amabashya* to a hidden place of bush. Binding a broom on their waist and a *kula* (winnowing fan) on their armpit such women come to the *guru* in bare body. They offer a black cock to their *guru* (preceptor) and cook the said cock and rice together thereafter and eat all together. The preceptor helps them to recite incantation in a straight crying tune. Before learning incantations, the learner calls their eight former preceptors and gods. They are *Kanru* (kamrup), *Narsingh* (ojha), *Madhy* (chakbhanga), *Neor* (neul), *Hanuman*, *Bhnaisasur*, *Bhnuiphor* and *Deogam* (village god). Between *Ojha*, God and

evil there works another bodiless power. It is called *Bir* who acts as helping hand of the *Ojhas*. There are many names of *Bir* as *Hanuman Bir*, *Paban Bir*, *Narsingh Bir*, *Raghut Bir*, etc. They solve many impossible tasks according to the instruction of the *daini* and *gunin*. Driving out the ghosts from the homes they stitch them by nails in the big trees such as *bat-ashwath-shaora* etc. Respect to the incantation's preceptor is seen everywhere in the folk society. On the earth, they are the representatives of Brahma, Bishnu and Maheswar. They are the foremost and skilled preceptors. Each tribal has their own preceptor as *Domgure*, *Lodha guru*, *Hardi Guru*, *Jalia Guru* etc. In the beginning of the activities of the *ojhas*, they praise their preceptor through *mantras* in the following way.

“*Shikha guru bandi, Dikhya guru bandi r bandi Kaura Kamati*”

At last they praise their local semi legendary deities. In the incantations of vanishing poison, they praise lastly to *Manasa*, *Bishati*, *Padmabati*, *Adya* and *Hari jhi*, *Neta Dhopani* and *Jalia maa*. *Hari jhi* is a daughter or wife of any *Hari* caste family. She is worshipper of lord Shiba but being from lower caste Hindu, is untouchable. She is known as *Chandi* in the society of *gunin*. *Jalia ma* is from Keot kaibarta society. She is also expert in vanishing snake's poison. *Neta Dhopani* has born from the tears of lord shiba. She is the follower of goddess *Manasa* and washerwoman of the heaven. In the ghost vanishing incantations there are praises of *Kamrup Kamakhya*, *Shibani*, *Chandika* etc. Here is an example.

“*Mantrer tejete petni chharia palay*

*Kar aangye? Kamikhyer aangye, Hari jhir aangye.*”<sup>13</sup>

The shabars of Chorchita village of Jhargram claim themselves as Hindu and thinks that they are separate from the lodha or lodha shabar. In their mantras, they use the names of deities as *Rama*, *Sita*, *Lakshmana*, *Hanumana* etc. from Hindu epics in time of driving out ghosts, evil spirits, *daini* and even poison of snake.<sup>14</sup>

To get relief from various mental and physical diseases, the tribal people use various types of worship, incantations, *phnus*, *tuktak*, *Jalpara* (exhale on the water after uttering chants), *Dhulapara* (exhale on a handful of dust after uttering incantations) and finally the use of herbal medicines. The *ojha* and *kabiraj* use many herbs and their barks, roots, leaves in different ailments.<sup>15</sup>

From the above discussion it is clear that *tantrism* is a prevailing practice in most of the areas of Jhargram and belief in *tantrism* is also very common among the people of this district. Now the question is, even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, in spite of the unprecedented development of science how such belief can still be prevailing among people? Actually, people who are living through ages in illiteracy have continued to maintain such beliefs and rituals. There is a great impact of these beliefs on the tribal and low caste Hindu people. Blind faith or superstition, whatever is said by the upper castes, it is the tribal society where the culture of black magic is seen. They all know that its application is unsocial, but they fail to become free from its attraction. It is a great curse to the tribal society.<sup>16</sup> Now, the question is: if it is a blind faith, is it totally unscientific? But some have found application of science in it. According to science, our eye is a lens. If the Sunlight is thrown in a fixed center through a lens, the flames burn. Likewise, by stopping breathing, if any one gaze on anything and throws his/her eyesight on

a fixed point, a miraculous event will happen there. *Daini*, *Ojha* and *Gunins* increase their power of eyesight day by day through various methods and later one day they apply it on gourd or pumpkin experimentally. If the said things start to get rotten, he thinks, some power has been acquired by him. In this way while such people use their eyesight dishonestly on other, it is called *najar*. Many people believe on it and go to the *ojha* or *gunin* if his child is affected by it.<sup>17</sup> In case of snake bite, the *Ojha* or *Gunins* apply incantations, black magic etc. as well as herbal things. Here, the herbal things work like *mantra*.<sup>18</sup> Such use of herbal medicine is no doubt a bright side of *tantrism*. It can be accepted with great care for the betterment of society. But in case of its dark sides, the wrong believers and wrong doers should be convinced about its actual necessity in this century, so that they can avail the modern facilities and come to the main current of the society.

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