

The Living Heritage of Saura ‘Idital’ Art and Script Writing System

Mr. Manoj Kumar Sabar

PhD Scholar, Department of Political Science, KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

ABSTRACT

We can find in Odisha and especially in the Rayagada and Gajapati District. Souras are the Second highest after Knodh Tribe in our Rayagada District. Saura Tribes are the constitute one of the segments of the PVTGs groups. The Saura and Lanjia Souras are living in the hill slopes therefore their villages are situated in the foothills and slope of the hill, mostly lie hidden in forest middle of the forest clad hills. They select the high land high slopes which are free from water logging and lie near the natural water sources. They are the skill holders of the Traditional knowledge system or Indigenous Knowledge which is developed by the local Indigenous community. The knowledge is basically transmitted through the culture, rituals, folklore and through the oral from generation to generation or the orally person to the Community. The Saura “*Sompang*” or the Script of the Saura is preserved by the Saura Community which is discovered in the body of God “*Matarbnum*” or called “*Aksharabrahma*”. The script was created by the Pandit guru Mangai Gomango. In this study the scholar wants to highlight the Scripts of Saura and the “*Idital*” which is very famous in now a day from the village to the towns in India. It is based on the value and necessity of the generation. The Community that is shared seems to have been one of the things that makes us strong and yearns to survive in an indigenous Community. The aboriginals have their own indigenous world, and they are from non-dominant group of a society. This topic is the purpose of exploring the traditions of Saura Community where they are practiced nurtured and celebrate through the ritual beliefs and their practice is radiate like a concentric ring.

Keywords: Generation, Aksharabramha, Indigenous Knowledge, Community, Idital.

INTRODUCTION

The Souras are one of the most ancient tribes of India. In the early historical period, the tribals appeared to have lived in state internal movement cutting across the country, were generally guided by the river valley and destination were the hills regions in state. Most of the tribes are living in the forest, hill station and naturally isolated regions of the country. Frequent references to the tribes are found in Hindu

mythology and classics. In the ancient India epic literatures, the Vedas, the Purans, Ramayan present a good account about the Soura tribal people. More often they find mention in the Sanskrit literature, the epics, the Purans and other religious texts. Souras are called Soura, Saora, Sora, Sabar, Sahara, Sabara, Savara etc. Mostly the Soura tribals are found mostly in Odisha, central India, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh. Souras are the 5th largest tribe among 62 Tribes now it is 64. The state of Odisha was created on 1st April 1936. Spread over an area of 155,707 square kilometers, it is surrounded by the West Bengal in North East, Jharkhand in the North, Chattisgarh in the West, Andhra Pradesh in the South and the Bay of Bengal. There are 62 tribes in Odisha including the 13 particulars vulnerable (PVTGs). The scheduled area includes 118 Tribal blocks in all the 13 districts. Presently 21 ITDA As, 17 Micro projects for PVTGs, 46MADA (Modified Area Development Approach) pockets and 14 cluster pockets are functioning in the state with financial support from the state and Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India.

Without the belief in supernatural entities the human being cannot be exists. The religious faith and superstitious of phenomena are deeply rooted in each and every known human society on this lifestyle of the human being. But in this modern era these cultural heritages are facing more problems by distinct religions, loosing fraternity among the brotherhood and disputes among themselves. The Souras are mainly divided into 2 broad classes firstly the Hill Souras and the second Low-land Souras. The Hill Souras also known as Lanjia Souras who live in inaccessible hill regions, whereas, the Low-land Soura inhabit the plain country adjoining the areas of the civilized people and sometime ignoring their own beliefs. The people of the community refer to the planet as a mother earth and all animate and inanimate objects and such substances. As they move from one person to another, they link all family members and the area's sources of strength to each participant. Tribals ensure that everyone is giving the opportunity to participate, have a voice and make decisions within the Community. The souras are the famous for their wall painting based on the religious and ceremonial theme. *Idital* commands great religious devotion from the tribal people. Each *Idital* contains various symbols and signs and convey special meaning for which it is meant. The pictograms are categorized into different sections as per their meaning and purpose. These paintings convey great aesthetic sense. Verrier Elwin was the first scholar to study the Soura pictograms. This form of art is mostly found in Rayagada, Gajapati and Koraput districts of Orissa.

IDENTITY OF TRIBES

The Soura people's appearances the Soura resemble the other pre- Dravidian tribes. The tribes widely found all over central India comprising Bihar, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh Maharashtra, and West Bengal. They have long headed and flat noses, wavy and curly hair. They brow ridges are prominent but not to a great extent like the kondhs. Skin colour is generally brown to dark brown, there are so region can find the fair complexioned individuals with yellowish shades. They are always wearing coarse waist cloth red

border and middle is white and simple gray that is their traditional dress. They have a reason to called Lanji Soura. Because of distinct style of male dress in which the long and narrow strip of male and cloth is worn in such fashion that both the red embroidered ends hang down in front and back like tail, so they are called Lanjia Soura. In a 21th it is very difficult to recognize the tribal or non-tribal. The modern peoples have speedy adopt the western culture. It is very critical to turn back in to the traditional and traditions, so the things what have to adopt that disappear from society. The Soura peoples are built by strong, the most remarkable point as their efficiency in climbing and dwelling on top of the hills. Or slop of the hills.

In every field of development in a tribal community, there has been a traditional method, cultivation, transformation, and use of tools and techniques in an interior area; it may be apply the knowledge in field of agriculture, medicinal knowledge, artistic knowledge, cultural knowledge, sacred knowledge. They have shown many broad farming systems and were of the opinion that there is a considerable different diverse, less of important farm system which do occur in each broad farming system. Even the systems overlap each other in some instance. The broad cultivation systems according to them are rice farming system, rice- wheat cultivation system, dry rained cultivation system, mixed cropping system. The hills of Rayagada District are classified under highland mixed cultivation system, whereas rest of the area. The forest-based farming is one slash and burn cultivation system that can even be classified within highland mixed cultivation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To document and preserve the traditional wall painting technique of the Soura community: Highlighting the different materials, methods and designs use in the Soura wall painting.
- To examine the cultural significance of Soura wall painting, investigating the roll of wall paintings in Our Soura culture including in their ritual's ceremony.
- To analyze and assess the artistic excellence and evaluating the composition color palette and symbolism used in Soura wall painting.
- To explore the impact of the wall painting and the Script of our Soura literacy, impact of our modernization and Identifying strategies for safeguarding for the *Sompeng* and the traditional art form and promoting its appreciation among the wider community.

REVIEW AND LITERATURE

Dash Soumyashree Deepayana. *Religion and religious beliefs of the Souras of Odisha* (2018) Review of Research UGC Approved journal No- 48514 volume-8 issue-3 December 2018. In this paper the author has been highlighting the religious belief of the Soura tribes how they are isolated from all tribes in Odisha. And the author was trying to exploring the wall paints of the Soura people. In this paper author was not mentioned about the sompang of Soura literature and about the situation of the wall painting and the generation of the Soura Script. So that the scholar has found some gap and want to input the more information about the community of Souras.

Biswas Indrani. *The Lanjia Soura of Odisha*. (2016) in this topic the author has mentioned the cultural and social livelihood of the Lanjia Soura tribes. The author has not mentioned the practices and how much experiences to the traditional skills in every field in a community and mentioned the demographic profiles for the tribals. The tribes are related and interaction with man, women tree, forest it may be the traditional and traditions and agricultural practices. Scholars have a deal input about this topic through research.

Mohanty Sarat Ch. *Social control, Tradition and transition in Lanjia Saora Society (2015)* here the author has been mentioned the quiet frequently in Hindu mythology and ancient classic epics, purans and scriptures. How they developed with their own concept and distinguished cultural. In this topic the author has not explain about, and how they are very important protector of the community and that management or the protection of the natural resources are sustainable in nature, and they worship the nature in vedic period like tree, hill, stones, etc. it reaches the thought to continuing the vedic, purans, culture it will be mandatory to mentioned for the Saora tribes.

Ota A.B, Mohanty Sarat Chandra. *Lanjia Soura. (2007)* in this book the author describes briefly about the Lanjia Souras livelihood, settlement and the practices of the agricultural, social organization of the community. Lanjia Soura is the most primitive tribe in Odisha. There is nothing difficult to understand of the Lanjia Soura. Most interesting thing in there is beliefs and practices. The author input the cultural symbols in this book but did not input about script. So, this is another reason to research again about the scripts and aesthetic skills in a community.

METHODOLOGY

The research paper has been adopting a primary and secondary method to exploring the distinctive art and culture of the Soura literature (Sompeng) and the “Idital” painting of the community. The study focuses in two blocks in Rayagada district of Odisha that is Gunupur and Padmapur. Categorize in to regions where they practice more about “Idital” and somewhere practicing more about the Soura lipi Sompeng. On the basis of these, who converted peoples are practicing the old Roman lipi and who are not go through by the religion they are practices the Soura lipi and *Idital* painting. And we can see there somewhere wall painting has been reflecting in a society. I want to research in that area where much more engaged with their ethos and cultures where the ancestors are transmitted, on the other way where opposites likewise they converted or influenced by another “Satsang” and “Biswahindu Parisod”. They are ignored or they are out of this knowledge, and they are strongly related with the modern version.

THE SOURA “SOMPENG”

The Soura script, also known as *Sorang Sompeng*, is a unique writing system created in 1936 by Mangei Gomango for the Soura language. Who was known as the Soura Pandit Mangai Gomango, he was lived in the Marchaguda village, Rayagada District of Padmapur Block. This script is features 24 letters, named after Soura deities, with an inherent vowel sound that can be modified or silenced by other letters, and is used in religious texts, education, and publications, though literacy remains a challenge.

Tribal language has such phonetically peculiar sounds as checked consonant glotted stop low tone stress long or faminate vowels positional different articulation of palatal and velar nasals different qualities of vowels, very difficult to understand by the tribes. However, there is no widely recognized Soura script in the traditional sense it is possible that is symbolic or iconography elements embedded in their works of the “*Idital*” art. It has been proved that in the traditional sense the synthesise of topic has been availability of knowledge, drawing from culture, historical, artistic contexts related, and the hunting scenes, marriage ceremony’s, dancing, food serving, and life cycle of the Community. Soura painting includes its significance, evolution, and cultural impact. It will address the concept of the script as it might pertain to the symbolic motifs in their art. The soura script, also known as Soura *Sompeng*, is used for the Soura language, an Austro-Asiatic language spoken mainly in Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. Language has been created by Mangai Gomango in 1936 and considering vulnerable to extinction by UNESCO. It was digitalizing that such scripts are crucial for preserving indigenous language in the rapidly scientific age.

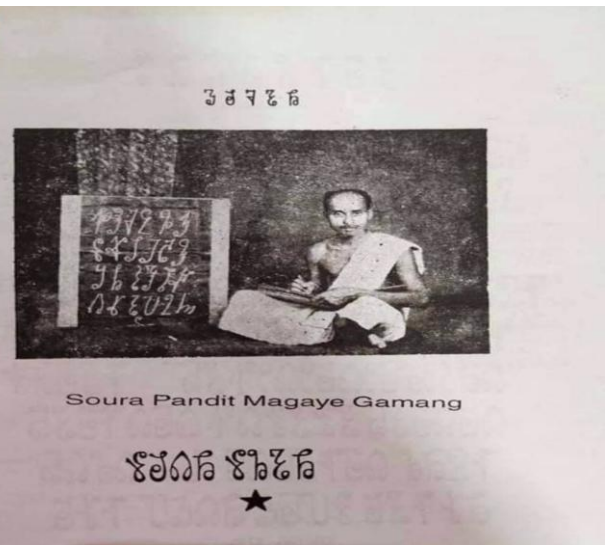
Sony Solma Priyadarshani likely has been digitalized this script and design contribute script of character creating by digital font. She was belonged from Kondh community of Gajapati District, she was an IIT graduate from Bombay.

Soura Script (Sompeng to Odia)

| | | | | | |
|------|----|----|----|----|----------|
| ୩ | ଓ | ସ | ୧ | ୧ | ଓ |
| ସା | ତା | ବା | ଗା | ଢା | ଗା |
| ଝ | ଞ | ଟ | ଠ | ଡ | ଢ |
| ମା | ତା | ଲା | ନା | ଧା | ପା |
| ଫ | ବି | ଡି | ଡ଼ | ଢି | ଞି |
| କ୍ଷା | ରା | ହା | କା | ଜା | ଞା |
| ଠ | ଝ | ଞ | ଠ | ଝ | ଞ |
| ଆ | ଏ | ଇ | ଊ | ଅ | ଆୟ ପ୍ରାୟ |



(Soura Pandit Mangai Gomango)



(Real Image of Sompeng letter)

THE “IDITAL” WALL PAINTING

Idital is one of the most important traditions of the Lanjia Saura community, and it has made them famous all over the world. These paintings are drawn on house walls to honor and remember their ancestors. Common images in *Idital* paintings include humans, horses, stars, elephants, the sun, the moon, and the tree of life. The background of the painting is made using yellow or red ochre soil. The figures are painted with brushes made from soft bamboo shoots. The wall painters, called *Idaimar*, use natural colors prepared from white stone, colored earth, vermilion, and mixtures made from tamarind seeds, flowers, and leaves. The drawings are mainly made using simple geometric shapes and lines. *Idital* paintings show different

aspects of life, such as fertility, birth, protection from diseases or disasters, and religious rituals. The process of making an *Idital* begins with a dream seen by the *Kudan* (priest). In this dream, the priest receives guidance from the ancestors about how the painting should be made. Before painting a sacred *Idital*, the painter must stay in the house overnight. After the painting is completed, the *Idaimar* offers prayers along with rice, liquor, and flowers to the ancestors or spirits. The Saura people believe that the spirit of their ancestors' lives within the *Idital* painting.

The Saura religion is the custom of making drawings on the walls of houses in honour of the dead or saying the life style of the ancestors, to avert disease, to promote fertility and on the occasionally in a certain ritual festival. In every cultural program the worshiper (*Kudangboi*) who is taking lead role in to connect with their ancestral spirits. In that time, they are creating the wall painting that is "*Idital*", That is popularly known as *Idital*. The word has been probably derived from the roots of the Saura language *id* means "to write" and *tal* means *Kitalan* or wall. The *Idital* means the "writing on the wall" or wall painting. The wall paintings of the Souras known as *Idital* are very attractive, lively and fascinating. Inside the house on the walls, as well as we can see also in the border of the verandah. One often finds a group of sketches elaborately drawn which are significant from religious point of view. The Souras believe in four categories of spirits which are mainly based on their pattern of relationship with men. These are like Protective Spirits, Benevolent Spirits, Malevolent Spirits, and an Ancestral Spirits. The *Idital* painting of the Saura tribes have very famous in the Odisha state and the world, the best example of the documenting and highlighting of the *Idital* is KISS University Bhubaneswar and Dr. Achyuta samanta Founder of KISS University.



(Artists are Painting the Idital Paints)

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS OF THE SOURA TRIBE

Every community of their life covering round the year is intimately connected with their ethos, religious beliefs and ritual practices. It is these aspects of their culture that give meaning and depth to their lives and solidarity to their social structure. The accurate symbolic meaning of the icons which adhere to the various sketches of human being, horse, and elephant Gun man, cycle, sun, moon, spirits, etc. are very difficult to understand. An icon is meant for the edification of God goddess and ancestors. The general

idea is that an icon is done to flatter and individual attention of the community. The Soura peoples are practicing many cultural and ritual festival from that Miria (*Nua Khia*), Guar (*Karja*) in every village they consist the yearly Mangalabar (*Mangadara*). The Karja has been practicing every 5 or 7 years. But the *Miria* is celebrating in every year of the December month in the *Miria* peoples worship "Tangi Maa". The Soura tribe, an Indigenous community in Odisha, exhibits kind of unique cultural behavior shaped by their history, traditions, and environments. The cultural activity is very distinct from all tribal communities. The activity of the human changed or evolved with the time to time, technology made them wise and they learnt to survive in every condition of the society. The Soura tribe are a dwindling the supreme or sacred tribe with a distinctive shamanic culture because of undocumented of the ingenious knowledge and modernization of the culture. The tribal peoples are lost the expensive things. The Soura tribes have their own writing which is "*Sompang*". The Soura peoples are naturalists who are devotees of nature, they believe in God "Aksharabramha" (Matarbnum in Soura). Soura's writing is discovered from the god Matarbnum.

CONCLUSION

Idital painting is a vital cultural tradition of the Lanjia Soura community that reflects their deep respect for ancestors and nature. These wall paintings are not only artistic expressions but also sacred symbols of belief, ritual, and daily life. The use of natural materials, simple geometric forms, and traditional methods shows the close relationship between the Soura people and their environment. The involvement of the *Kudan* and *Idaimar* highlights the spiritual importance of the painting process. Overall, *Idital* paintings help preserve the history, faith, and identity of the Lanjia Soura community, keeping their ancestral traditions alive for future generations. The art *Idital* is very famous in the world by the constantly incorporated by the peoples of Soura Tribe, (LSDA) Lanjia Soura Development Agency, and KISS University has been taking the main role for exploring the *Idital*. Their spells, charms, amazing *Idital* folk method of treatment and the medicine and their arts dialogue are the invaluable wealth for our Soura community.

REFERENCES

1. Bhuyan, J., & Parida, T. N. (2025). Echoes of Identity: The Role of Riddles in Preserving Soura Tribal Heritage. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, 10(4), 619933.
2. Sabar, M. J. Traditional Agricultural Wisdom and Livelihood: A Brief Note on Lanjia Saora Tribal in Gajapati District.
3. Rath, M. (2023). Folk and Indigenous knowledge in environmental sustainability: A study in the context of Odisha. *Literary Oracle*, 7(2), 97-106.
4. Mishra, M. (2017). Traditional knowledge systems, culture and environmental sustainability: concepts from Odisha, India. In *Communication, Culture and Ecology: Rethinking Sustainable Development in Asia* (pp. 51-66). Singapore: Springer Singapore.
5. Kumar, K., Marinescu, A., & Nayak, S. (2023). Society, Culture and Natural Surroundings. Indigenous Knowledge and Practices of the Dongria, Dhuruva and Poroja Tribes of Rayagada and Koraput Districts, Odisha, India. *Revista Romana de Sociologie*.
6. Jena, B. K., & Prasad, D. (2022). Belief, Identity and Socio-Cultural Practices among Lanjia Soura of Odisha. *Indian Anthropologist*, 52(1/2), 77-92.

7. Sahu, B. (2019). Understanding Idital the Amazing Ritual Art of The Souras of Eastern India. *Editorial Board*, 8(9), 49.
8. Mall, A. (2020). Indigenous knowledge on selection, sustainable utilization of local flora and fauna for food by tribes (PTG) of Odisha: A potential resource for food and environmental security.
9. Rath, S., & Ormsby, A. A. (2020). Conservation through traditional knowledge: a review of research on the sacred groves of Odisha, India. *Human Ecology*, 48(4), 455-463.
10. Das, Soumyasree Deepayana, Religion and Religious Beliefs of the Souras of Odisha (2018). Review of research UGC Approved Journal No- 48514 Volum -8, issue-3 December 2018. Impact factor: 5.7631(UIF) ISSN 2249-894X. www.Ibp.wprld