

# **CELEBRATION OF DEATH AMONG THE GADABAS OF ORISSA**

*Suresh Chandra Pradhan*

## **INTRODUCTION**

There is no more universal than death. Every individual and society to Van Gennep it follows the passage ceremonies. These rites of passage include some kind of disconnection with an initial status and role, a liminal and in between period and the incorporation into the new status and role. Death ceremonies are considered as the most prominent for the deceased which must be removed from the world of living to the symbolic world of dead. A funeral ceremony is personal in its focus and societal in its consequences. Death ceremonies often entail the central motifs of a culture; their performance usually helps to bolster the solidarity of the social group.

The aim of this article is to give a description about the death ritual both primary as well as secondary to highlight the belief pattern, magico religious practices to control the supernatural power. The present inquiry is an anthropological attempt to examine the enormous socio-cultural implication through participation of all types of kin categories secondly it attempts to explain how their society integrated through this ritual.

## **Material and Methods:**

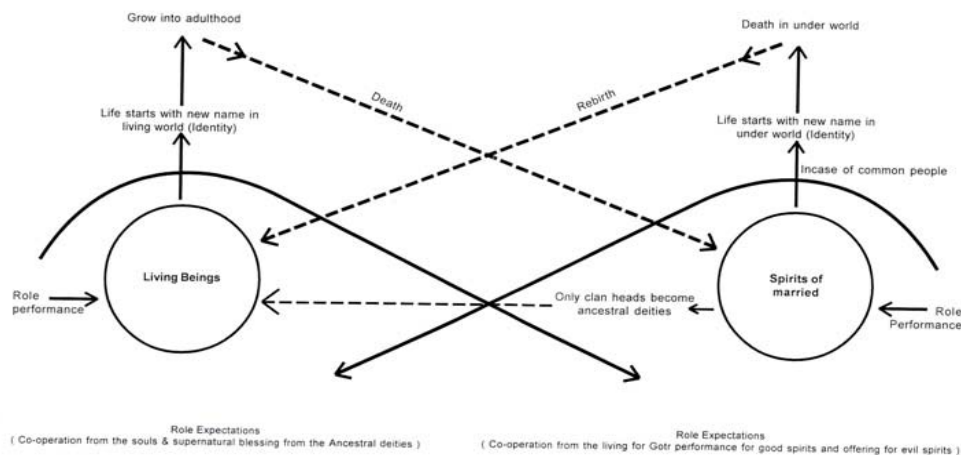
We had fortunate to observe ix Gotar ceremonies as well as eight death rituals among the Bada Gadaba and Ollar Gadabas of Lamtaput block under Koraput district. The methods adopted during data collection are both structured and non-structured with different people. Besides this, different techniques are followed i.e. Case Study, Genealogy etc. Both participant and non participant types of observation method are adopted.

The Gadabas are one of the most colourful and primitive tribes of Orissa. They are one of the early settlers of this country and trace their origin from the time of Ramayana. They are mainly seen in adjoining mountainous tracts of Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. They are mainly concentrated in the district of Koraput, on its central plateau stretched over from the border of Madhya Pradesh to the borders of Andhra Pradesh. Though they are often said to be a single tribe, but actually the name covers several tribes in Koraput district and its eastern slopes in Orissa. But broadly the term Gadaba refers to Bodo and Ollar Gadaba. Some scholars mention about Parenga Gadaba. According to their language Boda Gadabas belong to Mundari speaking group whereas Ollar Gadabas speak a Dravidian language. Among the three groups Bodo Gadaba enjoys the superior status than the other two.

A Gadaba village is socially inter connected with a series of village through various ties. The chief of these ties are Chorubhai and Panjiabhai. Chorubhai relationship based on interlinking one group (totemic group / title group) with another group and one village with another. The presence of Chorubhai is necessary in all rituals. He cooks the Chorubhata (sacred rice) in every life cycle ritual. Panjiabhai relationship is integrated at inter-clan, intra-tribal and inter village level. Panjiabhai perform specific role on the occasion of the Gotar ceremony. Besides these two another three types of relationship are Mahaprasad, Maitar and Babu relationship.

The Gadaba life and culture may be divided broadly into a production cycle and life cycle. This article comes under the later one. In Gadaba Society though life begins with one's birth and its connected rituals, very peculiarly it does not end with ones death and cremation. Very interestingly, physical phenomena are added to the social factors. Ten days after the cremation there is an important ceremony called Dasa and several years after that perhaps after a generation or more the cycle ends with Gotar (Izikowitz, 1951:129). Ram Das (1931) has noted that every Gadaba performs it within three to four years called Gotar. Haimendorf (1943:152,158) has termed it as the Great Memorial Feast. The community called this as Gotar or Gatamela.

### GADABA WORLD VIEW OF LIFE & DEATH



In Gadaba society soon after the death of a person the corpse is carried by a bamboo bier called Mada Dandia. Generally, they cremate the corpse and in case of unnatural death burial takes place. In the cremation ground (Raisang), chorubhai cook the chorubhata (sacred rice) in a new earthen pot called patali and after the fire setting he broke the patali with an axe called Duma Tangia. Then all the mourner group returns from that place and take bath and no feast is arranged on this day. After three days they observe the Tigab ceremony called as 'Pita'. This day fish and rice is cooked by choru bhai in the name of the deceased. The entire relative with the chorubhai, maternal uncle and panjiabhai go to the burial ground and offer different types of cooked food with rice and fish curry which is specially cooked by chorubhai. After they return from the cremation ground, all take bath and participate in a feast which is arranged by the deceased family.

On the tenth day or on an auspicious day, they observe the second Tigab ceremony called Dasa. This day chorubhai and maternal uncle cook separate rice and chicken for the deceased. Sluetering of a cow is a must on this day. This cow is brought by the maternal uncle known as 'muali'. They offer the blood and liver of the cow at the cremation ground in the name of the deceased with the believe that this cow will remain as the property of the deceased in the underworld (Bhitarpur). After all return from the cremation ground all take bath and enjoys the feast which is arranged by the host family.

There is a strong belief among the tribe that unless the Gotar ceremony is solemnized the spirit of the dead (Duma) wanders about restlessly and may cause trouble. This may be reflected in the death of domestic animals and relatives, in poor or no harvest etc. This ceremony is a very expensive one. Therefore, the largest part of Gadaba savings go in the performance of the Gotar feast and for that one must save all through his life in order to arrange such a feast. They celebrate the ceremony on the community basis as it requires much manpower and time.

This ceremony does not end within a day or two; it takes more than a month. In every stage there are some rituals indicating definite belief and practices.

Though the actual Gotar ceremony falls in the month of Magh (January to February) but before that in the month of Diali (October to November) all the Gotar doers invite the Gotaria Disari (who perform the Gotar ritual); and on an auspicious day Gotaria Disari performs the “ Duma Puja” or “ Banabhara Puja” at the cremation ground by slaughtering a pig and two he-goats in the name of the Gogoi (the master of the sprit). He offers rice, rice bear (Pendum) in the name of the deceased whom Gotar is planning to be celebrated Gotaria Disari gives life to the spirits (Dumas) by enchanting mantras and keep away the evil spirit from the village. This day Gotaria Disari fixes the auspicious days for the further activities.

Purchase of buffaloes takes place twenty days before the Gotar ceremony. On an auspicious day, Gotaria Disari gives a stick, a rope and one rupee coin to the chief Gotar doer whose relatives died earlier among the other Gotar performing spirits. The buffalo tied in the name of the deceased having leadership quality called as “ Kuti poda’ or ‘Kuti bangtel’.

It always stands for a male spirit. After purchasing the Kuti buffalo the other buffaloes are purchased by the Gotar doer in the name of their respective deceased spirits with keeping in mind the age, sex and colour of the buffalo. Then after consulting the Gotaria Disari they are engaged in other activities like wood collection (Daru mara), leaf collection, husking of paddy, ragi etc. (Gadamara) with proper rites and ritual according to the instruction of Disari. In every activity some feasts are arranged by the Gotar doers by slaughtering goats, cows etc. relatives and kin members including Chorubhai and Panjiabhai take part in these activities.

Three days before the ceremony with the help of the villagers a stone and simili branch (*Salmalix malabarica*) are placed at the nggom munda or the family’s own stone place which is situated in front of the house. Disari ties the Kuti buffalo in the similimuna by offering hen, rice, pendum etc. Then he pushes the Duma or spirit of the deceased inside the buffaloes and give chicken, mixed with rice to the Kuti buffalo. This is performed at the night time. After this rite is over all other buffaloes are also treated like this. This day is known as “Subhdia”. At this night the buffaloes remain at the nggom munda, while the Gotar families and other inhabitants sing and dance throughout the night. In the morning, Gotaria Disari bathe the Kuti buffalo with the help of turmeric paste and warm water at the nggom munda and he first feeds the chorubhata (sacred rice) which is cooked by

the Chorubhai. This day is called Choru eating day (Chorukhua). After Kuti buffalo eats the chorubhata all other buffaloes are fed by the Chorubhai, family member and relatives. A large number of friends and relatives gather on this day at the nggom munda or families own stone place. They erect two stones; one in horizontal (sansarabiren) and another in vertical position behind it (sibiren) in front of the similibranch in the name of the deceased in whose honour the feast is celebrated. Then, rice beer is served after one chicken egg is sacrificed on the stone by the Disari. Another pair of stones and the simili branch are also erected at the Gotar langbo (which is situated at the outskirts of the village) and near the cremation ground in the similar manner. Then, all perform their dance in front of the nggom munda. Host families throw different types of coloured water like black, red, yellow etc. and even mud and dust to their Panjiabhai. Then all are highly treated with a great meal and drink at the night. On this day, Dhensa dance is also performed by both males Chorubhai, matter normally done in the presence of elderly persons and the village head Naik. But 'Kuti buffalo' is kept specially for the Chorubhai.

Next day of the jagarna is known as the Jur day (tearing into pieces day) of this day is called as Gotar day. Before sunrise at about 4 a.m. Disari worships the Rau Debta (Sun god) by sacrificing a she-buffalo. Sisabhai (Pujari) slaughters the buffalo in the outskirts of the village near the Gotar langbo with facing the east in the name of the Sun god (Rau Debta) for the welfare of the village. All the people make a fight to collect the tongue because they believe that it is used for medicine. One can do many things in morning, the buffaloes are bathed with hot water, turmeric paste and castor oil and they are decorated according to the age, sex, choice of the respective deceased person. They are mainly decorated with mirrors, combs which are placed on their horns. A piece of cloth made out of kerang(bark of a tree) or sometimes lungi vessels once used by the 34 dead person tied round the neck and wrapped round the stomach of the animal. In order to satisfy the spirit believed to be hidden in the animal they clean with cow dung the middle portion of the path through which the dead person was carried to cremation ground and there they offer different types of cooked food liquor. They believe that the spirit through the animal will receive food given in its honour. After that the music of drums and shawms (oboes) and the noise of loud wailing they are led at the front of a procession of the relatives out to Gotar langbo. At the same offered as a sacrifice. The buffaloes containing the spirits of the deceased are carried away from the

village and thus first phase of the rites is completed; that is the spirits of the deceased have been removed from the actual village boundary.

At the Gotar which is situated at the outskirts of the village tremendous crowds gather. Panjiabhai groups tie each buffalo in the similibranches and dance backside of the buffaloes with gotar songs. At this time different friends, relatives come with a buffalo as a presentation. This buffalo is called as purani. It is the tradition in their society that after this purani received by the Gotar doer is slaughtered and the flesh is distributed equally among the donors Panjiabhai and receivers Panjiabhai. But sometimes one party creates tension and quarrel takes place between the two parties which ultimately takes the shape of fierce fight.

Then at about two o'clock the people return to the Gotar longbow where the original containing the spirit of the deceased are standing. After the ritual performed by the Disari to the Kuti buffalo, Panjiabhai drives the buffaloes swiftly in the direction of their villages as fast as the buffaloes could go excepting the Kuti buffalo which is lastly stroke by the Sisabhai to the left side of the belly.

The assembled people then rush towards the Kuti buffalo and as soon as gushes from the first wounds all men present irrespective of clan and phratry throw themselves on the buffaloes, slit upon the bellies and tear out the entrails from the living animals. Chorubhai takes the backside and Panjiabhai takes the front side of the remaining part of the Kuti buffalo. This is the last scene of the Gotar ceremony. The day following the Gotar is known as Kutum bageguige (relatives go away) or kadamaraday. Each Gotar doer arrange a special feast by slaughtering cow, goat, sheep etc. for the relatives who donated cow, goat etc. at the time of Gotar ceremony and also to people of his own village in recognition of services rendered during the ceremony. New clothes are also presented by the Gotar doers to the maitar, mafsad, Chorubhai etc. The whole atmosphere is filled with merry making, jokes and humour.

The exchange of gifts in Gotar ceremony plays an important role in Gadaba society. They never go to their relatives house with empty hand. They give with the hope of getting back the same on any occasion later on. The diagram given here shows the nature of exchange of respective taken place at the time of Gotar ceremony (Fig.1).



Panjiabhai plays a vital role and takes the lion's share in the ceremony. The gaining of prestige is also considered through this gift of exchange. They have the strong belief that until and unless this ceremony is completed the spirit or Duma cannot get salvation and never enters to the underworld (Bhitarpur) and in taking rebirth. In every ceremony there is often an intensifying element, and this finds expression in certain aesthetic actions such as relation and artistic exchange among the people.

This ceremony comes after a long time even after a generation or more. As it has been indicated, a Gotar implies tremendous economic effort for a family and their relatives and a really impressive accumulation of wealth. It requires more money and manpower, they sell their land, ornaments and do extra work to save money for the purpose. Thus, it is seen that the ceremony of Gotar enhances group relations and it creates a favorable atmosphere for integrated and co-ordinated community life as a whole.

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