

Ethnobotanical Studies on Folklores of Orissa

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural activity in Orissa normally coincides with the period of active monsoon in the state i.e. from June to September every year. Although, monsoon behaviour is often erratic leading to flood or drought, farming without permanent irrigation (only 35.16% irrigated area including lift irrigation; Pattnaik, 1996) and dependence on monsoon rain is a common feature in major part of the state. So, the Oriya farmer has been cultivating his main kharif crop rice, during this period, from ancient time.

In order to perform the necessary interim steps of cultivation process starting from ploughing of land, showing seeds, transplantation, weeding, etc. in appropriate time within the short span of the active monsoon season, these stages are linked to specific lunar or solar days and months as well as with certain religious and socio-cultural functions during the rainy season. This linkage leads to the formation of regional agricultural calendar, created in form of folklores in colloquial languages for easy remembrance as well as timely performance of the rural cultivator which persists in the interior pockets of the state till today. The present work is a collection and analysis of few such folklores with emphasis to its relevance in 21st century.

GENESIS

Folklores are the best means to learn or explain any incidence or event (Agarwal, 1981). Thousands of such folklores relating to various aspects of natural, cultural, mythological, political, traditional and other activities of people prevail in Indian folk life (Jain, 1996). Similarly, the present ones depicting agricultural timing in Orissa, are some among the numerous poetic versions of ancient wisdoms still alive in rural areas of the state. This folk science is originated through years of keen observation of rainfall on specific lunar and solar days or months and correlating it with different agricultural processes during rainy season. Subsequently these folklo-

res are transferred from generation to generation orally in form of popular folksongs for easy remembrance of the rural farmers of Orissa.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

Folklores concerning agricultural timing were collected through extensive survey and discussion with peasants (Mohanty et al., 1999). Literatures regarding folklores of this region (Dash, 1976; Dash, 1985; Mishra, 1997) were also checked to avoid errors in spoken language. These were scrutinised and most relevant ones are presented

ENUMERATION

Fifteen proverbs relating to agricultural timing are presented in spoken Oriya language with their transliteration followed by explanation.

Agi bâsi, do±a bâsi, jalabâsi

Ki Karibu putâ khaei ghaei

(Agi-Agni Purnima i.e. Full moon day of Magha during Jan. and Feb.; *bâsi* –next day; *do±a* -Doal Purnima i.e Full moon day of Phalguna during Feb. and March; *ja±a* rain; *Ki* –What; *Karibu*-will do;*putâ*-Son; *khaei ghaei*-foretelling through astrologer).

Ploughing of farm land should start day after rainfall, day after Agni Purnima (Full moon day of Magha i.e. during Jan-Feb.) or Dola purnima (Full moon day of Phalguna i.e. during Feb-March) and any consultancy with foreteller or astrologer is not necessary to start the process.

Phagupe caæa, sunâ kasa

Caite caæa, Ku»umba poæa

Bai>âkhe caæa,

hâkima poæa

Jyæ»he caæa, Chatare pa>a.

(*Phagupe*- In the month of Phalguna, *Caæa*-Plough; *Sunâ*-Gold; *Kasa*-Test for purchase; *Caite*-In the month Chaitra; *Ku»umba*-Family; *Poæa*-Maintain; *Bai>âkhe*-In the month Baisakha i.e. April and May, *Hâkima*- Authority, *Jyæ»he*-In Jyesthe i.e. May and June; *Chatare* – Place where food is distributed on charity; *pa>a*-

enter.)

Ploughing and preparing the farmland for paddy cultivation in different months gives different yield as observed from long experiences. Ploughing in 'Phalguna' (Feb.-Mar.) is most beneficial and gives higher yield as the soil gets sufficient time for proper conditioning. In 'Chaitra' (March-April) with moderate yield, in Baisakha (Apr.-May) the minimum and in 'Jyestha' (May-June), the least amount of paddy output due to lack of appropriate time.

Cāæabāsa, Baisākha māsa

Phaguṃa guṃæi Bhodua biṃæi

Dhāna kâ»i cāæā, mārai heṃæi

(*Cāæabāsa*-Ploughing, *Baisākha māsa*-Month Baisakha; *Phaguṃa*-Month Phalguna; *guṃæi*-Make soil to dust; *Bhodua*-Bhadra i.e Aug. & Sept.; *biṃæi*-Weeding; *Dhāna*-Paddy; *Kāti*-Reep; *Casā*-Farmer; *Mārai heṃæi*-Overjoy).

Baisakha (Apr.-May) is the ideal month of ploughing the field. But the same in the month of 'Phalguna' (Feb. March) is more beneficial for processing and conditioning of soil. Similarly weeding in 'Bhadra' (Aug.-Sept.) leads to proper growth and good harvest of crop.

Bruæa satara kâna »uṃa

Dôba ciri dhāna buṃa

(*Bruæa*-Solar month Brusha i.e during May & June; *Satara*-Seventeenth day; *Kāne*-Ear; *»uṃa*-Listen, *Dôba*-Grass; *ciri*-Poughing, *Dhāna*-Paddy, *Buṃa*-Sow).

Seventeenth day of solar month 'Brusha', which usually falls towards the last part of May or beginning of June as per Christian calendar year; is the suitable day to start ploughing and sowing of paddy in Orissa.

Āæāæha mā sare baturi cāæa

Ati bhāgya thile pâl

-hiāhoi buṃithile, basikari khâi

(*Āæāæha*-Month Asadha i.e. June & July, *mā sare*-In the month, *Baturi*-Wet Field; *Cāæa*-Ploughing, *Ati* Most; *Bhāgya*-Good luck; *thile*-If *Pâi*-To get; *-hiāhoi*- In standing position; *buṃithile*-If sowed; *Basikari*- In sitting position, *Khâi*-consume.)

Ploughing of Land and sowing paddy immediately after a shower in the month of 'Asadha' (June-July) leads to good harvest because of minimum appearance of obnoxious weeds in this moist soil cultivation method.

Janamaku buṃile

Karmaku pha±e

(*Janamaku*-Formation of ear of Corn; *Buṃile*-Sowing; *Karmaku*-As you sow; *pha±e*-Fruiting)

Sowing of paddy in 'Bhadra' (Oriya lunar month) i.e. in August- September usually leads to poor yield due to lack of sufficient time for proper vegetative growth and tiller production.

Āge buṃa pache buṃa

Garbhāṃku »āṃa»uṃa

(*Āge*-Early, *Buṃa*-sow; *Pache*-Late; *Garbhāṃku*-On the day of Garbhana Sankranti; *»āṃa»uṃa*-Manage to flower)

Both the early and late variety of paddy usually flowers around 'Garbhana Sankranti' (First day of 'Tula', the solar month) in the month of October is autumn season.

Āæāæhe rue' khetaku

«rābaṃ rue' phā»aku

(*Āæāæhe*- In the month Asadha; *rue'*-Transplant; *Khetaku*-To field; *«rābaṃ*-In month Sravana; -To low land)

'Asadha' (June-July) is the suitable month for transplantation of rice seedlings in plain farmlands and 'Sravana' (July-Aug.) for low land stagnant water.

Āæāæhe rue' balake

«rābaṃ rue' phalake

Bhādrabe rue' tuæake

Ā»vine rue' kasake

(*Āæāæhe*-In Asadha; *rue'*-Transplant; *Balake*-Healthy and robust; *«rābaṃ*-In Sravana; *Phalake*-Good fruiting; *Bhādrabe*-In Bhadraba; *tuæake*-Production of more chaff; *Ā»vine*-In Asvina; *Kasake*-With difficulty)

Transplantation of rice seedlings in different months gives different results. Transplantation in 'Asadha' (June-July leads to desired growth with resistance to disease, in 'Sravana' (July-Aug) higher production, in 'Bhadra' (Aug-Sep.) more chaff and in 'Asvina' (Sep.-Oct.) reduced growth and low Harvest of crop.

Bhādrba māse na bithuæa buā

Tahi're luce hariṃa bāhu»iā

(*Bhādrba*-In month Bhadraba; *māse*-Month; *Na*-do not; *bithuæa*-Puddle; *Buā*-Broadcast seedlings; *Tahi're*-In it; *Luce*-Hide; *hariṃa bāhu»iā*-Buck)

Planting of broadcasted seedling in the month of Bhadraba (Aug.-Sep.) is futile as it is too late

for proper growth and tiller production.

Sātapurḍ yāuchi khasi

Indra mā kānde

Bāri piḍḍāre basi

(*Sātapurḍ*-Satapuri amavasya, *yāuchi* Khasi-Passing away; *Indra*-rain God; *Mā*-Mother; *Kānde*-Crying; *Bāri piḍḍāre*-Backyard; *Basi*-Sitting)

Less or no rain during 'Saptapuri Amavasya' (New Moon day of August) indicates failure of crop and incoming famine in that region.

Āvina mā sare dhoi

Niæka±a¶ka hoi

(*Āvina*-Month Asvina; *Mā sare*-In the month, *dhoi*-Wash out; *Niæka±a¶ka*-No further problem; *Hoi*-Happen)

Flash flood and washing out of crop in the month of 'Asvina' (Sept.-Oct.) has devastating effect on crop production as there is least possibility of further replantation of seedling beyond that month,

Kakaæā hatā, si'ha cau»hā

Kanye nighañce ro

Tu±are roile mø±are pha±e

Biæi biæi kari tho

(*Kakaæā*-Solar month Karkata i.e. July & Aug; *Hatā*-One hand; *si'ha*-Solar month Singha i.e. Aug & Sept.; *cau»hā*-One fourth; *Kanye*-I solar month Kanya i.e. Sept. & Oct.; *nighañce*-In thick Cluster; *Ro*-Transplant; *Tu±are*-In solar month Tula i.e. Oct. & Nov.; *Roile*-Transplant; *mø±are*-Average; *pha±e*-Production; *Biæi*-In Bundles; *Kari*-Do; *Tho*-Keep)

The distance between seedlings during transplantation should vary in different months for proper growth and better yield of grain. Transplantation in the month of 'Kakada' (July) at a distance of one hand (around 1.5 feet), in 'Simha' (August) at one span (around 9") in 'Kanya' (Sept.) less than a span and in 'Tula' (Oct.) more densely with more than one seedling at a point, are advisable for desired harvest of grains.

Thoæa bati»ā

Phula bāi»ā

(*Thoæa*-ear of corn; *bati»ā*-Thirty two; *Phula*-Blooming; *bāi»ā*-Twenty two days)

The ear of corn (Panicum) blooms after thirty two days of its inception and grains are formed after twenty two days of flowering

Kārtike nathāe aphulā

Mārga»ire nathāe apācilā

(*Kārtike*-In lunar month Kartika i.e. Oct. & Nov.; *Nathāe*-Shall not remian; *Aphulā*-Without flowering, *Mārga»ire*-In Margasira i.e. Nov. & Dec.; *apācilā*- Without ripening)

All variety of rice, flowers in 'Kartika' (Oct.-Nov.) and start ripening in 'Margasira' (Nov.-Dec.) irrespective of its day of sowing or transplantation.

DISCUSSION

The livelihood in India is mostly based on agriculture which in turn depends on rainfall by south west monsoon in major parts of the country. Perhaps no other part of the world does the rainfall regime enter so much into all aspects of human life as in the Indian sub-continent (Singh, 1974) the picture is similar in Orissa where most of the cultivable land depends on monsoon rain for its kharif crop, due to inadequate irrigation facility in the state.

Monsoon winds become active in Orissa during June to September every year barring occasional deviations. The concerned folklores are formulated by monitoring the timing of rainfall during definite day or month as per lunar and solar calendar and co-relating it with different phases of cultivation practices as well as associating with certain socio-religious functions during an agricultural season with the sole purpose of easy remembrance by the farmers of the state. It has also explained, advised and cautioned to the cultivator, the exact timing and effect of performing different agricultural practices to make him aware and punctual in his job. This folk science of rainfall timing is observed to be near accurate and hence relevant to the farmers and ruralites. So, it is imperative, to further survey in wider scale, collect and record these ancient wisdoms before they vanish with rapidly changing socio-cultural pattern of the society in rural Orissa.

KEY WORDS Ethnobotany. Folklore. Farming. Schedule.

ABSTRACT Folklores composed in form of couplet, quatrain or a stanza are represented along with the English rendering of the underlining meaning. These folklores concerning the monsoon rainfall and agricultural timing as well as its effect on the kharif crop of the state are

composed by some unknown creative souls basing upon their vast experience and keen observaton of nature. These became popular due to their utility and passed from generation to generaton orally. The present relevance of such ancient wisdoms is also discussed.

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