

The *Jatra* (Fair) of the Madia Tribe and Its Related Culinary Practices in Surjagad Village, Gadchiroli District

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Abstract: Food culture constitutes an essential aspect of every society. Communities characterized by diverse cultural norms consume a wide range of foods and adhere to various dietary practices. The *Surjagad jatra* serves as a significant fair/festival and a traditional ceremonial gathering for the Madia tribe. Members of the Madia tribe assemble at the sacred site of *Thakoar dev*, located within the lush forests of the mountains. They engage in their customary cultural expressions, including folk dances and folk songs, while also undertaking a pilgrimage to the revered *Thakoar dev*, presenting offerings to both the *Thakoar dev* and their other deities. By examining their diverse food choices and preparation methods during the fair, we can gain insights into their sacred food offerings to their deities.

The Madia tribe resides in the Gadchiroli District of Maharashtra State. This Madia tribe is categorized as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Limited research has been conducted regarding the cultural practices of the Madia tribe.

This paper aims to investigate the culinary traditions practiced by the Madia tribe in *Surjagad*, located in Etapalli Taluka of Gadchiroli District. Various elements are linked to food culture, including essential food items provided by each villager, the ritual sacrifices of animals, the distribution of the meat from these sacrificial animals among the villagers, the preparation of dishes, sacred offerings, and the provision of food to participants. *Surjagad*

holds significant spiritual value for the tribal communities living in the Gadchiroli District. Therefore, there is a pressing need for research into the dietary customs and cultural practices of the Madia tribe.

Keywords: Food Culture, Jatra (Fair), Festival, Pilgrimage, Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group

Introduction

This paper mainly focusses upon the *Jatra* (Fair) of the Madia tribe and its related culinary practices in Surjagad Village, Gadchiroli District.

In The SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES ORDERS (AMENDMENT) ACT, 1976. (108 of 1976), [18th September 1976], In THE SCHEDULE Part – IX – Maharashtra - Sr. No. 18. **Madia**

The Madia tribe lives in the Maharashtra State, District of Gadchiroli. This tribe is classified as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG). In India there are 75 PVTGs, and in Maharashtra there are 3 PVTGs (Katkari, Madia Gond & Kolams). Characterization of Tribal groups as PVTGs is based on their Pre-agricultural level of technology, Low Level of Literacy and Stagnant or diminishing population.

Madia tribe have their unique traditional food culture, where they eat *tambode* {red ant chutney (Weaver ants)}, Monkeys, Farm rat, Rat snake etc. So, studying their traditional diversify food varieties will give us insight into the diet they have.

There hasn't been much research done on the cultural practices of the Madia tribe. Because the Madia Adivasis inhabit a dense forest area that is devoid of adequate road access and transportation options. Perhaps this could be the primary concern, as there is a lack of extensive study on the Madia tribe, specifically on food culture.

According to Malinowski's (1944) theory of needs, Food is both a biological and a social need and is vital to be satisfied on everyday basis. The need for food shapes the society through the activities related to food production, consumption and distribution. Likewise, the food ways i.e., social, cultural and economic practices related to food production, consumption and distribution are defined by the society, its cultural values, customs and beliefs (Mallery). This can prove the importance of food in anthropological studies and the need for study on food ways and patterns to analyse and understand about the evolution of humans and their culture (Levi-Strauss; Levi-Strauss *et al.*).

For the people of Island of the Union Territory of Lakshadweep, India, food is prepared and served by female members. But generally food is first taken by the children, next by the adult male members and lastly by the female members (Das 1982).

There are rules as to how the meal should be served and the persons who are to serve it are also defined. These rules have encoded messages about the various aspects of the society like hierarchy, exclusion boundary maintenance and social events. Food intake is a compulsive thing and it has to come in some order. It not only satisfies hunger and regulates the material aspects but it is also important enough in maintaining social relations. By offering food, people express their social ties with one another. Among most of the societies friendly relations are established by offering food to individual or family. (Malaya Mazumdar, June 1995)

Ethnographers have found multiples entry points for the study of how humans connect food to rituals, symbols, and to re-enact venerated stories (e.g., see the franco phone research on Islamic ritual sacrifice – Brisebarre 1998, Bonte et al. 1999, Kanafani-Zahar 1999).

Research Methodology

Study Area and Research Design

The study was carried out in Etapalli Taluka of Gadchiroli District, Maharashtra, an area significantly dominated by Madia tribal people. The research focused on the *Surjagad Jatra*(fair) of *Madia* tribe in Maharashtra with reference to Food Traditions. A qualitative study design was to understand the food pattern during the fair and cultural activities.

Data Collection Tools and Techniques

Primary data were collected using qualitative ethnographic methods. A semi-structured and unstructured interview schedule was administered to record the rituals practices details of the respondents. An interview guide was used to conduct in-depth interviews focusing on ritual, fair observance.

Participant narratives were supplemented with audio recordings and photographic documentation to capture material culture, ritual spaces, and symbolic elements of fair. These visual and oral records supported thick description and contextual interpretation of cultural practices. Ethical considerations were strictly

followed. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured. The research process was conducted with cultural sensitivity, adhering to the anthropological principle of beneficence.

Data Analysis methods

Qualitative data were analysed using manual thematic analysis. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to identify religious practises related to rituals. Interpretations were informed by emic perspectives and supported by relevant anthropological literature.

Aim of the Study

The present study aims to examine the Madia tribe's culinary practices at *Surjagad* in Etapalli Taluka in Gadchiroli District.

Objectives of the Study

- To study their traditional food culture, dietary practices with reference to their cultural event of *Surjagad Jatra*.
- To understand the practice of offering food to deities and its cultural and religious importance in Madia Tribe.

Data Interpretation

The *Jatra* (Fair) of the Madia Tribe and Its Related Culinary Practices in Surjagad Village, Gadchiroli District: *Surjagad* is a place at Etapalli Taluka, District – Gadchiroli. Furthermore, it is a fort/place associated with legendary God *Thakoar dev / Thakkor dev*, that resides on the mountain peak in dense forest. *Surjagad jatra* is also called a *Dussera* festival. It is at this place that *Dussera* is celebrated. During the first week of January, a *Surjagad Jatra* is performed.

The Pooja samiti (prayer committee), which takes care of all the necessary arrangements, such as constructing a pavilion (Ghotul – Traditional political & educational place), preparing food for the outsider guests or visitors, preparing a schedule of tribal cultural events, promoting tribal identity and promoting tribal culture. For performing the ritual, the *Perma*, *Bhumiya*, and *Punjari* are called upon. There is a separate place dedicated to *Perma*, where the people provide him with all the necessities, including food, water, *muhwa* liquor, and servants. Besides,

there is no permissible presence of menstruating women or men whose wives are menstruating near Perma premises. Because menstruation blood is not accepted at the Perma's premises and holy sites. Each village chief allows only one household member to visit the god's site and enjoy the village's part of the feast.

However, everyone is welcome to attend the *Surjagad Jatra*

First Day of *Surjagad Jatra*

On first day, the pilgrims halt at the God *Thakoar dev / Thakkor dev's* site (Surjagad area). Where, goats, chickens and pigs are sacrificed and are butchered by the tribal butchers.

During the field research near Surjagad area there were seventy villages, and from all these villages, money was collected and by that money sacrificial animals were brought for sacrifice.

The goats are cut by *kashya* (small cutting knife) on the *Tadkama* (toddy palm wine tree's leaves). Later the flesh/meat are made into pieces by axe on a wooden log, that are placed on the *Tadkama*.

After butchering, the pieces of meat are distributed to entire 70 villages on *Teka aakee(s)* (leaves of teak wood). And pig's meat is distributed separately from goat's and chicken's meat.

The meat is then enjoyed by the Tribeswomen and Tribesmen. Also, vegetarian food is also cooked by the people and Pooja samiti (prayer committee). In the past, they prepared meals using red ant chutney; however, they now opt for masala purchased from the market. They serve people food on leaf plates made up of Phanera Vahlia/Bauhinia racemose Vahl (*kanchanvel*) or Butea monosperma (*palas pan*) or Teak (*Tectona grandis*) leaves/*Saag*. After enjoying the food, people participate and enjoy the tribal cultural event for entire night like singing folksongs and folkdance i.e. *Rela Relu* (move round in anticlockwise direction with singing *rela rela* chorus).

Second Day of *Surjagad Jatra*

On second day, all the people again celebrate their cultural activity. In Morning, Tribesmen, Tribeswomen and prayer committee cook non-vegetarian and vegetarian food for themselves and guests / visitors. After consumption of morning food, the procession leaves for the Surjagad's mountain peak where the *Thakoar dev* resides. Procession includes *Perma, Bhumiya, Punjari*, Tribesmen, and Tribeswomen.

Tribeswomen are allowed to visit till the entrance of the Surjagad fort and do worship.

For *Perma* and *Bhumya*, separate goat was sacrificed on the first day and the head of the goat is offered to *Perma* only. Also, *Perma*'s food is cooked at his premises only.

Perma/Bhumya offers *Pattee* or *Peend* by making designs of several vertical lines and several horizontal lines joining each vertical lines which are made from rice flour, kuku (red colour vermilion powder), turmeric, black powder and festive colour (pink colour powder) in front of the Votive(s) {Tribal clay figurines} remains of *Thakoar dev*. Before worshipping their deities, *Perma* touches both hands fist on the ground to respect the Earth and Sky. And, then they start with their worshipping rituals.

In every designed boxes of *Pattee*, heap of rice grains is placed in the name of their deities by the *Perma*. Because their deities accept offering from the *Perma* only.

Before cutting the pig/rooster/hen, *bhumiya* or *perma*'s pupils pour few drops of water containing mahua flowers or mahua liquor over the sacrificial animals as a purification. After that, some rice grains are placed in front of the sacrificial animals, and if they eat that grains, it means the animal has agreed to be sacrificed in the name of *Thakoar dev*. Then, the animals are sacrificed by the *kashya*.

After procession returns from the mountain visit, they again enjoy the cultural activity entire night.

On third day, people return to their respective places.

Conclusion

Madia Adivasis resides in dense forest, which lack access to suitable roads and lack of transportation. There is unrest in this region. Perhaps this could be the primary concern, as there is a lack of extensive study on the Madia tribe, specifically on food culture.

Based on the ethnographic study, it can be said that food practices have its own distinct characteristics and food culture is an integral part of it. *Surjagad jatra* is regarded as one of the most significant fair celebrated by the Madia tribe. Previously, meals were prepared with red ant chutney; however, due to evolving cultural dynamics, they now have adopted masala sourced from the market.

Cultural ecology has shaped up the belief system of tribe and is reflected in varieties of material used in the rituals such as leaf cups made from *Tadkama* (toddy

palm wine tree's leaves), *Teka aakee*(s) (leaves of teak wood), leaf plates made up of *Phanera Vahlia/Bauhinia racemose* Vahl (*kanchanvel*).

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