

An Unknown Legacy: A Living Tribal Heritage of the Oraons

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ABSTRACT

The Oraons or the Kudukh's are an important Dravidian tribe of the Chotanagpur plateau in Jharkhand. Oral traditions narrate that their cultural practices, customs, food habits and ornaments are closely related to those that were practiced by the inhabitants of the Indus Valley Civilization; their folklore states that the Oraons have co-existed in that region with the Munda tribe and they were displaced only due to the arrival of the Aryans making them move to their current location. Traditionally the Oraons have been known to be nature lovers, their entire lifestyle, habitat, ethnicity and practices, in more ways than one, revolve around nature. They can therefore be considered to be the protectors of nature as they have been for generations protecting sacred groves and their rituals and festivals, the Karam, Pahgu and Sarhul, surround these groves. Their heritage is seen in their unique lifestyle and attachment with nature. While change touches everyone, a tribe which has for centuries maintained its food gathering and hunting identity are also being impacted by the prevailing modern and more civilized social milieu. The history of the recent years has witnessed a growing consciousness towards the maintenance and preservation of the environment, deforestation being a major concern; where on one side industrialization has its own benefits, on the other, its ill effects are clearly visible on the environment. This paper intends to bring to the fore the Oraons, a neglected community, and highlight their contribution as nature conservers and protectors, thus making them relevant to the modern times.

Keywords: Sacred groves, folklore, rituals, nature conservers, tribal heritage