Myth in Urban Oraon: An Anthropological Study at North 24 Parganas in West Bengal

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Abstract

Present paper discusses the changes and modification of myth. No one can live without myth. The unwritten subjective and intuitive nature of origin of life since believed by all society that is generally regarded as myth. Oraons myth and creation of life since heard of thousands years. In recent time they have triggered it among people of larger community. The village communication system could be divided into two main categories. One of the two is traditional means of communication system through it the Oraons prescribe their cultural fertility to local people. Myth is most powerful way through the cultural dignity may be signified. The present study has been carried out on two different areas of North 24 Parganas of West Bengal. These study area are inhabited by Oraon community. They had living here since hundred years. They migrated from Chota Nagpur area. Although they are migrated but also they could not forgotten their own cultural activity. Especially we have studied their myth and related tales for understanding how they improvise the tales of myth and convey it to the other people. It is seen that Urban Oraons have already been modified their myth tales not only development, they want to serve it among the larger people with modern context. The study depicts written documents of myth story, changes of story by intake some characters from Hindu epic namely; Ramayana and using the modern communication devices like microphone, printed book etc. So the study has been regarded under prestigious communication of system of village level known as traditional means communication.

Keywords: Myth; Urban Oraon; Traditional means of communication; Cultural fertility

Introduction

Communication is active action of human mind. It is a system of transferring and receiving message from a man or place to another. Generally "communication" is a process of sending and receiving message. Some scholars asserted that it is the process by which people send message to another person or to people. Communication has many channels. The two most important categories are modern channels or means of communication, and traditional means of communication; the former is very popular to us. In this phase scholars have pointed out, that the modern media like Newspaper, TV, radio, Internet etc. are examples of modern means of communication. But even today, in villages, semi-urban and local towns, people convey message in their own cultural communication system, which is designed as Traditional means of communication. The traditional means of communication is actually very old rooted communication system. It can also be termed as 'generational memory'. It is technically very poor, yet very popular among the villagers. The people of rural areas are not able to access the Modern communication channels to some extent. It has been observed that in these areas, people have always tried to maintain their own traditional means of communication system parallel to the modern means of communication. As a result of this, a balanced situation has evolved by these two channels of communication, in which, the traditional means of communication very seriously reshuffles itself, reflecting a new mode of modernization. Thus, author has mentioned that the process of modernization affects the traditional means of communication of the Oraons who are residing near city area or semi-town area and they have been designated as Urban Oraon. The traditional means of communication are Myth, Festival, Rituals, Song, drama, Puppet show etc. In this section author tried to explain how traditional myth and tales have changed and modified themselves over a period of time. The Urban Oraons carry forth their legacy, yet, with their brush with modernization the past undergoes certain changes, in which, the newly emergent culture is never completely bereft of traditional mores/moorings.

Review of Literature

Everybody lives in myth. This idea disturbs most people for conventionally myth means falsehood. Nobody intends to live in falsehood. Everyone believes they live in truth but there many types of truth, some objectives some subjective, some logical, some intuitive, some cultural, some universal. Some are based on evidence; other depends on faith. Myth is true which is subjective intuitive, cultural and grounded in faith. Myth is essentially cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals communities together Pattanaik [1], Lévi-Strauss [2] sees myth as a mode of communication, like language or music. In music it is not the sounds themselves that are important but their structure that is, the relationship of sounds to other sounds. In myth it is the narrative that takes the part of the sounds of music, and the structure of the narrative can be perceived at various levels and in different codes (e.g. culinary, astronomical, and sociological). From this it follows that no one version of a myth is the "right" one; all versions are valid, for myth, like society, is a living organism in which all the parts contribute to the existence of the whole. As in an orchestral score certain voices or instruments play some sounds, while the whole score is the sum of the individual parts, so in a myth the different, partial versions combine to reveal its total structure,

including the relationship of the different parts to each other and to the whole Myth, then, is a mode by which a society communicates and through which it finds a resolution between conflicting opposites [3].

Lang [4] told that "The science of Anthropology generally speaks, with some confidence, on many questions of mythology". Myth represents now the early scientific, now the early imaginative and humorous faculty, playing truly round all objects of thought: even round the superhuman being belief.

According to Kirk [5], myth is a traditional tale with an important message. He classified myth into three broad functional categories these are as follows: 1) Narrative and entertaining 2) Operative, iterative and valedictory (including myths associated with rituals and religion, charter myths, and etiological myths) 3) Speculative and explanatory (myths that reflect or explain fundamental paradox or institutions).

Winzeler [6] stated that "The term myth comes from Greek "mythos" and originally meant the stories of the ancient gods and heroes of Greece and Rome, to which were soon added those from India, Europe and elsewhere. Anthropologists and most other scholars would probably agree that myth in the classic sense has a number of characteristics". So far what the several scholars of anthropology have pointed out in general regarding myth, are listed below. However, one needs to remember that their characteristics are at variance with the particularities that we see in the Urban Oraons, which author have explored in this chapter.

1.   Myth is a story rather than a statement of belief or doctrine.

2.   It includes personalities that may be human, animal, or supernatural or a combination of these, who do things or to whom things happen.

3.   It is a story that is not just known but "believed" and regarded as important or sacred.

4.   It has no known author or authors, myth is different in this way from religious revelation or prophecy, to which it may otherwise be similar.

5.   It involves events or activities that are in some way extraordinary, "larger than life" if not necessary supernatural and cannot be confirmed or disproved.

Burkert [7] described "Myth belongs to more general class of traditional tale. The identity of traditional tale, including myth as it is from any particulars text from and from direct reference to reality, is to be found in a structure of sense within the tale itself. Tale structure, as sequences of mortifies, are founded on basic biological or cultural programs of action. Myth is a traditional tale with secondary partial reference to something of collective importance". Caldwell [8] proposed the following characters are the major functions of myth.

1.   Myth is a source of cognitive categories.

2.   Myth is a form of symbolic expression.

3.   Myth is the projection of the sub-conscious.

4.   Myth is the world view.

5.   Myth as legitimate by social institution.

6.   Myth is character of behavior.

7.   Myth is a mirror of culture, social structure and so forth.

8.   Myth is religious communication and genre.

9.   Myth is a medium for structure.

Beals and Hoijer [9] described that myths frequently are connected with origins – the creation of the universe and its various aspects, the origin of important cultural aids such as fire, the origins of significant food animals and plants, the beginnings of death or illness, the origin of the society itself and of its clans or other social segments, and the ceremonies and rituals.

Boas stated that "The mythological beings pre-existed the modern order of the world". They may still appear as actors in tales relating to the modern world, but their great feats belong to mythological period. It would not be fair to assume that the myths dealing with the origin of the world or of the gift of arts and ceremonials to mankind were the result of a light play of imagination, as we suppose the rather in significant animal tales to have been. Boas further said "It is impossible to draw a sharp line between myths and folk tales, because the same tales who occur as myths appear also in the form folk tales. If we define myths as tales that give an interpretation of natural phenomena, we are confronted with difficulty that a tale may conform to this definition in one case, while in another it may be a purely human tale sometimes even void of wonderful elements. Thus the same tale would at one time be classed as a myth, and at another time as a folk tale".

Myths are the oldest and most powerful of all story forms. Myths are stories that give people a relationship with the universe, the passing of time, and with their environment. Some myths give the official view of creation; others are a way to explain natural events. Myths were passed on by spoken word, and their function was to explain, to teach lessons and to entertain.

Objectives

1. To understand traditional means of communication system in village level.

2. Changes of Myth structure and modification.

3. How the people convey their message through myth by using modern techniques.

4. An ethnographic profile of present Myth and tales.

Methodology

Methodology may be used to refer to theoretical discussions concerning the entire research proposal including the forms of thought of the research, aims and objectives of the research, application of the research methods. "Methodology" is also often used in a narrow sense to refer to the methods, techniques or tools, employed for the collection and processing of data. But in broader sense methods and techniques are one of the components of methodology. Finally, methodology may be called to designate all the concepts and procedures employed in the analysis data, however, collected to arrive at conclusion [10].

The Oraons of Dhalani and Sardapara of Gobardanga have been living since for long time. Dhalani is situated near Bangaon Town. They always contact steady communication with town people and communicate daily with the larger people who live around them. As result, a number of urban cultural traits have entered their life. Although they have been living there in a pocket, they have not completely given up their traditional way of life; rather they have infused with a new blood in their traditional culture by taking over features of modern urban culture. This resulted in their way of communication. All these has led me to designate them as Urban Oraon and fit to be a study of anthropological research. Some of the following important field

method and techniques have been used in this study. To procure data from the field I pen-friend to take the following technique used by all research scholars in social sciences including anthropology.

A) Interview B) Observation C) Genealogy D) Census and survey E) Photographic and F) Case study. Besides those techniques we used the content analysis, took some photographs etc.

The people

For the study there are two areas selected, one is governed by panchayat system and other is Municipality. Dhalani village is situated 20 km. away from Bangaon town and Sardarpara of ward No'-2, is in Gobardanga City. Both areas are actually local towns (Table 1). From Dhalani village 97 and 24 families from Gobardanga, have been investigated for purpose of the study (Figure 1).

Table 2 shows the total family distribution of two different study areas. Among 121 families, there are 80 family belong to Small families (66.11%) and 23.98% (29 families) of the families belong to medium and remaining 9.9% (12 families) of the families are living in the large families. The combined data of the study indicates the small family more than large and medium families (Figure 2).

Discussion and Findings

Myth and tales of urban Oroan

Dalton [11] wrote 'Dharmesh is the original creator of Oraons, who

| Age group	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
0 to 4	15	2.80	20	3.79	35	6.6
5-9	18	3.40	14	2.66	32	6.0
10-14	22	4.17	23	4.35	45	8.5
15-19	21	3.90	35	6.60	56	10.6
20-24	26	4.90	33	6.20	59	11.1
25-29	31	5.87	23	4.30	54	10.2
30-34	21	3.90	22	4.10	43	8.00
35-39	29	5.40	21	3.90	50	9.3
40-44	19	3.50	18	3.40	37	6.9
45-49	22	4.10	18	3.40	40	7.5
50-54	11	2.00	13	2.40	24	4.4
55-59	12	2.26	02	0.30	14	2.5
60+	25	5.80	14	2.60	39	8.4
Total	272	52.00	256	48.00	528	100

Table 1: Shows the distribution of Oraons according to age and sex. The percentage for male and female are 52.00 and 48.00. Highest percentage of male (5.87) has been found within the age group of 25-29. In the female population highest percentage of female (6.62) has been found within the age group of 15-19.
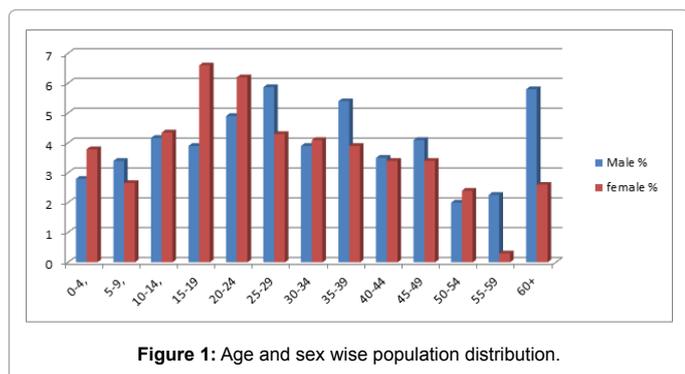
Figure 1: Age and sex wise population distribution.

Types of Family (Type A+B)	Frequency	%
Small (0-4)	80	66.11
Medium (5-7)	29	23.98
Large (8+)	12	9.9
Total	121	100

Table 2: Types of family of two studied area (Type A and Type B).
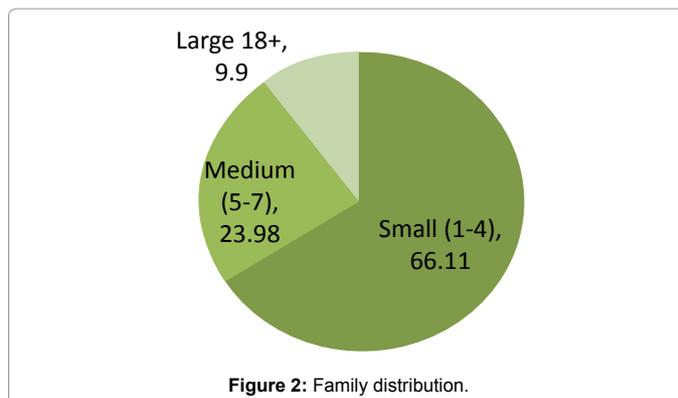
Figure 2: Family distribution.

is manifest in the sun. He further said that "Oraons regard Dharmesh as a perfectly pure, beneficent being, who created us and would in his malignant spirits whom mortals must propitiate, as Dharmesh cannot or does not interfere, if the spirit of evil once fastens upon us. But no above mentioned concept has been found in our present study.

Grignard [12] asserts that 'Oraons is Kurukhas, still they have, besides, and among strangers only, a sufferance name, which Dhanger. Dhanger, in the Oraon language, means a slave'. But in this present study urban Oraons have no knowledge of Dhanger. No traditional story is found on "The origin tradition in its account of Dharmesh and the twelve Asurs" as said by Roy [13] and reviewed by Dixon [14].

Classification of findings into three categories:

1. General findings.

2. Myth related tales and changes.

3. A Bengali printed script of Urban Oraon Myth and English narration.

General findings:

1. It is orally transmitted from generation to generation.

2. The urban Oraon enjoy a lot of freedom, as the narrator constantly improvises on the traditional story to give birth to new tales, however, keeping the traditional story alive. This takes place as these displaced urban Oraon coming into contact with the urban living and people, seek to orient the urban folk to the traditional/originary myths, with the sole intention to orient and modify their traditional tales to this new social context. This adds an air of relevance to traditionalism in the modern set up.

3. They try to reconstruct their historical stories.

4. They convey the messages of their original legends to the new generation with modern coinages and significance to attain social acceptability. For example, they have replaced Ram with Sun (Surjahi), as sun would seem more relevant in the present day social context, compared to the mythic God Ram of the days of yore/past.

5. They have added the separate reverent identity themselves from the reverence of monkeys.

6. The most important changes and modification is seen, that the printed documents of Myth related stories have now been found.

7. No concept of Dharmesh has been found today as said by SC Roy.

8. The Myth related tales collected from the study.

Myth related tales

Tale–a: "We were reverent of Rama just as the monkeys. They said, "We and the Monkeys were not equally accepted by Lord Rama. Probably, Rama preferred us over the monkeys, because we were agriculturists. While Sita (wife of Rama) was permanently living in Jungle at Balmiki's'Ashrom'. While two sons of Rama namely Lob and Kush had been fighting against Rama as a result of which the Lord was defeated and dead". At this time the Oraons were speechless with utter grief and said "Oh Ram". The word "Oh Ram" is transferred to the word "Oraon".

Tale-b: "We are the descendents of Mahisasur to Ravan and the latest Oraon. When Ravan's Brother Bhivison joined Lord Rama, we also joined with Bhivison to Rama".

Against this tale, another critic, as I have collected from field work says that "Initially we played a valuable role in favor of Rama in "Rama and Ravana War". When Bhivison joined Rama, Oraons were divided into two main parts/groups; one part remained with Rama and the other group returned to the forest. Those that remained with Lord Rama, are the actual Oraon.

They believe today that the sun is the supreme god of the Oraon community. Sun or Surjahi (in Sadri Language) created the world. We have described below the Mythical story of the urban Oraon

Tale-c: Oraon were hunter and gatherer. Every prey was burnt and then consumed. They hunted rabbit, squirrel, and big mice in forest area. They practiced fishing in pond, river and water land. In earlier times Oraons had known cultivation, they cultivated paddy, wheat etc. Traditionally they had used plough. The informant also added that, "We originated from the broad trunk of a big tree. So we always worship tree. The tree is our mother and it also symbolizes Nature". At the same time we are reverent of Rama. The word Rama transferred to the word "Rmoram" and transmuted to 'the Oraon'.

Chota Nagpur is the cradle of the Oraons. The myths and the tales prevalent among the oraons of Chota Nagpur are markedly different so on those found among the Oraons of North 24 Parganas. Although the urban Oraon have made changes in the superficial structure of the myths and the myth related tales, the core remains same since it has been greater acceptability among the larger section of the local people. But in case of migrated or semi-urban local town areas same community changed the story line although the inner meanings of tales remain unchanged. The following original cradle tales of Oraon, is explained here for understanding the changing pattern which is detected in my study (Table 3).

Narrators of Urban Oraons are elegantly added the new thought trough the addition of Balmiki, Lob and Kush and Bhivision for better improvement of their myth story since easily accepted among the young generation of their own generation and growing popularity among the larger people.

Cultural fertility: Cultural fertility is a stage of certainty to uncertainty but more conscious that brings a valid modernity which has a freedom of a community. It is not same as acculturation and assimilation. It is the product of all cultural process. After acculturation, modernization cultural fertility is evolved. Cultural fertility focuses that own original cultural dignity preservation and modification for conveying it outer world. The present study deciphered that the means of traditional communication is a catalyst of cultural fertility and that give birth "Urban Oraon".

A Bengali script of urban Oraon myth

(I have received this myth from Dhiren Sardar, who informed me of this. He received this as an oral transmission from Kalipada Sardar of South 24 Parganas and subsequently jotted it down. There is a possibility of Kalipada Sardar to have written this and got it published (Figure 3). At present in this village during Karam ceremony, Mahadeb Sardar uses mikes and loudspeakers to spread and popularize these stories to the new generation 'Oraons'. He takes it as an onus upon himself to publish and circulate these stories among the children) (Figure 4).

The origin of earth and Human beings: (English translation): Surjyahi made this land habitable by creating grass, mango, jackfruit, banana, bamboo, banyan plants etc. The egg floated on the water for days and reached the land. Egg for the first time disengaged itself from water.

From Book (Patnaik N)	Present findings	Changes and addition
Tale-1: Once a saint was in a cave near a water fall in a hill. While he was engrossed in his meditation, ants climbed over him and made an ant-hill. A wood cutter cut it thinking it a trunk of a tree. Blood started to flow from the saint's waist which he collected in an utensil. A boy and a girl were born out of that blood. Then the children of these communities were called Urjan (born from plant). Gradually this word become extinct and was pronounced as Oraon	**Tale-1** They mentioned directly about Balmiki, the monk. Because, on him, in meditation, ants climbed over and made ant-hill. While Lord Rama was defeated in war against his sons, Lab and Kush. They said in grief "Oh Ram". Gradually the word was pronounced as Oraon. Although they (both the Oraons and monkeys) were reverent of Rama, however, the Oraons consider themselves as different from the monkeys.	1. Balmiki, Lab and Kush words are improvised in addition by the narrator.
Tale-2 During the origin of Rama the Monkeys were the ancestors of the Oraon community. When Rama went to northern India and died, the people of this community, were moved at his death, lamented "Oh Ram" and it thus turned into "Oraon"	In the case of the urban Oraons, in my study, the story changes considerably compared to tale no-3. Here narrator improvised the story that: "Mahisasur" was a descendant of Ravana, and his offsprings were Oraon. Rama was their lord so they joined Rama through Bivison, once Bivison decided to join Rama.	The narrators manifest that the Oraons were more developed than monkeys. To stick purity to their identity and acceptability to the mainstream they insist upon their allegiance to Lord Rama add the Bivison related facts to their original story line.
Tale-3 It is postulated that Oraons are known as the sons of Ravana, as Ravana had one lakh grandsons. This word was first recognized as "Raon" and later with the altered alphabet came to be known as Oraon and then gradually become Uraon.		

Table 3: Changes and modification of tales.
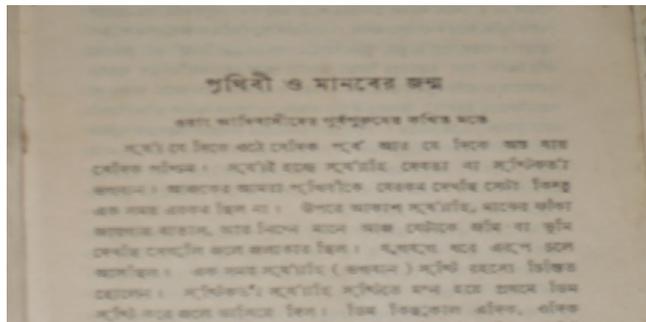
Figure 3: Bengali printed script.

Figure 4: The printed copies of myth related tales of Urban Oraon.

The egg in due course of time produced small bird by the incubation process, with the help of light, heat and gentle breeze. The two birds were called 'Hans' and 'Hansuli'. They derived succor from nature and grew up to live on the face of earth. After long Surjyahi (God) remembered them again and thought of his creation. He reflected on the fact of having created beings that could neither remember, nor worship Him. They are not in a position to do anything. They would not be able to remember Him in the sense that they would not be able to make home for themselves. They would not be able to engage themselves in farming. Nor would they be ever able to converse. They would not be able to search roots from forest to extract juices from them and make medicines for themselves. God reflected, "I who am reflected and shimmer on the surface of water in dawn and dusk would not be paid due obeisance". Thus, He decided to create higher beings on the ladder of creation. They, as he felt had to be humans.

One day Surjyahi saw the two birds busy picking things from the ground and eating them. Surjyahi picked the moulds of clay and made man and woman and kept them in the nest of the birds. After a few days the human clods started to cry in a sustained refrain of 'Oaon', 'Oaon'. On hearing it the birds flew into the forest. The Sun God told them, "I am your grandfather". For these children to sustain themselves on the face of the earth, He tucked leaves in the shape of feeding bottle into their mouth. They gradually fed themselves on those leaves and grew up. When they were two years old then God gave them fruits to eat. Gradually they learnt to speak. With grass, creepers and twigs they started to build their house. Fruits became their essential food to sustain them.

One evening after partaking of the fruit from a tree they were intoxicated. With every passing hour of the night they started to feel the pangs of lust. They involved themselves in bouts of lust. After their lust had subsided they felt fast asleep. Even after the sun had peeped out in the morning and later reached the middle of the sky, they felt ashamed to come out of their home. God came and called them. They confessed, "Grandfather we have committed a grave sin, that prevents us from facing the world". God comforted them saying, "Since I am your grandfather, you need not feel ashamed. Whatever you have done, that makes you feel guilty, is no misdeed. It is merely the function of your body and is meant to satiate your soul, to which you have responded. Henceforth, to ward off your shame, use grass and other creepers and cover your body. Open your eyes, be bold, and come out, and you will see you have overcome your sense of shame". After that, the two humans (man and woman) came out and offered the God fruits and 'bel' leaves ('Aeglemarmelos'-botanical name). The God was pleased and blessed them, saying, that they would spread their progeny on earth.

The "Oraon" tribe subsequently proliferated on the face of the earth and populated this earth. They made their own clans, for example 'Tirkey', 'Kerketa', 'Toppo', 'Lakra' etc. They even made rules forbidding marriage among/within same clans. This is the origin myth of the "Oraons". Through the 'Oaon', 'Oaon' refrain of crying the tribe thus inherited the title of "Oraon".

Most interestingly they make a persistent and sustained effort to not just spread this origin myth among the 'Oraons', which forms their identity, but also to those who are outsiders to their clan.

Discussion

This is interesting to note that in Tale-3 of the traditional type myths of Chota Nagpur, the word Oraon springs from a mere change in pronunciation or inflection of the word "Raon". The tale that I have come to know from the studied areas, however, introduces a completely new and fresh angle of purity where they admit that Ravana was the descendant of Mahisasura and thus the Oraon did have a vile origin, yet, with the crossing over of someone like Bivishon of their own clan to the side of Ram they followed suit, thereby changing their allegiance from someone as corrupt as Ravana to that of Lord Ram. What is significant here is that, the Urban Oraons understand the necessity to re-inform and address their identity and bring in a fresh new angle of purity. That is why they make subtle changes in the traditional tales to suit their present necessity to reinforce their acceptability in the mainstream Hindu culture.

It has been investigated that the younger generations of both areas played a great role as a narrator, to improvise and to make a new story alive. They have presently started to write their myth related documents in books, or in typed form. During their festival 'pahan' (Priest) giving speech they provided the people the printed document of Myth related stories. The urban Oraons have triggered to convey a message to larger society that their myth stories have a lot of moral lessons for rectifying the society. That is why, it is our duty to serve "the grace of myth must be reached to outer world" as they say in field. So the myth related story today has been written down and using microphone for hearing it from a long distance. Urban Oraons usually explain natural phenomenon or an occurrence and describe the creation of the world. Through myth they teach moral lessons to all (not only Oraons).

Oraons have their own creation story that expresses their inner spiritual aspirations and religious convictions. In their creation story,

Dharmesh creates human beings in his own image. No concept of Dharmesh is found today in their way of life. Oraon creation stories consist of two major parts, namely, the Genesis of the human beings and the Origin of the sprits. However, to bring out its ecological significance; their stories have been divided into three parts-the creation of the earth and human beings, the fall of human beings and Punishment, and the Restoration. Oraon have no written documents of myth and tales. Tradition and Everything has been handed down from generation to generation orally. Hence, the villagers have a lot of freedom to improvise and to make new story alive. The essence of new story remains unchanged, but the freedom of the narrator in improvising the story brings changes in the story line. The stories are handed down through various mode of communication system. But the printed documents of myth related stories have now been found. An important fact is investigated that they represent themselves as a reverent of Rama. Thus, important modification and changes have been recognized in their tradition; that they distinguish themselves from monkey in their traditional beliefs. All these Myth related findings has led us to designate them as Urban Oroan and fit to be a part of Anthropological study.

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