

Remosam

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Logline

Far up on the Bonda hills, the Remos are met with dysfunctional governance that fails to feed or keep their language alive.

Characters

Mangala Sisa - Sarpanch (elected administrative head of the village) of Mudulipada village. He narrates about the festivals and preparation of pendrom (fresh rice alcohol).

Sukru Dhangda Majhi - Priest of the village who narrates the mythologies of Remosam community.

Buda Dhangdamajhi - Local farmer who would be seen harvesting "sapung" (an alcoholic beverage made from fishtail palms). He narrates the alcohol harvesting process and "Pusarke" (winter harvest) festival.

Manguli Dhangdamajhi - Community elder who narrates and sings (along with KINKER DHANGDAMAJHI) a song that is sung during Remosam wedding ceremonies.

Kinker Dhangdamajhi - Community elder who narrates and sings a song that is sung during Remosam wedding ceremonies.

Gobardhan Panda - A veteran public worker who was posted in the Mudulipada village and learned to speak Bonda. He compiled the dictionary "Remosam" along with other books, and consulted for this film project with interviews and translation.

Synopsis

This film takes place in the Mudulipada village of the Malkangiri administrative district in Odisha, India. The stories of harvesting "sapung", alcohol from the fishtail palm, and fermenting cooked rice to make the "pendom" (rice alcohol) are

the recipes that were hardly ever documented as audiovisual media. The interviews could also open a window into the unique customs and rituals of the Remo community and a unique social system of older women getting married to men younger than them. The local environment and the close relation the Remo people have with it through their festivals such as "Pusarke" or the wedding ceremonies lit the eyes of many elders as they recollect. Panda also feels home to sit down and sing the wedding songs that many young Remos have now forgotten.

The Malkangiri district was formed on October 2, 1992, from the then undivided Koraput district of the Indian state of Odisha. This southern district of the province is full of natural resources, water being the most precious of them. It is home to over 617,000 people (Census 2011) of multiple ethnic races and the Bonda people is one of them who have been living around the Bonda Ghati, a mountainous region, and the Khairput subdivision. Though their population was diminishing until a few years back, mostly because of poverty and lack of healthcare, the 2011 Indian census confirms the Bonda population to be between 9,000-12,000 (Ethnologue 2015). Remosam, the Bonda language, is however limited to only about 6,700 people, the "upper-Bondas" who live up on the Bonda hills. The "lower-Bondas" that live in the plains are more assimilated with other communities and tend to speak a dialect called "Desia" which is a connecting link between the province's official language Odia and the regional indigenous languages. Remosam has been identified as a severely-endangered language by UNESCO. The low-income Remosam community has extremely low political power, let alone decent access to healthcare and education. There is also an emergence of the self-organized and rebellious Naxalite movement (Sendha 2018) which originally started to protest against rights issues. The intertwining and rather complex factors have affected the growth of the Remosam language. This film is an attempt to capture a small glimpse of the Remo community as the current socio-economic hindrances greatly affect any multimedia documentation of the Remosam language. Our hope is that the future generations of the community would have open access to the oral history of their own ancestors when they would need these resources. Even though the language is met with an immediate threat of endangerment, its revival and active use are still a hope.

Credits

Producer, Director, Cinematographer and Editor: Subhashish Panigrahi.

Panigrahi is a National Geographic Explorer, documentary filmmaker and open culture advocate. He has created other documentaries including "Gyani Maiya" (2019), "Mage Porob" (2019), "Karinding" (2020) and "Who Owns the Content?" (2019) among others.

Translation & interviews: Gobardhan Panda

Panda is a self-taught ethnographer, anthropologist, lexicographer and author.

Co-Cinematographer: Prateek Pattanaik

Pattanaik is a student of physics and has interest in cultural documentation.

References

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