

6. Socio-Culture of Lodhas Tribe in Odisha with Special Reference to Morada and Suliapada Block of Mayurbhanj District

Luchhu Hansdah, Research Scholar, Dept. Political Science, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha. email: luchhuhansdah124@gmail.com

Abstract

This article presents the particulars about the Lodhas – a rare primitive tribe of Odisha who has a distinct lifestyle of their own. More specifically this paper aims to provide a historical analysis of their socio-culture i.e. their physical feature, main food, their marriage, their settlement, their house types, their political organisation, customs, traditions and so on.

Key Words: Primitive Tribal groups, political organization, work involvement, indigenous ethnic group.

Introduction

Odisha (previously known as Orissa), being socio-economically backward but culturally sound, is one of the important states in Eastern India. Out of 30 districts 9 are considered as tribal districts (according to Location Measure value) and of the total population (41,947,358 in 2011) an important portion (22.1%) goes to tribal people (8,145,081 in 2011). This tribal group of Odisha has special significance because they are one of the most backward and geographically isolated communities. That's why their lifestyle and economy is confined to the direct consumption of natural resources, pre-agricultural level of technology and specific indigenous type of work. But now with the emergence of industry and market economy, the age-old relationship between tribes and nature has disturbed. Keeping this in the backdrop, the present study tried to explore the changing scenario of the socio-economic condition in the tribal areas of Odisha.

In this regard, various socio-economic indicators have been analysed and compared for on behalf of district-level outlines of quality of life and finding out the variation among the Primitive tribal households in the study area. In addition, Mayurbhanj has also been taken as a case study to represent the socio-economic condition Lodhas tribe of Morada block. It may be pointed out in this context that out of 30 districts in Odisha, according to Location Quotient value Mayurbhanj is the highest tribal concentrated

district. The overall objective of this study is to obtain a better understanding of inequalities and variations in socio-economic status in Odisha as well as in Mayurbhanj and also find out some remedial measures to overcome the problems to bring the Primitive tribal community in the mainstream of the society.

Origin of Lodhas

“Lodha” means a piece of flesh named after their ancestor. Lodhas have been in the focus of anthropologists and social activists. During the early period of their rule, the British government in India oppressed the tribal people of **Jungle Mahals**, who were traditionally dependent upon the forests for a living. They had revolted but were ruthlessly suppressed. Having been deprived of their livelihood and without any alternatives, they took to criminal ways of life and were subsequently branded a criminal tribe. They should properly be labelled as uprooted rebels. Lodhas titles are Nayek, Mallick, Digar, Sardar, Bhokta, Kotal, Dandapat, Bhunya etc.

These titles reflect social responsibility. They are descendants of **Jarasandh** from Mahabharata. The Lodhas hold that they are Sabars. One of the most important research on the Lodhas was done by a Calcutta University faculty, Professor Probodh Kumar Bhowmick Much later, researchers from the Department of Anthropology at Vidyasagar University have done empirical studies on the development scenario of the Lodha tribe in Midnapore district who were by that time declared as a 'Primitive Tribal Group'(PTG) by the Government of India.

Odisha is one of the fascinating states of India from an anthropological point of view. It is the second largest tribal dominated state in the country with the largest number of tribal communities. In 1956 the President of India declared sixty-two (62) different tribal communities in Odisha to be scheduled tribes. (STs) Out of sixty-two notified scheduled tribes, thirteen (13) are declared as primitive tribal groups (PTGs) by the Govt. of India. Those tribes are namely the Juang, the Bonda, the Lodha, the Didayi, the Mankidia, the Birhor, the Hill Kharia, the Kutia Kondha, the Dongria Kondha, the Soura, the Lanjia Soura, the Paudia Bhuyan and the Chuktia Bhunjia.

This paper aims to discourse about the Lodha is a Primitive tribal group among the thirteen notified PTGS. It is noteworthy to mention that the PGTS constitute 22.13 percentage population of Odisha and almost 44.25 percent of the total land of Odisha is scheduled area.

Lodhas means a piece of fish named after their ancestor. It a small tribe having a total population of 8905 as per census 2011. They are mainly found in the Suliapada and Morada Blocks of Mayurbhanj district. They claim that they are the descendants of Zara Sabara who are the only worshipers of Lord Jagannath and till today they have been performing an important role in the religio-cultural norms of Jagannath temple. So it is justified to say that the Jagannath cult of Odisha is interwoven with the tribal religion especially the Lodhas community. Based on these beliefs the Lodhas regard themselves superior in social status than any other tribes in Odisha.

It is, therefore, they identify themselves as Lodhas Sabara. The Lodhas belong to the North Munda group speaking Mundari language as their mother tongue. By virtue of their long association and contact with the Hindi neighbours, they have forgotten their Mundari speech. Now they are speaking a dialect which is a mixture of Bengali, Odia and Mundari. Lodhas have been in the focus of anthropologists and social activists. If any that revolted against the British in India first, it was the tribal's and the Lodhas communities who were in the front ranking.

They were ruthlessly suppressed by the British and branded by them as criminals. It is sad to note that the Govt. of India, even after independence continues to brand them as criminal tribe instead of honouring them for the revolt they had pioneered against the foreign aggressors. In India, Lodhas are known as the criminal tribe until the revocation of the Criminal Tribal Act 1962.

Such attempt of the Govt. in free India left the Lodhas having no alternatives to earn their bread as they have no landed property. So the Lodhas are forced to become petty thieves and earn their bread by stealing. As a result, they are not accepted in the society to live with dignity. In the present context, it is important to discuss the physical features of the Lodhas. Of course, their physical characteristics are accepted only by observation and so we observe a little variation in their characteristics.

The Lodhas are coming from an Austro-Asiatic group but they have exhibited a rare characteristic in general. The colour of their skin and hair are brown to dark brown. They exhibit a medium (mesoprosopic) face and medium to the flat nose. Both the male and the female of the Lodhas group have normal height. The approximate height of both the male and female are 5'6'' and 5'1' respectively. They normally possess good health. As special challenge has been started to discuss both the social and economic life of the Lodhas in this paper, it is relevant to focus on the same in detail.

They are mainly found in the Suliapada and Morada Blocks of Mayurbhanj District.

Blocks	G. Ps	Lodhas Villages
Morada	Jualibhanga	1. P.C. Pur 2. Bhadrasole
	Gudigaon	1. Gudigaon 2. Hadibhanga
	Haldipal	1. Samadihi
	Barkand	1. Tiansi
	Chikitamatia	1. Chikitamatia 2. Ghodabandha
Suliapada	Bagada	1. Nekadgunja 2. Bhobani
	Uphalgadia	1. Sansasol
	Kantisahi	1. Patharnasa

Social Life: The Lodhas stand separate from all other tribal groups. So, their social life is interesting to reveal. Their social life includes their settlement, their house types, their literacy and education, their social organisation, food habits, social customs, work participation, their love for art, their political organisation and so on. It is vital to discourse these ones after another.

Settlement: The Lodhas settle in villages either separately or with other communities. It is obvious that most of the Lodhas villages are situated far away from the human reach inside the dense forest separately. But some of them are found living in multi-caste villages. In such cases even they have their houses far away from the village dominated by other castes.

House Types: The Lodhas build their house here and there in a scattered manner. These houses appear as a shapeless cluster. They build a single-roomed house made of mud and straw-thatched. Some well to do Lodhas families, of course, have multi-roomed houses with country yards and gardens fenced with bamboo poles and twigs. They live with their pet animals. They never mind sparing a portion of their single room to keep the goats and cattle. In one corner of the house on a raised platform near the hearth, the seat of the ancestral spirits is located. The Lodhas families in the past did not know the use of modern utensils. They used mud pots, leaf plates and cups as their utensils. But today they are using steel plates, plastic bags and aluminium.

Family: Family is the smallest social unit in the Lodhas society. The family comprised of parents and their children. The Lodhas prefer to live in joint and extended families. The father is the senior most male member is regarded as the head of the family. The family property is inherited along the male line. After marriage, a daughter leaves her parental house and joins the family of her parents-in-law. This custom shows that the Lodhas family is patriarchal.

Food, drinking and Smoking: The main food of the Lodhas is rice. They take meals twice and thrice a day. In the morning they eat soaked water rice of the previous night. They take it with burnt potatoes and tomato with mustard oil, roasted drumstick leaf. During lunch, they take boiled rice with different vegetable items. Sometimes they take roasted fish with mustard oil. In the night they eat the same food prepared for the lunch. They prefer to eat vegetables they grow from their lands like potato, tomato, drumstick leaf, chilly, cauliflower, cabbage, bitter guard, ladies finger, radish arum and brinjal etc. Besides vegetable food, they also eat non-vegetable food like chicken, mutton, fish and dried fish. Sometimes they take meat with the pack the bamboo hole, Sal tree cover and burnt.

Now-a-days called it “**Tandoor Chicken**” another one item is rice, rice mixed and prepared “**Briyani**” these items come from the tribal community. The food habit of the child and the old in the Lodhas society is interesting to describe. The old usually avoid taking cooked or spicy curry as these are not peptic. Children are given soft food like boiled rice, boiled vegetables such as potato and tomato. They fry drumstick leaf (Munga Saga) with mustard oil to feed the children and sometimes they give boiled eggs to their children. **Consumption of liquor:** Consumption of liquor is more or less a part of their food habits. Both male and female drink country liquor when they feel tired. Both men and women are having the habits of chewing the betel leaves along with tobacco. Men are smoking bidi and cigarette for pleasure.

Education and Literacy: The social life of the Lodhas is reflected through their discouraging literacy position. The following data prove the point. The literacy situation of the Lodhas is below the state average in case of both males and females. The literacy rate of the Lodhas as reported in 2011 census is 28.0%. The percentage of matriculates among the Lodhas is below 5% in case of males and below 2% among the females. The number of graduates and diploma holders are negligible among the Lodhas till today.

Social Organization: The Lodhas tribal group emerges out of clan organisation. There are nine different clan groups having totemic origin each who start living as a community under one chief. Subsequently, they are known as Lodhas tribal group. After clan, the Lodhas tribe becomes the largest social unit.

Political Organization: Similar other groups the Lodhas depend on the political institution for discipline and smooth run of their tribe. The Lodhas have their village Panchayat which is called Desh. All adult male persons are participants of the village panchayat. The village headman is called Mukhia or Sardar. The Mukhia controls over the village panchayat and decides cases relating to breaking of social customs, norms and taboos. The decision given by the Mukhia is to be obeyed in one and all. Dakua, a village messenger helps the Mukhia.

Work Involvement: The work involvement rate among the females is higher than males in case of primitive tribal groups especially the Lodhas. In 2001 census the work participation rate of Lodhas is reported as 47.3% in case of male and 47.7% in case of the female. The percentage of male non-workers is reported from Lodhas 44.3% as per 2001 census.

Observance of Social Customs: Similar to Hindus the Lodhas observe certain customs during birth as well as death. Goats and fowls are offered to the local God to ensure smooth birth and welfare of both the mother and baby. Birth prohibition is observed for twenty-one days and during this period the mother and the baby remain confined to the house. The baby is breastfed by the mother up to the age of six months. After six months two ceremonies namely the hair cutting and rice feeding are observed. As per custom the Lodhas used to bury or immolate the dead body. Death prohibition lasts for ten days. Purificatory rituals are observed on the tenth day as well as on the eleventh day. On the day of purification, the relatives and the co-villagers are given with a feast arranged by the members of the family of the dead.

Marriage: The custom of marriage in Lodhas society is another important social event. Adult marriage is common among the Lodhas and mostly it is performed by negotiations. A mediator is engaged by both the bride and groom sides to carry on negotiation and settle the bride's price. Cases of arrange marriage, love marriage and marriage by exchange of sisters are also found in the Lodhas society. Widow re-marriage is customary among the Lodhas and divorce is permitted.

Observance of religious rituals and festivals: Comparable other communities the Lodhas observe certain religious rituals and festivals. They worship many Gods and Goddesses. Among them Dharam Devta is supreme. They worship Basumata, the mother earth. Goddess Sitala is worshipped as Goddess of epidemics. Lodhas observe a number of magicoreligious festivals and rituals around the year. The important festivals are Sitala Puja and Chandi Puja. These festivals are observed to ward off the evil spirits. Besides every year ancestor worship is performed in the month of Chaitra (March-April).

Love of Art: The Lodhas are regulars of art. Tattooing gives an indication of the love of the Lodhas for art. They have a special attraction towards this kind of personal beautification. They decorate their body with a kind of paste prepared by mixing castor oil (Jada Tela) with pen ink. They mark their body with the paste through puncturing and put in colour. Lodhas women are fond of making tattoo marks on their body with different forms like flowers or names of their beloved on their hand. Unmarried girls like to design their left hand, right hand, forehead, arm and left leg with a tattoo which is regarded as "Khoda". When on the other hand male persons are tattooing their name on the hand, it is called "Sikha" and It is a general belief among the Lodhas that the women who died without tattooing is impure and is punished by "Jamraja".

Economic Life: Financial condition of the Lodhas was not successful. It was mostly pathetic. Since the Lodhas are mostly forest dwellers, their economic events centre in and everywhere the forest. Their main work was childhood the tussar silkworm in the host trees of Sal and Asan. As well tussar cultivation they pursue hunting, food gathering, and collecting forest products in the forest. Apart from the collection of fruits and roots for their own consumption, they collect Kendu leaves to make bidi. They used to collect Sal and Siali leaves to make leaf cups and plates and Sabai grass to make ropes. They also collect forest products like honey, Lax, Sal, Seeds, Mahua flowers and firewood which they sell in the local market to earn a livelihood. Though it is a matter of regret that determined deforestation throws the Lodhas out of their old-style source of living and turns their financial condition pathetic.

Development: The District Level Committee (DLC) of Mayurbhanj in the process of certifying that all PVTGs in the district receive habitat as mentioned under rule-12(b)(1) of the Forest Right Act (FRA) with the concern traditional institutional leaders of Lodha PVTG Tribal Development Department(ITDA), Baripada, Lodha Development Agency (LDA), Morada and NGOs. The Lodhas are the maximum backward indigenous ethnic group of Odisha. Government, non-Governmental organizations are working for their development since long. The Government has done many myriad plans, policies and programs for Lodhas development. But the fruits of development have not yet been achieved as expected.

References

1. Bhowmick, Probodh Kumar, 1994, The Lodhas of West Bengal Kolkata: Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology (ISRAA).
2. Bhowmick P.K. 1981, Rehabilitation of a “Denitrified Community” The Ex-Criminal Lodhas of West Bengal, Royal Anthropological Institute Newsletter, 44: 6-8.
3. Chanda, A. 2005, “Tribal Women”, in the Changing Status of Women in West Bengal, 1970-2000 the Challenge Ahead. Edited by J. Bagchi, pp.130-141. Sage Publications: New Delhi.
4. Devi Mahasveta, 1983, Lodhas of West Bengal-1, Economic and Political Weekly. Vol. 18, N0. 22: 947- 949.
5. Mandal, H. et.al. 2002. West Bengal, in India: An Illustrated Atlas of Tribal World. Anthropological Survey of India: Kolkata.
6. Panda, S. and Guha, A, 2013, “Macro-categories of Development and Micro-level Realities: A Case Study of Lodhas in Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal” Journal of Indian Anthropological Society, Vol-48, pp: 245-255
7. Panda, S. 2014 “Educational Scenario among the Lodhas of Paschim Medinipur District: A Comparative Account” International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention Vol.1 No.9 pp-875-890, 2014 [ISSN: 2349-2031]
8. Panda, S. and Guha, A. 2015, “Criminal Tribe” to “Primitive Tribal Group” and the Role of Welfare State: The Case of Lodhas in West Bengal, India” NOVA Science Publishers Inc. New York, USA.
9. Patnaik, Nityananda, 2005, Primitive Tribes of Odisha and their Development Strategies, D.K. Print world (P) Ltd. New Delhi.