

A Study on Livelihood and Socio-Cultural Dealings of the Paraja Tribe in Laxmipur Block of Koraput District

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Abstract

This study investigates the livelihood patterns and socio-cultural dynamics of the Paraja tribe of Laxmipur block of Koraput district of Odisha. The Parajas, one of the major tribal groups in South Odisha, have traditionally relied on agriculture, forest resources and animal husbandry for their livelihood. Based on primary and secondary data, this research examines the socio-economic changes and cultural shifts observed due to modernization, education and various developmental interventions. This research paper uses a fieldwork approach to analyse data collected from 250 respondents through structured interviews, observation and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that while traditional customs, rituals and community cohesion continue to define the essence of Paraja life, their socio-cultural fabric is gradually undergoing visible changes. Economic diversification, increased access to education, and exposure to modern lifestyles have contributed to changes in occupational structures and social relations. However, these changes also pose challenges to the continuity of tribal knowledge systems and cultural identities. This study highlights the ongoing dialogue between tribal traditions and modernity, providing insights into how tribal societies are adapting to socio-economic changes while striving to maintain their cultural integrity.

Introduction

One of the oldest and most populous tribal communities in the Koraput district of Odisha is the Paraja tribe. The tribal Indian society is one of the most diverse and alive cultural landscapes in the world, with its unique identity due to the historical development, natural, and social settings. The Paraja tribes of Odisha hold a special position among them because of their strong association with the land, forest, and community life. (*SCST_2013_handbook_0036*, n.d.) The Parajas people are found mainly in the Koraput district, and more so in the Laxmipur block, where they have maintained their generations-old livelihoods, customs, and beliefs. (Pattanaik, n.d.) They live their lives on agriculture, the collection of forest resources, and the farming of animals, which are the pillars of their economic and social life. (Khosla, 2024 ;Singh & Sadangi, 2012) The geographic insularity of their settlements set up in the

twisting landscape and on the edges of the woods has enabled them to keep on with tribal traditions. And their village economy is self-reliant. This has, however, been taken into their traditional way of life in recent decades by the power of education and modernization as well as development interventions, and has resulted in both opportunities and challenges to their mode of living. (Nyoman Sumaryadi et al., 2020) The government programmes, like MGNREGA, tribal sub-programmes (TSP), and the introduction of formal education, have improved the livelihoods, healthcare, and infrastructure. (Nielsen & Tripathy, 2020) But these have also influenced their social behaviour, family setup, and cultural expression. The young members of the Parja community are being lured to urban life and daily wage jobs, which is slowly crippling the traditional values, practices, and group practices (Kavitha et al., 2021). This transformation has resulted in a complicated socio-cultural scenario where the community is attempting to strike a balance between contemporary desires and traditional practices. Laxmipur block, which is one of the dominated regions of Koraput, can be used as a microenvironment to study the dynamics of livelihood change and cultural adaptation within the Parajas. Their economic and social life is also significant to study due to the fact that it is not only valuable in terms of academic knowledge but also in terms of developing an inclusive development policy that regards tribal identity and cultural integrity. Thus, the given research paper will focus on discussing the interdependence between the traditional ways of livelihood and the new socio-economic changes that are on the rise within the Parja community. It dwells on the way this augments continuity in culture. It examines the way in which economic transformation and outsourcing are altering the way community relationships, social hierarchy, and cultural expression are defined. Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data gathered from 250 respondents selected in the villages of the Laxmipur block, and qualitative data on the societies, this study provides insight into the shifting nature of livelihoods, culture, and identity in the Paraja society of South Odisha (Jena, 2022).

Sanskritization is a process by which lower castes or tribe, or any group of people, change their customs, rituals, ideology, culture, art, tradition, beliefs, rules and way of life in the direction of higher caste people and adopt their own customs, habits, and practices and change their own traditions. Due to the latter reason, the common people were very proud of their religion, art, and tradition, but with the advent of industrialization, they were attracted by education and modern media and gave importance to education and medicine, leaving their traditional superstitions. Previously, the common people used to depend on agriculture, farming, hills, mountains, and agricultural work in villages. However, with the advent of factories, industrial work, road construction, and village development, they are leaving the city or factory to work. With the advent of modernization, the common people used to wear a lungi and dhoti, and girls followed their own traditions. Modernization is a multifaceted process of social change that alters the social, cultural, economic, and political organization of society. Now, if we look at it, they are changing their religion, language, and tradition and using various modern equipment. Westernization is the adoption of Western cultural trends by some Indians, especially those associated with modern education, media, and urban lifestyles. As a result of this influence, many Parja youth are gradually adopting Western-style clothing, food, and communication styles. As a result, the traditional customs, social gatherings, and tribal practices of the Paraja tribes are gradually declining as new values and lifestyles replace the old ones. Globalization is the process of increasing social, cultural, political, and economic integration and interdependence across the globe, driven by factors such as trade, technology, and the effects of people. The Paraja people of the village used to take care of their farming, tradition, and culture, whether it was in the economic or social sphere, and they used to enjoy their Demesa dance,

but now digital mobile phones, social media, transportation facilities, modern dance songs, and cinema have shown great interest, which is seen in the transformation of their culture, social life, economy and lifestyle.

Literature review

Pattanaik Jyotiraditya (2019). This study on livelihood and natural resources: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Paraja Tribe of Koraput District, Odisha, India. The interaction of the Paraja tribes and their resources of nature is complex in nature, extending from ancient times to modern times and possibly to the future. Conventionally, the Parajas practice farming and partly rely on non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and minor forest products (MFPs) to facilitate their economic survival. The Parajas cannot live without natural resources, especially the agricultural landscape and the forest ecosystem. They have, over generations, evolved to live in harmony with the natural environment, which has led to a livelihood that is essentially dependent on natural resources (NR). Due to the stagnancy of the cultivated land resources with a rise in the family population, they have shifted to daily wage labour to supplement their earnings. The paper is an attempt to analyse the socio-cultural aspects related to the livelihood of the Parajas, which is essentially based on the use of natural resources. The present research is qualitative, based on primary data; the research was done in Balda village, found in the Koraput district of the Odisha state. To collect field data, the major research methods to be used are observation, structured schedules, and interviews. The purposive sampling method was applied, which was followed by the snowball method of sampling. Moreover, the paper seeks to examine agriculture as an inherent element of the Paraja culture, as well as the relationship between natural resources, knowledge and cultural practices as cyclic.

Swain, Deepika (2020). This study focuses on the reproductive health-seeking behaviour of Tribal women from the PARAJA community in the Laxmipur Block of Koraput district, Odisha, India. Utilizing both primary and secondary data, the research involved interviews and discussions with approximately fifty pregnant PARAJA women in Ranjitguda village. It was found that government reproductive and child health schemes are underutilized and not effectively accessed by the community. Key findings include a notable absence of gender bias and low abortion rates among these women. The study highlights a reliance on traditional knowledge and practices for prenatal and postnatal care.

Tripathy Arun Kumar (2023) A study on the dynamics between gender and socio-economic prevalence among tribes in the Undivided Koraput District of Odisha emphasizes the significant role of women's status as an indicator of social development. Unlike developed countries, gender issues remain pressing in underdeveloped regions, with cultural practices leading to a skewed sex ratio. Despite government regulations, gender preference persists, notably favouring male children, which has resulted in a shortage of girls for marriage. The last census in 2011 reported a sex ratio of 943 in India and 979 in Odisha. However, tribal areas like Koraput exhibit higher ratios, with 1048 in 2011. This article explores the reasons behind the positive sex ratio observed in tribal societies, contrasting it with the negative trends seen elsewhere.

Patra' Debashis (2017). This study focuses on socio-cultural Aspects and provides a detailed ethnographic account of the Paraja tribe, emphasising their demographic features, social organisation, and rich cultural heritage. Patra highlights the tribe's strong communal structure, including village councils, totemic clans, and youth dormitories that sustain social cohesion. His work also documents the vibrant aesthetic traditions of the Paraja, particularly their festivals, dances, and music rooted in nature.

Additionally, Patra explains the agro-forest-based economy of the community and the continued relevance of traditional rituals in daily life. The study concludes that despite exposure to modern forces, the Paraja maintain cultural resilience while undergoing gradual socio-cultural change. This literature serves as a foundational reference for understanding both continuity and transition within Paraja society. Khosla, R. K. (2024). This paper is on forests are known to be a huge source of natural capital of the nation. Major Forest Products (MFPs) are a major source of employment in India, either directly or indirectly, in terms of collection, processing and sale. The MFPs have greatly contributed positively to the lives of individuals who live in and around the forest. MFPs play a vital role in the nutrition of the native people, especially in the poorest areas of our country. Under some conditions, MFPs may become the main source of cash income of a person, and this individual would be able to meet the non-subsistence costs, such as medical care and education. The Odisha people living in the forest rely on it as a source of food and a home. The forest is closely associated with all the beliefs, customs, economy, and social organization of the tribal people. The MFPs constitute the most valuable resources to the existence of tribal populations in rural Odisha. MFPs are effective in the homes and provide crucial nutrients to the people in the forest areas. MFPs act as a source of financial income to many indigenous populations that practice agriculture, especially during lean seasons. Although MFPs are important to the survival of tribal economies and lifestyles, their potential has remained untapped, and there has been no serious impact on reducing poverty in rural areas. It is against this background that the paper critically examined the importance of MFPs and how they have helped to promote the livelihoods of the tribal people in Odisha.

The study investigates socio-economic changes in the livelihoods of agricultural migrants in Tirupur district, Tamil Nadu. The study used an ex-post facto research design and 120 respondents with agricultural backgrounds. Socio-economic indicators included socio-psychological factors, education, health maintenance and nutrition, housing, occupation, cultural factors, economic changes, social participation, and material possession. Results showed that most migrants increased their expenditure on education, had a balanced diet, improved their houses, changed occupations, celebrated festivals, and had a significant income increase. Most migrants owned mobile phones and televisions, and outside contact increased. Kavitha et al (2021)

The Paraja tribe in Southwestern Odisha had a significant interaction with the British and coastal non-tribes during the colonial period. Gopinath Mohanty, a British official, is a colonial administrator who engages with the tribe during the formation of the nation state. His narrative, "Paraja" (1945), depicts the tragic disintegration of the Paraja community and the displacement of social-cultural and economic standards. This study examines Mohanty's narrative as an outcome of colonialism introduced by early British modernity in provincial Odisha, examining Mohanty's literary imagination and political mapping. (Jena Sarat 2022).

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the traditional livelihood practices of the Paraja tribe in Laxmipur block.
2. To study the socio-cultural organization, rituals, and festivals among the Paraja community.
3. To analyse the socio-economic and cultural changes resulting from modernization, education, and development programs.

Methods

This research will be founded on primary and secondary data. Purposive sampling was undertaken. Data collection was carried out with the selected of 250 respondents in different villages of the block, Laxmipur.

The current research on the Paraja tribe of Laxmipur Block, Koraput District, Odisha, is aimed at analysing the relationship between the livelihood patterns, socio-cultural practices, and the constant changes taking place in the society. It has taken a descriptive and analytical research design that will offer quantitative and qualitative information on the economic, social, and cultural aspects of the Paraja society. The study incorporates both field research with secondary sources to have a holistic view of the lifestyle and changes in the community.

Research Design

The study under discussion is the qualitative one, as it is based on both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative aspect primarily consists of the involvement of the structured survey, which would mean the provision of the numerical figures of the demographic factor, the economic activity, the level of education, the level of income, and other quantifiable aspects. The qualitative section would entail observation, in-depth interviews, and a discussion group to gain insight into the cultural practices, beliefs, behaviours, usages, and perceptions of the participants regarding social and economic changes. This combination will be able to triangulate data and, therefore, increase the validity and reliability of the findings. It is a descriptive research study, which will outline the current socio-economic and cultural status of the Parja tribe, and find out the trends, changes, and changes over the years. Analytical methods have been used in interpreting the data, and this has consequently provided an insight into the connection between the livelihood strategies and the socio-cultural alterations in the society.

Data Collection Methods

To be thorough, the primary data were collected using several methods: 1. Structured Interview: The respondents were made to fill in a detailed questionnaire to get information on the variables of demography and occupation, income, education, land tenure, and other variables related to livelihood. 2. Observation: Villages, farming practices, festivals, and normal activities were directly observed to provide a clue to the traditional styles of livelihood, dwelling patterns, and interaction in the society. 3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): FGDs were organized in selected villages and in groups of 8-12 individuals who included the elders, women, and young people to obtain the perceptions of the socio-economic change, cultural practices, and the difficulties of the people.

Secondary data were obtained from a variety of sources, including:

- Census of India (2011) for demographic and socio-economic indicators.
- District Statistical Handbook of Koraput (Government of Odisha, 2021) for data on education, infrastructure, and development schemes.
- Scholarly articles, books, and government reports related to the Paraja tribe and tribal development in Odisha.

Study Area and Population Sampling

The study was conducted in selected villages of the Laxmipur block, a tribal dominated of Koraput district. The area is predominantly tribal and is bounded by hilly terrain, forested landscape and

subsistence agriculture. The tribal families are divided into many villages, where, despite visible socio-economic changes, traditional customs and livelihoods remain important. Data were collected from the following villages and panchayats:

Ranjitguda (Laxmipur Panchayat)

Champi and Jholaguda (Champi Panchayat)

Lauripadar (Champi Panchayat)

Kakiriguma (Kakiriguma Panchayat)

Tunpar and Jirjira (Tunpar Panchayat)

Bagepadara and Panchada (Panchada Panchayat)

Charada and Merichamada (Bhitaragarda Panchayat)

Jholaguda, Badanerka, Sananerka, Meradaguda, Goudaguda (Goudaguda Panchayat)

Structured interviews, observation, personal data, and focus group discussions were used to collect the data. The population was taken based on official records (Census-2011), and secondary data were obtained in the form of academic publications. Analyses were done on quantitative data, and percentages and frequency distribution were made, and content analysis was conducted for the qualitative data.

The Population of men and women of the Paraja community residing in the Laxmipur block of the Koraput district constitute the target population. A stratified random sampling strategy was used in an attempt to attain representativeness. The blocks were divided into villages, and the respondents were sampled proportionately in terms of population size, gender as well and the age group. The personal data were collected using 250 respondents, comprising 134 males and 116 female respondents. This sample was sufficiently large to support a considerable statistical analysis, and it also reflected the diversity of the Paraja population in terms of demography and socio-cultural characteristics.

Results and Analysis

Quantitative data collected through structured interviews were organized into tables and analyzed using percentage distribution and frequency analysis. This enabled the identification of patterns in demographic composition, occupation, education, income, and landholding among respondents.

Qualitative data from observations and FGDs were analyzed descriptively, focusing on narrative explanations of social organization, family systems, rituals, festivals, and perceived cultural changes. Themes and patterns were extracted to understand the socio-cultural dynamics and the impact of modernization on traditional practices.

quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a holistic interpretation of the socio-economic and cultural transformations within the Paraja community, ensuring that statistical results were supplemented with contextual understanding.

Table -1
Gender Distribution of the respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
Male	134	53.6
Female	116	46.4
Total	250	100.0

The table below represents the distribution of gender among the respondents of the Paraja tribe in the Laxmipur block. Among the 250 respondents, 134 were males, which comprised 53.6 Percent of the total respondents, and 116 were females, who comprised 46.4 Percent of the total sample. This means that the male respondents are slightly more in the study area as compared to the female respondents. The margin difference indicates that both genders were represented in the sample population in a relatively balanced manner. Such close participation indicates the inclusivity of the study and gives a justifiable picture of both male and female socio-cultural and economic views in the Paraja community

**Table-2
Marital status of the Respondents.**

	Frequency	Percent
Married	224	89.6
Unmarried	18	7.2
Divorce	1	.4
Widow	7	2.8
Total	250	100.0

The information on the marital status of the respondents indicates that most of them are married, with 224 people (89.6%) of the entire sample being married. Fewer percentages, 18 respondents (7.2%), are not married, and 1 respondent (0.4) is divorced, and 7 respondents (2.8) are widows. The distribution significantly shows that the population of the study is mainly made up of married people, hence the social culture of early and universal marriage in the Paraja community. Low estimation of the unmarried, divorced, and widowed also indicates that marriage is an important and stable institution in Paraja society, and its importance is in the theory of social structure and continuity of its culture.

**Table -3
Educational Status of Respondents.**

	Frequency	Percent
illiterate	82	32.8
up to 5 standard	88	35.2
up to 7th	42	16.8
up to matriculation	26	10.4
up to intermediate	11	4.4
up to graduation	1	.4
Total	250	100.0

The educational status of the respondents is demonstrated by data that a substantial part of the Paraja population is still educationally backward. Among the 250 respondents, 82 people (32.8) are illiterate, and this means that a number of the people in the community lack access to formal education. Many of them, 88 (35.2) respondents, have shown that they have completed education up to 5th standard, and 42 (16.8) respondents have finished their education up to 7th standard. Additionally, 26 (10.4) respondents have achieved education to matriculation, 11 (4.4) to intermediate, and only 1 respondent (0.4) to graduation level.

This tendency is a clear indication that the most widespread is the primary-level education, but higher education is still very unexamined. The educational problems of the Paraja people are manifested in the high illiteracy rates and the low number of secondary and higher education representatives. Poverty, the absence of educational facilities, and the necessity of child labor in fields like agriculture and household chores are likely to be some of the causes of this low educational attainment.

Table -4
Occupational Status of the Respondents.

	Frequency	Percent
Gov Job	13	5.2
Own Cultivator	106	42.4
Farm Labour	99	39.6
Non-Farm Labour	29	11.6
Private Job	3	1.2
Total	250	100.0

The job distribution of the respondents shows that most of the Paraja people are involved in agriculture and other related studies. The number of those who are own cultivators is the largest occupational group of 106 (42.4 out of the total 250 respondents). This shows that agriculture still remains the main source of livelihood among the majority of Paraja families. The proportion of farm labourers is great and constitutes 99 respondents (39.6%), which proves their reliance on farm labour as a source of income. Also, 29 respondents (11.6%) are in non-farm labour, including construction or daily wage work or other manual work not in agriculture. Another small proportion of the respondents, 13 (5.2) people, are those who are engaged in government jobs, and only 3 (1.2) people are those with employment in the private sector.

This allocation brings out the fact that the economy of the Paraja community remains mainly agrarian with little diversification towards formal or non-agricultural economies. The low percentage of respondents in the government and private sectors is our indicator of low education levels and low access to the contemporary job market, thus reflecting that the community still relies on the traditional livelihood methods.

Discussion

The study findings indicate that the socio-cultural life and livelihood of the Parja tribes of Laxmipur block are slowly changing severely upon the influence of Sanskritization, Industrialization, Modernization, Westernization, Globalization, education and government development activities. Even though agriculture has been the main livelihood of most of the households, as is indicated by the large amount of paddy, millet, vegetable and agricultural labour, there has been an increasing trend of using non-farm income opportunities and wage labour, factory and industrial work, which suggests an imminent change towards diversified income strategies. This change is closely connected to the development of infrastructure, the enhancement of mobility and external labour markets. Nevertheless, the educational profile of the respondents demonstrates a similar scenario, whereby the percentage of individuals who are illiterate or those who have attained primary education is higher. This low education level will limit the socio-economic movement and chances of securing improved jobs, and as such, they

will be more reliant on low-skill agriculture or daily labour work, manual labour. The qualitative results also imply that the socio-cultural sector is not spared by such changes. Although the tribal society still values traditional festivals, rituals, and communal activities such as Pushpa Parva, Magha Parva, Chait Parva, Badbalni Yatra, the modern generation is constantly getting swayed by new leanings in the modern way of life, digital media, modern dance, music, movies, costumes, dresses, jeans, modern shoes and the urban culture. Acculturation processes, westernization, and so on have also led to the shift in dress codes, food habits, social behaviour and belief systems and hence the deterioration of some tribal practices and traditional art forms. Also, government welfare schemes have increased security of livelihood, but at the cost of altering the collective kind of traditional system of labour division, cohesion and economic organisation of communities. Globalisation is also increasing the rate at which the culture is changing with the use of mobile phones, TV, transport, entertainment media and new aspirations, and therefore the way members of the Parja community deal with one another, celebrate and experience their identity. On the whole, it can be seen that the Parja tribe is striking a complicated balance between continuity and change: the economic pressure and modern forces and tendencies are transforming the occupation patterns, family patterns, and social values, but there is still a strong tendency to retain the cultural identity. This community is showing strength in adapting to emerging socio-economic conditions while at the same time maintaining its cultural fabric, and in these times, the paraja society is going through a significant phase of transformation.

Conclusion

Laxmipur block of the Paraja tribe is an illustration of a society that has been sailing through the complicated border between tradition and modernity. The Parajas have had a rich socio-cultural heritage which is characterised by strong family ties, kinship networks, traditional rites, and lively festival celebrations, as the Parajas have historically been dependent on agriculture, forest resources, and collective labour. The cultural practices have guaranteed social cohesion, ecological balance, and intergenerational knowledge transfer. The community is, however, undergoing massive transformations as a result of modernisation, education, and development programmes. Traditional livelihoods, social organization, and cultural manifestations are slowly changing with the introduction of wage labour, non-agricultural work practices, government initiatives, and the city routines.

Household income and financial stability have risen, education has been made available, and healthcare and modern facilities have been made accessible and accessible. This has been enhanced by education, particularly among the younger generation, whereby there has been an increased awareness of broader socio-economic opportunities and the propensity to adapt to the change of values. The role played by women in the Self-help Groups (SHGs) has facilitated gender empowerment, which has seen them participate in household decision-making and earning of income. Although these transformations present opportunities for a better quality of life, they also present a threat to the conservation of the cultural identity, practices, and ecological knowledge.

A balanced approach has to be chosen in order to provide an inclusive and sustainable development, upholding economic development yet ensuring the cultural and environmental heritage of the Parajas. The policy interventions can be made to consider giving more people access to higher education and vocational training and enhancing healthcare infrastructures, and boosting traditional agricultural methods by employing climate-resilient methods. Simultaneously, the cultural continuity can be preserved with the assistance of programs that encourage the documentation and observance of the

cultural practices, festivals, folk arts, and languages. Engaging the community in the planning and execution of development projects will ensure that developments will be based on the basis of the needs and values of the local community, hence the feeling of ownership and accountability.

Lastly, the Paraja tribe is a living organism that is in a state of transformation. Though they have absorbed the modern opportunities, they have not lost the main aspects of the traditional lifestyle and cultural identity. The strategies of sustainable development that combine economic, social, and cultural aspects are needed to enhance the livelihoods, education, and general well-being, and safeguard their heritage. The sustainability of the Parja community is in the power of its capacity to reconcile between modernization and the development of the distinctive socio-cultural background so that future generations could have an opportunity to experience material prosperity alongside the rich cultural background.

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