

# The Parhaiyas of Jharkhand: A Glance

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## Abstract

The Parhaiyas are one of the Primitive Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Jharkhand, and this lesser-known community is found settled mainly in the Latehar, Garhwa, Palamu and Chatra districts, and they also live in a small number in the neighbouring states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Although they had been traditionally associated with shifting cultivation and forest produce for their subsistence, they were compelled to adopt traditional cultivation patterns in the resettlement areas for their livelihood due to environmental degradation, wildlife and forest policy, land encroachment, and issues related to land ownership. However, as the agricultural activities do not fulfil all their requirements, they have to depend on the forest produce to meet their livelihood demands. They sell their forest produce, such as roots, fruits, leaves, bamboo materials, etc., in the local markets, and even hunting is still considered by the community members as one of the income sources. Conversely, despite the governments' various initiatives, due to various factors, they are still lagging on important indicators of development, such as health, education, etc. They are the poverty-stricken people living in small hamlets in the hilly area from time immemorial, which has resulted in a strong emotional attachment to the region. There are few studies available on the Parhaiyas and their economic condition, level of education, poverty, health, social exploitation, etc. However, scholars have very rarely attempted to explore their cultural life, which is filled with oral traditions, customs, beliefs, material cultures, and artistic traditions that collectively contribute to establishing their cultural identity. In fact, this study explores the comprehensive perspective on the nature of cultural life of the people and their conscious and collective efforts by focusing on their cultural milieu which is consisting of crafts, ornaments, food practices, sports and games, festivals, rituals and celebrations that together make their life not as a monotonous entity, rather a dynamic one that participates in the process of differentiation and assimilation with other mainstream communities living in the localities. While this study relies on the ethnographic details of the community, it proceeds further by examining various cultural domains that are used both explicitly and implicitly to address some of the issues of confrontation with their neighbouring communities, who constantly produce opinions and impressions about the Parhaiyas. This study also explores some of the cultural practices that they can project unique and any neighbouring cultures that have not influenced them. Similarly, this study tries to locate some of the cultural hybridity elements within their culture that have been the result of living closer to other communities. This study also identifies some of the practices related to health, healing, rituals,

celebrations, and worldview that can be considered as unique in every respect. Finally, this study initiates a contemporary dialogue on the importance of addressing the relevance of the cultural identity of indigenous communities in the globalisation scenario.

**Keywords:** Forests, traditions, isolation, identity, intermingling, sustainability

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**Introduction:** Jharkhand, the newly carved eastern state of India that came into existence on 15 November 2000, is known for its rich linguistic, cultural, and demographic diversities. Having an area of 79,714 square kilometres with beautiful landscape blanketed with thick forest and filled with several rivers, and importantly holding 40 per cent of country's natural resources, being called as forest land as the name of the state literally means it (Minahan 2008:839), the state occupies an important place in the different historical periods that are evident from available archaeological and epigraphical evidences, and cave paintings (Singh 2008: 220), and its active and vibrant participation in shaping the modern Indian society is understood from developments in the modern and post-independence periods (Yadav 2014; Jha 2009; Sinha 2017). However, to look at the demographic structure, Jharkhand offers a colourful picture of diversified but harmonious coexistence of tribal and non-tribal communities among a population of 32.96 million according to the Indian Census 2011, with the estimated figure of 8,646,189 (26.21%) as the tribal population under the state's social demographics (Census 2011). Further, the tribal population of the state is consisting of the following 32 tribal communities distributed across the state and the size of their population varies according to the same source quoted here: Asur/Agaria (22,459), Baiga (3,582), Banjar (487), Bathudi (3,464), Bedia (100,161), Bhumij (209,448), Binjhia (14,404), Birhor (10,726), Birjia (6,276), Chero (95,575), Chik Baraik (54,163), Gond (53,676), Gorait (4,973), Ho (928,289), Karmali (64,154), Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, Dudh Kharia, Hill Kharia (196,135), Kanwar (8,145), Kharwar (248,974), Khond (221), Kisan, Nagesia (37,265), Kora, Mudi-Kora (32,786), Kol (53,584), Korwa (35,606), Lohra (216,226), Mahli (152,663), Mal Paharia, Kumarbhag Paharia (135,797), Munda, Patar (1,229,221), Oraon, Dhangar (1,716,618), Parhaiya (25,585 with 33.10% literacy rate), Santhal (2,754,723), Sauria Paharia (46,222) and Savar (9,688) (Census 2011). As mentioned, the linguistic diversity of the state is evidenced from, and the reflection of, the presence of speakers of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, and Austroasiatic languages, but Hindi, the official language of the state, is considered as a link language, and notably, the tribal communities can also be found providing substantive base for this linguistic and cultural diversity as they speak various languages and display different cultural practices with differences in worships. The major tribal communities are identified and classified by Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi (1964) based on their traditional occupations, such as hunter-gatherers (Birhor, Korwa, Hill Kharia), shifting cultivation (Sauria Paharia), simple artisans (Mahli, Lohra, Karmali, Chik Baraik), and settled agriculturists (Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, Bhumij, etc). Among these thirty-two tribes, however, eight tribal communities such as Asur, Birhor, Birjia, Hill Kharia, Korwa, Mal Paharia, Parhaiya, Sauria Paharia, and Savar have been identified by the Government of India as most vulnerable communities

compared to their counterparts in Jharkhand and thus, they have been treated under sub-classification as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) for improving their living standard on priority (Petel 1998:313; Chaudhuri and Chaudhuri 2005; Mahapatra 2011). The disparity and inequality existed among the tribal communities, who had less access to modern development among them, along with a pre-agricultural system of existence and also with an extremely low literacy rate, which had been highlighted by the Dhebar Commission (1960-1961) (Sharma and Sharma 2004), resulted in the creation of primitive tribal group in the Fourth-Year plan. Groups had been added till the Seventh Five-Year plan, and as of now, seventy-five had been identified as Primitive Tribal Group (Mahapatra 2011). Later in 2006, the Government of India renamed the Primitive Tribal Group into Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in 2006 (Laxmikanth 2011:14). Thus, the Parhaiyas, living in the scattered settlements in the Palamu, Garhwa, Chatra and Latehar districts of Jharkhand, being officially recognized PVTGs by the Government of India, and being considered as ancient inhabitants retaining their lifestyle deeply associated with forest and natural resources, have been studied for exploring their cultural diversity and highlighting the nature of coexistence mediated through their language, traditions and worldview. As the community is lesser known, the name of the tribe is often confused with Paharia, another tribal community living in Jharkhand, and it is also less pronounced correctly by many. They, in fact, the derivation of the term Parhaiya and its etymological significance holds different versions of interpretations, and some of them are: 1) as the word Parhaiya or Paraiya has Dravidian root of *para* meaning ‘a hill’ it refers to the mountaineer; 2) quoting Bishop Goldwell it is stated that the name Pareiya or Pariah has synonymous with the Paharias (also called as Malers), where *pahar* means ‘a hill’ 3) as *parei* refers to a ‘drum’ used at funerals, the *pareiya* could be interpreted as drummer, the name of hereditary occupation; 4) however, Parhaiya in Gondi ‘burners of the jungles’ that is, can be referred to the people (the Parhaiyas) who use traditional method of ‘slush and burn’ cultivation system; 5) the derived word *para-gaya* (lit. who fled away) interpreted differently as who ran away from the battle with the invaders, which is based on their old songs of war that refers to one of the leaders of the invading forces according to O’Malley (1926:64) “Some of their songs are evidently old war songs of tribe, and one referring to the invasion of Palamu has a refrain of “Fly, Fly, Deo Sahi [or Deo Sahu] is coming, we not resist him, ... This Deo Sahu was the father of Puran Mal, one of the leaders of the invading force.” (quoted in Nag 1973:9); 6) according to the legend familiar with the Parhaiyas, and other communities such as Kharwar and Chero, during the reign of Raja Medini Roy of Palamu, the Paharis lived on the highlands, used forest produce and had slash and burn cultivation and the Aharis lived on the plains and used ploughs and bullocks for cultivation, and the invited the Paharis for a feast and provided them with rice *bhat* which they considered as a humiliation and ran hither and thither made them to be called as *para-gaya* or runners; 7) according to another legend in a Paraspani village of Dhurki anchal, on the insistence of Parwati, Lord Mahadeve gave life to two *Jhalka* (scarecrows) kept in the field by a cultivator, one fell on the Kora, lap of the Lord to become Kora or Korwa tribe and the other one flew away to be called as Para-gaya, the descendants of the Parhaiya (Mohan 2020:41, Sharma 1996:3); and 8) another legend proffers reason for why are they called as “Pandavanshi” that relates the Parhaiyas as the descendent from Lakhur, identified with Nakul, belonging to the five Pandavas of the Mahabharata. On the death of their father, Lakhur quarrelled with his brothers over the division of the kingdom. The infuriated Lord Krishna ordered the other brothers to rule. The dejected Lakhur went into the jungle, and the Parhaiyas came to be his descendants (Crooke 1896:125-133 quoted in Nag 1973: 8-12). The following is an eschatological story of the Parhaiyas: “All Parhaiyas are the creation of God. They hold that when a child is born, God gives *Jiv* (soul) in him, which enables

him to live on the earth. This soul is given to a Parhaiya for a period which is generally prescribed by God. When this period is over, God recalls the soul, and the man dies. The soul does not die, and it takes rebirth. The body, which dies, becomes evil spirits, and that's why they do not go to the burial or cremation ground frequently. They further hold that so long as the soul does not take rebirth, it becomes either evil or helpful to the living Parhaiya. They believe that a woman who dies during pregnancy becomes a *kichin* (evil spirit) and a woman who dies after childbirth becomes a *dakin* (evil spirit). These evil spirits are dreaded very much, and whenever any calamity befalls a family, these spirits are appeased. The names of the spirits are known through the help of the *Ojha*." (Mohan 2020: 80). However, the present generation is not very much aware of the origin and meaning of the name and any myths or legends associated with it. Further, their affinity with Bhuiyar or the Korku has been traced, and their agnate with Korwa has been acknowledged by the Parhaiyas of Latehar and Palamu areas. This study is based on both primary and secondary data, and while primary data have been collected by the interview method from the Parhaiyas by the authors. Thus, the details of the key informants are given here: 1. Parhaiya Tola of Latdag village of Chandwa block (Latehar district): Sadare Parahaiya, Nunar Parhaiya (38), Sukanti Devi (37), Parbati Devi (45), Magha Baiga (74), Seema Devi (65); 2. Kone village of Latehar block (Latehar district): Raghunandan Kharwar; 3. Orea village of Saryu block (Latehar district): Deepak Parhaiya; 4. Chirpu village of Kari Tola of Saryu block (Latehar district): Sugiya Devi (27), Sushinta Devi (29), Bishnu Parhaiya (34), Ram Singh (36), Sukhan Parhaiya (60), Muneshawar Sing Kharwar, Bishnu Parhaiya (Tamakhad village); 5. Sarja village, Pokharaha block of Medininagar (Daltonganj, Palamu district): Sakenda Parhaiya; and 6. Hisra village, Pokharaha of Meninagar (Daltonganj, Palamu district): Anita Devi (25), Upendra Parhaiya (28). It is to be noted that the data gathered from the available literature have been cross-checked and verified with the informants listed here, and thus, this article presents updated content on the social and cultural life of the Parhaiyas of Jharkhand.

**The Parhaiyas from Historical Perspective:** The historical account of the Parhaiyas offers different opinions, but many of them agree on the view that they are the ancient inhabitants of Jharkhand, which has been established through their dependency on forests and natural resources. Their settlement in Jharkhand, according to some, is considered to be well before the arrival of the Mundas, and in the absence of written records, it becomes a difficult task in making a clear statement on the glory of the ancient tribal society known for a great system of governance (Minz and Hansda 2010; Diwakar and Delo Mai Hansda 2010; Ghurye 1980). For Dalton, "The people in Palamau, Parhaiyas, appear to be the mere remnant of a tribe who, according to their own tradition and traditions of other races in this district, once formed an important section of the population, I have little to say about them. They are one of the numerous tribes, or perhaps, it might be more correctly stated, one of the branches of the great tribes who with the Turanian features and many corresponding customs, have adopted Hindi as language to the obliteration of all their primitive forms of speech, and who, though affecting Hindu customs, retain practices that are in the eyes of Hindus impure and abhorrent. Their marriages and funeral ceremonies are Hindu." (Dalton 1872: 126-127 as quoted in Mohan 2020: 1-2, Sharma 1996:1). The legends of the Parhaiyas present narratives that relate them with the shifting agriculture, or as those who had avoided settled cultivation, or 'fugitives of cultivation'; a confrontation between them and the Raja who trespassed into the forest for hunting of wild animals; priests or *baiga* of the local people, one of their cultural heroes, Haithi Baiga, had been endowed with magical powers; and their links with the Pandavas and punished by Krishna when they quarreled with brothers (Burman 1973:1). Some of these legends help us to understand a kind of encounter the

Parhaiyas had faced from the external agencies or “outsiders”, and they had to show resistance on their trespassers in their territories. According to Sundar (1898), “Parahiya are a Dravidian tribe and found, I believe, only in Palamau. According to their own tradition, they have lived all along in Palamau and they allege that originally they were the “Duar Pujars” or priests of the Maharajas of the district” (Sharma 1996: 2, Mohan 2020:5, Nag 1973:8). Or, to go by Drake-Brochman (1911) and Crooke (1896), the Parhaiyas originally belonged to some place in the Surguja district of Madhya Pradesh. It had already been observed by O’Malley (1907) that at some point in time, many tribes had been involved in the exodus from their original habitat, mainly due to invasion. Their move towards eastwards, from Surguja and possibly through Mirzapur, was for exploring land for cultivation (Nag 1973: 13). In fact, Risely (1891) indicated that the Parhaiyas as a “small Dravidian tribe of Palamau” (Sharma 1996:2). The earlier account of Hunter is useful in understanding the historical development and culture change in the Parhaiyas, and he writes that “The wildest people now in Palamau are the Birhors and Parahiya. These tribes confine themselves entirely to the hills and gain their livelihood chiefly by bird catching and snaring of wild animals. They also collect and sell the jungle medicinal herbs, plants, and roots. The only thing they ever attempt to cultivate, and this always on the hill sides, is the castor oil plant.” (Hunter 1867: 100-106, quoted in Sharma 1996:1). But for L.R. Forbes (1870), ‘they are the Hindu speaking aboriginal tribe living in tolerable numbers in the more jungle parts of the pargana of Palamau, and their customs and habits are a mixture of the Hindu and aboriginal. They are not pure Mundas, but may be Kankus, a branch of the Munda family’ (Sharma 1996: 1). Though there were studies by the British authors, Ramakant Prasad, who had an extensive field study among the Parhaiyas between 1965 and 1967 and analyzed their culture in terms of acculturation or the process of change occurring in economic and social life, “so far on the origin of the tribe nothing specific has been mentioned by the British authors” (Sharma 1996:3).

The social interaction between the Parhaiyas and members of neighbouring communities is an important issue because, to see it historically, they had different stories to narrate on their migration and settlement. As the community is already scattered and settled in different locations in small number Jharkhand, and Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, also as a less populated community with meager economy, and change in the cultivation pattern from slash and burn to other traditional cultivation, from inaccessibility to accessibility due to improved connectivity, their migration to other states as labour, their interaction with other communities is inevitable and it can be evidence from their confidence they showed during their interactions with the authors and accompanying fieldwork assistants. During the interactions with the Parhaiya community members, people from other communities were also present, and they shared some of the information in relation to their interactions and participation in the festivals, celebrations, and rituals of each other. While we were on our way to search for the villages where the Parhaiyas are living, we were guided by members of other communities, and their response showed that the social status of the Parhaiyas is better, and they enjoy their due respectability. However, with reference to their social status with other tribal communities such as the Gonds, the Majhis, the Korwas and the Bhuiyas (“higher rank”) and the Cheros and the Kharwars (“lower rank”), although there is a change in the attitude towards each other, the community members couldn’t pay any serious attention to the question which indicated that the social intercourse with other local communities has not been a burdensome. The interactions with other non-tribal communities are part of their social reality, and not only Brahmin priest, but members from servicing castes such as Dhobi (washerman), Nai (barber), and Chamar do extend their services to the Parhaiyas as a way to maintain defined social relations. Apart from occasional washing of clothes, the role

of the washerman is significant for washing clothes that have been polluted during birth and death in the Parhaiya *jajman* (patron-clients). However, in the case of barbers, they have to perform their role as hairdressers for the Parhaiya community throughout the year, and apart from this, they are sometimes by the Parhaiyas to do the role of a messenger for conveying the information related to marriage, etc. Their role is paramount during a marriage occasion, and it is their responsibility to ensure comfort and acceptance of the groom's party. All of the service providers receive customary dues in a year in the form of cash or kind, or both. However, the Chamar men play the role of musicians during their marriage ceremony of the Parhaiya and Chamar women, along with women from the Parhaiya community act as midwives. This interdependency of services from caste communities and the Parhaiyas cannot be the same in all their settlements due to the fact that they may not be found in all the villages. Therefore, these services will be replaced by the available castes in those areas. (Nag 1973: 83-84). Social relations of the Parhaiyas can also be linked with the customary laws of their food practices. They see certain food and drink as taboo, as per their customary practices. For instance, since the Parhaiyas consider the Dom, Dusadh, Chamar, Dhobi, Bhuiyan, etc., inferior, they don't eat rice cooked by people as well do they drink water from these tribal and caste communities, since they are habituated with eating beef or meat of dead animals. There was a severe punishment for the violation in terms of outcasting the violators or forcing the violators to through a ceremonial feast for the community members. However, things have changed, and thus, some of their community members eat and drink freely by mingling with others. (Mohan 2020: 88-89). (It is gathered during the interactions that though marriage between same clan members is permitted, they do not have any hierarchy among their clans – Parhaiya, Baiga and Kashi. In most of the settlements, the Parhaiyas have other ethnic groups such as Teli, Kharwar, and Chero as their neighbours with good relationships through collective participation in cultural activities, but both the Parhaiyas and Telis do not share food among them.) The post-independence scenario has really changed their social status, and it has resulted in the free movement as well as a change in the mode of transportation. Before independence, the Parhaiyas had to do Begari, or forced or free labour, for Zamindars and other well-to-do families of the caste Hindus. As the Begari system slowly decayed in the post-independence period, the Parhaiyas worked as labour and earned their salary either in kind or cash. As they were poor, they travelled on foot, even though it was a long distance. However, the well-to-do among the Parhaiyas had used modern transportation. (Mohan 2020: 20).

**The Parhaiyas and the Structure of Social Control:** The Parhaiyas, who have both nuclear and joint family types, are best known for being patrilineal and patrilocal (Mohan 2020: 41). Despite the fact that the new statutory *panchayat* has been effective, the Parhaiya community has not given up its traditional tribal council for managing their community affairs, a traditional and effective arrangement to have social control. This Parhaiya council is normally headed by the Mahato or *gauon*, that is, a hereditary headman, and he is assisted by a team of five senior members of the community, known as *panchas*. These members are selected from different lineages on the condition that they have sound knowledge of tribal affairs. The Parhaiya tribal council can be seen operating either at the village level or at the regional level, in which the latter covers a few more villages, and it is operational when either the aggrieved person or the guilty person belongs to different villages. The procedure for dealing with the cases is the same for both the village level and for regional level. For example, those who want to bring the matter before the village or regional council have to inform either the Mahato or the headman of the regional *panchayat* through a messenger. The council addresses issues about the violations of social norms, such as sexual offences,

divorce, domestic violence, assaults, any injustice to other members, occasionally theft cases, etc. A payment of fine depends on the nature and gravity of the offense is the routine practice of settling the issues, and in extreme cases, ex-communication will be imposed on the offenders or culprits, and an elaborate procedure is practiced to revoke the persons from their ex-communication, such as undergoing penance by having bath in the holy Ganges, at Gaya, at Varanasi, and throwing a feast for the community members. As part of the social development, and the impact of modernity, some sections of the community who claim to be progressive condone the ex-communication as extreme punishment, provided that the guilty person provides a public programme of recitation of *satyanarayan katha* (Nag1973:85). As the community claims to be highly moral, the members do not tolerate any extra-marital or pre-marital relations among their community members. In relation to incest relationship, Sharma writes that “[it] is unthinkable by them and they believe that such relationship may make a woman barren or both of them may die or suffer from incurable diseases.” (Sharma 1996:76). However, the caste Hindu neighbours always allege that pre-marital relations as well as extra-marital relations of women are ‘very much prevalent among the Parhaiyas’, and these allegations are highly refuted by the Parhaiyas mentioning it as a biased attitude and they also resort to say that the ‘cases of immorality’ are more among the non-tribal people in the area. (Mohan 2020: 58) As childlessness is handled seriously and also treated as an unfortunate affair, the birth of a child is a welcome and rejoicing event for the Parhaiya community, but the occasion is handled without any ceremony. However, they practice certain taboos and restrictions during their pregnancy to avoid any miscarriage or abortion, and a few of them are indicated here: looking at the sun and the moon during the eclipse; going near the vicinity of burial ground; witnessing a dead body; going to jungle or secluded or isolated or desolate places in the evening; and stale meals during the advanced stage of pregnancy. But after the delivery of a child, they observe certain taboos and restrictions. A newlywed woman is expected to conceive within two to three years, and if there is no conception beyond this time, she will be considered barren, and the concerned family will take certain courses of action as a remedy. An *ojha* will be approached for certain magico-religious rites for appeasing the spirits for redemption, and herbal medicines will be employed. On normal occasions, the Parhaiya woman promises to perform the mundane (tonsure/head shave) of her child, perform a religious discourse (*Satyanarayan Katha* or *Satyanarayan Puja*), and feed a Brahmin when she is blessed with a child. (Nag 1973, Mohan 2020:52). It is reported that delivery takes place at the husband’s house with a midwife from the Chamar or Mochi community assisting the parturient during the delivery. (Mohan 2020). The following ceremonies are performed during the post delivery period: *Chhatti* ceremony performed on the sixth-day which help her to revert to her normal diet; *Barhi* or *Bishaur* ceremony is observed on the twelfth day in which mother is given bath, given new cloths as she enters kitchen after the delivery; *Anaprasan* ceremony (the first morsel of cereal food given to the child – *Khir*, made of rice and milk, is preferably given (Mohan 2020: 55); name giving (no formal ceremony, but a Brahmin priest may be invited to prepare horoscope for the child); and tonsure (a barber from the Nai community invited to share the hair of the child on the occasion of either Shivaratri, Durgapuja or Ramnaumi).

Since girls are married at the early age (‘between 11 and 15; between 16 and 20’, according to Mohan (2020:59)) and tribal council’s stringent nature of punishment including heavy fine for girl’s parents and fear of ex-communication, social violations by the community members are rare in nature, and at the same time, the elders admit that there are minor issues that raise sporadically in relation to extra-marital affairs. (But it is gathered from the informants that nowadays they follow eighteen for girls and

twenty-one for boys.) The practice of polygamy can be permitted by the tribal council in exceptional cases, like the childlessness of the first wife. The members of the Parhaiya community prefer to have an arranged marriage, and it is negotiated between two parties (with or without the payment of *sudama* or bride price in both cash and kind) in the presence of village elders, and there are practices of exchange of sisters, or known as the marriage of exchange, followed to avoid bride-price. Marriage by adoption is also practised where there is no male heir, and the boy is adopted as *Ghardamda*. The role of *aguan*, the headman or a young relative, ‘who is intelligent, tactful and possessing experiences of conducting marriage negotiation’ (Mohan 2020), plays a vital role in the negotiation of the marriage (Sundar 1898:PCCXXVI), and as Mohan mentions that “Even today the *aguas* play a vital role.” (Mohan 2020: 61). Marriage is done with elaborate arrangements, procedures and filled with rites, rituals and ceremonies. The Mahato, or the headman, plays an important role in the whole process of marriage. However, divorce and separation are not permitted easily by the tribal council, and if the council is satisfied with the reasons cited for the divorce or separation, such as involvement in adultery of parents, childlessness (barren woman), impotency, laziness of wife, and incurable diseases (Mohan 2020:72 & 91). Remarriage is permitted, and it is done with few rituals and rites. The elderly Parhaiyas admit that their marriage rites had been simple earlier, and the role of barbers and Brahmins had never existed. (Mohan 2020). Moving to the last right of the life cycle, death right is well defined as far as the Parhaiyas are concerned. They have a clear notion of death and its associated process. Traditionally, the Parhaiyas bury the dead body (provided that if a person dies of a major disease, death of a baby or infant, an unmarried woman not attained puberty, and a woman who has recently delivered a child (Mohan 2020:78)), but with the influence of neighbouring Hindu society, they send the dead body to the crematorium. The eldest son is the chief mourner of the dead person, who has to do all the rites. As part of the death rituals, ten days will be observed as a pollution period, and non-vegetarian food is highly prohibited. Certain taboos have to be practised during these ten days at the house of the deceased. The male members refrain from shaving as well as cutting their nails, in addition to the hunting expedition. The purificatory rites, *daso*, will be performed on the eleventh day, and rice balls, or *dasgami pindas*, will be served to the soul of the deceased person, and then a feast will be provided to all the community members. The Parhaiyas believe in ancestor worship, and it is done on the twelfth day at the *muan* – the abode of the ancestor’s soul. A feast will be arranged for the community members, and inviting a Brahmin to the feast depends on the family. Finally, the ashes will be immersed in a nearby river or stream, and they may immerse the ashes in the Ganges at Varanasi if they can afford it. (Nag 1973).

The Parhaiyas’ settlement areas, including the open spaces around their houses, shelter their livestock. The construction of a house reflects their belief system that holds a steps and procedures for the whole process of construction, as well as to protect the houses from suspicious evil spirits during and after the construction. Further, it also unfolds a vast amount of knowledge that inter connects the Parhaiyas with their environment, cosmos and worldview, relationship with other communities, for example, they consult a priest from other communities; sounds of certain animals such as jackal, or fox, deer, etc., in the vicinity of construction site are considered as auspicious, however, at the same time, they drop the idea of construction half way or abandon the new house if they feel they are not auspicious for living. After the completion of the house construction, a feast will be offered to relatives and friends as a token of gratitude and thanks-giving to them. (Nag 1973: 30).



With informants at Parhaiya Tola



Interactions with the people at Parhaiya Tola



At Parhaiya Tola



Magha Baiga from the Parhaiya Tola busy in making basket



With people at Parhaiya Tola



With the Parhaiya family from Hisra Pakharaha



With Anita Devi of Hisra Pokharaha village



Chipru village Tattoo tradition



With Sukhan Parhaiya of Chipru village, Kari Tola of Saryu Block



With Sukhan Parhaiya of Chipru village



With informants at Chipru village



In conversation at Chipru village

**The Parhaiyas and Their Family:** Since the newly married sons are expected to live separately from their parents within the ancestral land of that lineage, by doing so, the nuclear family becomes a social reality, and therefore, a Parhaiya household, typically, will hold at least four to six members. The existence of the clan system is not clear from all the accounts available, and even Risely (1891) has provided a vague account in this regard, which has also been verified or cross-checked by other scholars. Sharma writes that “The Parhaiyas of today have almost forgotten the names of their clans and even the old persons fail to recollect their clan names, so they have no clan names as a suffix after their names. In the absence of any clan system, they consider the kinship system at the time of settling a marriage. (Sharma 1996:12). This has been verified with the informants in a few villages particularly The Parhaiyas have clear idea about the role and function of a family, and it is learned from the interaction, and well as it has already been directly reported by scholar that it is the responsibility of “the family secure food, shelter, cloth and other material comforts for all the family members” (Mohan 2020: 43). The physical characteristics of the Parhaiyas indicate their nativity and belongingness to their environment and their height (Sunder 1898; Dalton 1872:126-127; Crooke 1896) is average (that falls within the range of between too tall and too short) with mixed complexion to support their Dravidian or non-Aryan ethnic affiliation – the claim is not the reflection of earlier writers as there are changes and transformation due to their contact with other non-tribal communities. The skin colour is neither too dark nor too fair, rather it is a transformed colour with mixed shades, and while their hair is generally short and wavy, some of them have straight hair, and others with baldness due to age. These facts have been reported on the basis of the observation during the authors’

intensive fieldwork in the villages of Latehar and Palamu districts. The Parhaiyas do not mention the presence any exogamous clans, but accept that there is a practice of grouping in the name of *gotia* which includes both consanguineous and affinal kins, and another type of group that has been vogue now is known as *khut kutti* referring to the place where ancestors settled (Nag 1973:23). Considering all these information, it is clear that the old members of the community have never failed to transmit social heritage to their younger generation, that is, they create such a conducive family environment where the young members learn about their heritage, tradition, customs and folklife. (Mohan 2020). The role of old age people, who are the custodians of customary laws and resourceful people of traditional knowledge on the health system, is well managed by the Parhaiyas. As it is observed by the authors, the elderly people had never been treated as a burden, as they had been engaged in some activities and responsibilities. For instance, they do small household activities such as sweep their house and surroundings, look after the minor children, graze their cattle, advice youngsters in their socio-economic matters and customary practices, participating in the community panchayat, etc. (Mohan 2020:73). Their family is both nuclear and extended, and so far there is no reporting of polygamous from some of the villages visited by the authors. There are examples to show that married couples stay in their wives' houses, despite their customary practices of setting up new houses for married couples to begin their new life. As far as the ancestral property distribution is concerned, the practice is in no way different from the one practised by the mainstream communities, that is, the property is equally distributed among sons, which means that the daughters may get the property where the families do not have sons to inherit the property. Due to their cultural contact with the other communities, many of their practices are similar, and thus, they are not so enthusiastic, for example, the permitted joking relationship within a family between husband's younger brother (*devar*) and elder brother's wife (*bhoujai*), and between wife's younger sister (*sari* or *sali*) and elder sister's husband (*bahnoi*); and the avoidance relationship between (husband's elder brother (*bhasur*) and younger brother's wife (*bhav*); and between younger sister's husband (*bahnoi*) and wife's elder sister (*jethsar*) (Nag 1973:28). In case the family does not have a son, as per their custom, if husband agrees to stay in his wife's place as *ghardamda*, then the daughter can inherit her parent's property. (Mohan 2020: 45). However, the role of the Parhaiya women in family maintenance is highly appreciable, and as it is observed by the authors, their position is better when compared to caste women counterparts. They showed no hesitation in interacting with outsiders, and interestingly, they appeared to be rejoiced when they talked about the community and its activities, including their economy, festivals, family life, their interaction with other communities, etc. It is also noted that due to their socio-economic condition and cultural life, the Parhaiya women are well treated by their male counterparts. As Mohan rightly pointed out their use of bullock cart analogy for describing the relationship between men and women, that is, "if one wheel is neglected or maltreated or gets wrong, the bullock cart cannot be driven." (Mohan 2020: 44). But, it is not to claim that they are from totally free from male domination, or enjoy their independence in decision making. They do agree that they are not in favour of women becoming influential, rather they want women must work under the direction of the male members. However, the custom of bride-price enhances and adds certain values to the position of women, and it can also be said that, mostly, parents, to some extent, would like to have a female child. (Mohan 2020: 45).

**Occupation and economy:** A change in the traditional occupational style that happened to the Parhaiyas has shown a major impact on their socio-economic life, and it has also resulted in the community's outlook. The earlier accounts of the Parhaiyas portrayed them as those who made their "living principally

by cutting and selling wood and bamboo, and by collecting and changing forest produce such as lac” (Brockman 1911:113-114 quoted in Nag 1973:45), and the later report pointed at them having living by ‘hunting and gathering’— while men were engaged in hunting in jungles, their women along with their children took care of other activities such as ‘collection of roots and tubers, fruits and honey’ (Prasad 1961). However, the economic activities of the Parhaiyas in the early stage in the Palamu region highlight another dimension of their life that "some are good cultivators, but the majority live in the hill ranges, and roam from spur to spur, clearing small patches of ground and cultivating a few hardy crops. They also bring down to the plains, honey, bee's wax, resin, lac and other jungle products, which they barter for grain, salt, tobacco and cloth" (Crooke 1896, quoted in Nag 1973:45). Though as it is reported that it has been a great relief for the Parhaiyas by giving up their primitive and most backward cultivation system known as slash and burn system of cultivation (Sahay 1967:88), the ‘hunter and gather’ life was not smooth as expected. Their life became harder with the introduction of the forest rules with strict forest laws, as they had been compelled to come down to settle on the foothills, and without owning land, they had to start their life as agricultural labour in the fields of their neighbours, which eventually affected their livelihood, and it became a setback for their economy. Despite having their primary occupation as cultivators or agricultural labourers, along with the collection of forest produce as a supplement to their sustainability, their economy draws from being workers or labourers in different non-farm sectors such as brick kiln industry, forestry, mining, quarrying, construction works, household industries like making of mats and ropes from palm leaves, etc. While both male and female workers equally contribute significantly to the economy and livelihood of their families, the male partners are found to be migrating out of their villages in search of employment opportunities. Due to their low economy, there is a considerable change in their land holdings, and the drastic reduction in landholdings is due to their lack of access to the forests, which they had earlier cultivated in large area, in other words, after the enforcement of the forest regulations, they could use only a limited size of land for cultivation (Nag 1973). Meanwhile, as an extension of, and continuity of, pastoralism, in small scale, the Parhaiyas draw some economy that plays a significant role in their life, from keeping cows, bullocks, goats, hen, etc., and this point has also been indicated by Sharma (1996:29). Due to this shift in their access to forest, i.e., limited and minimal access, has resulted in the reduction of collection of forest produce by the Parhaiyas, and therefore, the local markets that used to have the items like honey, gum, *mahua* flowers, wild bel, jam, medicinal items on the one hand and other hunted items like rabbit, fowl, bear, etc., are now having less arrival on the other hand – which has also denied common people from their access to these produce. The denial of their access to the forest in the name of environmental regulations and stringent forest laws will harm the traditional knowledge system of the Parhaiyas, who will be losing it in the long run, as it does not get opportunities to be practised. (Mohan 2020: 22-33). The change in their environment and the establishment of accessibility have opened up the opportunity for the tribal communities to have proximity to markets, either to sell their products or to buy required items. Most of the Parhaiya community members do not fail to attend the market, and the improved transport facility has also added an advantage to both the community and the vendors to make use of the regular markets. (Mohar 2020: 34). These facts have been confirmed or verified with the people during the interactions with the authors. Their new adaptability for livelihood is evidenced by their involvement in the making of bamboo products. There is an example that indicates their adaptability in their new settlements. They collect bamboo from the forest and split it into thin sheets, make a winnowing fan, and also make thin strips for making brooms to be sold in the nearby market to make their living. They also make use of bamboo for their domestic needs, such as a

platform to keep water pots. The shelves made from bamboo are also used to store household goods and materials at home. Doors with bamboo frames are quite common in the houses of the Parhaiyas. Further, bamboos are best used by the Parhaiyas for making materials that are needed for sheltering their cattle, pigs, and goats.

**Food Habits and Health System:** As far as the health system is concerned, there is a mixed response from the community members, and it is observed that the change in their cultural milieu due to the resettlement and proximity with the caste Hindus has resulted in the optimal use of their traditional and modern medicinal systems. While the older generation prefers to keep themselves away from the modern allopathic medicines, due to their strong belief in their herbal medicines along with magico-religious approaches, the younger generation, who have access to government initiatives and interaction with other communities, can be seen with the belief that the modern medicines give quicker relief than the traditional ones. However, one of the point for the existing practical difficulty in accessing the modern medicines has been already revealed by Sharma who says that “But their economy does not allow them to treat the patient as desired by them, this is largely because of their poverty, ignorance and bad communication system.” (Sharma 1996:28). The Parhaiyas have a simple food practice and they are non-vegetarian by tradition and practice, and particularly without any compunction for meat eating. However, other than beef, the menu of the Parhaiyas includes all varieties of items, including goat meat, pig, varieties of fish, fowls, deer, hare, doves, partridge, peacock, quails, etc. As the food habits of all the communities have encountered some changes, the Parhaiyas are not an exception. As their settlements are not in isolation, and their lifestyle depends on their intermingling, there is no regret in admitting that their food habit is a bit influenced by their dominant neighbours. It is visible from one or two evidences, even observed by earlier cholars: 1) one they were regular pork eater, but they consume sparingly, and the reason is given by Sahay who says that "the ancestors of the Parhaiya ate pork and still occasionally, they sacrifice pig to appease certain deities like Deehwar and Goreya, but for a few generations they have given it up as a regular food as well as its domestication since it is considered to be polluting and derogatory by the Hindus. Almost all of them have completely given up this food" (Sahay: 1965: n.d., quoted in Nag 1973: 32-33); and 2) some of the Parhaiyas have given up their non-vegetarian food habits citing the reason that they are the followers of the sect of *Gurumukhs* (Nag 1973:33). Due to their low economic status, buying mutton and poultry chicken from the local market could be a difficult affair, and which might have prevented them from consumption. Further, a strong aversion and unpleasant attitude towards poultry chicken could have resulted in the avoidance of consuming them, and there is also another reason that varieties of country chicken are part of their livestock, making them avoid eating poultry chicken. Rice is their staple food, and it is consumed as *bhat*, but maize is also used to make *roti*, and thus they eat *bhat* or *roti* with pulses or a vegetable, or sometimes, a non-vegetarian dish. It is observed that their food is spicy, and the food preparation with spices is quite common. They also have the habit of eating roasted and salted animal flesh. They are fond of *handya*, a local liquor prepared from the fermentation of either rice or *mahua* fruits; sometimes, it is added with local roots or herbs to make it delicious and intoxicating. Either they make it at home or buy from the local weekly market or local shop. This *handya* occupies an important place in the religious life of the Parhaiyas, and it is offered to their deities along with offerings or sacrifices.

**Dress, Ornaments and Tattoo tradition:** Even though the traditional dress of both male and female Parhaiyas has been in vogue in all areas, there are slight changes that can be observed. Therefore, the male members use *langoti* (loincloth) in some areas, and in other places it has been replaced by *dhoti*. The upper

garment, *pichora*, has nowadays been replaced with *kamiz*. The modern and young generation has access to both *baniyan* (vest), pants, pyjama under-garments, and shirts are common among the affluent elderly Parhaiyas. Whereas the Parhaiya women use a sari with which they cover the lower and upper parts of the body, particularly the chest portion. The sari appears as a short covering up to their knees, and the use of *choli* or *luga*, or blouse, is being used by the present generation, or among young women. The Parhaiyas purchase their clothes from the weekly market (hat) or from local weavers. The ready-to-wear clothes have also been found used by people in place of fabrics prepared by the Chik Baraiks, that is, the past monopoly of the Chik Baraiks has been almost ended. (Nag 1973:34). It is observed that the Parhaiya men and women are fond of their simple and elegant ornaments that reflect their customs, beliefs, and tradition apart from their sense of beauty and aesthetics. *Kardhani* is a simple (either silver cocoon or plaited) thread that all men wear around their waist, and it is useful for hanging small things like a tobacco pouch, keys, etc. During festivals, especially when they participate in dances, the Parhaiya men decorate their body with simple ornaments like necklace with silver coins, beads, etc. and wear one or two finger rings (Nag 1973:35). The Parhaiya women wear ornaments that are simple and aesthetically graceful, and they are made of cheap materials such as silver, lac, beads, zinc and aluminium, etc. Rarely, the affluent Parhaiya women wear gold. Worn as part of decoration, these ornaments reflect their traditional and cultural outlook, and interestingly, these ornaments are purchased from the weekly local market, and some of them are: *chichia*, *lola*, *nakvesar*, *nathni*, *karnaphul*, *jhumak*, *baria*, *tarkula*, *kana*, *sikuri*, *ghengke*, *guria* or *lalri*, *baju* or *bajua*, *silver* or *gillite*; *pachua*, *pahunchee*, *churee*, *themua*, *banguru*, *bajni*, *kankana*, *korau*, *chanda*, *nupur*, *baturee*, and *anguthi* (Nag 1973). The Parhaiya women are so fond of having tattoos or *khodana* on their bodies as part of aesthetics, tradition, and magico-religious importance, which helps them to identify their relations in heaven after their death. As it is reported, a tattoo is given to girls before they attain puberty. The tattoo designs are chosen by girls as per their fancy, and these designs that include figurines, moon, garden, etc, will be tattooed in hands, chest, legs, ankles, for a nominal charge by women peddlers from other tribal communities who periodically visit the Parhaiya settlements (Nag 1973).

As part of their cultural identity, the Parhaiyas have their own arrangement for their recreational and leisure activities, and it is their *Akhara* provides space for the unmarried young girls and boys to gather around every evening to sing and dance to the accompaniment of *dhol*, *mandar*, *mridang*, *jhumar*, etc. Another culturally unique arrangement is known as *Jatara*, which helps the community to rejoice by singing and dancing. The community members from nearby villages gather at one spot and mingle with each other, and it is even an opportunity for the unmarried people to find their future life partners. This is another occasion when the community members find the opportunities to dress up in traditional attire, singing and dancing, and also drinking *handia*. (Nag 1973:81). Therefore, the *jatara* of the Parhaiyas is a self-created opportunity to display their culture for solidarity and to establish and reestablish their social and cultural identity.

**Religious Life: own and borrowed:** The religious life of the Parhaiyas has been overwhelmingly influenced by the religious practices of other communities, as they have close contact with other communities due to their relocation and resettlement. Despite their culture being impacted by the elements of their neighbouring communities in their mutual interaction and association, although this incorporation differs from area to area, they have claimed to have retained some of their cultural elements as part of their identity. The religious worship is one of the components in which the interaction between the Parhaiyas and other communities is evident. So far, the religious worship is concerned, it is clear that they worship

their own deities as well as the deities of other tribal communities, which has helped to retain their tribal religious identity. Some of these examples are interpreted as the epitome of influence of culture of others: 1. the presence of Brahmin priest in rites, rituals and ceremonies such as marriage, death, horoscope making for new born child, etc.; 2) worship of deities like Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesh, Parwati, Hanuman, Surya Bhagawan, Shakti cult (Durga, Kali), etc.; 3) listening to the recitation of Satyanarayan Katha by a Brahmin priest, Ramayan and Gita; 4) visiting popular sacred places like Varanasi, Prayag, etc; 5) listening to the recitation; etc. However, the Parhaiyas are known for propitiation of their own deities that are wild spirits and deities, and quoting Sahay (1967:69), Nag pointed out that the Parhaiyas believe that their spirits and deities protect their cattle from wild animals, evil spirits and also ensures plenty of forest produce (Nag 1973: 72). Their deities are very specific and each one is designated with unique duties responsibilities. Quoting Sundar (1898) Nag mentions that Dhartimai or Muchukrani who resides in a big tree within the vicinity of the village is offered with a young goat (kid); Raksel, which takes he-goat as its offerings, protects them from sickness; Dwar-Pahar, their favourite deity, takes male pigs as offerings, but a buffalo during Dussehra festival; Devimai, a benevolent deity is offered black sheep; and some deities such as Deehwar, Bansakti, Dariha, Devimai, Chandī, Bagtiaot are mentioned by Sahay (1967) (Nag 1973: 72-73). The religious belief of the Parhaiyas revolves around the cult of mother goddess, apart from Dhartimai, and particularly, for the Parhaiyas of Palamu, *Dharti* as a sylvan deity and Gohet as the deity of hill adorned with the offerings of the blood of goat (Dalton 1872, Mohan 2020:97). There are references given by Crooke (1896) to the worship of Dih, a collective village gods and Siari devi, a female deity, worshipped by the Parhaiyas (Nag 1973:73). Examining the Dalton's and Sundar's brief account on the influence of Hinduism on the culture and religious life of the Parhaiyas, which has 'neglected the aspect of contact which had begun in some form or other,' Mohan remarks that "they were only interested in indigenous deities and a study of contact was of little importance. ...The Parhaiyas hold that their deities have their own powers, and it is very difficult to place them in hierarchical order." (Mohan 2020:97)

The ancestor worship of the Parhaiyas must be seen as a continuity of their tradition and lineage, although their religious and spiritual life is being engulfed by the elements of other tribal and non-tribal communities due to their proximity of contact. Through this ancestor worship, the community members and their families live by the guidance and moral support of their deceased members, who help them to retain the bond among themselves by recollecting or symbolizing their belongingness. The community goes by the belief that even after the demise of an elderly person, one aspect of his soul escapes from the bonds of the body to merge with God, and another aspect of the soul, *muan*, wanders in the world to exercise its influence on the community members, guide them, and regulate their life towards sustainability. As the ancestors rose to the level of deities for protecting their family members from any disaster and calamity, by invisibly being with them, thus being worshipped and remembered, which in every respect differentiates the Parhaiyas from those who worship the gods and goddesses of the established and dominant religion. Further, as their ancestors have emerged as deities, they need to be appeased by worship and sacrifice. Unlike other communities who worship their ancestors out of their love and respect for the dead, the Parhaiyas' worship is based on the belief and confidence that their deceased family members may continue to live with them and influence them in shaping their fortune of living due to their proven ability. On the other hand, this ancestor's worship by the Parhaiyas ensures the well-being of the ancestors and fulfils their unfinished wishes and satisfies their unsatisfied spirits for their

positive disposition towards the living, and by this veneration of ancestors, the kinship values are protected as it makes children respect their parents, learning family loyalty and establishing continuity of family lineage. This interpretation can be substantiated by the spiritual life of the Parhaiyas, who worship their ancestors on the special occasions of their life cycle, like birth, marriage, and death, and they also do offerings and sacrifices to appease and keep the ancestors pleased.

As part of the belief system, the Parhaiyas worship or propitiate both benevolent and malevolent spirits found in their environmental settings, including rivers, hills, hillocks, trees, etc. Their belief in these spirits can be understood right away from their practice of witchcraft and magic by the witch-doctor, known as *Ojha*. The small shrine under a tree known as *dihuwar*, where the collective deities (*dih*) live, it gets worshipped by the villagers once a year with sacrifices of sheep, pigs, and fowls, and they play the role of controlling the activities of the villagers. Apart from Dhartimai, the principal deity of mother stature, *dih* includes Guhail, Deo, Dudhi, Devi Mai, and Satbahini (known as the seven sisters), and the Guhail Devi is worshipped in the month of *Chaitra* on the Ramnaumi day. Devi Mai is regularly worshipped twice a year, both at the village and household levels. (Nag 1973:74). While Devi is claimed to be the deity of the Hindu neighbours, the Parhaiyas disapprove it by saying that they have been worshipping it for a long time and thus it is their traditional deity. (Mohan 2020: 98). Similarly, the Parhaiyas assert that they were created by Mahadeo and Parvati, and thus they are remembered for all their social and religious rituals. However, the Parhaiyas couldn't understand the claim by the neighbouring Hindu communities, as these deities are their deities. (Mohan 2020: 100).

Meanwhile, Kamardevtas, symbolized by a branch of the Karam tree, is the deity of fortune, and it is worshipped collectively with the sacrifice of goats, *roti*, and *pua*, at the village level for wealth and prosperity. The Parhaiyas also have some spirits and demons as part of their worship like Goraiyabhut (it is originated in the Goria Karam village and it is a deified spirit responsible for disease among the cattle), Raiytabhut (a malevolent deified spirit that haunts those come in contact and takes he-goat as its offerings), Raxaildeota or Raxailbaba (widely feared malevolent spirit worshipped by individual for success), Baghaut (disguise in wild animal and protects crop and humans from wild animals, and takes goat or fowl as its offerings), sulliraj (patron deity of the community), and snake worship. (Nag 1973). These deities are not merely their benevolent and malevolent spirits, but they are the reflection of collective experiences and expressions of a particular community in the given environmental settings, and these deities are also associated with the community's migration and settlement. Therefore, these deities that are special to the particular community must be seen as the cultural identity of the people who have some as their own to differentiate themselves from other communities. These social and religious affiliations towards small and big deities have resulted in the creation of sacred spaces as well as sacred specialists. With the former category, three things, such as Gaonhel Asthan (an isolated place inside the village under the tree), Devi Asthan (an isolated or busy area within a village), and inside the house (household deities reside in the house of the head of the lineage), can be seen as sacred places. Whereas, Baiga or the village priest is found in every village, and when the Parhaiya village has a mixed population, then there will be no Parhaiya Baiga. Since it is hereditary, there are socially sanctioned ways to select the next Baiga in case he does not have any heir to replace him. (Mohan 2020:101-102)

**Festivals of the Parhaiyas:** The festivals celebrated by the Parhaiyas gain significance as they reflect the historical condition of the community, in which the community has incorporated some of the elements of

other communities alongside retaining their own in order to show their magnanimity and generosity on the one hand and the coexistence as a way for sustainability on the other hand. Therefore, the festivals celebrated by the Parhaiyas provide an ample scope for a cross-cultural study by which one can portray the cultural history as well as the cultural and religious significance of the festivals of the Parhaiyas. However, this brief sketch of the festivals helps in differentiating the two components of the cultural identity of the Parhaiyas – festivals that uphold the tribal culture, identity, and uniqueness, and the festivals that have been borrowed by the Parhaiyas and that portray the goodness and munificence of the tribal community in imbibing the cultural elements of their neighbouring communities. Celebrated in the Chaitra month when *mahua* flowers bloom, the Parwa is an important festival of the Parhaiyas. The Baiga performs worship at the *Devi-dham* for the well-being of the entire village. They sacrifice fowls, and their meat has to be consumed by only male members of the community. Sarhul festival is celebrated either in the month of *Chaitra* or *Baisakh*, and it is coincidentally associated with the blooming of *sal* flowers. For the Parhaiyas, it is the “festival of flowers” and it symbolises the arrival of prosperity. Celebrated with elaborate arrangements, festivities, fervour, and feast, Sarhul is an important event that emerges as an identity of the tribal community. Hariari or Asarhi is celebrated after the onset of the rain (monsoon) on any suitable day as marked by village elders. During the event, the blood of the sacrificed fowls at the village Devi shrine will be mixed with some quantity of seeds, and this mixture is distributed to all the households to be added with the seeds for sowing in their fields to ensure a bountiful crop. *Karma* is an important festival of the tribal communities, including the Parhaiyas. The festival includes an elaborate worship at the Devidham, going to the jungle with singing and dancing, the Kamar tree is selected by the accompanying *baiga*, but the branches of the Karam tree to be ceremonially planted in their agricultural field, *baiga* invokes all the deities with the offerings of ghee and incense sticks, *baiga* offers prasadi to the fasting the Parhaiya men and women, drinking alcohol and singing and dancing on the same evening throughout the night, and immersing of the karam plant in a pond or rivulet on the next day. *Jitia* is another festival celebrated in the month of Kuar in which a branch of each of the Karam, Jhur, Dumar, Pipar, and Palas trees is planted at each household and worshipped by offering sweets, observing fast on the same day, and gathering in the evening for singing and dancing throughout the night. Observed on the sixth day of Karthik, *Sohrai* is celebrated for the well-being of the cattle, and sacrifice is also offered to Goraiyabhut, who is responsible for the protection of cattle of the Parhaiyas. *Phagua*, held on the full moon day in the month of *Phalgun*, is celebrated with the planting of the branch of the Semal tree at the Devidham and covered with straw, dry leaves, wood, etc. In the evening, the heap will be put on fire ceremonially, and the villagers sing and dance around the fire. The next day, after their bath, they worship *muan* and thereafter they play and make merry by throwing dry coloured powder on each other. *Muhanjali* is celebrated in Kuar during the worship of Dihumar and Gambhail deities by performing havan and some offerings such as ghee, incense, flowers, milk, and vermilion, and the members take *mahua* and *satua* mixed with their diet after the festival. Finally, Aghani or Khariani is the festival celebrated by the Parhaiyas in the month of Arghan when paddy is harvested and stored in a *kharian*. Baiga worships Devimai at its shrine with the offerings of a few seeds obtained from the new harvests from his own fields. Thereafter, others thresh their harvest and give some seeds to the *Devidham*. Despite having their own festival celebrations, the Parhaiyas have been generous in taking part vibrantly in the festivals of the caste Hindus living in their localities, and these festivals are Ramnaumi, Shivaratri and Chhath, and Diwali. (Nag 1973:77-80, Mohan 2020:106-114). As gathered from the informants, they also celebrate Holi, Jetia, and Teej along with their neighbouring communities, and their annual celebration of the hunting festival

of Bishnu Sendra Parva, in which, after having a full-day fasting, the team under the leadership of the village Pahan goes to the forest with their traditional hunting weapons and tools. The hunted items will be first offered to their local deity before they consume them.

**Concluding Remarks:** The Parhaiyas living in Jharkhand are a known example not only of change and transformation but also of the display of their coexistence through the appropriation and exchange of linguistic and cultural elements. Further, while incorporating elements of non-tribal communities, due to their proximity caused by dislocation and resettlement, they have shown a great resistance in retaining some of their elements as their socio-cultural identity. One visible fact is that even among the thirty-two tribal communities, eight are identified as PVTGs, the Parhaiyas are the lesser-known people despite being included in the PVTGs, and it could be a significant factor for being a disadvantaged group, irrespective of initiatives by both the state and union governments. As one of the underprivileged tribal communities, and especially being the most vulnerable by lacking in modern development, by practising a pre-agricultural system of existence including hunting and gathering, and by having an extremely low level of literacy, the Parhaiyas are inherently simple, non-resistive people, and multi-lingual (Nagpuri, Bhojpuri and Hindi), which have facilitated their sustainability through the tendency of coexistence. Though the government initiatives are visible, they are minimal, and some of them are dysfunctional, despite people leading their lives with spirit and enthusiasm, with a strong hope that has been built on their self-dependency and magnanimity. However, as informed by the people, the life of the Parhaiyas in their new settlements has not been a smooth and easy-going affair because of factors such as water scarcity, human encroachment, and changing climatic conditions that resulted in their forced migration to remote places within and outside the state. They reflect their deep pain of losing their livelihood as a result of ‘environment degradation, wildlife and forest policy, encroachment of habitats and a persistent denial of land rights’ (Ramesh and Sugathan 2024), and as the education of their children is completely disturbed due to unstable conditions, they are worried about the future generations. Being affected by the multiple factors of modernity, indifferent attitudes of the mainstream communities, the degraded state of their life, cultural practices, and their economy has become the subject of discussion within the framework of indigenous rights (Ghodke 2024) that includes human rights. To look back, historically, as Shubhra Shilee says, “[a]bout 400-500 years ago Jharkhand was basically a tribal area. Tribals, the masters of land in Jharkhand mainly depended on agricultural and forest products. Mining of copper ore and diamond was the only other occupation that linked them to the outside world. In recent years, tribals have lost a major portion of their land due to various activities in the region. This has also been the main cause of tribal unrest and their marginalization in Jharkhand.” (Shilee 2002:75). These few lines clarify the cause of the problem faced by the tribal communities in the state of Jharkhand, particularly the Parhaiyas, whose identity is in danger of dilution because they have been cut off from their forest, the source of their livelihood and the base of their cultural identity. To agree that almost all aspects of tribal life revolve around nature and its resource, then the process of alienation of them from their land, forest and resources, by the government, camouflagedly or ostensibly, in the name of development, or protection of forest, can cause the loss of indigenous identity among the tribals in Jharkhand, and the resettlement or relocation of them, by which a mingling is inevitable, helps the non-tribal dominant communities to create the discourse of their influence on the indigenous communities as part of their long pending agenda. Therefore, the tribal life of the Parhaiyas cannot be imagined unless they retain the socio-cultural and political identity of their own distinctness and uniqueness. As the subjective consciousness of distinctness is not a static concept

(Shilee 2002), it evolves along with them in their constant interaction with “others” as well as their encounter with the “crises” – thus playing an active part in defining their distinctness and uniqueness. This struggle by the indigenous or tribal communities in defining and redefining their distinctness and uniqueness, as well as constructing and projecting their socio-cultural identities for their participation in the social and political life, is visible in the case of the Parhaiyas of Jharkhand.

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