

A Portrayal of Socio-Cultural Life of the Lodha Tribe of Odisha, India

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Abstract

The present review aims to explore the socio-cultural life of Lodha tribe residing in northern Odisha, India. Peculiar by nature, Lodhas are mainly inhabited in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, representing one of the thirteen PVTGs of Odisha. This review tried to investigate traditional cultural practices, rituals, social hierarchy, religious beliefs, and cultural identity through available secondary resources. Moreover, this review contributes to the broader understanding of cultures of the Lodha tribe in Odisha who are on the verge of cultural assimilation.

Keywords: Lodha Tribe of Odisha, Socio-cultural life, Traditional Cultural Practices.

Introduction:

Odisha is one of the major states among all the tribal states founded in India, where sixty-two types of tribal communities and thirteen PVTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) live. Their way of life i.e. social and cultural folk arts is completely unique and different from each other. Lodha tribe is one of them, looking of their historical appearance; it seems that they belong to the Austro-Asiatic family. Some scholars argued that, historically the Lodha tribe belong to the 'Shabar tribe'. They are part of the Indo-Aryan language family. Presumably, this tribe is found in Medinipur district of West Bengal in India as well as some areas of in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Some of the Lodha villages has been seen in the West Bengal in the areas like Bardhaman, Birabhum, Bankuda, Huguli, Howrah, Chaibasa etc. Similarly, in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, the Lodha communities are found in blocks like Suliapada, Morada, Baripada, Badashai, Udala, Kaptipada etc¹.

According to the census of India 1901, the Lodha often migrated from Madhya Pradesh to the West Bengal and Odisha. Since agriculture is their main livelihood, they settled in small river basins along the hills of Medinipur district often related to the Shabars. But researchers don't accept such views because the Shabars are much better than the Lodha communities with respect to the ritualistic and spiritual performances. They are very advanced in Odisha; these Lodha communities are especially found in Mayurbhanj district². They are seen in the areas of Patharnesa, Bhuturudhi, Shanshashol etc. Lodhas used to live with a peculiar criminal mentality in the primitive stage. Gradually their mentality started to change due to various government policies and opportunities after the country's independence. Various institutions have been set up for their overall development³.

In recent times more emphasis is being given to the education sector of Lodhas. As they live by hunting animals from forest resources, these Lodha have integrated them in to the education system and spread them in to the main stream. Gradually their life style is changing. But due to forest degradation and rapid industrialization, their free and independent life is now endangered. Being displaced from one place to another they are living free with their social and cultural mobility.

Objective:

The main objective of this review was to explore the socio-cultural life of Lodha tribe of Odisha, India.

Methodology:

This review has been prepared by following the social, historical, and cultural context of the Lodha tribe. A good number of articles and books have been downloaded from various online platforms to analyse the socio-cultural aspects of Lodha tribe. Ancient books have been studied and some important full official records have also been explored to understand their daily social life. This is also important to engage with these communities to gather personal stories of their lives and insights into their traditions and lifestyles. To discuss the cultural life picture of the Lodhas, their festivals and various events have been followed. The necessary information and resources are reported in this article.

Legend Regarding the Lodha Tribe:

Like every tribe, the Lodha community has its own legendary folklore. Regarding the name of the Lodha community, it is popularly said that; in the age of Dwapara, grief stricken over the loss of his relative in the ruins of Jadukula, Shrikrishna sleeps in the forest and meanwhile he was attacked by the arrow at the feet by Jarashabar as he thought it was the perhaps the ear of a Deer. Shrikrishna screams in pain, Jarashabara gets scared thinking that he has killed a human instead of an animal. He tries to run in fear of not being able to find a way. Seeing this, Shrikrishna forbade him to go to 'Nadhaan' (do not run). The Lodha community believes that the word 'Lodha' derived from the word 'Nadhaan'.

Food Practices of Lodha Tribe:

Man is a food-loving creature. Along with clothing and shelter, the need for food is also essential to make life interesting. Lodha collects food both from the wild and civilized societies. Since it is collected and used from the forest, various animal and bird meats are prepared and consumed, while rhinoceros, crabs are also consumed as drugs such as honey and handia. In the same way, the forest areas are cleared to grow vegetarian food, and fields are cultivated for crops. They also depend on various plants⁴. For example, drumstick leaves, Malabar spinach, Amaranth leaves, Pumpkin, Taro, Bottle gourd, Kanchan, Matha, Nardank, taro leaf etc. They use a variety of vegetables in their diet, such as Tunga potato, sweet potato, papaya, bitter gourd, bottle gourd, brinjal, ladies finger etc. Along with fish from rice fields and forests, they have these as their main food. Children of the Lodha community are given mainly honey, water rice (*pakhal*), Chunga, potato, sweet potato etc. Similarly, pregnant women are given different types of vegetables and are given to drink Sijjakotha water, Sijjakaranj tree bark etc⁵. Along with this, various forest-based products such as Sunthi (dried ginger), Pipili, Black cumin, etc are eaten.

Rice is their staple food. Like civilized society they also celebrate various festivals. That's why they eat different foods during that festival. Just like during Makar Festival, when a chicken is sacrificed, they cook and drink a broth made with its meat. During the Raj festival, youths organize feasts by hunting animals and birds from the forest. On Holi, they perform Shal Puja. They sacrifice one black and one white chicken to appease the Shal forest, and the villagers eat its meat. Along with this, Lodhas also make different kinds of pies on different festivals. As Non-vegetarian, the Lodhas consume wild boar, deer, goats, chickens, deer, jackals, hens, turtles, geese, peacocks and eggs found in the forest, and take fish from the river at various times as their main food⁶.

Festivals and Rituals:

Mostly the individuals of Lodha community believe in Hinduism. The creation of their spiritual forces based on their religious beliefs. Their religion is as ancient as it is great. There is no cleric or written teacher like them. But nature is everything to them, and they have deep faith in God. Lodha festivals are considered special in cultural tradition. These communities usually celebrate 13 festivals in 12 months. Among them, they celebrate 'Dhanmuthi Festival' in the month of April, in which they celebrate their 1st Goddess Basumati Mata, Surya God, Kali Goddess and their ancestors before sowing seeds. The heads of the household usually dress with new clothes to commemorate the deities for a good harvest.

Similarly, they celebrate Raja festival in the month of June. In which the young women of the village spend their days happily eating pies and playing swing. Chitau Festival (*Asadia Festival*) of Lodhas is held in the month of June-July. This festival is celebrated at night on the new moon day of the month of 'Assadh'. The village priests and the heads of the houses call their village deity and also worship the ancestors. In order to please the village deity; worship is done by offering rice and chicken eggs in the Sal leaves. The young men and women of the village perform dances throughout the night, singing Karma songs and playing drums.

'Gamma festival' is one of the main festivals of Lodhas. It usually falls in July-August. The heads of the household worship the ancestors. This festival is held to show brotherly love and compassion. Similarly, 'Nua-Khai' festival is celebrated in the month of August-September. Raw rice made from new grains is new to the family. Thus, Lodhas perform 'Bandana Puja' in the month of October-November. To appease their hunting deity, they perform 'Hunting Goddess Puja' in the months of November-December. According to traditional beliefs, they worship to appease the Hunting Goddess. As 'Makar festival' is a major festival of all tribals, Lodha community celebrates this 'Makar festival' with great joy. It is observed during the months of December-January. They first worship the Goddess and wear new clothes and celebrate the festival with joy. Since the life cycle of the Lodhas begins in nature, they especially perform 'Magha Puja' in the months of January-February to appease nature. They worship the forest in the middle of the forest and take an oath to protect the forest. Before Magha Puja, members of this community are prohibited from hunting in the forest. Lodhas perform 'Flower worship' in the months of February-March. There is a tradition of worshipping their own deity and sal flowers. Along with this, the Lodhas also celebrate many other festivals.

Religious Beliefs and Virtues:

Born in the bosom of nature, this community gives more importance to religious beliefs. Because like civilized societies, they have more faith in traditional religion than science. It is this religious faith that strives to bind them together in a bond of peace, friendship, and goodwill. The village priest is called 'Dehuri' by the Lodha community. He plays the main role in festivals and village Pujas. An elder of the village inherits this position. After breathing, there must be devotion to God and religious beliefs along with knowledge of one's own religion. Then the person can go and become a thief.

Among the Lodha community, those who teach are accepted as Gurus in the village. These Gurus know all the art of appeasing the invisible ghosts and apparitions of the deities, starting from the installation or placement of them in their proper place. In order to preserve the tradition, the heirs are doing this work. Especially if someone in the village is possessed by a witch or a ghost, the Guru heals them with learned mantras. The sages dress in white clothes and heal any family in the village from exorcism to fever, diarrhea etc. In their social life, not only men but also women learn to play tricks. Some of the widows and married women after learning this science are also engaged in the welfare of the poor people of the village. They often believe in

worshipping together. Since they attach more importance to tradition, they try to reproduce the trends adopted by the earlier men. They get involved in the festival in such a way that it has a profound effect on their practical life.

Political System:

Man is a social animal. Society is his abode. He governs the social system through mutual relations. That is why he gets along with everyone in the society. Lodha communities hold village meetings in traditional style to make their village life happy. In which all the people of their society get proper justice based on principle justice. Gram Sabha plays an important role in social security in Lodha community. Gram Sabha is formed mainly by president, vice president etc. Due to the lack of village meeting houses, village meetings are held under the big trees in the village. In this Gram Sabha, from the criminal to the poor, all advantages and disadvantages and good and bad judgments are also held here. Here everyone is free to express their opinion. The head of this village assembly is honoured with the title of 'Dehuri'. When there is a discussion about any matter in the village, He is the president who takes the final decision. According to the decision of the Gramsabha, the culprit is punished there. Not only that, if any village festival is celebrated together, the village chief or president himself discharges his responsibility. Family conflict, redressal and control responsibility for any fatal disease, taking oath of the accused after pleading guilty, trial of land grab suit, harassment of elderly parents by son, theft of property etc.

If he commits a crime, if he does not repay the loan money or if he cheats, his case will also be tried in this village council. The Lodhas get their social justice through this Gramsabha. It can be seen that due to mutual respect and fear of the president, the constitutional law is traditionally organized. These village councils specifically provide social punishment to the guilty as per the law⁷. Whoever disobeys the assembly or the Dehuri, the concerned person is removed from all the activities of the village. Lodhas believe that whoever does not admit guilt or lacks proper evidence against the accused, God will punish him in due course. This punishment is called spiritual punishment according to Lodhas. In recent times, the Grammukhya (Village Head) is no longer able to announce the results of all the punishments as before. A number of serious complaints or objections are now pending in the Court. Even today, their village meetings are held in traditional style under the tree where the Lodha community still stands as a testimony of faith and unity.

Crafts and Artistic Professions:

The artistic profession or the Charu Art of the Lodha community has created a special chapter in their life. Some of the items used by the Lodhas in their homes are usually the ropes which have been used to make the bed with Bena grass and Sabai grass. Sal leaf plates are used for eating on occasions like weddings. They also prepare an umbrella in the branches and leaves. The Lodhas bring the fibre from the forest and use it as a rope to tie the cattle and to weave the bed. Lodhas are fond of hunting and hunt game birds with bows and arrows made up of bamboo. The Lodhas wear hand-made silver coin-necklace along with sticks on their legs and copper nose-ring on their noses. There are also some delicate works in these. Lodhas play drums and flutes and perform dances in their festivals. The cloth used in this is usually decorated with colourful cloth. To make the turquoise they use beautiful, they attract different types of bird feathers⁸.

The Lodhas paint various animals such as elephants, peacocks, swans and camels on the walls, fences, doors and beds used to decorate their homes. Similarly, the Lodha community seems to be well-versed in the handicrafts industry. They have been adopting this craft as a traditional occupation to meet their livelihood. The Lodhas are more dependent on the forest, so they use the bones and bones of various animals and birds along with forest produce. Just as hunters use vultures on their bows. Gurus especially use peacock feathers to shake the system. Similarly, Lodha youths make locketts out of tiger claws and wear them around their necks to enhance their body beauty. They collect stones from the hills and break them with the help of other stones and use them as

household utensils for seasoning and also make small pots. In the same way, drink is prepared from wood and animal bird's horn to shave the head⁹.

Ethno-medicinal Practices:

Lodhas do not trust or depend on doctors or medicine, they depend on nature. Nature can be said to be a storehouse of medicine for them. Trees, vines, leaves, roots, flowers, bushes found in nature are the main reason for their healing. Depending on nature, these Lodhas use different herbs for different ailments. They are given below.

- If there is any kind of rupture of the ligaments and there is bleeding, then the wound will be cured by making a mixture of sandalwood and lime and applying it to the wound.
- Bleeding from the nose is cured by taking the bark of the golden tree and applying it to any part of the body.
- If you are suffering from tuberculosis or Kamal, it is good to drink the juice of the palm tree found in the forest.
- If the body is burnt due to the snake bite, the roots of the abyssal-eaglltree are consumed by the underworld.
- In case of stomach ache due to some reason, the Lodhas used to wrap Samarajseed and consume it, as a result of which Seman's disease was cured.
- The women of Lodha community dry Datura stramonium flowers and make a paste from it and mix it with honey and consume it.
- To get rid of cold and cough, Lodhas drink it with honey mixed with basil leaves.
- If any of them have a stomach ache, they get relief after eating a bowl of betel leaves and basil leaves together.
- Similarly, in case of liquid diarrhea or watery diarrhea, the Lodhas are cured by collecting juice from the bark of sour- ball, mango and Sal trees and adding lime to it.
- In the Lodha community, if the mother's milk is not available to the new-born child, the woman cuts the bark of the tugar tree and drinks its juice to overcome this problem.
- Lodhas are not only tree climbers but also eat the flesh of some insects and birds for various ailments. While eating locust meat to increase sexual power, parrot meat is used in case of respiratory disease, nut skin is tied around the waist for malaria, and rhinoceros meat is used to improve eyesight and get rid of beriberi¹⁰.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it can be said that the social and cultural life of the Lodhas living in Odisha today is intertwined with prosperity and traditional strength. Despite adopting modern lifestyles, they have not forgotten their cultural values. Because man lives in a society, social instincts compel him to be in harmony with that society. He seeks out his relatives in any event, from private to collective. Lodhas are always trying to live their lives in harmony. Their social life can be cut happily as they can help and cooperate with each other in good and bad. Although the Lodhas are a primitive tribe, they have now become part of the social mainstream. Now they don't have that traditional house anymore. They have built houses in modern style by earning money through various schemes of the government and by their own profession. After all, Lodhas have always respected social norms and justice. By which one's cultural life journey becomes very pleasant. Lodhas have always tried to maintain their identity through their voices and cultural expressions.

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