



Socio-Economic and Cultural profile of the Mahali Tribes of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha.

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Date of Submission: 08-04-2026

Date of Acceptance: 21-04-2026

ABSTRACT:

The study of Socio-Economic and Cultural profile of the Mahali tribes of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha is an interesting aspect in the history of Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Mahali is a small tribal group of Odisha. They belongs to Dravidian race they are emigrants from Bihar West Bengal and Jharkhand who came to live near the Odisha border and spread to other districts of the state. They are artisan group who work with bamboo. They are well known for their traditional skills introducing fine bamboo crafts. Though they are not trained artisans by their natural talents and skill. They create magnificent piece of crafts. They have totemistic and exogamous clans and cult of ancestor worship. Their religious life is mostly influenced by the neighboring santal tribe and other Hindu group like Santal they worship Marang Guru as their supreme deity and few others worshiped sacred Sal tree which is situated at the village outskirts. The aim of this article focused on the potentiality of Mahali Community in Mayurbhanj District of Odisha and propagates the tribal culture for retaining tribal identity, recognition of the indigenous knowledge system of the tribals and also the Promotion of the tribal language and dialects for developmental communication.

Key Words:

Bamboo Works, Basket Making, Palanquin Carrying, Exogamous Clan, Village Council, Agriculture, Wage Laborer.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The Mahali is a small tribal community of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha. They belong to Dravidian race. They are emigrants from Bihar and Bengal, who came to live in the border of Odisha and then spreaded to other districts of the State. They are an artisan group who work with bamboo. They are well known for their traditional skill in producing fine bamboo crafts. Though they are not trained artisans, by their natural talent and skill, they create magnificent pieces of crafts. They have totemistic and exogamous clans and the cult of

ancestor worship. Their life and culture is mostly influenced by the neighboring Santhal tribe and other Hindu groups. Being an artisan tribe their income is not sufficient for their livelihood now days. They are losing their market for selling their products. They are thinking themselves that their positions are being deteriorated for this occupation.

Mahali is one of the Scheduled tribe people of Odisha. The Mahali people are living different States of India like Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal. There are 62 types of Scheduled tribe people living in Odisha. Among them Mahali is a small group people in Odisha. They are mainly found in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh district of Odisha. The name has been derived from the Santhal word 'Math' and 'Mor' means Bamboo. They are the original natives of Chhotnagpur and West Bengal States who usually work as labourers, palanquin bearers and bamboo workers.

The Mahali are divided into five endogamous sections, like *Boasphor Mahali*, *Patar Mahali*, *Sulunkhi Mahali*, *Tante Mahali* and *Munda Mahali*. Socio-Culturally the Mahalis have resemblances with the Santhal and Munda Tribes. It is assumed that the *Boasphor*, *Sulunkhi* and *Tante* section of Mahali tribe are branches of Santal tribe. Similarly the Mahali Munda is an offshoot of the original Munda tribe. As per the census, the Mahali population in Odisha is 18625. The male Population is 9182 and female Population is 9443. The literacy rate shows an increasing trend from 37.96 percent in 2001 to 51.24 percent in 2011. They have their own language which is classified with the Mundari group. They have also well conversant with the Indo-Aryan languages such as Bengali, Hindi, and Odia. Now most of them understands and speaks Odia and Santali language.

In Mahali society, nuclear family is the smallest social unit composed of married couple and their legitimate unmarried children. They have patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and patriarchal family. In the Mahali society, the property of a deceased person is equally shared among his sons and if he is issueless, the property goes to the nearest paternal kin as decided by the



tribal council. The Mahali maintain social relations in the village community and ritual kingship bonds with their neighboring communities. All public places like temples and crematoria in the locality and beyond are shared by them with others.

The Mahalies are divided into different clans called '*killi*' which are exogamous in nature. These are *Charbar* (a tree), *KatharGach* (jack tree), *Duagri* (wild pig), *Kerketta* (a kind of bird), *Murumar* (nilgai), *Topowar* (a bird), *Tirki* (bull) etc. Marriage is also contracted outside the totemic clan. Activities among *killi* members are based on mutual co-operation and help to each other.

The Mahali tribe is endogamous and their clans are exogamous. This customary rule is viewed seriously in their society and their traditional tribal council punishes the offenders which lead to heavy punishment like ex-communication from the tribe. Both child and adult marriage practiced in their society. In selection of spouse, the Mahali follow principle of endogamy at the tribal level and rule of exogamy at the clan level. In the case of an arranged marriage, the initiative is always taken the boy's side. The boy and his family members look for a beautiful girl having expertise in household activities while selecting a bride for marriage. The boy's side first consult the astrologer to find out whether the match will be a suitable one or not. If he says in its favor, they send a raibar (go-between) to start the negotiation with the girl's side. He pays a visit to the girl's family and makes proposal. If he gets a favorable reply from girl's side a date for the visit of the boy's side is fixed. On the final day, the boy's father along with his relatives goes to the house of the prospective bride. On arrival, they are received and served with drinks. During this visit the bride price is settled and the date of wedding is also fixed.

On the day of wedding the bridegroom is taken to the bride's house in a procession accompanied by dance and music. On reaching the house of bride, the party greeted and mats and charpoy are provided to them to sit down. The bride and bridegroom sit on a plank in one room of the house. After this, the party is served with cooked food and rice beer. Finally the occasion is celebrated with dancing and singing. The groom's party has to pay the bride price which comprises two sarees, one dhoti, two cows and Rs.100/- in cash. The Naya, the traditional priest of the village officiates in the marriage ceremony. On the day of wedding the invited kin members are served with a feast including delicious food and home brewed liquor. After marriage the bride groom returns to his village along with the bride.

Monogamy is a common practice in Mahali society though polygamy is allowed in rare cases if the first wife is barren. Levirate and sororate types of marriage are also vogue. Now marriage by service and marriage by capture are obsolete. Termination of marital bond is allowed in the Mahali society and divorce is permitted on special grounds like extra-marital relationship, quarrel some nature of either of the spouses' etc. with prior permission of the traditional tribal council. In case a husband wishes to divorce his wife, he as per the norms, is bound to give her some rupees and then he is permitted to take away the iron- armlet that was presented to her during the wedding ceremony.

There are a variety of products produced in the village made of bamboos. But among them only certain types are practiced mostly due to its demand. These are big baskets '*pachiya*' and *kula* or '*hatah*'. Among them the demand for the big basket or '*pan jhuri*' and these are mostly sold in bundle wise; each bundle having 40 baskets and half of the bundle having 20 baskets. These are sold to the local Mahajan who sell these products to the markets of different locations and that too are sold on weekly basis. On the other hand, the other two products that is the small baskets or '*pachiya*' and *kula* or '*hatah*' are generally sold in the local market mostly in the Kharika market of Kharika Mathani village which is held in every Wednesday. The amount of the production of the rest two of the products are comparatively lower than the big basket.

The Mahalis believe that supernatural powers control their life and fate. Mahali worship Marang Buru as their supreme deity and few other deities who reside in the sacred *sal* groove called *jahirsthan* situated at the village outskirts. Besides they worship *BanaKuanri* before proceeding on hunting expeditions, *ManeikoTureiko* for number crop and Goddess *BadaChandi* and *RangaChandi* to ward off epidemics. They also worship Hindu deities like *LordMahadev*, *Ahira* and *Garaya* for welfare and prosperity of their family. They observed certain Hindu rituals and festivals like *Holi*, *SriRamNavami*, *Rathajatra*, *Laxmipuja*. They offer home-made food and drink to the spirits of the dead ancestors on different festive occasions and new eating ceremonies for their appeasement who are believed to give them protection from different diseases and mishaps. They believe that witches, sorcerers and malevolent spirits cause diseases, sufferings and other misfortunes. The traditional method of treatment through Magical-Religious practices is still in vogue among them in which the spiritual specialists are called upon to diagnosis and



treat. The educated Mahalies prefer to go to the hospital for treatment.

There are various problems regarding the production, cost and marketing of this kind of basketry products. During rainy season since bamboo soak too much of moisture, it become much soft to be easily use in manufacturing in basket making. But too much water-soaked condition may be a problematic situation. In that case the bamboos are cut into pieces and inserted within the house. Though water-soaked bamboos are efficient and easy to handle but bringing the material during rainy season is hazardous. Though the cost of the bamboos, labor cost, and production costs were increased, selling price was not increased proportionately as the demands of the baskets or crafts made by bamboos have been decreased. The markets of the products have taken by the plastic products, as plastic products are more sustainable and sophisticated but lesser cost than the bamboos made crafts. The plastic products are easily available and easy to carry. So, many of the inhabitants of the village have left the occupation and young generation is not interested for the occupation. According to the young generation the occupation does not provide proper status in society as the income is poor.

II. CONCLUSION:

The Mahali tribe in Mayurbhanj district demonstrates a blend of traditional culture and evolving socio-economic realities. Their traditional crafts and close relationship with nature are important aspect of their identity and livelihoods, but economic challenges and competition from modern materials require attention and support. Ensuring access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities with respecting their cultural heritage is crucial for the well-being of the Mahali community.

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