

Chuktia Bhunjia A Neglected Tribe of Orissa, India

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Abstract *The name of 'Bhunjia' as a tribe is not found in anthropological writings except during numbering the Orissa's tribal groups. No reasons are found behind the invisibility of writings/ studies rather than un-enthusiasm of anthropologists may be due to lack of historical documents. It is fact that most of the anthropologists do not know its existence rather folklorists are more concerned about this tribe. Keeping these, this paper is about an anthropological account of this tribe showing how modernization and conventionally development oriented programs have not touched their traditional culture and ethos that has strengthen their identity of being 'Bhunjia'.*

Introduction

Out of 62 tribal groups found in Orissa, Bhunjia is a one of them and is recognized as primitive tribal group (PTG) in the State. In Orissa their high concentration is reported from Nuapada district (ex-Khariar estate) that was earlier forming a part of Central Province. Very few are reported inhabiting in Jaypore tahsil bordering Bastar district of Chhattisgarh. The Bhunjia are divided into two broad social groups: Chinda Bhunjia and Chuktia Bhunjia (Dubey 1950, 1963; Dube, 1948; Mohapatra 1967; Pattnaik *et al.* 1984; Mishra 2002). Chinda Bhunjias, known as Oriya Bhunjias, are distributed in both hill and plain areas. They are called so because they follow the culture very similar to general Oriya culture thus forms the acculturated section of the tribe. Chuktia Bhunjia, on the other hand, exclusively inhabit in the Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary¹ of Nuapada district along with other communities such as Gond, Paharia², Kultha (agriculturist), blacksmith and dom (Scheduled Caste). Kultha and blacksmith are reported have migrated to the sanctuary in 1960s from plain areas. The total population of the Chuktia Bhunjia is exactly not known may be due to bias in census. No censuses except 1961 and 1991 mention the number of

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- 1 It is a newly created wildlife sanctuary located west to Nuapada district between 82°20" to 82 ° 34" longitudes to 20°24" to 24°44" longitude. It harbors a great diversity of flora and fauna habitats. The demarcated core and buffer zone of the sanctuary contain 243.60 sq. kms and 356.40 sq. kms respectively. There are 64 villages within the sanctuary area, out of which 34 are revenue and rested of the village are identified as encroached village.
- 2 This community claims them as descended of Kamar of Chhattisgarh. Their main occupation is basketry making. When the district was a part of Central Provinces they were under the list of Scheduled Tribe. But once it merged into the Orissa state province in 1936, they were excluded from the list. It is because in Orissa the Kamar means potter who is Other Backward Caste.

Bhunja population. These accounted their total population as 7000 and 11000 respectively. According to a survey by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (2010) they are distributed in 14 villages spreading over two gram panchayats. Their total population is 2269 (1124 male and 1145 female from 519 household with a growth rate of 3.96 during the period 2001-2007. Their sex ratio is 1019 female per 1000 male. The literacy among them was 18.77 per cent (28.55 percent for males and 9.17 per cent for female). They belong to Dravidian language speaking group (Russel and Hiralal. 1916). They speak Bhunjia dialect (mixture of Oriya and Chhatisgari) among them and local Oriya for inter-group communication.

Origin of Chuktia Bhunjia

The myth of the Chuktia Bhunjia on their origin was reported from an elder person which goes like as follow:

“On one occasion, a Bhatra Gond named Bacher cast a net into the Pairi River and bought out a stone. He threw the stone back into the river and cast his net again, but as second and yet a third time the stone came out. So he laid the stone on the bank of the river and went back to his house and that night he dreamt that the stone was Bura Deo, the great God of the Gonds. So he said, ‘if this dream be true let me draw on a deer in my net tomorrow for a sign’ and in the next day the body of a deer appeared in the net. The stone then call often the Gond to worship him as Bura Deo, but the Gond demurred to doing so himself and said he would provide a substitute as a devotee. To this Bura Deo agreed, but said Bacher, the Gond must marry his daughter to the substituted worshipper. The Gond then set out to search for somebody, and in the village of Lafandi he found a Halba of the name of Konda, who was a cripple, deaf and dumb, blind and a lepar. He bought Konda to the stone and on reaching it he was miraculously cured of all his ailments and gladly begins to worship Bura Deo. He afterwards married the Gond’s daughter and then has a son called Chauptia Bhunjia, who was the ancestor of the Chauptia division of the tribe”.

The above story intends to signify that the Chuktia Bhunjia are of mixed descent from the Gond and Halbas.

Dress pattern and Ornament

The dress pattern is very unique among the Chuktia Bhunjia. Traditionally men wear a piece of cloth like Lungi and dhoti. Some peculiarities are marked in the women dress patterns. Women including the young girls are restricted from wearing sayaa and blouse. Girls even at lower age particularly after pre-puberty marriage, wear small saree (*Kapta*). Married woman blessed with child is compelled to wear white saree. There are two reasons behind it: (1) color saree is the seat of Goddesses; (2) Goddess Sunadie was insulted by her big brother Budhauraja because of here irresponsibility of the protection of the inhabitants. She then went to the earth to get rid of insult. She was wearing white saree during that time which is being followed by Chuktia Bhunjia women. Women use varieties of ornaments such as necklace made of beads and coil (*bandha*), glass and brass bangles, anklets and earring made of either aluminum or silver.

Household Patterns

The Bhunjia villages vary in size. Most of the villages range from 8 to 10 houses to 50 to 60 households. Two or more households build their houses taking a wide open space. Each household has two houses: main house and kitchen room. Their main house (*Jhinjri*) generally contains two rooms. They use it both for sleeping and storing grains. It is made of mud and woods. The second hut built adjacent to it is cattle-

shed (*Ge-kuria*). They maintain it in a more religious way because both livestock and Goddesses *Mirchuk* live there. Besides, a smallest hut built little way and in front of the living room is their kitchen room. It is traditionally known as *lambangala*. It is called so because *lal* meaning red and *Bangala* meaning room. It is enclosed all around. It is made of mud and thatched with wild grasses. It consists of two rooms. One is for cooking and another is for keeping utensils. The floor is plastered with mud and cow-dung. The houses are devoid of door except *Lambangala*. The doors of *lambangala* are made of either bamboo or wild grasses. The most peculiar characteristic of *lambangala* is that no outsider, including people belonging to other communities of the same village, can touch it. If anybody mistakenly touches it they immediately set it fire and construct a new one. It is because they believe that outsiders are pollutants and may defile their deities worshipped there and may harm to family members. They throw the cooked food and start cooking there after a purificatory ritual. It plays crucial roles in their socio-cultural and economic life along with determining their collection of minor forest produces and consumption. Girls after marriage are not allowed to enter into the kitchen room being considered outsiders. If she visits her parents in later days she is not allowed to enter into the kitchen room. She is even not given food cooked by her parents. She cooks for herself in the courtyard. She also brings cooking water from river not from tube well. Women in the states of pollution-puberty, childbirth and monthly menstruation- are not allowed to touch it. They can enter into it only after a purificatory ritual followed by sacrifice of hen or a goat to their deities. There are certain rules attached to it such as mandatory of having food inside it after puberty, washing of feet before entering it. It also determines their agricultural practice and exploitation and consumption of forest produces. These rules of the *lambangala* also restrict girl child to go school.

Social Organization: Family, Kinship and Marriage

The Bhunjia, as earlier said, is divided into two broad social groups: Chinda and Chuktia. Chinda group are Hindised section of the society and the Chuktia groups still follow the tribal religion though officiated as 'Hindu'. Each of the division is sub-divided into two moieties (*keni*) *Nitam* and *Markam*. Each moiety is again sub-divided into a number of clans (*Barag*) with different designations. Members of the same *Barag* consider them as descended from same ancestor and call them as *Dudbbhai*. Such relationship is viewed from worshipping the same deities, totemic object and exogamy. Each clan has designated with some kind of totemic object which they respect and do not kill believing their clan may decrease.

The Chuktia Bhunjia family is nuclear in type. Joint family is completely absent. The son after marriage establishes his own family of procreation in the same courtyard or in a separate place in the same village. He remains under the protection of his parents unless all the brother get marry and hold the complete rights on father's property. He cultivates his father's land along with other brothers and gets a share. The unmarried sons and daughters continue to live with their parent till their marriage or with married brothers in case of death of the parent. Until all the brothers get marry, father's properties remain undistributed. If father dies before distribution, elder brother does the same before village council. So among them the unit of land holding is neither a single person nor a nuclear family but rather a group or number of nuclear family tied by patrilineal descent. Sometimes under financial constraint they sell their land to non-tribal on a temporary basis. No daughters are entitled to get the share of their father property. Daughter after marriage lives with her husband. She accepts the title (*bans*) and *Barag* of her husband. The head of the family is generally the eldest male member of the family who takes all decisions and others obey. Thus, Chuktia Bhunjia family is by rule patrilocal and patrilineal.

Monogamy is the common form of marriage among them though polygamy is not absent. In case of polygamous, first wife (*Badli*) stays separately with her children and avail the property of her husband. The

most prevailing form of marriage is cross cousin. There is no restriction of marriage between Chuktia Bhunjia and Chinda Bhunjia. In such case, a rite called *Dudhpen* is performed where an affine washes the mouth of the bride with milk before she is taken as member of the groom's group. A feast is given to the community and marriage ceremony is done as it is done when the bride is taken from Chuktia group. But the girl after marriage follows the rules of Chuktia group.

Generally three kinds of marriage are socially accepted: (1) arrange marriage; (2) *Udblia* (marriage by elopement) and (3) *Paisamudi* (marriage by force). Arrange marriage is predominance form of marriage. This type of marriage ends with three stages. (1) *Mandpia* that indicates the bond between two families where some bottles of wine are given to the girl's parents and relatives; (2) *Pindhani*, the ring ceremony and fixation of bride price and (3) the actual ceremony.

Udblia is seldom found where both the boy and girl elope for someday and stay either in relative or friend house till society approves it. After social approval their parents arranges for a feast for village council. Both the families are imposed some monetary penalty. Similarly, in *Paisamudi* a girl forcefully enters the house of a boy she wants to marry but with the consent of boy. The village council also approves it after having a feast from both the groups. The practice of bride price is given in the form of sarees, ornaments made of silver or gold and some amount of rice, dal, male goat and money as fixed by village council.

Pujhari (village priest) and maternal aunt play a crucial role in the marriage ceremony who make bath the bride. The marriage ceremony is determined by the forest resources. Marriage spot (*modosal*) is made with mango leaves and stems of mahul (*Madhuca indica*). *Dimvari* smears oil mixed turmeric paste on groom's body followed by women. It is known as *telpia*. It is done for seven times. They make two idols in new sarees signifying bride and groom and go the sacred site of the village to bring a handful to soil from the site. Some young go to the jungle to bring two branches of *Muhul* (*Madhuca indica*) trees. One signifies the groom and other, the bride. The maternal aunt welcomes the mahul braches after washing the bottom of the branches and the persons holing it. The branches are then taken to the marriage spot and smeared with oil and turmeric as done to groom. In the third day they go to the girl's house to bring the girl. It is important to note that due to food restriction groom party is provided with the essential materials instead of serving.

In the next day morning they bring the girl with them. In the groom house few idols of wild animals are made and are kept in the courtyard. The groom shoots the animals by arrow and the bride is asked to take the arrow back indicating the hunting expedient of the community and real life scene of the couple. At the end of the ceremony both the bride and groom smear turmeric power in each other and the couple go for bathing to the nearby stream together.

Kinship

Kinship is defined as the relation between two persons through blood or marriage which regulate social behavior of the people in a particular society. Unlike other tribal societies, among Chuktia Bhunjia society the relationship between an individual and his/her kin/s is characterized by frequent shuffling of jocks, teasing, and sometime fun and love. Joking relationship (*Huria*) is observed between a person and his wife's younger sister and vice-versa, with potential spouse and between *samdi* and *samdein*. The relationship between real brother-sister and other prohibited category are not marked with fun, joke rather is marked with a notion of affection, concern, care and love and respect. Avoidance relationship is observed between a woman and her husband's elder brothers (*dedsusur*) and the person and his younger brother's wife (*bheba*) and a person and his wife's elder sister (*dedsas*). Avoidance is maintained in term of verbal communication, utterance of name, touching the food, dresses and bed and other personal articles. If it

happens incidentally then an affine is asked to purify the sin. He throws little water and milk in the head of the women committed.

Interestingly due to practice of cross-cousin marriage, they either prefer father's sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter. Before marriage they address each other as *maina bbai* and *maina bhauni* (brother-sister) sometime teasing jokes. But after marriage the relation between girl and a person elder brother became avoidance who also used to joke with her. A special tie exists between a man and his sister's children (*bhanja/bhanji*) who are not allowed to eat and joke with maternal uncle. This is a special token of respect to his sister's children. They do not distinguish father's sister and mother's brother's wife and father's sister's husband and mother's brother. They address both as *Aata* and *Mama* respectively.

Economic life

The economy of Chuktia Bhunjia is a hunting-gathering type which is of subsistence one. Shifting cultivation (*bewar*) is the predominant form of agriculture that shows their primitive techno-economic standard. However, very few of them have adopted settled agriculture. The division of labour is not well-marked as some works are found done by both male and female. Women are found predominant in all activities. Very few households have acquired government land patta whereas majority of them as landless and live in encroached land. During leisure they go for wage labour or quarry contractor on which they are paid according to the wage rates fixed by village council and government respectively. Land used for shifting cultivation is called *debi* in which they grow local varieties of crop. However, very few of them have adopted modern varieties of seeds. The local crops include *madia* (*eleusine coracan*), *gurji* (*setaria italica*), *kodo* (*paspalum scrobiculatum*), and *kedjandhla* (*sorghum vulgare*), *kulath* (*horse gram*), *rias* (*til*), *birbi* (*black gram*), *kandul* (*canjanus cajan*), *jbunga* (*vigna unguiculata*). They also grow local variety of paddies in the *debi*. So a kind of mix-cropping is generally observed in it. They also domesticate cow, goat and hen for consumption, agriculture and religious purposes.

Being living in rich deciduous forest the Chuktia Bhunjias get ample opportunity to collect the forest resources, albeit, strict rules have been imposed by the forest department. Collection is mostly done by women accompanied with children. Their collection activity is endowed with certain cultural practices, norms, beliefs, rituals and festivals. They collect various wild fruits, tuber, roots, fiber, timber, wild leaves, gum, resin, seeds, honey, and medicinal plants for various purposes including house construction, curving, basketry, rope making, broom-making and medicinal. Occasionally they hunt wild animals such as *Barba* (bear), *Kotra* (barking deer), *Chital*, *Dama*, deer etc. They also catch fishes in the nearby ponds found in the sanctuary areas particularly in summer when the water level becomes low. Their traditional fishing traps include *Thapa*, *Churia*, and *Dhuti*. All are made of bamboo.

Political Structure and Social Control

Their political organization is very simple comprising village council (*Panch*) and inter-village council (*Bad Samaj*). Each village council consists of traditional political leaders and a group of elderly person. Their office bearers constitute *Bhalbbhai*, *Munsi* and *Gana*. The elder male members of each clan become member of the village council. The council sits as and when required and decides upon the matters then and there in presence of the villagers. *Bhalbbhai*, the village headman is entrusted with a substantial authority and myriad responsibilities. He plays a crucial role in all village festivals, ritual and in settling disputes. This post is hereditary. *Munsi* is the messenger of the village. *Gana*, controls judicial dispute next to the village council who is from scheduled caste community. He is the informer to the *Bhalbbhai* regarding the offence, and the general situation of the village. The village council settles land disputes, marital disputes and

conflict between families. Inter-village council is formed by taking all the office bearers of each village council. The chairman of the inter-village council is called *Kurba*. It sorts out the cases which the village council fails.

Religion

The religious life of the Chuktia Bhunjias is very simple. They are animistic in nature and polytheist. Goddess Sunadie is their proprietary deity apart from other tutelary deities including ancestral spirit (*duma*). Their animistic nature is also revealed from worshipping the totemic objects. They worship some specific Gods/Goddesses for specific purposes such as Ushavana (Goddess of Mahul collection), Chhatigudi (goddess of scabies), Mata (goddess of small pox), Bhima (rain God) and so on. Their deities do not have any anthropomorphic elaboration.

As part of their religious organization, they have their religious head (*Pujhari*), *Chbatria* and *Kotria*. *Pujhari* is the chief religious personnel who worship village deities. He propitiates *Sunadei* and makes regular offering to the other deities on behalf of the villagers. This post has been traditionally held from *Pujhari* clan. He carries out the rituals and different festivals of their villages. *Chbatria* performs the work of carrying *Chbatar* (umbrella of Goddesses *Sunadei*) at the time of *Sunadei* festival celebrated in October. *Kotria* sacrifices animals during festivals. The post of *Chbatria* and *Kotria* is also hereditary. Shaman (*Dihari*) is other religious personnel who is believed messenger between people and deities. Magico-religious practitioner (*Gunia*) is also a religious functionary who treats the misfortunes caused by supernatural, witchcraft, sorcery and annoyed ancestral spirits. The last two positions are not hereditary and considered bless from the supernatural.

The Chuktia Bhunjias celebrate different festivals in different seasons. Most of the festivals are associated with collection of minor forest produces and agriculture. *Sunadei* festival is most important festival celebrated during *Dasabara* in the full moon day. *Chaitra* is an important festival celebrated by Chuktia Bhunjias in the month of March to April. Tuesday is considered auspicious for it. On the fixed day, male members from each household gather at *Sunadei* temple with a leaf cup of rice, local liquor, coconut, hen, and male goat mean for offering to the gods and goddesses. *Pujhari* offer these on behalf of the villagers. This festival is meant to sanctification of seeds for next year. At the end of the festival *pujhari* distributes a handful of paddy to each household which they broadcast in next year. They celebrated Holi in the month of *Jeth* (March-April) especially for preparing *debi* and consumption of mango and chahar. In the same day evening peoples gather at *Sunadei* temple. They collect some dried wood to make a triangular hut exactly known as *holi*. They fix a branch of *Semel* (*combax ceiba*) trees in the middle of the *holi*. *Pujhari* comes with few mangoes and a small chicken. He worships the village deities entering inside the *holi*. At that time some peoples close its entrance by covering branches of trees or dried wood. *Pujhari*'s son immediately set the *holi* fire. Once *pujhari* comes out by any methods head of the village cut the fixed *semel* (*combax ceiba*) branch with axe and the chicken is left there as an offering to the deities. This festival symbolizes the setting fire of dried wood and bushes for *bewar* cultivation.

They also celebrate *Ushavana Jatra* in the month of March/April specifically for collecting mahua flowers. A male goat is sacrificed before and after the collection. They collectively go for collection together with the Goddess Ushavana. The goddess is kept there till the end of collection and is worshipped. After returning to village no body are allowed to collect the flowers even if available. *Asad-kehena* is also an important agricultural festival celebrated during the month of *Asad* (June 15-July 15) to pluck unnecessary grasses from the paddy field. After the festival they fix a bark of *Bhelua* (*semacarpus anacardium*) tree in the paddy field which they believe work as pesticide and insecticide.

The Chuktia Bhunjias also celebrate *Nuakhei* in the month of month of *Bhodo* (Aug. 15-Sept. 15) especially for eating new crops. It is collectively celebrated or clan-wise but in a universal day. The peculiarity of this festival is that the new paddy is fermented and is consumed in *Kurei* (*Holoptelea integrifolia*) leave only after offering it to their deities and livestock. Similarly, they celebrate *Chauldbua/Pithori* in the month of *Dial* (October 15-November 15) to wash the new crops before eating. Until the festival is celebrated no one washes the paddy. After harvesting they celebrate a ritual called *Choro* in the crop field in respect of Goddess Chorokhuten followed by offering of local liquor, hen and male goats as she protected the crops throughout.

Rite de passage: Childbirth and name giving ceremony

In the Chuktia Bhunjia society childbirth is done at home. No one prefers hospital. Birth attendant (*Dai*) does all the formality starting from delivery to the bathing to child and serving food to the woman. If anyone prefers doctors or qualified nurse they consider it disobedience of rule. In such a case the family is ostracized from the society and considered the family as Hindu or sometime penalty is imposed in the form of money and communal feast. During childbirth the woman is placed in a corner of house for one month. She is considered pollutant during this period so remain untouched until a purificatory ritual is made. She is mostly restricted to touch kitchen room. If a male child is born father of the child fixes an arrow and if a female child is born he fixed a *pabarum* (husking tool) at the end of village. They do it believing he/she would use it later time in pursuance with economic livelihood and their specific assignment. After a month a purificatory ritual (*hanichhia*) is performed in which the women enters to kitchen room as a form of purification in the presence of other women invited for it. A feast is given to them. The umbilical cord is cut with an arrow by the father. As far name giving ceremony is concerned, the name of the girl child is suffix by the term *Dei* that shows their respect to Goddess Sunadei.

Rite de passage: Kanbiha (pre-puberty marriage)

It is an important socio-religious rite generally performed before a girl attains puberty. In this rite the girl formally marries to an arrow (*Kan*) or a branch of Mahul tree as her token husband. The girl menstruating before this rite is considered *Abheda* (characterless) and suffers many social disabilities and indignities and viewed with great concern and social disapproval. In such case the girl is tied in a mahul tree and unless and until her maternal uncle rescue her nobody interfere there. The social status of the girl becomes permanently lower. Nobody marries her. It also brings great social disgrace and ridicule on her parents. Therefore parents always try to get rid from such ridicule. The rite is performed with closed similarity with the marriage ceremony. It is said that during the actual marriage practice nothing is done except giving her hand to the groom as the formality is finished in this rite. This rite is performed collectively together with daughter of all brothers or from the same clan. So one can find 5-10 girls whose *kanbiha* is performed together. After the pre-puberty marriage the girls are force to wear the traditional small saree locally known as *Kapta*.

Rite de passage: Puberty

In case of puberty the girl is kept in a corner of house for one month. No male person is allowed to visit her. She is not allowed to touch their kitchen room. She is served by any female member of the family during this period. After one month, her maternal aunt (*aata*) takes her to the river stream. She takes bath there by applying oil-mixed turmeric. She wears a now cloth and on return she goes straight to mother's brother house. On reaching there her *aata* gives a brass pot filled in with water which she carries to her

own house. She directly enters into the kitchen room with it and starts cooking food in a new oven made by herself for this purpose which signifies free from pollution.

Rite de passage: Death ceremony

Immediately after death of a person they inform their relatives. As they do not use cot they carry the dead body in the bamboo pillar made for it to the cremation. Both men and women go for cremation. On the way to cremation, they smear turmeric paste and oil on diseased at end of the village (*Delabat*). They keep a *Pura* (paddy bag), a brass plate, and two mud pots there believing he will take with him. The dead body is hold erectly at cremation. An axe is kept in his shoulder believing he will work there. Some people move around the dead body simultaneously throwing rice and paddy on his face. It symbolizes their marriage. Generally they bury the dead body after which all the peoples presented keep a piece of *Bel* (*Aegle Marmelos*) and *lim* (*Azadirachta indica*) tree over it. Then they take bath in the river stream and come back to the home. At home they again put a jug of water mixed with milk that signifies their purification. All the clan people wash their cloth in a hot water putting little ash in it. It is called *Chbar*. They throw out all the mud pots. Interestingly the clan people do not wash their cloths in the village pond rather then in river stream believing that polluted clothes may defile the water in particular and deities as a whole. Stream water washes all these out.

In the third day, the actual purificatory ritual (*Tel*) is performed. All the bilateral descendents are invited. Barbers (Scheduled Caste) bald the entire deceased male member. An affine of the diseased family brings some *lim* (*Azadirachta indica*) leaves which he crushes and gives it to the each member as purification. It is known as *Pita* and the ritual as *Pitachaba*. Due to food restriction women cannot eat in the feast but cook for herself. Until the ritual is performed the deceased family does not participate in any social and religious activities. It is because during this period they are considered pollutant (*Chbituk*).

In the tenth day, they perform a ritual called *Badkam* in which they invite to their bilateral descendents and cognates. The elder son of deceased, along with invitee, goes to the river for bathing with a spoonful of ghee, a coconut, a leaf plate and cup and a little wine which they offer to the deceased. On the way back to home, they catch an insect at *delabat* which they consider spirit of the dead. They bring it to home who is later worshipped as *Duma*. It is known as *Jie*. The *Jie* of married person is worshipped inside the house whereas *Jie* of unmarried person is worshipped outside the home under a wood fixed in the courtyard (*duma kbuta*). The widow since then is barren from taking part in socio-cultural rites, ritual and festivals which they consider impure.

Education

The education level of Chuktia Bhunjia is very low. There are 6 Upper Primary schools in the sanctuary. Two residential schools are present one is at Sunabeda village and other is at Soseng. Both schools have up to 7th standard. But Chuktia Bhunjia children are hardly found. A high school has been running by Gurukul Ashram, Khariar Road at Sunabeda village. According to SCSTRTI (2010) the literacy among them was 18.77 per cent (28.55 percent for males and 9.17 per cent for female). However district administration has been trying to develop the Chuktia Bhunjia educationally due to certain socio-cultural factors they drop out from the school. In the year 2005 three Bhunjia girls are reported have appeared matriculation exam but could not success.

Status of Women

In every society status of women is determined by the structure and organization of the society they lives with. The Chuktia Bhunjia women play specific socio-cultural and economic role in their society. Their

economic role includes collection of minor forest produces, fetching water, washing of houses, courtyard, cooking, child rearing, seedling and transplantation albeit found done by male members. They do not have any political and decision making power. However play an important role in the religious festival starting with the cleaning the abode of deities to washing their feet.

The social position of the Chuktia Bhunjia women is looked tragic to the outsiders in the fact that women are not allowed to wear *saya*, blouse and colour saree which they conceive westernization and disrespectful to their tradition. Women and girls after pre-puberty marriage are not allowed to have outside food cooked by others even in the same community. After *kanbiha* small girls are forced to wear a small saree (*kapti*) leading to the drop out from school. They are also not allowed to have boiled rice. If they come from outside home they must wash their feet before entering to the houses and kitchen room. The disobeyed person is strictly penalized perceiving it Hinduisation. No one marry the daughters of disobeyed considering the family as Hindu or Chinda section. Due to patrilocal nature of society, girl after marriage goes to her husband home. She changes her clan name. She is not entitled for father property rather equally distributed among the brothers. Women in the states of pollution- childbirth, menstruation and puberty- are considered pollutant so remain untouched. They are kept in a corner of main house for the period. The Chuktia Bhunjia women do not sit on footstool (*pinha*) and bad cot which are considered seat of the deities. The divorcee and abedha women are not allowed to participate in any religious functions.

Development Programmes

Under the micro-project of PTG development Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA) was established in the year 1994. It has an office at Sunabeda village. As the district is outside the Tribal Sub-plan area no all the schemes, meant for tribals, come. CBDA covers 1579 population. Since its inception a total of Rs. 107, 36, 200 have been sanctioned till 2005 for different scheme for the development of Chuktia Bhunjia (<http://nuapada.nic.in/cbda.asp>) however exact expenditure is not known. The CBDA has been providing all the 519 households 10 kilograms of rice and few sugar and kerosene through Annapurna Yojana. Every year it also distributes bullocks, seeds, fertilizers free of cost. Each of the Bhunjia household has been provided with solar lights. It is also observed that the Chuktia Bhunjia also sell their minor forest produces and non-timber forest produces (NTFPs) through the CBDA. In the year 2001-02, Ministry Of Tribal Affair allocated Rs. 23.54 crores for the development of Chuktia Bhunjia (retrieved from <http://164.100.24.208/ls/CommitteeR/Labour&Wel/33.pdf>, on 11/08/09) and its expenditure is unreported. 86 households were assisted for small business i.e. cycle repairing shops (12), fertiliser shop (1), grocery (20), tailoring (12), rice vending (9), goatary (24), fancy stalls (8). Seven watershed societies were formed. Weekly market at Sunabeda was operated for the local people including Chuktia Bhunjia. Some local NGOs are working these days for their development. Few women Self Help Group (SHGs) have been formed on behalf government and NGOs. Two Chuktia Bhunjia girls are reported have been giving training by the NGOs pertaining to the modern health utilization. So the intervention of district administration and local NGOs has changed their economic life to an extent.

Problems

The Chuktia Bhunjia face lots of problems. Most of the villages do not have school which is one of the major causes for low literacy. However, the access to education among women is always governed by the customary laws and societal norms. Many villages particularly so-called encroached hamlets lack infrastructure facilities like road that again make them vulnerable due to in-access to development

programmes. Land holding is a biggest problem among them due to their forest habitation. Many of the families do not have authorized land and live on encroached one. As they inhabit in the core zone of the wildlife sanctuary they cannot expand their land rather living as mere encroacher.

The biggest threat to their livelihood is the state forest department who do not allow them to collect even the required forest resources. The strict restriction was imposed more after the declaration of sanctuary as 'tiger project' which again raises the issue of 'man-environment' conflict. The proposal of tiger project has threatened peoples to be displaced. There is a struggle among the people through Sunabeda Sangharsh Vahini for right to live in the sanctuary. In 2005 there was a conflict between forest department officials and villagers of Sunabeda on the issue to over exploitation of forest resources following it atrocity cases have been filed on 20 peoples. In this regard the angry forest authority trying to displace the people in the name of tiger project. All these issue are violating their human right and right to livelihood. Again, despite the implementation of Forest Right Act 2005 by the state government, majority of the households were said not even entitled for land right due to their encroached habitation.

The recent problem being faced by them is naxalism³. Being the wildlife sanctuary borders to Chhattisgarh- one of the naxal affected states in India- it has become a abode for them to hide after the police and operate their activities. Ever since their footstep in this locale they are said have killed the Chuktia Bhunjia in suspicious to police informer and have had created a panic situation in the region by burning the forest department offices, police personnel and local leaders. These situations have directly threatened their livelihood as the bureaucrats who used to come for their development have stopped coming to this area.

Conclusion

This ethnography portrays two sides of the Chuktia Bhunjia. One is the cultural attachment and second is the problem of mainstramisation. Of course, there are various factors found responsible for the marginalization of this tribe including that of customary norms. The absences of infrastructural facilities, on the other hand, have double their vulnerability as the development schemes and programmes are hardly reached to them. It was found that mainstramisation for them is only cultural change and for them change in culture is disrespect to their community value. Thus they do not want to change their culture which strongly is believed as heritage of their own. However, some of them eager to change their habit and to be mainstramised, the fear of social ostracism always guards them to be. Women play a dominant role in their society. Forest resources play important roles in their socio-economic life but the restriction imposed by the forest department has somewhat dismantled their livelihood. Most of the development initiatives, programs and schemes do not reach to them due to communication constraint or neglect of administrators. There is no synergy between development programmes provided by district administrator and forest department. It discourages people participation leading not only failure the scheme but also do not impact upon the people. The recent naxal activities in their region have threatened their traditional livelihood and cultural value. Thus there should be an immediate effect from the government to development their socio-economic life otherwise they would be legged behind forever. Some of their cultural value is still there. So let's ponder over.

3 It is one kind of guerrilla group who threat the state via creating havoc among the poor people in the form of killing them. They are basically considered them as people's groups and fighting for the undemocratic nature of the state.

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