

RESEARCH NOTES

A Journey through Time: Changes and Challenges for the Migrant Tribes at Krushnanagar

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Abstract: Migration has increasingly become a global phenomenon in recent years. This study was mainly based on the issues faced by the migrated tribes residing in the village of Krushnanagar. The study revealed that factors such as limited agricultural productivity, lack of employment opportunities, and environmental changes have remarkably influenced the pattern of migration. The residents of Krushnanagar are no longer attached to their own culture, a complete livelihood transformation has occurred and there is a struggle for cultural survival. The study area was near the periphery of Bhubaneswar. The demographic data show the dominance of the female population. This was an exploratory study. Information was collected through primary data collection methods such as discussion with the village people and was followed by some secondary methods such as collection of information from various works of literature, studies, articles, and news, etc. for comparison. However, addressing the issues arising from migration requires targeted interventions, such as improved infrastructure, sustainable livelihood programs, and government support for preserving cultural heritage.

Keywords: Intervention, Exploratory, Livelihood, Migration

INTRODUCTION

Human migration has occurred throughout history due to various factors, including resource scarcity, environmental changes, conflict, and economic pressures. For indigenous populations, migration is especially complex because their cultures and livelihoods are deeply connected to their natural environment. The impacts of industrialization and deforestation have forced many tribal communities to leave their ancestral lands, often without adequate compensation or rehabilitation. In addition, increasing conflicts with displaced wildlife have further threatened their traditional lifestyles. While some tribal people migrate voluntarily in search of better education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, such moves often result in significant challenges for them. These include the loss of cultural identity, social disintegration, exploitation in unfamiliar labor markets, and health risks related to changes in living conditions and diet. Therefore, for tribal communities, migration is not only a physical relocation but also a profound social, cultural, and economic disruption that reshapes their lives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Female international migration continues to reflect strong connections to regional and national contexts, with women contributing significantly to the labor market, particularly in domestic work across Asia, Latin America and the Middle East (Boyd, 2021). While male migration can enhance women's autonomy by offering greater financial control and mobility, it may simultaneously place additional burdens on them in terms of household and agricultural responsibilities, especially in the absence of male family members (Pribilsky, 2004; Toma, 2014; Choithani, 2020; Radel et al., 2012, as cited in Cagliani et al., 2024). These gendered outcomes illustrate the dual nature of migration as both an empowering and challenging force in women's lives in the Philippines.

Environmental changes have increasingly emerged as important drivers of migration, especially in coastal and low-lying regions that face heightened ecological risks. Scholars such as McLeman and Smith (2006) and Khan et al. (2018) argue that environmental pressures shape patterns of human mobility and adaptation. As Michael (2020) notes, populations living in ecologically vulnerable coastal areas face the compounded threat of displacement due to climate

change, yet often lack sufficient resources to migrate safely or voluntarily to other areas.

Within coastal and fishing communities, mobility is intricately linked to their livelihood strategies. Migration is frequently periodic or seasonal and is shaped by both land and sea dynamics (Failler, 2021). While men typically migrate for fishing or harvesting, women tend to move for trade or family reasons, particularly marriage (Njock & Westlund, 2010, as cited in Nunan 2021). These patterns underscore the intersection of gender, environmental change, and socioeconomic transformation in shaping migration decisions.

METHODOLOGY

The field study employed a qualitative and participatory research framework tailored to the socio-cultural dynamics of the Savara, Munda, and Santal communities in a migrated tribal village in Odisha. This approach prioritizes empathy, inclusivity, and ethical responsibility, focusing on respectful engagement with the community.

The research was descriptive, analytical, and comparative, using exploratory fieldwork and participatory observation to understand migration and cultural change within the community. Data were obtained from primary sources interviews, observations, and group interactions and secondary sources, such as Self-Help Group records and oral testimonies, enabling triangulation for reliability.

Purposive sampling captured diverse migrant experiences across age, gender, occupation and migration timelines. Structured interviews with open-ended questions, conducted by two expert researchers, encouraged participants to engage in authentic storytelling. The case studies provided in-depth insights into cultural practices and social structures.

Participant observation involved active engagement in village life to gather rich contextual data, complemented by non-participant observation for an objective view. Ethical standards guided this study, including informed consent, confidentiality, and community collaboration.

To validate the findings, triangulation was used by cross-verifying data with community members and external informants. Daily reflective discussions with faculty mentors helped refine the methods and analysis, ensuring rigor and ethical adherence throughout the research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Krushnanagar: A Brief History of Migration

The village of Krushnanagar, which is at the center of this study, is a semi-rural village situated on the outskirts of the capital city of Bhubaneswar. Any rural society is dominated by people involved in agrarian activities. However, as has been already mentioned earlier, Krushnanagar is not a purely rural society. The people of this village are not only dependent on agriculture but have diversified their sources of income by taking advantage of the developmental activities around their villages. While agriculture remains the primary occupation of the people, a significant portion of the population is now engaged in daily wage labor, small businesses, and industrial jobs in nearby urban areas.

This village is home to three tribal communities: Savaras, Mundas, and Santals. People belonging to these tribes have relocated from their places of origin to this area for various reasons.

The study found that the people of this village were inhabiting the area near the Chandaka forest. They rely on agriculture, forest resources, and traditional occupations. However, when the Chandaka Forest Reserve was declared, people were displaced around 1996 and 1997. The Government of Odisha helped them settle in this village. Acquisition of their native lands had also occurred earlier due to other developmental activities undertaken by the government. The Jhumka Dam was constructed in the 1980s. The Deras Dam was constructed as early as the 1960s.

Families also migrated from the Dholakatha area to this village for the construction of the Nandankanan Zoological Park.

Major Changes in the Lives of the Migrant Population:

Changes in Tangible Culture:

Every tribal community maintains its own distinctive architectural and cultural identity, especially evident in the way their homes are constructed and how they present themselves through clothing and ornamentation. These traditional practices often carry deep symbolic and religious meanings, reflecting both material needs and intangible cultural heritage (ICH).

For instance, Savara settlements exhibit a unique spatial and spiritual layout. Their traditional homes are surrounded by megaliths erected in memory of their deceased kin, serving as enduring reminders of their ancestral ties. At the entrance to each settlement, two wooden posts Gasadasum and Kitungsum are installed, symbolizing the village's guardian deity (Ota and Mohanty, 2020). This architectural feature is not merely decorative; it plays a vital role in maintaining cultural and spiritual continuity. The Munda community, on the other hand, demonstrates its distinctiveness through a spatial strategy that upholds social boundaries. They reside in separate wards at a deliberate distance from other ethnic groups, a practice that helps to preserve their cultural identity. Their houses are spacious, and their domestic spaces are organized into separate structures: the sleeping house, known as giti-ora, is distinct from the eating house, or mandi-o (Ota et al. 2020), reflecting an internal cultural logic tied to concepts of purity and function.

Similarly, the Santals construct large and clean houses called olah. These houses often include a long veranda and multiple rooms, with the most sacred space being the bhitar, where ancestral spirits are venerated. A mud wall typically divides the bhitar from a storage area used to keep grains and agricultural products. The kitchen, or dakaolah, is usually adjacent to this sacred space. Attached to the house is a cowshed, and a rectangular courtyard provides a communal area where family members gather for discussions and relaxation (Ota and Patnaik, 2020). However, in the resettled village of Krushnanagar, these traditional housing patterns were significantly altered. The government constructed the houses before allocating them to the tribal families, leading to a uniform and standardized layout. Most houses consist of two to three rooms and share common walls and courtyards, features that contrast sharply with the

more individualistic and spacious designs of traditional tribal homes. Additionally, new homes are often windowless or contain only minimal openings, reducing natural ventilation and light.

These architectural transformations are paralleled by changes in clothing and personal adornment. The Savara people once had a distinctive style of dress that was easily identifiable within their community. Men traditionally wore a long loincloth measuring approximately six feet in length and ten inches in width, sometimes accompanied by a beaded necklace. Women wore skirts about three feet long and two feet wide, covering their upper bodies only during the cold weather. Their traditional ornaments include bead necklaces, round wooden earplugs, spiral rings made of brass or bell-metal, metal anklets, and rings in the alae of the nose (Ota and Mohanty, 2008). The Munda attire is similarly distinct yet simple, made primarily of handwoven cotton fabric. Men wore a loincloth called botoi and used a waist belt known as kardhani. Women dress in a long cloth called paria, draped in a saree-like fashion. Footwear was rare among the elderly, although wooden shoes called katus were occasionally used. During the monsoon season, they wear circular rain hats called chakuri, made from the leaves of the gangu creeper (Ota et al., 2016). Santal men wore handloom loincloths known as kacha, while the women preferred green and blue checkered sarees called jhelah. Women adorn themselves with various ornaments, such as pankatha (hairpins), sikimala (coin necklaces), baju (armlets), sankhachudi (wristlets), satul (bangles), and painri (anklets) (Ota and Patnaik, 2014).

However, in the contemporary setting of Krushnanagar village, the distinctiveness of tribal attire has gradually eroded due to the pervasive influence of urbanization and modernization. Traditional garments and ornaments have largely been replaced by mainstream, commercially available clothing. Today, the clothing of tribal men and women closely resembles that of other rural or semi-urban populations. Men commonly wear formal shirts, t-shirts, dhotis, lungis, or pants, while women wear standard cotton sarees that are easily available in the markets. Among the younger generation, boys often wear shorts, trousers, t-shirts, or shirts, and girls typically wear salwar-kameez, kurtas, skirts, or frocks. This homogenization of attire has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish tribal identities based on dress alone, marking a significant departure from earlier times when clothing and ornamentation served as strong visual markers of cultural heritage.

Changes in Social Organisation:

Among the tribal communities studied namely, the Savara, Munda, and Santal family structures have traditionally been dominated by nuclear units. Typically, after marriage, the couple establishes a separate household, reflecting a neolocal residence pattern. While the woman leaves her natal home to live near her husband's village or household, she does not necessarily live with the extended family. However, field observations from Krushnanagar suggest a subtle shift in or adaptation to this pattern. Although households may be physically separate, they often function within the framework of a joint family system. This arrangement fosters a strong sense of collective identity and emotional security a "we-feeling" that provides psychological support in the face of socioeconomic challenges. Instances of extended families were also identified, indicating that kinship ties continue to influence the spatial and emotional organization

of domestic life, even in more individualized living arrangements.

Marriage practices in Krushnanagar reflect a significant departure from traditional tribal customs in India. While monogamy is now the prevailing norm, earlier practices such as polygamy, once observed among more affluent men in the Savara and Munda communities, are no longer present. The ritual and symbolic richness of traditional tribal marriages has gradually faded away. In contrast to the variety of marital arrangements that once existed, such as marriage by service, intrusion, exchange, or capture, marriage in Krushnanagar now predominantly occurs through family negotiations. Similarly, traditional practices like levirate and sororate where a widow marries her deceased husband's brother or a widower marries his deceased wife's sister—are no longer followed in the region.

Modern tribal weddings in Krushnanagar are virtually indistinguishable from those conducted among the Odia caste population. The sequence of rituals nirbandha (engagement), mangana (ceremonial bath), and bedi bahaghara (wedding ritual on the mandap) mirrors that of mainstream Hindu ceremonies. The officiation of the wedding by a Brahmin priest, rather than a tribal religious specialist, further exemplifies the assimilation of dominant cultural norms. These transformations illustrate a broader trend of cultural integration, where distinctive tribal practices are increasingly replaced with standardized, caste-based ceremonial forms. However, beneath these surface-level changes, the underlying values of kinship, social alliance, and community cohesion remain quietly resilient. As with many aspects of tribal life in transition, tradition persists in reconfigured ways, often tucked into the folds of new practices.

Problems Faced by Tribes Due to Migration

Out-migration, or the movement of tribal people away from their ancestral homes, has significantly altered the socio-cultural and economic landscape of communities in Krushnanagar, Gujarat. Among those affected is Anjali Padhi, a 60-year-old woman who has expressed profound grief over the erosion of her tribal identity. She described a persistent sense of loneliness despite being surrounded by others, noting that her family had to start from scratch in rebuilding social relationships. Her reflection points to a deeper loss—not just of home or land, but of the traditions, rituals, and social fabric that once provided meaning and continuity to their everyday life.

Displacement severed these cultural roots and forced the community into unfamiliar and inadequate living conditions. The houses provided by the government bore little resemblance to the traditional tribal dwellings. Kani Padhi, a 70-year-old resident, recalled that her family once owned two to four acres of land. Now, they live in a confined space, provided with a tin-roofed structure that lacks even the most basic amenities, such as a washroom an absence that persists to this day. The so-called rehabilitation efforts amounted to a one-time cheque that failed to compensate for the gravity of the loss. As Kani Padhi recounted, promises made in the 1970s particularly those concerning employment remain unfulfilled decades later.

Multiple residents, especially women, highlighted the ongoing challenges regarding essential services. Irregular

electricity and water supply remain a pressing concern. Compounding these infrastructural issues is a pervasive sense of insecurity, particularly among women in Pakistan. Elderly residents, such as Anjana Majhi, now 80, and Sajani Swain, in her 70s, recalled distressing episodes of harassment during their work commutes. As laborers in nearby industries, they were vulnerable to abuse by men from neighboring villages, such as Daruthenga. These incidents not only underscore the physical dangers faced by women but also reflect a broader breakdown of the communal safety that once existed in tribal societies.

In addition to out-migration, the community has also been affected by in-migration the movement of non-tribal populations into areas traditionally occupied by tribal groups. This dual process of displacement and demographic change was triggered by government-led development projects in the area. The families of Anjali Padhi, Anjana Majhi, and Dharendra Nayak were displaced to make way for the Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary, while Jhuni Nayak's family lost their land for the construction of Nandankanan Zoological Park. In the wake of these projects, in-migration has led to the alienation of tribal land and disrupted long-standing socio-cultural practices of the tribes. With new populations settling in, the tribal communities found their ways of life increasingly marginalized, further deepening their sense of dislocation.

The economic consequences of these processes are severe. Despite government assurances, displaced populations were not provided sustainable livelihood opportunities. Deprived of agricultural land and forest-based subsistence, many now work as daily wage laborers in nearby urban and industrial areas of the district. This economic dependency renders them vulnerable to exploitation, as employers are aware of their desperation and offer only minimal compensation. The impact is particularly harsh on women, who, as previously mentioned, must navigate financial insecurity and persistent threats to their physical safety. The resulting stress and fear contributed to a significant deterioration in their mental well-being and overall quality of life.

Health and sanitation conditions further illustrate the fragility of life after displacement. The absence of basic infrastructure, such as toilets and regular water supply, continues to pose serious public health risks. Families who once lived in well-ventilated, spacious homes have been relocated to cramped, poorly lit spaces that compromise their hygiene and respiratory health. Cut off from the forests that once provided them with diverse food resources, many tribal families now face chronic food insecurity and are increasingly at risk of malnutrition. The cumulative impact of displacement, inadequate housing, economic instability, and insufficient health infrastructure has resulted in a condition of prolonged vulnerability, endangering not only the material well-being of these tribal communities but also disrupting the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, practices, and identity. As their traditional ways of living continue to erode under the pressures of forced migration and systemic neglect, these communities face the risk of becoming culturally invisible in a landscape that once belonged to them.

CONCLUSION

Although the case studies may look a little grim, showcasing how cultural loss is taking place, the Government of Odisha has initiated schemes for the betterment of the

people who have been displaced. The most prominent one is called "Viksit Gaon, Viksit Odisha," which literally translates to "Developed Villages, Developed Odisha." Launched in February 2025, this initiative aims to transform approximately 60,000 villages over five years with an annual allocation of Rs. 1,000 crores. The program focuses on improving rural infrastructure, including roads, educational facilities, community assets, sports infrastructure, and small-scale tourism. Notably, 40% of the funds are earmarked for tribal-dominated blocks, which will likely benefit villages such as Krushnanagar.

However, even without adequate government help, the communities have shown remarkable resilience, which is evident in their efforts to hold on to their identity as much as they can. However, intervention by the authorities is essential. The issues faced by these migrant tribes require targeted interventions, such as improved local infrastructure, sustainable livelihood programs, and government support and encouragement for preserving their cultural heritage.

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