

Between Resilience and Rupture: An Ethnographic Study of Cultural Continuity and Acculturative Dissonance among the Mal Pahadiya Tribe of Jharkhand

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Abstract

Mal Pahadiya is the one among the three tribes of the Pahadiya community of Jharkhand. The Pahadiya people are a Dravidian ethnic people of India, mainly living in Jharkhand and West Bengal. They are the original inhabitant of the Rajmahal hills, present in the present Santhal Pargan subdivision of Jharkhand state. The Rajmahal hills are also called as “Saba Lakh Ekees Pahad”¹ by the Pahadiya tribes. They are listed as scheduled tribes by the government of Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal. They mainly speak Mal Pahadiya and Maudi/Maudo² languages in their day-to-day life. Except Maudi/Maudo and Mal Pahadiya language they also practice Parsi language. Maudi/Maudo or Parsi³ is a Dravidian language whereas Mal Pahadiya is categorized as an Indo-Aryan language.

Culture plays an important role in the existence and sustainability of any community. Birth, marriage, and death are important parts of the culture. The unique traditional practices to celebrate all these occasions make their culture significant. Due to a lack of literacy and awareness, their traditional and cultural practices are on the verge of extinction with time. Encroachment of Marathas, Mughals, British, Santhals, and mainland settlers in Rajmahal hills made them socio-culturally vulnerable. The study focuses on documenting their birth, marriage, death rites and rituals along with folktales and folklores associated with it. This study will also explore the spiritual activities and beliefs influencing the Mal Pahadiya community’s spiritual ethos, including everything from their relationship with the nature to the significance of ancestral worship. Further, the study will portray the Mal Pahadiya tradition and culture, showcasing the distinctiveness of an ethnic group that adds to the colourful tapestry of India’s diverse history. From the study, I will try to convey a deeper understanding of customs, and cultural richness that characterize the Mal Pahadiya people of Jharkhand.

The fieldwork of this paper was conducted by the author in several villages of Pakur districts of Jharkhand. The author used a variety of field approaches, including schedules, questionnaires, focus group, interviews, samplings and visual documentation, to collect data during the fieldwork. The study found that the traditional and cultural practices of this tribe need to be restored and documented as it’s on the verge of extinction.

Keyword: Mal Pahadiya, Culture, Maudi/Maudo, Rites and Rituals, Folklore, Rajmahal hills, Ancestral worship.

¹ साबा लाख इक्कीस पहाड़/ One Lakh Twenty One Thousand Hills

² मौड़ी/ मौड़ो

³ पारसी

Objectives

The relevance of the present study on Mal Pahadiya of Jharkhand, the researchers' Objectives are very specific:

- To study the culture and traditional practices of Mal Pahadiya of Jharkhand.
- To understand the Mal Pahadiya culture and society through their folklores and folktales.

Research Methodology

This study uses a triangulated ethnographic approach to examine the socio-cultural dynamics of the Mal Pahadiya tribe. It integrates historical literature with first-hand empirical findings to connect past developments with present-day realities. The methodology emphasizes participant observation for in-depth, "thick" descriptions that uncover profound cultural significances beyond superficial features. Semi-structured interviews and diverse documentation methods highlight emic perspectives, prioritizing the community's own reasoning and narratives. Overall, this method enables a detailed exploration of cultural continuity alongside the transitional ambiguities in their on-going evolution.

1. Introduction

The process of human evolution is indeed a fascinating journey that spans millions of years through various stages of development, from a single cell to the complex human body. As we all know the Mal Pahadiya community is categorized under Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). In eastern India, in the lap of Rajmahal Hills, a unique world is inhabited whose lifestyle, culture, and society are very different. Although the lifestyle of the people living in the mountains of many other regions of India is also unique, the specialty of these Mal Pahadiya settled in the Rajmahal hill range is that being away from the modern or the world of dazzle. This tribal community traces back their roots to the ancient Mal tribe mentioned in Mahabharata and many other ancient Indian Vedic epics (Jain, 2004). They were originally inhabitants of the Himalayan foothills but migrated to the present region due to political turmoil and economic reasons. During my fieldwork in Godda district of Jharkhand I found that a community Kushwaha (koeri) with surname as Mal. When I interacted with them, I came to know that their totems are same as like of Mal Pahadiya tribe i.e., "Rangadharia Devta"⁴. They also added that their ancestors have migrated from present Munger district of Bihar to Godda. According to census report of 2011 Mal Pahadiya tribes are also present in Munger district of Bihar. This depicts the Tribe caste continuum among this tribe.

Kumarbhag Pahadiya, Sauria Pahadiya, and Mal Pahadiya have been recognized as separate tribes because there are a lot of differences in the social, economic, and political systems of both tribes. There is no marriage relation between these tribes. Sauria Pahadiya eats beef and uses cows in plows. Sauria Pahadiya not only eats cows, bulls, buffaloes, etc. but also eats the meat of dead animals. That is why the Mal Pahadiya lives separately from them considering them to be of different cultures.

Marriage happens between the Mal Pahadiya and Kumarbhag Pahadiya. The economic condition of Kumarbhag Pahadiya is also very pathetic, but Kumarbhag Pahadiya has not been recognized by anthropologists and at the government level as a primitive tribe or tribe.

Mal Pahadiya is inhabited in all the districts of the Santhal Pargana division, but they are also found sporadically in Bhagalpur, Singhbhum (Chaibasa), Munger, and other districts of Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal. Geographically their habitat is not very suitable. Their area is hilly, wooded, and plateau and is not very ideal from a climatic point of view.

⁴ रंगाधरी देवता

Mal Pahadiya's are the original habitat of the Rajmahal Hills. They were brave soldiers and fought for the country and many Mal Pahadiya's have also served in the Indian National Army led by Subash Chandra Bose. Due to a lack of education, they are forced to work as daily wage/ migrant labor and other humble jobs for meager amounts. In earlier days forest was their main source of livelihood but now everything is under the control of the government which has made them unemployed and is forcing them to migrate towards the city for livelihood

This community has presented a unique example of patriotism from time to time. They have clashed with every external invader. This is such an area of India, where they never let the Hills and Pahadiya be slaves. Despite this, the rays of development did not reach them and now the tradition of these hill people who made history is also changing rapidly. In such a situation, it is a difficult task to throw light on their courageous history, customs, and languages. Sardar Ramna Ahadi (1721-1766), Karia Pujhar (1723), Jabra Pahadiya (1746), etc. are some of the major freedom fighters of Mal Pahadiya community. According to them the great freedom fighter Jabra/Jaura Pahadiya is the one who was later renamed as Tilka Manjhi by the Santhal community.

1. Indigenous lifeway's and Society

Mal Pahadiya calls their language Maudi/Maudo, which is very similar to Pahadiya, Khortha, and Angika languages. Diku people have also named this language as "Khodra-Damka". It is a Pahadiya language term that means something that is still shining and has maintained its dignity and prestige by remaining in darkness.

Looking at the social structure of Mal Pahadiya, it can be said that Clan is not found among them, which is an important factor in the social structure background of other castes living in Bihar and Jharkhand. According to Mal Pahadiya folktales "Nakay Ahadi and Ded-Bhudi" were the first person on the earth and are all the ancestors of these two. The concept of first person on earth changes from region to region i.e., when I moved towards the Pakur and Dumka border area they recognize "Lit Mia and Lit Baba" as first person on the earth.

There is a family division between them. There are a total twelve surnames in Mal Pahadiya – "Grihi, Dehri, Puzhar, Singh, Ahiri, Dulai, Laiya, Manjhi, Kunwar, Sardar, Patar and Rai" (increasing to decreasing order in terms of social status). A person belonging to the Dehri class always remains a Dehri. This division divides the Mal Pahadiya into different classes, but it does not play any role in the determination of marital relations. Marital relations were prohibited in other communities up to two or three decades back. Somehow if a girl was married to another sect, then she was punished by the whole village. In contrast, boys were allowed to marry in other sect. Here we can see gender discrimination. With interference and influence of Christianity their mindset has changed, and they (both boys and girls) marry in other sect without being punished by village level authority or community head.

The family is the primary and basic social unit among the Mal Pahadiya. Mal Pahadiya lives in a nuclear family. These include the man, his wife and children. In special circumstances, adopted children or stepchildren are also found. Due to the absence of a Clan, more attention is paid to the close relationship, which is important for many generations. By a matrimonial relationship, all the members of two families are bound in blood relations, because of which a joint kinship of both parties is established. Under Mal Pahadiya, there is a humorous relationship between some relatives, such as sister-in-law, brother-in-law, etc. There are some relations in whom there is an avoidance relationship, such as it is forbidden to see or touch Bhainsur and Jethsas. There is also an avoidance relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law. The family of Mal Pahadiya community is patriarchal. The father is the head of the house, and the

succession of the property runs only in the male class, that is, after his death, the son is the owner of the father's property. Girls are not given a share in the property, but arrangements for maintenance are made. Widow's share is not given, but their maintenance is arranged in any circumstances.

2. Embodied belief system

Mal Pahadiya's are the worshiper of nature. They specially worship "Bada-Gosai, Wilp-Gosai, Lehu Gosai, Darmente Gosai, Jarmatre-Gosai". Bada-Gosai and Wilp-Gosai appear in the form of Sun and Moon in heaven. While all the rest of the Gosai's are invisible. They can be worshiped at any time. Mal Pahadiya considers them (Gosai) as their protector. Apart from these, they always worship some wicked but fast working, miraculous spirits so that no epidemic, disease, calamity should come upon their family and village. These spirits are known as "Bedu Gumon- Gosai, Nadu Gumon-Gosai". By the way, every rites-ritual, festivals of Mal Pahadiya community are associated with the worshiping of these ditties and nature. Along with nature worshipers, Mal Pahadiya also worships Hindu gods and goddesses. They worship the Lord Shankar, Maa Parvati, Maa Kali, and Maa Lakshmi. They worship Lord Shankar and Maa Parvati in the form of supreme justice of this universe. They also worship their ancestors in the form of Mada-Modpa. They always pray to Pahad Thakur and Mother Earth (Dharti Maa) for their wellbeing and employment. Apart from this, they also always try to avoid evil spirits by worshiping them. Maghi Puja, Asadhi Puja, Makai Puja, Ghanghra Puja, is popular and compulsory festivals to be performed by them.

3. Myths and Memories of Mal Pahadiya

▪ Creation of community on earth according to Mal Pahadiya folk tales

"Bada Gosai" created all kinds of creatures, vegetation, climate, etc. on earth and sent seven brothers from heaven to reside on earth. On reaching the earth, the eldest brother fell ill. The rest of the six brothers started preparing for a big banquet. At this feast, they prepared all kinds of food delicacies. Everyone had to eat the food of their own choice, and after that, they had to leave to settle in the selected places according to their own choice. A brother ate Goat meat and went to settle far away country; in the future his descendants were known as Hindus. The second brother ate all kinds of meat but left the Pig and went to settle in the other direction, in the future his descendants were known as Muslims. It is not known what the third brother ate, but his descendants were called Kharwars. The Dog's meat was eaten by the fourth brother and he left to live in the northern direction, in the future his descendants were known as "Kirtas" (North East tribesmen). The fifth brother also ate his favorite food and went to live in the hilly, forested areas, in the future his descendants were known as Kol. The sixth brother enjoyed all kinds of food items, in the future, his descendants were known as Christians (White men). The seventh brother was ill, so he was served all kinds of food on an old plate. His remaining six brothers expelled him from the banquet and left him to settle on the mountain, where he was forced to live. In the future, this seventh brother was called Mal Pahadiya, who is still living in poverty and suffering on the hills.

▪ Lit Mai and Lit Baba

God created a "lit Baba" and sent him to live on the earth alone. God used to come every day to know about the condition of Lit Baba, but Lit Baba used to sit silently and sadly. God asked Lit Baba one day why are you sitting silently and sadly? Lit Baba angrily says that I am alone, that's why I keep sitting there beating my heart, whenever you come, I feel a little good. God comes back to heaven and thinks

that Lit Baba is right, what will he do alone? So, God created "Lit Mai" at the same time and sent him to live with Lit Baba. Lit Baba was blessed to have Lit Mai. Now both of their lives have become happy. Both lived happily and became parents of a son and later a daughter. Lit Baba-Lit Mai's life became happy with the cries of both the children. In the future, they became parents of 22 more children. Thus, both had 12 sons and 12 daughters. Time passed, and these 24 brothers and sisters considered their elder brother as their Guru and said that we are all 24 brothers and sisters, we will play together, work and obey their elder brother's orders. One day, while playing, the elder brother said that all of us together will make an Earthen ladder from the earth to the sky, and on becoming a ladder, we will touch the Moon and the Sun. All the brothers and sisters said that then it will be a lot of fun, let's start the work of making stairs from now on. For six months, all kept making stairs continuously, the ladder was almost about to touch the sky, and one day God came, and by seeing the ladder asked why are you building stairs? Brothers and sisters answered, what you have, all of us brothers and sisters have one speech, one opinion, so we will make a ladder up to the sky. God thought in his mind that their dialect (language) is one, it is unanimous, so they will make a ladder. One of the other remedies must be done so that the ladder cannot get completed. God changed the dialect (language) of everyone in the night. On the second day, everyone was engaged in making ladders, due to a change of dialect (language) in the absence of coordination, the work of making ladders remained undone. Thus, by changing the language, their unity ended, and they became ignorant among themselves, but God kept the language of a brother and a sister the same. Thus 12 languages were born, and each language was considered as brother and a sister. In the future, based on language, 12 pairs of men and women were formed. Eleven couples left for life in different directions, but the language of the elder brother and elder sister had not changed, they both remained with Lit Mai and Lit Baba. Later, all the human races of the world originated from these 12 pairs, it is believed by the Mal Pahadiya community.

Even today, Mal Pahadiya considers Lit Mai and Lit Baba as their Ancestor. Every year in his name, each Pahadiya performs a farming puja in the name of "Mada Modpa" inside his house. Two grains of Rice and two drops of Liquor are compulsorily offered in their names before every Pahadiya meal and before drinking alcohol. Even today, every Pahadiya remembers Lit Mai and Lit Baba before traveling. Pahadiya reverently remembers Lit Mai and Lit Baba in other rites as well.

- **There is another Pahadiya folk story of the first male and female creation, which is prevalent in the Pahadiya peoples in this way:**

In earlier times there was water everywhere, and the earth was not visible anywhere. The earth was submerged, and the Goddess of the earth was Kali Maa, who used to reside in the Patal-lok along with the earth. "Vidhi-Vidanta (Lord Shankar-Goddess Parvati) produced two Eggs out of water for the first Man-Woman creation. Both the Eggs kept moving on the foam of water all around. From the one Egg the first Woman and from the second Egg, the first Man was supposed to come out. Wandering through the sky, "Vidhi-Vidanta" thinks that there is boundless water all around, where will they and what will they eat? So, the earth should be raised. But how to raise the earth? After thinking a lot, he put a Nalka (pipe) from above the water to the Earth which was below in the Patal-lok and he put an Earthworm in that Nalka (pipe). The Earthworm scrawled down to the underworld and directly fall on the chest of Goddess Kali and started eating the soil from the Earth. As a result, the soil from the upper mouth of the Nalka started coming out on top of the water. Meanwhile Earthworm also multiplied, and they altogether started digging more amount of soil and throwing it out of the water. In this way, due to the tireless efforts of the Earthworm, this rough Earth was formed and thus the unfathomable water was confined to large Seas, Rivers, Streams, and Lakes and the foam remained on the earth. When the earth was created, the Vidhi-Vidanta also created Forests, Animals, Birds, etc., so that the maintenance of the first Man and Woman could be blissful. When this happens, a Woman emerges from one Egg and a Man comes out of the other Egg and on Earth. The human family begins to form and settle down. The Pahadiya people

believe that the "Vidhi-Vidanta" put the Earthworm in the Nalka to protect Earthworm from Fish, Frogs, and various aquatic animals. Otherwise, the Earthworm would have fallen prey to these aquatics on the way and the work of removing soil over water could not become successful.

▪ **The tale of Rajmahal hills**

During fieldwork interactions with the residents of Talajhari village in Pakur district, Jharkhand, I observed a prominent hill formation and inquired about its local designation. The villagers identified it as "Saba Lakh Pahad", translating to a range purportedly comprising 1.25 lakh (125,000) individual hills, reflecting the community's perception of its vastness.

This nomenclature is deeply rooted in Mal Pahadiya oral folklore, which attributes the origin of these hills to a formidable demon's intervention. According to the tradition, the demon sought to impede the descent of the sacred Ganga River to earth, aiming to prevent its purifying influence on the terrestrial realm. In opposition stood Sage Bhagirathi, whose unwavering devotion manifested through rigorous penance and meditation directed toward Lord Shiva ultimately succeeded in channeling the river from the heaven.

Despite the demon's exhaustive efforts to erect 1.25 lakh hills as a barrier in this region, his stratagem proved futile. The Ganga adeptly altered its trajectory, bypassing the Saba Lakh Pahad expanse in the adjacent Sahebganj district of Jharkhand. This mythological triumph not only symbolizes the victory of divine righteousness over malevolent forces but also underscores the river's sanctifying role, restoring purity to the land and terminating the demon's reign. Such narratives illuminate the socio-cultural worldview of the Mal Pahadiya tribe, intertwining geography, spirituality, and moral cosmology.

The above-mentioned folktales and folklore depict their vivid and unique vision towards society. Their worldview somewhere associates with the mythologies of Hindu religion. We cannot deny the fact that they have their own verbal stories passing decades to decades and generations to generations, which make them culturally and traditionally rich. The folktales and folklore play an important role in the sustainability of any community. We can also say that folklore and folktales is the root of our existence. Through these stories we can also trace back our values and importance in society. "The folktales presented here are to be seen for having a function that is beyond the level of amusement and entertainment, and the simple form of folktale designated as suitable for children must be understood as it is having some inevitable role to the humanity. The human society that constantly involves in the pursuit of knowledge is guided by a set of epistemological frameworks, other than the one provided by the scientific paradigm, that is having a trailing of experiences of the past generations. The epistemological continuity of human experience has continuously been achieved through telling and retelling facilitated mainly by the creative forms of oral and literary traditions. The folktales on the creation of earth and mankind given here present a narrative structure that represents a universal pattern of trajectory with which some of the events are arranged in chronological order with conceptual ascension towards the fulfilment of the task. The structure of a folktale must be seen either as a cognitive model that must be filled with the contents in the ways conditioned by the model to be meaningful or as a locutionary act" (Ramakrishnan, 2023).

4. Lifeway's and Institutions among Mal Pahadiya

The villages of Pahadiya are situated on top of hills or pulses. Their villages are small and separate. Their houses are rectangular. In a village, there are 15 to 30 houses; their hut-like houses are wooden, made of bamboo and thatch. Rare houses are found. For the construction of the house Kasi, Po, Kusum, Sinduwar, Phuro, Sakhua, and Panaktha wood are used which are easily available in the local

environment. The house often consists of two rooms and a veranda. But it is 8-9 feet long, 6-7 feet wide and 7 to 9 feet high. The wall is erected with the help of a bamboo splinter and wooden shovel and a layer of earthen plaster are applied to it. There is a Tatinuma (Bamboo door) door. There is no window at all. The porch of the house is surrounded by bamboo strips. The front of the house is surrounded by bushes.

Earthen utensils for cooking food, earthen pots for storing water, and some made of brass and aluminum are found. There is Oak in their homes. Knives, Sickle, Spade, Khanta, etc. are their essential equipment. Brooms, Sup, and baskets are often found in all homes. Simple cots and Palm tree leaves mats are found for sleeping. For hunting Bow, Baghdadhanu (Arrow), etc., and for fishing Chato or Kumbani and net are generally found. Mal Pahadiya women use mud for bathing and washing. To wash clothes, the work is done by putting Orbhi (Ash of hearth) in the water. Now educated or employed Mal Pahadiya people have started using Soda-Soap. They cure their diseases with herbs-Serbs or traditional medicine. They avoid English or allopathic medicine and doctors and due to poverty and lack of facilities, it is beyond their capacity.

The life of the Pahadiya community was completely dependent on Flora, Fauna, Tuber, Green leaves, wild hunting, Fish found on or nearby hills and mountains. Along with this, they also used to do some Kurao (Jhum cultivation) from which they got grains like Corn, Bajra, Sutri, Tur, Ghanghara etc. After the arrival of the British and the settlement of the Santhals, the monopoly/right of the Pahadiya on wild food products, hunting, fish etc. ended rapidly. Now their cultivation was also limited and due to limited area, the crop cycle was shortened to two to five years, whereas earlier this crop cycle was longer from fifteen to twenty-five years, due to which the yield of crops was abundant. After independence, the forests of Pahadiya were occupied by the Forest Department and Kurao farming” became illegal. Now Pahadiya had to depend only on Bhitho farming, Paddy cultivation was negligible among them. In the Bhitho land, they cultivated Corn, Sutri, Bajra, Tur, Kursa etc. in the rainy season, while in winter they cultivated Mustard. They also cultivated a small amount of Brinjal, Tomato, Radish, Potato, Wheat, Sesame, Sweet potato etc. On the edge of the fields, they also earn bread and cash by planting trees of Berry, Custard Apple, Banana, and Jackfruit. Some Pahadiya have also started planting Papaya, Mango, Guava trees. Apart from this, Khexa (wild bitter gourd) has also been planted, whose market price is fifteen to thirty rupees per kg. In this way, by selling fruits, green leaves, bitter gourd, wild products like Mahua, Kendu, Sal leaves plates, Brush of Sal and Sakhua tree (Datwan), Mushrooms they earn a living for two to three months. Often the Pahadiya’s also add some amount for the household by selling Pigs, Goats and Chickens. The Pahadiya’s settled near the road and market usually make their living by selling wood. Kurao farming (Jhum cultivation) is completely the farming of moneylenders, there are many dangers in Kurao farming, they have to bribe to the forest department employees, village heads.

5. Economic system

The main economic sources of Mal Pahadiya are farming, collection of minor forest materials, labor in the forest and fields, working as daily wage laborers as Reza-coolies, and working in some government non-government offices. The main means of subsistence of the Mal Pahadiya living in the forested mountainous areas are hunting, food-gathering, and kurao or jhum cultivation. They sell wild products, such as bamboo, firewood, fruits-flowers, tubers-roots, etc., in the Haat-Bazaar, from which good earnings are earned. The main means of livelihood is Kurao farming. Bajra, Tur, and Corn are grown by ploughing the land on the mountain with plough and oxen. Kurwa fields are prepared with great effort and dedication. A tract of forest on the slope of the mountain is selected in “Push” (December-January). Trees are cut by Doli or Dao (traditional axe) leaving pegs three to four feet from the ground and small bushes are left to dry. In the month of “Chait”, it is set on fire and its ashes are spread on the ground.

Then at a distance of six to ten inches, Millet, Corn, and Ghanghara are planted in that land by drilling a hole with Jogori. This land is cultivated for three years, by which time the land becomes infertile. Then another new plot of the forest is discovered and farming starts there. Thus, the Mal Pahadiya's leave one piece of forest for trees to grow and cultivate the other. This shifting cultivation is called 'Kurwa'. There is a good yield in the Kurwa field. In this Millet, Corn, Mahua and Kodo are grown. For this, a large area of forest land is needed. The cutting of trees in the forest can be a subject of criticism, but keeping in view the environment and conditions in which the Kurwa is forced to cultivate and the care taken to make the trees flourish again, it is considered very fair or environmentally friendly. Almost all the Mal Pahadiya families have agricultural land in which Bhadai, Aghani, and Rabi grow, but are unable to collect food for a year from farming. So, they also take support other occupations.

- Mal pahadiya divides their land into four categories: Sem, Tikur, Dam, and Gharwadi.
- 'Sem' land is quite fertile in which Corn, Potato, Barbatti, Ghanghara, etc. are grown.
- 'Tiku' is a less fertile land. In this, the cultivation of Kurthi, and Suthari are grown.
- 'Dame' it's the land between these two, in which Rice and Wheat are grown.
- 'Gharwadi' where vegetables are grown.

Mal Pahadiya also, hunts and catches fishes. Some of them also earn bread from small village level industry. They make ropes and khatia, and sell them in the local market. They also make local wine (i.e., Hadiya, Mahua, Pochai, Nira, Jharna Daru) and sell them at home or local markets. The local market plays an important role in indigenous people's daily life and in a week its schedule in two-three different parts of the village or nearby village. Their women generally go to the market for selling and purchasing goods. In some villages of Mal Pahadiya, people prepare wooden charcoal and sell it in the market. In Santhal Pargana region, Rampur hat is famous for selling wooden charcoal. They gather flora fauna, herbs-Serbs, and other vegetables and leaves from the forest which they use to consume in their daily life. They also work as labors, housekeepers, and agricultural laborers. In search of work, they usually travel to West Bengal. After some time, the laborer who has gone to another part of the country for earning bread returns home by saving some money and some of them settle thereby only. Livestock is also important in the economic system of Mal Pahadiya. There is also a culturally important aspect of livestock. They rear cows, bulls, goats, pigs, and poultry chickens. The pig has a special significance. It is customary to give pigs at 'bride price'. They also eat its meat and when needed, they get a lot of money by selling it in the Haat-Bazaar. The pig is a symbol of economic status and social status. Chicken eggs are sold and eaten. Chickens and incense sticks are used to offer sacrifices to the deities. They also keep dogs, which are used for guarding work.

Still, the financial condition of Mal Pahadiya is bad, they remain in debt. They take loan from moneylender and pay heavy interest. Given their pathetic financial condition, the government has started a special welfare scheme to improve their economic condition. Under the rehabilitation plan, efforts are being made to provide them with an opportunity to start a new life by giving them land and cultivable land and other assistance, but it is not so easy to bring them down from the mountain.

Their neighbors are Santhals and other people in whose fields they work as laborers. Many different things are found in the forest around them, which gives economic benefits. Whether near or some distance from their village-house, weekly Haat are held where they do shopping. Together, meeting people, meeting relatives and discussions take place here. Sometimes the same goes for a marriage. Haat's has socio-economic importance in their lives.

6. Food and Costume

Their main food is Corn, Millet, and Barbatti, Mahua, Tamarind, Jackfruit, etc. are also included in their food. They are generally carnivorous. Whenever they find the meat of Pigs, Goats, Chickens, and Birds, they eat. Wild fruits and flowers, especially Berry and Mahua, are an important part of their diet. They drink and sell liquor made from Mahua and Dates (Tadi). They do not eat beef nor do they eat the flesh of dead animals.

The clothes of Mal Pahadiya are simple. Men use Dhoti, Tunic and Gamchha. These days they buy innerwear and shirts from the market and wear them. The blanket is used to protect them from cold. Peacock feathers are used on the occasion of festival or dance. Young children wear only underwear. Women wear sarees. The upper part is covered by one end of the saree or a tunic-like garment is worn. Both males and females use very few clothes. Godna is very popular among them.

The jewelry of Mal Pahadiya women is simple and cheap. They are very fond of jewelry and try to keep their body parts decorated with ornaments. They wear jewelry on the Head, Neck, Ear, Nose, Wrist, Arm, Leg, and Finger. Their main ornaments are Tanned, Baju, Lolak, Karla, Phuli, Pajeb, Hansuli, Necklace, Khell, Putki, etc. Jewelry is often cheap and is bought in the market. Generally, ornaments are made of Brass, Gilt, Steel, Bronze, Kodi, etc. Some women also wear silver jewelry; gold jewelry is rare for them. Nowadays City-Gold jewelry is in trend. Men also wear some jewelry. Makeup with flowers is very common among them (men).

Religion

In the environment in which they live and have been residing for centuries, it is quite natural to imagine ghosts in that forest-covered mountainous environment. They seem to be full of spirits to keep them happy. They have the belief that there is life after death. And the souls of their ancestors keep wandering around them, who can help when needed, so remember the ancestors on every occasion and worship them. Simultaneously they also worship other gods and goddesses and offer sacrifices to them. The main deity of Mal Pahadiya is 'Dharti Gosai', which is in the form of a stone under a tree. It is also called 'Vasumati Gosai' or 'Biru Gosai'. This deity is the Sun, which is called 'Singbonga' between Munda-Uraon. Mother Earth, Kando Gosai, Gomo Gosai, etc. are other divinities.

Their main festivals are Karma, Navakhani, and Falgun. There are many types of worship in the middle of Mal Pahadiya, among which the main ones are Bichi Erai, Gangi Erai, Osri Erai, Ghanghara Puja, Aam Puja, Barbatti Puja.

7. Governance

Mal Pahadiya village is the unit of their political organization, which controls and conducts their social, religious, and political life at the village level. The head of the village is called Manjhi. He is the head of the Gram Panchayat. There are "Godates" and "Diwans" to help him. All positions are hereditary. In this traditional panchayat, all the senior citizens of the village are members. The disputes and problems of the village are resolved in this panchayat. Divorce, sexual offenses, property disputes, adultery, rape, etc. are settled at this level. The verdict carries a variety of punishments and fines. The decision of Panchayat is valid. Anyone who violates or disobeys it has the fear of being boycotted by the caste and village. The fined money is used for worship or village feast. To resolve the dispute, a large organization is formed by merging several villages under the head of a Sardar. Previously, the Sardar was recognized by the government and given a stipend. Now government panchayats have started functioning, whose structure and the process are different from the traditional panchayat. The officers and most of the members of this panchayat are elected from other castes or classes, whom the Mal pahadiya's consider strangers. People do not trust them and are afraid of them. After the establishment of government panchayats, the

traditional panchayats have started to weaken, yet the Mal Pahadiya's still take the help of the old panchayats only. Political consciousness is slowly coming in Mal Pahadiya community.

Conclusion

It is not surprising that their traditions are disappearing with time. With the passage of time and increasing human necessity, they are also migrating towards the urban centers, which are leading to the loss of their culture, tradition, rites, rituals, and indigenous knowledge system.

During my fieldwork, I found it very difficult to collect data for my writing as I think I am too lucky that I luckily meet some old age people, who still have some knowledge about their traditions, culture, society, etc. Sufficient work has not been done on this tribal group in comparison to other major tribal groups of Jharkhand as well as of India. The literacy rate is abysmal in the Mal Pahadiya community as a result every one of them is somehow earning their bread, and no one from their community is conscious of conserving their knowledge system and tradition. They are geographically living on hills but now their contact with other modern communities has increased which poses a great threat to their cultural loss. As I observed, they feel shy to speak about their tradition, culture, and community in front of urban people because there is some sort of inferiority mindset in them due to urbanization. "Maudu/Maudi" and "Mal Pahadiya" speakers are very less in numbers. Languages like Khortha, Angika, Santhali, Bengali, and Hindi is dominating in their region very rapidly. There is a negligible written record about their language, customs, rituals, community, etc., if some are present then they are very old it's nearly impossible to verify whether data is correct or it was an armchair work. Many of the freedom fighters of the Mal Pahadiya community are not even on record.

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