

Economic Life of a Vulnerable Tribal Group: Livelihood, Institutions and Changes among Chuktia Bhunjia Tribe of Odisha

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Abstract: The paper concentrates on the economic life and livelihood of Chuktia Bhunjia tribe of Odisha. Data collected through prolonged observation at different stages show that livelihood of this small group revolves around local ecology and is shaped by traditional ecological knowledge-based practices. But the exploitation and consumption of resources are governed by institutions and existing customary normative practices, often intertwined with specific rituals, festivals, taboos and use of technologies which make their economy 'sacred'. The structure formed on the basis of economic activities reveals that kinship as a network of relationships not only controls the production relations but also distribution of goods and services and the way they are exchanged. Although the gender based division of labour tends to follow a principle of equality in work participation, yet the seclusion of women from economic participation during pollution period and restricting women from land entitlement clearly uphold the 'male-line'. Such rules, supported by customary behaviours are believed to ensure ecological sustainability and early flow of resource. With the emergence of peasant economy, state intervention and introduction of market economy in this region, their economic structure has undergone change whereby 'class' has emerged in this society. Nevertheless, the persistence of traditional characteristics of economy- cooperation, interrelationship and subsistence- and its interconnectedness make their economy function like a 'distinct economy'.

Key words : Ecology, livelihood, economic transition, class formation, gender, kinship, Chuktia Bhunjia, Odisha