

Bhubaneswar Sabar and Dipak K. Midya

SOCIAL STRUCTURE AMONG THE CHUKTIA BHUNJIA TRIBE OF ODISHA: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Abstract

This ethnographic paper documents the traditional social structure of Chuktia Bhunjia tribe of Odisha to understand how they, as a unit, organize their social relationship. With a focus on major components of social institutions, that is, family, marriage, kinship, economics and politics, attempt has been made to understand how different social phenomenon like economics, material culture and customary laws influence their social institutions and shape their social intercourse. It also examines the circumstances under which changes have occurred in their major social institutions. Ethnographic investigation over a prolong period reveals that traditional institutional practices are continue to exist among them due to submission of people to protect their customs; and punishment given to the breach of customary laws including temporary excommunication and atonement of community feast. The external factors contributing to change in their social structure include state intervention, out-migration, education and non-tribals influence. The existing political units- village and intervillage councils- continue to play crucial role in balancing the core value attached to each social institution via established customary rules. Although their self-realization of being stigmatized because of low literacy, traditional attires, other cultural practices and subsequent resistance against the customary laws have been underpinning few sections of Chuktia Bhunjia to assimilate themselves to the so-called 'mainstream' culture as against the preservation of primordality by others whereby a new kind of social order has been created among themselves. Nevertheless, their ability to adopt to the new cultural practices and submission to customs indicate that they strike a balance between tradition and modernity.

Keywords: *Institutions, customary laws, marriage, kinship system, rank, authority, social control, material culture, culture contact, tribal identity*

BHUBANESWAR SABAR, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies, Maharaja Sriram Chandra Bhanja Deo University (Erstwhile North Orissa University), Takatpur, Baripada, Odisha-757003, India, bhubansabar@gmail.com; **DIPAK K. MIDYA**, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore- 721102, W.B., India, dkmidya@gmail.com

Introduction

Tribal peoples of India have been the focus of scholarly attention, particularly in the fields of anthropology and sociology, for about a century, as witnessed from the ethnographic accounts of many tribes. Following the establishment of Asiatic Society of -Bengal in 1784, much has been written on tribes. The early ethnographies, notable being the W.H.R. Rivers's *The Toda* (1906), V. Elwin's *The Baiga* (1939), *The Agaria* (1942), *The Muria and Their Ghotul* (1947), C. von-Furer-Haimendorf's *The Chenchu: a jungle folk of the deccan* (1943), *The Apa tanis and the neighbour: a primitive civilization of the eastern Himalaya* (1962), to name a few, are some of the monumental works that not only documented the institutions of social structure, surrounding within the domains of family, kinship and marriage, economics, politics, religion but perceived tribals as a 'homogenous group'. However, the idea of tribal being a 'homogenous category' were encountered by few scholars in postcolonial period. Some of the critical works that appeared in anthropological and sociological studies on tribes are K S Singh's *Tribal Society in India: An Anthropo-historical Perspective* (1985) and Virginius Xaxa's *State, Society and Tribes: Issues in Post-colonial India* (2008), Alpha Shah's *In the Shadows of the State: Indigenous Politics, Environmentalism, and Insurgency in Jharkhand, India* (2010), Meena Radhakrishnan's (ed.) *First Citizen: Studies on Adivasis, Tribals, and Indigenous Peoples in India* (2016), Ramachandra Guha's *Savaging the Civilized: Verrier Elwin, His Tribals and India* (2016), Xaxa and Devi's (eds.) *Being Adivasi: Existence, Entitlements, Exclusion* (2021). These works have established tribes as communities having their own diverse histories, languages, cultures, social practices and so on; and therefore a 'heterogeneous group' who is constantly changing its institutions of kinship, family, marriage, economic, politics, laws and many more aspects.

Studies on changes in the social institutions of tribes gained currency given the transition, transformation, assimilation of tribal people with outside world (Mahapatra, 1962; Narayan 1986; Sharma 2005; Das 2005; Samson 2015; Atal 2016; Sharma 2018; Kumar and Lobo 2022). Social change is conceptualised as a structural change in 'the size of a society, the composition or balance of its parts or the type of its organization' (Ginsberg 1958: 205). Although it is cumbersome to empirically measure the changes happens in social institutions, considering it as a 'relative' term, it is viewed as a drastic alteration in 'prevailing value system' (Cosser 1957: 202) and rules governing the interaction among the members. There are number of determinant factors intensifying changes in the social institutions of tribes. Traditionally, modernization and westernization area believed to be key forces altering the social structure of people including tribals. The migration-led inculturation, educational attainment and other aspects although are reported to influence the institutions of family, kinship and marriage (Kattamayam 1996; Padhi 2015; Jeermison and Sahoo 2018; Sharma 2018), increasing interaction of tribe with non-tribals and the consequent acculturation are claimed to amplify change in the social

structure of a community (Sharma 2005; Baite 2014; Atal 2016). The available studies on change in family institution of tribals communities are mostly about changes in family compositions, types, shift in nature of families (Das 2005; Sharma 2018; Yadav 2018). Similar is the case of marriage where changes are reported with regard to age at marriage, acquiring of mates, marriage rules due to adaptation of new system of marriage regulation, marriage practices etc. (Babu and Naidu 1994; Sikdar 2009; Goutam et al. 2010; Zomi 2014). Studies on change in the institution of kinship among tribals in India are evident (Joshi 2014; Sharma 2018).

Yet, there are specific theories conceptualising the operation of social change in a society. For specific theorists, change being a process, two categories of social change are reported- 'adaptation' and 'transformation' (Dwyer and Minnegal 2010: 632). By 'adaptation' they refer to a context 'when quantitative and context-dependent shifts occur in the expression of particular variables without substantive alteration to functional relationships between those variables and the contexts within which they are expressed' (ibid: 632) and by 'transformation', they mean a condition 'when relationships between variables alter to elicit qualitative changes in the structure of the ensemble as a whole' (ibid: 632). At abstract level, both are different in its subjectivity where in adaptive change, system within society remained unchanged whereas transformative change entails alterations to the system itself (Watzlawick et al. 1974) or society restructures its dominant socioeconomic codes. Firth (1954) reconceptualised these changes as '*structural change*' in which basic elements of the society alter and '*detail change*' in which social action while not merely repetitive, does not alter the basic social forms' (p.17). Rao (1984) opines that structural change brings total change in the social system through revolution, and organisational change brings change only at the level of norms, activities, and personnel in which one's social position is changed.

Since tribal society is perceived being an 'integrated system', it is expected that change in one aspect of institution could alter not only of the nature and function of other institutions but also every-day interaction of members of the society at individual, group and societal levels. Sharma (2018) noted how leaning of new language due to formal education has altered the kinship term among Savara tribe of Andhra Pradesh. He also observed that adaptation of named lineage from Jatapu by Savara tribe in Andhra Pradesh has impacted on their marriage structure. Similar observation is made by Joshi (2014) among Jaunsari tribe of Derhadun district, India. The adaptation of clan system by Paudi Bhuyan of Odisha also reflects the changing lineage pattern due to influence of dominant culture (Acharya and Kshatriya 2014). The change in agricultural practices in some tribal communities also found to have changed the family structure (Thangchungmunga 1998; Mishra 2008; Kumar, 2018). Yet, comprehensive studies about the interrelationship and organisation of important aspects of the social institutions is either limited or merely absent. Therefore, understanding traditional social institutions and

their changing structure is equally important largely to answer two important questions: (a) why do certain tribal groups uphold their traditional institutions; (b) how do tribals respond to the dynamics and changing context of social structure to retain their primordial characteristics?

On the above background, this paper documents the traditional social structure of Chuktia Bhunjia society and examines the circumstances under which changes have occurred in the institutions of family, marriage and kinship among the Chuktia Bhunjia tribe of Odisha. Attempts are also made in this paper to understand how change in livelihood and gender relations has restructured the institutions of family, marriage, kinship and social interaction among them. It also aims at understanding how they negotiate with the changing social structure in order to maintain their traditionality, culture and identity.

Research Methods

This paper, based on long term ethnographic fieldwork among Chuktia Bhunjia tribe living inside the Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary of Odisha, (a) documents the traditional social structure and circumstances under which changes take place in the organisation of social structure; and (b) examines how change socio-economic behaviour altering social institution, especially family, kinship and marriage among them. With these objectives, data were collected through ethnographic fieldwork techniques usually interview, observation and case studies about various domain constituting social structure namely social division, family, marriage, kinship, inheritance rule, authority and social intercourse. The change in their social institutions were captured by comparison of data collected in two different points of time: first, May-December 2010 and second, January-May 2020. First phase focused on documentation of the traditional social structure that include habitation structure, village structure, family organisation, marriage patterns, kinship organisation, power distribution and rules and laws attached to all those social phenomena. Attempts were also made to understand the interconnection between those phenomena. Second phase of fieldwork was devoted to document the change occurred in their social institutions particularly on family, kinship and marriage and political structure besides examining the factors led to such changes. Data were then analysed using a theoretical framework to infer how change occurs and to know if change in one institution leads to change in other aspects of their social structure.

People: The Chuktia Bhunjia

Bhunjia is one of the tribal groups largely distributed in central India. They are divided into two broad social groups: Chinda Bhunjia and Chuktia Bhunjia. In Odisha, Bhunjia are reported to have settled majorly in Nabarangpur, Mayurbhanj, Nuapada and Baleswar district with a total

population of 12350 with 1012 sex ratio and 44.93 literacy rate (Govt. of India 2013). The Chinda Bhunjia -also known as Oriya Bhunjia- is an acculturated section of Bhunjia tribe are almost inhabit in all the district mentioned above. The Chuktia Bhunjia (the subject of the present study) inhabit only in Nuapada district of present-day Odisha. They are identified as one of the PVTGs in the state and exclusively inhabit in Sunabeda Wildlife Sanctuary bordering the state of Chhattisgarh. According to a base line survey by Ota et al. (2020) their total population is 3086 (1593 male and 1493 female from 938 household). They live in 35 villages/hamlets of SWS. With a sex ratio of 937, the literacy rate of Chuktia Bhunjia is estimated 24.54 (29.14 male literacy and 20.00 female literacy). They belong to Dravidian language speaking group (Russel and Hiralal 1916) who speak Bhunjia dialect (mixture of Oriya and Chhattisgarhi) for intra-group communication and local Oriya for inter-group communication. Although they were reported to practice hunting-gathering form of economy, inclusion of their habitat into the protected area forced them to become settled agriculturists. Still collection of minor forest produces (MFPs) constitutes an important source of their livelihood. They are animistic in nature and worship a number of natural phenomena. Majority of their festivals are associated with the agricultural practices and collection and consumption of various wild edibles.

Social Division

The Chuktia Bhunjia are sub-divided into two broad endogamous moieties (*got*): Netam and Markam. Each one is sub-divided into number of exogamous clan (*barag*) with specific designation. Clans are usually territorial unit, although not in strict sense. Yet, many villages are found to be predominated by a clan group or two. The members of same clan believe to have descended from same ancestor who exist in the remote past and call themselves as *Dudhbhai* and link themselves from worshipping the same deities and totemic object. Their totems include species like tiger, deer, snake, tortoise, tree species, etc. and people have profane relationship with those objects. They do not kill or harm those objects with a belief of negative impact on their clan. For instance, the Barik clan do not kill the tortoise. If they come across any tortoise in the river or pond, they tie a thread on her neck as a symbol of offering a cloth to their ancestor. It is believed that tortoise helped them crossing river. In a similar vein, members of Mallick clan are believed to have originated from tiger. So as a tribute to their ancestor, when they hear any misfortune to tiger either in radio or any means, they perform the ritual as done in the case of death of any family member. Certainly, the totemic objects among Chuktia Bhunjia primarily serve as a mark of differentiating people along clan lines and as regulator of marriage, but the customary laws and taboo associated with the totems in term of not harming the objects in any form ensure their survival. Some clans are having few sub-clans who are said to have common origin but are self-ranked due to their cultural assignments. For example,

Majhi clan is sub-divided into Bada Majhi, Pat Majhi and Kaunkar Majhi. Some clans are assigned with ritualistic duty to perform. For instance, Barik clan perform the duty of purification to a person accused of guilty for violating customary laws. Chhatria clan people worship Goddess Sunadei whereas Majhi clan is assigned the duty of sacrificing goat and hen during festivals.

Housing Structure

House constitutes an important part of Chuktia Bhunjia social structure the construction of which is governed by sets of customary beliefs. Their house structure shows that two or more households, usually of brothers, build their houses taking a wide-open space. Each household possesses two houses: main house and kitchen room. The main house (*Jhinjri Mahar*), made of mud and wood, generally contains two rooms that are used for sleeping and storing grains. A smaller hut built a little way and in front of main house is kitchen room, locally known as *Lalbangla*. It plays important roles in their social and religious life. If more than two brothers build their houses in a closed place, they build their *Lalbangla* separately. Some households build cowshed (*Guhai*) adjacent to main house which they maintain in a more religious way because of being an abode of Goddess *Mirchuk*.

The term *Lalbangla*, derived from two words '*Lal*' meaning red and '*Bangla*' meaning room, is usually red in color. Built in mud and wood, and thatched with wild grasses like *Singkhar* (*Pennisetum purpureum*) and *Dabkhar* (*Imperata cylindrical*), it is exclusively used only for cooking. It consists of single room and devoid of window. Doors are made of wild bamboo or *Gandhla* (*Anthistirla ciliate*) (a type of grass available on river bank). In its entrance two woods are fixed on the ground and a plat wood over it to keep utensils; although people now prefer to make plinth like structure in its front side. The floor is plastered with mud and cow-dung. The walls are splashed with locally available red soil (*Ratamiat*). In most *Lalbangla*, a husking tool (*Katen*), usually made of trunk of Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*) is found to husk paddies and cereals with a long stick with iron at one end (*mussel*). It is considered as one of the sacred places because they worship their tutelary deities inside it and therefore always shapes their socio-economic behaviour and social interaction. No 'outsiders'- including peoples not belong to Chuktia Bhunjia, own married daughter, school going girls and working women- can touch the *Lalbangla* otherwise they set fire with a belief that outsiders are pollutant and their entrance may defile their deities.

Institutions of Social Units: Family, Kinship and Marriage

The family among Chuktia Bhunjia is largely nuclear in type consisting of parents and unmarried children. The reason behind practicing nuclear form of family is said to be making the family members economically self-sufficiency and confident. It is by such system each son learns to survive and take care of

his individual family. So, separating the son after marriage is considered as one form of socialization to have a burden of shouldering the responsible of their own family. After marriage the son establishes his own family of procreation in the same courtyard or in a separate place at the same village. He remains under the protection of his parents unless all the brothers get marry. He cultivates his father's land along with other brothers and gets his share. The unmarried children continue to live with their parent till marriage. After all brothers are married, father property is equally distributed among the brothers. In case, father dies before distribution, the elder brother does the same by asking certain elderly peoples. So, father is recognized as the head of the family and authorities relating to the overall maintenance of the family is vested on him. He officiates in all family rituals and represents the family in village functions. In case parents die, they live with married brothers and help them in agriculture and other household works. The issueless couple may adopt a child preferably male of his brother's'. No ceremony is followed for adaptation. The adopted child inherits and succeed the property of adopted parents. The religious role is vested with elderly male who offers homage to ancestral deities. Women do have significant role in religious sphere of family but are governed by idea of purity-pollution. According to the nature of marriage, monogamous family is predominantly found in this society, albeit, polygynous family is not completely absent. In polygynous family, first wife usually stays separately with her children and access her right over the husband's property. In case of half-sibling each having equal rights over the property of father. Daughter leaves her father's house after her marriage and lives with her husband. She accepts the phratry (*bans*) and *Barag* (clan) of her husband's family and her children are reckoned through her in-law's line. So, they are patrilocal in nature.

Kinship is defined as the relation between members either through blood or marriage. In this context, the kin relation among Chuktia Bhunjia can be comprehended in two directions: (1) father's family of origin; (2) mother's family of origin. Kins are addressed in classificatory terms except the descriptive kins. The kinship system of Chuktia Bhunjia is classificatory, but have been influenced by local Odia and Chhattisgarhi terms due to their habitational character. The Chuktia Bhunjia have also developed certain ideal pattern of kinship behaviour concerning kinship behaviour. The notable being the joking relationship, avoidance relationship and teknonymy. As regard joking relationship, it is reported between a man and his elder brother's wife (*bahu*), a woman and her husband's younger brother (*diar*), a man and his wife's younger sister (*sali*), a man and his brother's wife's sister (*sangata*). It is also seen between *samdi* and *samdein*, a man and his granddaughter (*naten*), usually daughter's daughter and a woman and her grandson (*nati*). Since Chuktia Bhunjia practice widow marriage, first preference is usually given to deceased's younger brother. So, any intrigue relationship or joking between a woman and her husband's younger brother is not taken seriously so as a man and his

wife's younger sister (*Sali*). Since each category can enter into the matrimonial relationship, it is not restricted rather provides great amusement and source of a good deal of joke. Joking is also reported between cross-cousins who may enter into a potential marriage relationship.

There is strict adherence of avoidance between certain category of kins that are noticed between a man and his wives of younger brothers (*bheba*), a woman and her husband's elder brother (*dedsusur*). In both the categories, a man or woman avoid all the real and classificatory *bheba* or *dedsusur* respectively. Avoidance is maintained in term of verbal communication, utterance of name, touching the food, dresses and bed and other personal articles. As a rule, a man must not stay together with *Bheba*. Any violation of avoidance rule requires a purificatory ritual where an affine or a person from Barik clan sprinkles water and milk over the violates in a *Sunari* (*Cassia fistula* L.) leave. A coconut is also offered to the home deity to forgive them. A similar rule governs a man and his wife's elder sister (*dedsas*) and a woman and her younger sister's husband (*banjuae*) but not rigid as the case of *dedsusur-bheba* relationship. Both can talk from distance and in go-between. *Banjuae* can accept food and water from her from distance. Similarly, it is interesting to note that since the Chuktia Bhunjia practice cross-cousin marriage, the relation between a person and his mother's brother's daughter (MBZ) become avoidance if the girl marries to that person's younger brother that was earlier joking. There are certain rules in Chuktia Bhunjia society where certain category of kin are restricted to utter the name of few classes of kin group. For instance, father's younger brother's wife (*kaki*) does not utter the name of her husband's elder brother's children rather give them a name of her choice. Younger brother's wife also cannot name her husband's elder brother's children. There is also restriction on the part of mother-in-law to utter the name of son-in-law. Similarly, neither brother-in-law nor sister-in-law utter anybody's name. Sister-in-law is also prohibited from taking the name of husband's younger brother and sister.

As regard to marriage, two state of marriage ritual is evident among the Chuktia Bhunjia: pre-puberty marriage (*Kanbiha/Kundabara*) and actual marriage. In first category of marriage i.e., a group of girls from a homogenous clan, aged between five to ten, formally marry to an arrow or a branch of Mahul (*Madhuca indica*) as her token husband before attaining puberty. Girl menstruating before this rite is considered impure and her social status become permanently low. She is believed to bring many social ignominies to the family. Thus, parents always try to perform this rite as early as possible to avoid such misfortune. If it is the case, the girl is tied to a Mahul tree and until her maternal uncle rescues her, no one interfere there. The post-rescued phase of her life is so tough as she can neither participate in religious functions, village festivals nor enter to sacred sites, grooves and *Lalbangla*. Those girls find difficulties to get marry as their customary law does not allow anyone to marry them. However, no strict rules are attached to the girl after *Kanbiha*, this rite

is viewed as a pre-socialization stage where girls are suggested to wear a small saree locally called *Kapta* and to eat food inside *Lalbangla*. The second category of marriage, i.e., actual marriage, is having a definite structure. Endogamy is commonly practised. Monogamy is common form of marriage though polygyny is not absent. In polygynous marriage, both wives have equal rights over husband's properties. Cross-cousin marriage is prevailing form of marriage among them. There is no restriction of marriage between Chuktia Bhunjia and Chinda Bhunjia but a rite called *Dudhpen* is performed where an affine wash the mouth of bride with milk before she is accepted as a member of the groom's group. A feast is given to the community and marriage ceremony is performed as celebrated when bride is taken from Chuktia group. But the girl after marriage must follow the rules of Chuktia Bhunjia group.

Generally, three kinds of marriage are socially accepted: (1) arrange marriage; (2) *Udhlia* (marriage by elopement) and (3) *Paisamudi* (marriage by force). Arrange marriage is performed with the consent of parents of both boy and girl but after matching the *jatak* (date and times of birth and puberty of girl) that ends with three stages: (1) *Mandpia* (bond between two families where some bottles of wine are given to the girl's parents and relatives); (2) *Mangen* (fixation of date of marriage and giving bride price). Bride price consists of few sarees, ornaments made of gold and rice, pulses, sugar, tea, bidi, etc. as fixed by village council. (3) the actual ceremony. *Udhlia* is seldom reported which is approved by village council after a community feast and monetary penalty provided the girl is from the marriageable category. 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. Besides, another form of marriage, locally called *Khotla biha*, is also often reported when any unmarried boy marries a girl from a permitted clan without the notice of parents. In such case, boy's parents go to an affine family who is having a mango plant. Since both the boy and girl are already married with their own consent and have stayed together for few days somewhere nearby village or in any relative's home; boy's parents do not arrange for any ceremony as done in marriage by negotiation rather the boy marries to a mango tree signifying the daughter of a marriageable clan followed by a community feast.

The Chuktia Bhunjia have instituted certain rules concerning marriage, bride wealth, divorce. The important rule noted about restriction of marriage within clan breaching of which is resulted to excommunication of the couple and purification of parents of couple and expiation of community feast. So it is taboo among them to marry between people having similar mythical origin and worshipping of common ancestor and totemic object. The marriage outside the unacceptable category is taken seriously. If Chuktia Bhunjia girl marries to non-Chuktia Bhunjia boy especially Scheduled Caste and Muslim, she is permanently excommunicated and parents of the girl are asked to undergo a

purification ritual followed by a feast and monetary penalty. A member of Barik clan with the present of affine group and village council usually purifies the accused clan people by sprinkle milk and water in *Sunari* leave. Similar is the case of Chuktia Bhunjia boy marrying a non-tribal girl but its' acceptance depends on who you are! For instance, a Chuktia Bhunjia boy married to a Goud girl (milkman community) in Cherechuan village. His parent undergone purification and the couple were allowed to stay in the house but they can neither touch the *Lalbangla* nor participate in any community festivals. The children born to them are ritually taken to the father's clan but thereafter they cannot take food cooked by their parents rather they are taken care by other members of the genetal family but expenditure is bear by the parents of the children. If Chuktia Bhunjia boy marries to a girl belonging to Scheduled Caste, Muslim or other lower castes like Lohra (iron meltor), the couple are permanently excommunicated. In such case, girl's parents smash the *Lalbangla* and throw out all the mud vessel. The boy's parents have to undergo a similar kind of purification, besides monetary penalty of Rs. 10, 000 and a community feast.

In Chuktia Bhunjia code of ethics, running away with another man's wife is considered as sin. The accused is penalized but nature of penalty depends on duration of marriage. For example, if the marriage is a year or two years old, then compensation is conceded to the afflicted husband by the abductor. The breach of exogamy rule is severely punished. The incestuous marriage is no way unacceptable to them but the village council tries to solve it by requesting both boy and girl. If they refuse to compromise, then they are permanently excommunicated. The case of elopement with a girl after knotting ceremony is also summon publicly and the accused person is imposed monetary penalty of ¹ 1051 by the village council along with a feast and instruction to return items to boy parents given as bride wealth. The practice of levirate marriage is also seldom reported if younger brother gives his consent, otherwise she continues to stay in her house along with her children, if any, and avail the right to land and properties. Sororate marriage is also permitted. The incidence of divorce is hardly reported among them but if any, the issue is brought to the notice of village council for summon. According to their divorce rule, all items given to her during marriage are returned. So the items given to the bride during marriage are listed in a paper. One copy of the same is given to the groom parents in the presence of their respective affine groups from both sides. The divorcee is permitted to marry but has to obey customary rules like not entering into *lalbangla*, splashing the abode of deities and eating sacrificed meat and taking part in any community festivals.

Properties and Inheritance

The Chuktia Bhunjia of study area usually possess two types of properties: individual and common property. The possession and inheritance

of each property is governed by their instituted rules. The individual properties- movable and immovable- has a gender dimension. The immovable property that are seen in term of land and house are owned by and inherited to male members only. The property is partitioned equally by the sons except the elder one who gets a higher share than others. No females, including widows, are reported to have hold land patta (land entitlement document) in their name. The clan deities are even shared among the brothers. The moveable properties that are seen in term of jewellery is inherited to both son and daughter equally. The reason for not giving any immovable parental property to girls is that, girls after marriage are considered member of her husband's household and the village and therefore become outsider even if girls get marry in the same village. Thus, property getting transferred to an outsider is seem to be a mere excuse to retain 'male line' over the property and hence the society.

Despite aware of their land entitlement, no daughters are found to have claimed parental properties in any Chuktia Bhunjia village. The only reason if daughter is not asking for parental property is that by refusing a share, she wants to strengthen the bond with the natal family and ensure a regular flow of gift, financial and moral support at the time of crisis. The property of widow not having any offspring is also transmitted to deceased brothers or deceased brother's son after her death. A couple not having male child also give a patch of land to nearest agnate especially brother or brother's son who have only right to bury their corpus after death. Even if their daughter wants to keep the property, especially land, as long as she is alive, a small patch of land is still given to her father's brother' son for that purpose simply because daughters are customarily not permitted to bury the dead. Since there is also a provision of marriage by service (Ghar-jwai), after the death of his wife's father, he is entitled to cultivate the land till he is alive. He ceases to be the owner of the said land after his wife's death. The property is then inherited by the nearest agnates of his wife's father. The daughter's son does not inherit the property. So, it may not be wrong saying land has the clan dimension in which land property is not at all transferred to other clans rather remain within the clan even if daughter marries within the village.

Authority, Power and Rank

The Chuktia Bhunjia are found to politically organize themselves in a definite way for smooth functioning of the society. Their political structure reveal that each village has a traditional governing body consisting of Gountia (village headman), Munsu and Gana. Gountia, the village headman, hereditary by nature, is entrusted with a substantial authority and myriad responsibilities to maintain the tranquility in the village. Traditionally, his role is to preside over the village meeting and persuade the matter to public for decision. He plays a crucial role in all village festivals, ritual and in settling village disputes.

Being hereditary, the post is transmitted only to male heir and in case of no male child, it is pass on to the nearest male kin largely brother or brother's son after his death. Yet, his widow is tagged with the female version of position occupied by her husband. Mungsi is the messenger of the village. He takes message to other villages when needed. Gana (a person from scheduled caste), is also part of Chuktia Bhunjia's traditional village structure whose role is only to assemble villagers to the village meetings. He is the informer to the Gountia regarding the offence, and the general situation of the village. The post being hereditary, his family is given a few acres of cultivable land for their survival. Besides, he is also given few grains, especially paddy at the end of the harvesting season for his rendered service.

At community level, they have other two centralized political structures: village council and inter-village council, each having a group of people representative, usually male, with authoritative power. Yet, kinship based political structure always constitutes a primary unit in adjudicating decision regarding conflicts where an affine is first consulted to settle the dispute. It is reported that each clan affiliate with other one or two clans who usually cooperate each other in the matter of social interaction, dispute settlement and performance of lifecycle rituals that include childbirth, puberty, marriage and mortuary. The village council (Panch), an independent political unit, is existed in all villages with its own representatives: Sabhapati (president), Upa sabhapati (vice-president), Sachib (secretary) and Dakua (messenger). The governing members of a village council is composed of a group of elderly male persons from each clan residing in a particular village. Sabhapati presides over the meeting. Upa Sabhapati assists Sabhapati in all administrative matter and can preside over the meeting in the absence of Sabhapati. Sachib maintain the record and writes the minute of meeting whereas Dakua circulate the notice about meeting on behalf of Sabhapati. The role of Panch is to settle disputes concerning marriage, divorce, land, family conflicts, etc. and to control any deviant behaviour reported in the villages according to instituted customary laws. The village council sits as and when needed. It is obligatory for all the villagers to remain present in the meeting and any case to be summoned is decided by the members of village council in the presence of other elderly male members of village participate in the meeting. No females are encouraged to take part in the village council meeting. In case their presence is required, they go back after presenting their issue. The council does not work in isolation. If any matter is unsolved in the village council, it is taken to intervillage council (Samaja)- council of ten villages- for discussion and judgement.

Thus, intervillage council is an extended village councils having similar governing body structure as village council who are unanimously selected by the members of representative village councils. Being formed by assembling village councils, preferably village located closed to each other, it is territorial in nature. At present, three intervillage councils are in operation in the study

area each having similar by-law. The head of the intervillage council is entrusted with power to hold meeting as and when required and presides over the council meeting. The other office bearers-Upa sabhapati, Sachib and Dakua - also perform their substantial roles and are selected on the basis of work experience and wisdom. The authorities enjoy fixed term of power. The council also sits in every five years to settle pending works and to discuss various matters including reconstruction of office bearer, if required. The council also sits in emergency if village council fails to settle any disputes. All the intervillage councils are assembled to form a larger political body known as Bad Samaja at district level, with similar composition of membership as intervillage council, whose role is to settle the matter where intervillage council fails to resolve.

Furthermore, the religious personnel- *Pujhari* (priest), *Chhatria*, *Kotria* and *Dihari* (Shaman) also constitute important parts of the social structure of Chuktia Bhunjia. The first three are hereditary and served for a male member belonging to specific clan. Each personnel occupies specific place in their social ordering and exercise their duties to maintain their statuesque. Besides, *Gana* (a person from scheduled caste) albeit does not belong to their structural fold; his presence is required at functional level who serve them in beating drum during village festivals and thus is intrinsically linked to their social structure. This position is also hereditary but is paid annually in term of kind by the villagers. The family occupying the position is also given a patch of land by the villagers in his name.

Institutions of Social Intercourse

The Chuktia Bhunjia have instituted sets of rules about interaction with people within and outside society that are reported largely in relation to food taboo, dress patterns, employment, access to healthcare service, collection of MFPs, etc. Regarding food taboo, it was found that they are customarily restricted to eat boiled rice and always eat raw rice (*arua*). In case they wish to eat boiled rice, it must be boiled in their *Lalbangla*. The girls after *Kanbiha* are socialized to consume food cooked in *Lalbangla*. The school going children are suggested to take food at home that become rigid after puberty. Pubertal girls are restricted to have food cooked outside their *Lalbangla*. Thus, it is a usual practice among them that when they step out of their home for a day or two, they take utensil and consumable food items with them. Even when they go to local market, they never purchase any cooked items. Married women do follow the same rules. The daughters after marriage are also restricted to eat cooked by their parents. As a practice, during marriage ceremony, before the bride is taken to the marriage spot (*modo*), her elder brother takes her to *Lalbangla* and asks to bow her head to the deities by throwing a fist of turmeric mixed rice besides, suggesting her not to enter to *Lalbangla* thereafter because daughters after marriage are considered 'outsiders'. Her acceptance of food cooked in parental *Lalbangla* is believed to defile the sanctity of her husband's

clan. With such beliefs, So, if she visits, she cooks food for herself in the courtyard. It is also customary among them that during community festivals, unmarried young always cook and serve food to the people.

Anyone going outside for longer period is also considered outsider and is required to go through a purification. It is believed that person going outside for longer become pollutant by coming into contact with various people. Their entrance to house in general and *Lalbangla* in particular may bring misfortune in the family. Thus, they need to be purified. Since last few years, CBDA encourages Chuktia Bhunjia to participate in the *Adivasi Mela* (Tribal Festival) held at Bhubaneswar, the state capital not only to sell their tribal products but to expose them to the outside world. In a formal interaction with them at *Adivasi Mela*, it was learnt that they are accommodated in hostel along with other tribal participants across state. They are given few utensils to cook their food. Over the question on how the Chuktia Bhunjia participants specially women and girls manage their food during festival owing to their cultural restriction on food consumption, one of the participants shared that although they share the room to stay often with other tribals- male and female separately- they cook their individual food. They either use the utensils given to them or brought from home. Often reaching to home after festival, they do not enter to house or *lalbangla* directly rather keep their luggage in the courtyard and go to river or pond to take bath. The used clothes are washed. An affine is then invited to purify him/her in their respective home who gives a spoon of water and milk in a *Sunari* leave to the person to drink as a form of purification. The affine also sprinkles the same over the person before allowing them enter into the *Lalbangla*.

It is taboo for the Chuktia Bhunjia women to touch *Lalbangla* during perceived pollution periods- child birth, monthly menstruation and puberty. The blood discharged during these periods is perceived being impure and may taint the deities. This is the reason why a delivering woman is secluded to the main house or a special hut meant for delivery for 01 months. No other members of the family, except her husband or a birth attendant, are allowed to touch her. The father of newborn cuts the umbilical cord with an arrow and buries it in front of main house to avoid it from being used for black magic or sorcery. After a month they perform a purification rite called *Chhati*, where an invited female affine takes her to *Lalbangla*. Her entrance into the *Lalbangla* signifies her freedom from pollution. Similar is the case of pubertal girl and menstruating women (*Maskia*), who are prohibited to touch *Lalbangla* and other family members for 01 month and five days respectively. The pubertal girls are assisted either by father's sister or mother's brother's wife (*Aata*) during this period. She is served in a leave plate which is put into garbage after eating. She takes bath in the kitchen garden in the early morning before any person gets up. After a month, her *Aata* takes her to the river stream with a mud vessel filled with millets. The girl washes all her cloth in the vessel with hot water. She

then goes around the hearth seven time and break the vessel near the river after which she takes bath by applying soap and oil-mixed turmeric. She wears a now cloth and on return she goes straight to mother's brother house or related to her in classificatory term. On reaching there, her *Aata* gives a brass pot filled in with water which she carries to her home. After bowing her head to the elders, she directly enters into the *Lalbangla* starts cooking food in a new vessel. She thereafter follows the social norms. Similar notion of pollution is attached to menstruating woman that last for five days. During this period, she is banished from household chores, MFPs collection, entering *Lalbangla*, cow-shed and participating in any cultural rites until purified. On fifth day, after taking bath, she directly goes to an affine house, where any un-pollutant woman gives her a palm full of water in a leave to drink as a form of purification. Un-pollutant here means those women who are not menstruating during that time. The Chuktia Bhunjia are also perceived being pollutant in case of death of any person in a family. The concerned family does not cook food for three days and is served by affine families. It is known as *Mithipej*. On 3rd day, they throw mud vessels, wash their clothes and splash *Lalbangla* with red soil and cow-dung. They invite their bilateral kins and affine to perform a rite called *pitachaba* where an affine gives a fingertip of crushed neem (*Azadirachta indica*) leave to all clan members of deceased clan family to eat as a token of purification. He also purifies the *Lalbangla* by sprinkling water mixed with cow milk. Until this rite is performed, the deceased clan families are abstained from any form of social interaction or participation in community festival.

Some peculiarities are marked in the dress patterns of women. Women and pubertal girl are restricted wearing petticoat and blouse. Girls after *Kanbiha* are advised to wear *Kapta* (a small saree). The married woman blessed with child is obliged to wear white saree otherwise considered disobedient to cultural rules. There are two reasons behind it: (1) color saree is the seat of Goddesses; (2) Goddess *Sunadie* was once scolded by her big brother Budharaja because of her illicit relationship a man of Brahmin caste. She was then hibernated herself to get rid of insult. At that time, she was wearing white saree which is being followed by Chuktia Bhunjia women.

Anyone Chuktia Bhunjia who adopts Chinda Bhunjia culture for certain periods and wish to come back to the Chuktia Bhunjia group has to go for purification followed by a community feast. Prasad Mallick of Barkot village live with his wife and three daughters closed to his brother. He married to a Chinda woman. His wife followed the Chuktia Bhunjia culture for long. As his daughters grew up, he wanted his daughter to go to the school and mingle with other caste people. His family started wearing foot wear and colour dress as wear by Hindu caste people. His family now keep them apart from entering into the *Lalbangla* of his brother and other neighbouring Chuktia Bhunjia. He expressed his willingness to come back to the Chuktia Bhunjia often approaching his daughter's marriage as he wants his daughters to marry in Chuktia Bhunjia group.

There are other sets of norms surrounding the social structure of the Chuktia Bhunjia society that customarily control people's behaviour and action. The women and girls, for example, are prohibited from wearing of footwear. No Chuktia Bhunjia are customarily allowed to use cot to sleep instead they sleep in a self-made mat simply because cot is believed as shrine of goddess *Sunadei*. They also do not sit over pestle considering it a seat of deities. Girls after puberty must not touch the plough till marriage. It does not mean that she is allowed to touch plough after marriage. Restriction is still attached with her. It is only on marriage day, they are ceremonially asked to touch the plough as the process goes like; once the bride is taken to the groom house, priest brings a plough to the marriage spot and asked the bride to sit over it and the groom behind her. Priest then pour turmeric powder over their head. It does not signify social acceptability of bride to touch the plough thereafter rather provides a legitimacy to the groom to plough bride's body which they equate with the land in the course of production of children equate with seeds to social survival. Thus, customary laws do not allow women to touch the plough. Therefore, family having no male member always depends on other male to plough her agriculture land either in hire or mutual exchange of labour force. Interesting to observe that in case a plough falls down or a woman has to shift it to a different place, she cannot touch it but can take the help of a male, even small boy, to do that for her. The restriction has two strands: one, because plough is considered sacred agricultural implement which supports their livelihood and food, so her touching may result crop loose or draught; second, ploughing is masculine character. Although no case of violence is reported because of their self realisation; any such case is expiated only through purification by sprinkling water in a *Sunari* leaf by a member of Barik clan over girl after she takes bath in river followed by offering mahua liquor to their ancestral deities and/or sacrificing a hen. Similar sacred belief is also attached with the bow and arrow that restrict women from touching these except in two occasions: *Kanbiha* and marriage. In the former, a girl formally marries an arrow or Mahul tree in which the girl is asked to go around the marriage spot for seven times holding an arrow while in the later, during marriage practice, they keep idols of wild animal made up of paddy straw in the courtyard. The groom shoots the animals with an 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.

The women and grown-up girls are also restricted taking up any form of government jobs otherwise have to answer to the village council. Anyone not mandate to this restriction is perceived as 'outsider' and result to temporary excommunication of the family or the accused woman from the social interaction until a communal feast is expiated. The best examples of this kind were documented in Barkot and Junapani village. Tribeni Chhatria, who was once put out of the tribe because of her schooling, is matriculated. She married Birsingh Mallick of Barkot village. Being educated and eligible for teachership,

she was offered to work with Educational Complex, a residential school established by Government of Odisha at Salepada in 2008 and monitored by Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA) with free hostel facility. All the teachers appointed in the school are from the Chuktia Bhunjia communities. Birsingh is also matriculated and wanted to work in the Educational Complex. Villagers did not create any sensation when Birsingh worked there. It was with Tribeni only. Birsingh's father was asked to answer the village council for violating the customary rule. Later, it was summoned that Tribeni can neither participate in the community festival nor any functions until she is ready to come back to the tribe by herself following a ceremonial purification. At the family level, she is restricted entering into the Lalbangla because of her job but can eat food cooked there provided her left out food and used plates are not taken to the Lalbangla. Tribeni's sister-in-law was later put in Ekalaya Model Residential School (EMRS), Khariar Road, to study high school who also shared the similar story and thankful to Tribeni for encouraging her to further study. She also wishes to challenge their cultural stigmatisation and encourage others to study. Her father-in-law said that his daughter will be purified before marriage by Barik clan in the presence of affine as done in other instances followed by a community feast. She would, thereafter, be considered a member of Chuktia Bhunjia group. I met her after she became a mother. Asking her about the status of her child, she being outsider, it was learnt that her children need not have to face any social disabilities because of her, rather can lead normal life as their father. But the family requires to expiate a feast to the village council before the child is taken as a member of the tribe.

Although, no strict rules are structurally attached about the attainment of education, the norms associated with *Lalbangla*, *Kanbiha* and puberty (wearing *Kapta*, eating food cooked in *Lalbangla*, washing feet before entering *Lalbangla* and so on) always enforce people not to send their girl children for schooling. Yet, unlike working woman, school going girls are perceived being 'outsiders' and therefore, secluded from the social interaction.

The access to healthcare among the Chuktia Bhunjia is also shaped by the sets of perceptions. Despite having a Primary Health Centre (PHC) at Sunabeda village, the Chuktia Bhunjia women in particular, mandated by customary norms, rely on herbalists for any kind of disorders. It is customary among them that no Chuktia Bhunjia women are allowed to consult any trained doctors or nurses as men, considering his or her as 'outsiders' for their caste background, can even during childbirth and gynecological disorders otherwise the concerned family has to answer the village council and may face social ostracism. Because of such rules, no institutional delivery is reported among them and is done by traditional birth attendant (*dai*) otherwise the accused family has to answer the village council often expiated by feast or monetary penalty. In Sunabeda village, Banita (disguised name) had a hectic labour pain during childbirth. She was unable to bear the pain and the birth attendant also

could not handle the case. So, her husband immediately asked the female nurse available in the village. Nurse injected her pain killer and helped her to deliver the baby. After 7 days, the family was asked to explain the reason for violating the norms and to give monetary penalty in money and a feast to village council as purification punishment. The family was incapable to pay these and was temporarily out casted. According to the Chuktia Bhunjia code of law, anyone consulting doctors for women-related disease including childbirth is considered disobedience to culture and perceived as Hinduisation. The accession register of PHC shows that no Chuktia Bhunjia women have approached the PHC in last few years. Those male members approached are mainly for ailments such as malaria, cough and sneezing.

Changing Institutions, Changing Structure

The social institutions of Chuktia Bhunjia are found to have been tremendously changing over a period of time due to number of indigenous and exogenous forces. The foremost change noticed is in their family compositions. It is estimated that during 2007 to 2019, nuclear family has been increased in almost all villages. For example, number of family during 2007 was estimated to 519 which increased to 614 in 2010 and 938 in 2019 (Ota et al. 2020). Such increase in the genealogical composition among them may not related merely due to birth and death of members or the marriage and divorce of its members. The members of one family, even the unmarried, may leave a family and join another whose head is agnatically related to him. A couple living with one of their married sons may leave that family and join another married son's family. In some cases, a man may join family of one married son and his wife may join another married son. This flexibility offered to the members thus leads to changes in the number of different family types. A typical case study can be illustrated here. Sidheswar Majhi migrated to Bhaosil village from Sunabeda to cultivate his father's land who had once come to Sunabeda due to marriage by service. His father has three son and two daughters. Sidheswar got the land of his father as share after all brother married. So he had to move to Bhaosil along with his wife and two sons and one daughter. After his father's death in 2010, his widowed mother joined him as other two brothers refused to take care of her due to their poor condition turning his family nuclear extended type. Two sons also got married and lived with their family in the same village. His daughter also after marriage wanted to settled in the same village with her husband. So, it is a definite tendency for married children to build their house closed to their parents. Still, in the large villages like Sunabeda and Salepada, kin group cluster together and build their house in some distance from those of the other families that usually lead to increase in the numbers of family.

Such usual increase in family composition among Chuktia Bhunjia is also noticed from the increased periphery of the village that might be due to

the increased nuclear family because of the fact that son after marriage constructs his own nuclear house. Elaboration of family composition of a specific village through longitudinal observation can give clear picture in this regard. Shivrinarayanpur village is 20 years old where Damu Chhatria moved from Sunabeda as he had to cultivate an encroached land there. He made a temporary hut to watch the wildlife from crop damage. At later stage he thought to construct a permanent house as it was bit difficult to come from long way around 15 kilometers. At that time his family was nuclear in type. His younger brother followed him along with his unmarried son and daughters. Later Sanatan Barik, from Barik clan moved from Koked. He made a house little away from Damu's house. Santan later invited his son-in-law to stay with them. So he also came and constructed a new house in the same premise along with his wife, two daughter and one son. The village which had 15 households during first phase of fieldwork in 2012 has now about 40 nuclear families. Although joint family is not completely absent, the logic behind increase in such nuclear family is said to be because of their self-sufficiency economy where they want their sons to establish their own family immediately after marriage. It leads to increase in number of *Lalbangla* that determines people's livelihood, culture, behaviour and every-day interaction of people within and outside the group. So among the Chuktia Bhunjia the increase in number of nuclear families in their territory is due to migration of some families with a nuclear structure and appears to be largely due to reduced number of compound families formed on account of polygynous marriages and breaking up of joint families.

The institution of marriage is also reported to have been tremendously changed a lot many ways. The foremost being the legitimization of the marriage between some of non-marriageable categories. Marriage by elopement by younger is becoming a regular phenomenon in most of the villages either with girl of their own group or others. Certainly, the first type of case is not taken seriously except recognition of such relationship after some time. If it is with between a man and a married woman, the matter is resolved in different ways if it is within the marriageable category of kin otherwise taken very seriously. The elopement of Chuktia Bhunjia boy with non-tribal (except scheduled caste and Muslim) is although legitimized these days with regard to the sharing of house and usable materials in the household, they are neither permitted to enter into the *Lalbangla* nor participate in social interaction. The preferential marriage that was once largely prevalent among the Chuktia Bhunjia is now reported to have been gradually changing. It is said that they usually prefer their mother brother daughter (MBD) or father sister daughter (FZD) for marriage largely evoked in the first marriage. If they go for second marriage due to any causes, they simply prefer outside preferable category. Polygyny marriage is being reduced these days that was once an option in case of barren or illness of first wife or need of male child. Sometimes sororal polygyny is also reported but from three cases reported of this kind the first wife is living

separately with her children because of personal causes and is supported by her husband. Now a day, it is hardly reported among them which they believe burden for the household economy. Levirate marriage is also found to be discouraging among them as no case is reported during study period. The practice of bride wealth (*mangni*) constitutes an important part of the Chuktia Bhunjia marriage. It is reported to have been change frequently. Each territorial council fix bride price of their own. It is said that although structure remain same, nature of bride price and quantity have been changed. For example, it is now fixed for 12 *mana* rice (1 *mana* =5 kgs), 2 kgs of dal, local cigarate, sugar, tea powder, 12 sarees that was earlier limited to few quantities of rice, dal, and 4 sarees.

The traditional political structure of Chuktia Bhunjia is also reported to have been changing a little particularly in its domain of authority. The important changes reported are emergence of new political functionaries, replacement of oral laws, disappearance of kinship based political power, etc. The traditional political decision making that was vested with few clan people has been replaced with centralized territorial political groups consisting village and intervillage councils. Recently they have come up with written form of law, developed by members of inter-village council, with a modification of their customary laws related to marriage, divorce and properties. The state, democratic political structure and its authority, that include Sarpanch and ward members, are arbitrarily reported to have been influencing their political decision-making in certain matters if not exclusively related to traditional cultural domains. Nevertheless, culture-based decision making about schooling of girl child and employment of women in government sector that was once rigid is now relaxed to some extent provided the accused are adopted to alternative without affecting the value of culture as few households allow their girl children to go to the school and at the same time restrict them to enter into *Lalbangla* and eat food cooked there. The instances can be given of all those going to Educational Complex at Salepada and Chandini and Tribeni who are working as teacher and nurse respectively. So, the change in their power structure from clan to knowledge proclaim to emerge a class of power in which particular section of Chuktia Bhunjia is claimed to rule the society. Similarly, the wearing of color saree and foot wear by few women indicate their changing decision-making and customary practices that were once perceived as cultural disobedience.

Discussion and Conclusion

The narrations of different institutions constituting Chuktia Bhunjia's social structure reveal that they are organized into a definite social relationship but are shaped by territoriality, material culture and existing customary laws which, interact with each other to forms a system. Although each institution more or less upholds their primordality, their social structure is in the state

of flux and changes are evident. Contextualising these two facets, one can see that continuity is assumed to be because of fear of social ostracism, believe in supernatural punishment and loss of tradition. Although, village council is found to reinforcing the cultural preservation, people's submission to protect their cultural epitomes continue to become an instrument in this line. Yet, each institution is influenced and altered differently. The alternation of family structure in particular, noticed in term of change in composition, is found due to migration and joining of new families. It has nothing to do with the kinship; but its structure is influenced by marriage structure. The change in preferential category especially from boy side is found to have destabilized the marriage structure. Similarly, the absence of levirate marriage indicates two elements: one, widow do not want to be permanently secluded from social interaction in post-marriage life; second, they want to enjoy the land property of his deceased husband. Yet, any widow, preferably of young age, marrying a man of her choice by giving cultural penalty to the village council, is her 'silent protest' to patriarchal nature of their society.

Kinship is significantly found to have been altered its usages and terminologies along with change in marriageable category. Although no changes are reported on the old social units- phratry, moieties and clan- the changing preferential marriage has resulted to a new relationship and change in classificatory kin terms. Therefore, in certain cases a classificatory category uses different term for a same person. So, kinship terms have been losing their functional utility. Marriage distance that was once territorial-based, mostly within village or its compact area is now reported to have been changing as people are preferring to take bride from Chhattisgarh state. Thus, the village endogamy is changing its originality but resulted to a new kind of relationships among themselves.

The emergence of peasant economy due to intervention of non-tribals and migration for livelihood opportunities has not only transformed their economic behaviour but has resulted into change in family structure. The migration led new economic behaviour- evident from the use of market products usually footwear and color dresses- also challenges the dress taboo of Chuktia Bhunjia. Certainly, at the beginning such adaptation led to punishment, these has now become a regular phenomenon among the younger generation and therefore a clear indication of their eagerness to assimilation and transition. The shift from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture and the adaptation of new technology is also found to have altered their economic arrangement and creating a new social order among them by halving between those adopting and non-adopting to such changes. The migration-led economic integration of Chuktia Bhunjia has resulted to rapid linguistic integration and new religious faith on their part in recent times. The economic relationship that was once based on reciprocity is becoming individualist and losing its arrangements.

The gendered nature of Chuktia Bhunjia is clearly marked from

seclusion of women to participate in various socio-economic spheres including that of political decision making, collection of MFPs during pollution periods, attainment of education, etc. These are assumed to be patriarchal. But the protagonists of these rules argue in its favour as a pathway to 'balancing male line' and maintaining 'sacredness' of their economy. The adaptation of foot wear, schooling system and color saree due to external influence indicate their inclination towards modernization, yet they strike a balance between culture and modernity by devoiding the self-constructed 'outsiders', including that of school going girls and working women, to enter into the *Lalbangla*. Commensality do have significant aspects of the social structure Chuktia Bhunjia. No intervention is able to influence their food culture yet. Gender nature of food consumption remain static because of their submissive notion of purity and pollution. The Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA) that was established to facilitate development to Chuktia Bhunjia is found to as one of the pathways to bring change in their social institutions. Along with economic transformation, CBDA has helped them to increase the female literacy from 18.27% in 2001 (CBDA 2001) to 20% in 2017 (Ota et al. (2020). The establishment of Educational Complex for girl children at Salepada in 2008-09 has attracted many Chuktia Bhunjia girls to schooling system. Their realisation of the value of education after the appointment of two Chuktia Bhunjia sisters by government as teacher and health worker molded many of them to send their girl to school. This is a significant change observed so far among them. The entry of non-tribal to the sanctuary, out-migration of people and increasing education level also cannot be ignored behind present transition of Chuktia Bhunjia. Yet, the submission of Chuktia Bhunjia to preserve their primordality- which is found in term of restriction of female at different spheres- indicate that acculturation is an automatic process and is hindered by static custom and traditions as revealed from the behaviour associated with *Lalbangla* including that of food consumption, schooling and access to modern healthcare institutions.

The traditional political units- village and intervillage councils- although are functioning to intercede matters associated largely marriage-related disputes, have been restructured according to the changing socio-political conditions of their community. The adaptation of formal state laws in certain issues has weaken the customary governance system. The nature of law concerning the violation of societal rules and associated punishment are modified now. The punishments that were earlier atoned with a community feast or arrangement of local brew to the members of village council are now imposed in monetary way.

The changes so far the Chuktia Bhunjia experience are multifaced. Contextualising such changes especially in term of 'order' and 'integration' (Oommen 2010:2), change among them cannot be simply conceptualized as 'process' but product of changes is 'self-revealing' (Dwyer and Minnegal 2010:

631). Nonetheless, the social phenomenon reinforcing such changes are found to create conflict especially when one group favour the essence of change and other oppose it. The Chuktia Bhunjia across Sunabeda wildlife sanctuary once met at Salepada in 2015 to discuss about whether to adopt those changing characteristics of their people, besides modification of existing customary rules. The self-realization of being stigmatized because of their low literacy, traditional attires and other customary practices have been underpinning few sections of Chuktia Bhunjia to assimilate themselves to the Hinduized culture. Yet, the fear of excommunication and loosing of cultural value remain primordial tools to arrest such integration whereby they hitherto remain at their customary tradition. The incidence of 2012 when defense personnel touched their *Lalbangla* in the name of naxal operation and subsequent resistance by Chuktia Bhunjia continue to assert their distinctiveness by clinging to their primordial practices. Yet, the pristine state of their culture and institutions being subjective, the primordial behaviour is found to as a tool towards resisting change.

The ethnographic facts collected for this study reveals that changes in the economy inevitably lead not only to important changes in demographic structure of the community and genealogical compositions of the individual domestic unit. But whatever changes noticed among them are both 'adaptable' and 'transformative' (Dwyer and Minnegal 2010: 631) In adaptable change, functional relationship of institutions remain static whereas in transformative change, qualitative changes are reported within a structure with a total absence of old features. Although no revolutionary changes are noticed among them, but their resistance against the touching of *Lalbangla* by the defense personnel indicates a form cultural revolution towards preserving their primordiality. The changes in their institutions of family, marriage and kinship also explain the adaptive response of the Chuktia Bhunjia tribe and strength of the forces operating towards changes. Now all those changes are found to have been reinforced as a system in this society. It does not mean that the evolved system is constant rather tend to change in the process of their adaptation to new avenues of government including state intervention. Contextualizing such situations, it can be said that the Chuktia Bhunjia negotiate with the forces encompassing changes in the social institutions but together compromise with the existential situations. The structural stereotypes that were once restricting women from various socio-cultural domains, are loosen now due to self-realization of the limitation of customary laws by few of them towards community's change and development. Yet, majority are submissive to those culture to uphold their identity. Nevertheless, their ability to adopt to the new cultural practices and submission to customs indicate that they strike a balance between tradition and modernity.

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