

## **TRIBALS IN THE CHANGING SCENARIO: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDY ON MANKIRDIA NOMADIC TRIBE OF MAYURBHANJ DISTRICT, ODISHA**

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*Odisha in India is known as one of the largest tribal-dominated states with diverse tribal population. The Economic Survey 2010-11 at the state assembly has claimed that Odisha state has achieved 9.57% development against the national average of 7.79%; at the same time, the state has witnessed a wide range of regional and social disparities in development failing to address the economic and social constraints of the tribal groups of scheduled districts of Odisha. Although the state and central government have introduced an immense number of tribal development programmes and schemes, in reality, they have failed to reach the targeted population in many ways. The question remains whether there are flaws in the scheme, or a lack of proper implementation of tribal development policies, or a lack of awareness. The reasons may be numerous; however, few effective actions have been undertaken at the grass-root level to curb the crisis. The Mankirdia who are Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of Mayurbhanj district are nomadic in nature. The government in recent time has tried to settle the tribal groups by providing various tribal developmental schemes and programmes. The current paper deals with the case-study that has tried to critically analyze the impact of development programmes on Mankirdias on their transit phase from nomadic to settled living in the Mankirdia colony. The paper further draws attention to the need of anthropologists, anthropological methods and approaches for the formulation and better implementation of the tribal development programs and schemes.*

*Keywords: Mankirdia Tribe-Odisha, PVTG-Mankirdia, Odisha Tribes.*

### **INTRODUCTION TO ANTHROPOLOGY OF DEVELOPMENT**

Anthropology as a discipline that largely deals with the science of man endeavours to study man in his totality. The subject has helped to understand people and society and various social relationships. With the pace of time, anthropological research and studies started to change the human situation rapidly. Thereby 'Science of man' became the 'service of man' (Bhowmick, 1987). Progressively welfare and development activities were initiated by many anthropologists. Applied anthropology and action anthropology have become watchwords of the day with anthropologists playing a major role as social engineers or architects in the administrative activities. Now anthropologists

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have taken and are still taking foremost role in the development process in the society. However, the involvement of anthropologists in the matter of development of the nation has now become significant. Many of the anthropologists are now involved in the pertinent governmental and non-governmental organizations and projects working for the betterment of the human population. Looking at the present need of anthropology as a subject in academics and anthropologists as development catalysts in particular, it is most needed to strengthen the discipline as a whole. According to Fardon, Binsbergen, and Dijk (1999) anthropology of development is merely a way of carrying out empirical field enquiries leading to new ways of understanding social phenomena, based on the contemporary objects. Bennett and Bowen (1988) stated that anthropology of development is not an independent discipline; it is a relationship between research and action, be it relevance of research to action or integration of research to action. It is nothing but a fundamental anthropology of development that investigates the practices and conceptions of the actors concerned. 'Therefore, development should embrace by fundamental anthropology as an object that deserves scientific attention, methodological vigilance, and conceptual innovation. Development is omnipresent, inevitable, and presents some specific characteristics.' (Kurane, 2012). *Bottom of Form* The term "development" indicates the overall improvement in the quality of life. The term development is well perceived by many anthropologists; according to Bhowmick (1987) Development is a process of 'gradual unfolding', 'growth' or 'stage of advancement'. He opined that none of the society is static; all of them have related movements through adjustments and interactions, either with nature or with different groups of people in and around.

However, development in tribal regions has remained a challenge since time immemorial. The anthropological school of thought in reference to tribal development says that any development for tribal communities should be along the lines of their genius and that the programmes implemented in tribal areas should have a 'tribal touch' or 'tribal bias' (Taradutt, 2001). Nevertheless, the battle of isolation and assimilation has affected tribal communities, thereby obstructing the implementation of tribal development programmes. It was understood that the progress of social development can be observed in the form of empowerment, equitable distribution of income and wealth or in the broader context of socialisation of natural resources, which can be possible only with the involvement of tribals in project formulation and implementation by working through their traditional system. The present tribal development process gives a completely different scenario; instead of involving tribals in the planning and implementation of development programmes, they are rather

blamed for the failure of developmental schemes and programmes. The concern remains within the administrative system itself; the multiplicity and complexity of the administrative machinery helps only in confusing innocent tribals. For example, tribal development schemes and poverty alleviation projects, which are certainly implemented by the Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDA) and the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) have common beneficiaries, but frequently fail to pool resources together for drawing integrated action plans; both agencies tend to work parallel to each other but in isolation (Taradutt, 2001). The needy tribal communities who fail to have access to development programmes give an open space for non-tribal communities to dominate the government machinery in tribal areas, and tribals not only feel bitter about the various welfare programmes designed for them but also get into an exploitative relationship with the local traders, contractors and police. This results in benefitting a handful of people rather than actually reaching the needy population. While tribals preserve the natural resources as life-sustaining forces, the outlook of non-tribals is one of utilitarian and short-term commercial exploitation. This disregard for tribal-nature symbiosis causes not only a threat to tribal survival but also leads to the depletion of resources in tribal regions, thus affecting nature and the environment. In this paper, I have tried to study the impact of development programmes and the schemes implemented by the Hill Kharia and Mankirdia Development Agency (HKMDA), Government of Odisha in two Mankirdia settlements, i.e., Kendumundi and Durdura in the Mayurbhanj district. I have also tried to trace the upshot of the developmental programmes and the schemes on Mankirdias livelihood and culture using the anthropological methods and approaches. The findings are based on the field work done with the Mankirdias in Mayurbhanj district of Odisha.

#### **MANKIRDIAS- A PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUP**

The Mankirdias are the most primitive nomadic tribal groups of Odisha. Mankirdias are known for their monkey-eating habits. However, the term *Birhor* or *Mankirdia* originated from the Austro-Asiatic language group; *Bir* means 'forest' and *Hor* means 'men'. The Birhor are nomadic tribal communities mainly located in northern parts of Odisha. They are hunting and food-gathering groups, which have reciprocal economic relations with their neighbouring peasants. The Birhor are addressed with various names such as in places like Kalahandi and Sundergarh, they are called *Mankidi*, whereas in Mayrubhanj and Sambalpur, they are called *Mankirdia*. There are two types of Birhors, the 'Uthal' who are nomadic and the other type of Birhor

are the 'Jagi' who are settled Birhors. The Birhors are also called as Mankedi or Mankirdia because they are known to be skilled monkey catchers (Patnaik, 2005). The Birhors (Mankirdia) in Mayurbhanj are mainly seen in Sirrampur, Thakurmunda, Thungudihi, Podadiha, Kendumundi, Durdura, Baniabasa, Uthania, Chatani and Malibasa area. As per the 1971 census, the total Mankirdia population was 3,464 in Odisha; in 1991, the population drastically decreased to 825 and further to 702 in 2001. The worrying decreasing population figures show from the five decadal census years (1961–2001) that the male population is higher than the female population. The decadal growth rate of the population is variable. In comparison to the 1961 and 1971 population, there was a 64.10% sharp decline of population. In the census year 1981, the population decreased by 44.90%.

The reason for the decrease in population could be the remarkable features of the Birhors who are constantly shifting in groups from one place to another and staying in camps known as 'Tanda'. The camps are close to the market and the peasant village. The Mankirdia (Birhor) use leaves and twigs to build their houses popularly known as 'Khumba', which is conical in shape having an oval-shaped base; the *Khumba* is usually constructed like any modern house with a bedroom, kitchen and a place for storing things. In every temporary Tanda, there has to be a 'Mukhia' or headman; a 'Dehiri' or priest and Shaman has to be nominated through rituals. The selected leaders are there to take decisions during ritual hunting, change of Tanda and selecting a new site, as well as selecting village sacred and secular functionaries. However, the leadership changes along with the change of the Tanda (Dash, 1998). The Birhors are mostly nuclear families and are multi-clan in nature and marry within the same clan (endogamy). Early marriages are mostly seen among the Mankirdia community. However, at present, due to frequent seasonal migration by the Mankirdia, male groups are seen having partners outside the clan (exogamy). According to them evil eyes are the ones who create trouble and cause illness and death in the village.

The Birhors are known for making ropes out of the bark of Siali creepers (Lama Bayers), which are used for different purposes like making net for hunting monkeys and for making tupa (small baskets). They are also aware of weeding, transplanting and harvesting of paddy, which helps them to substitute their income. They also collect roots and tubers, fruits (kendu, jackfruit, mango, etc.) and flowers from the forest for consumption. The Birhors are technically sound in extracting oil from *Kusum* and *Mahua* seeds using traditional wooden oil press. They use nets made of Siali creepers for catching monkeys. They eat monkey flesh and sell the skin.

The major celebration observed by the Birhors are *Karma Naukhia* (first eating of maize), *Dasai parab* and *Dak Bonga*, *Sohrai*, *Makara*, *Magh Parab* and *Sendra Bonga* (for hunting). In *Pana Sankranti*, during mid-April the Birhor set camps for ritual hunting known as '*Akhanda Sikar*'; mass hunting is known to be a sign of manhood, i.e., if a youth does not kill a wild animal, he is not accepted as having attained manhood (Wright and Mohanty, 2010).

### **MANKIRDIA COLONY AT KENDUMUNDI**

In the year 1986–1987, the Hill Kharia and Mankirdia Development Agency established at Jashipur was given an order by the state government to endow with special emphasis to improve the quality of life of the Hill Kharia and Mankirdia tribes through developmental activities. At present, there are many Mankirdia colonies in various parts of Jashipur, Karanjia and Thakurmunda blocks of Mayurbhanj district, such as in Durdura, Kendumundi, Kiajhari, Podagarh, etc. As per the 1991 census, the total Mankirdia population in Jashipur and Karanjia block was 203 surrounding the Mayurbhanj district. The Mankirdia communities are still considered monkey eaters and a primitive tribal group in the district. Their population is numerically low in comparison with other primitive tribal groups of Odisha

The colony is located 10-15 km from the Karanjia town. The Mankirdia community people were brought to the Kendumundi colony 20–25 years back. The Mankirdia colony has a total of thirty-one households, along with three khadia households who had built their own houses in the colony. The colony is provided with thirty-one cemented houses, school building, aganwadi and tube well, job cards and BPL cards have also been provided to each Mankirdia family by the HKMDA.

### **Developmental Programmes Vs Mankirdia Traditional Practices**

Although the Mankirdias have started living in the cemented houses provided by the government under the *Mon Kudia* scheme, the pitiable condition of the houses has compelled the Mankirdia to construct Khumba (traditional houses) next to each house. Many villagers confessed that the modern houses do not give enough shelter to the family, and hence during summer they prefer to sleep inside the Khumba. To many women, the Khumba still remains a sacred sign of giving birth to the baby inside it. At the time of labour pain, a woman is taken to Khumba for the delivery; once the baby is born, the umbilical cord is cut using a sharp snail. The Mankirdia people are spiritual in nature; they believe in various gods and goddesses. They believe when a baby is born in a household, one of their ancestors has been reborn, and therefore the family

fortune and well-being has come back with greater potency and vitality. Although the government has tried to provide the Mankirdias with modern houses, their strong belief in tradition and culture has made the tribals not to accept modern housing and technology.

### **Government Interventions**

The government has taken painstaking efforts to provide settled colonies and livelihood options to the Mankirdia community, which will enable the tribals to shift from nomadic to settled life; the concept might seem splendid but the progression for Mankirdias is not an easy state of affairs. The Mankirdia who have lived a nomadic life for long have been unable to assimilate with the urban kind of living. The government has provided homestead land of 0.97 acres along with constructed cemented houses to the Mankirdias, which is certainly not the cure to poverty of the nomadic tribes. The government has also taken the initiative to provide livelihood training in honey brewing, jute-rope making, leaf-plate stitching, poultry farm, goats for gotary, etc., but rightfully learning the skills and leading a market economy is not the very cup of tea for the Mankirdias in Kendumundi. The villagers in Kendumundi were seen with unused poultry farms, and rolling empty honey-brewing boxes on the floor stating loud and clear the message of the failure of the livelihood schemes by the government. However, failed government schemes have made many young boys migrate outside the district to earn their living and have allowed many to get married from different communities. From all the above factors, one can say that although the settled lifestyle among the Mankirdias has started prevailing, at the same time, many yearn for the old lifestyle of hunting and gathering. Older-generation people are trying their best to preserve traditional practices of catching monkey spreading sacredness in the community. On a similar note, the Durdura Mankirdia settlement was no different from that of the Kendumundi.

### **MANKIRDIA COLONY AT DURDURA**

The Mankirdia colony at Durdura is situated 12–15 km from Jashipur town. The Mankirdia population is the smaller group among the rest of the PVTGs in Mayurbhanj district. The Mankirdia of Durdura who used to have their temporary shelter near Durdura hata (Durdura market) are now provided with a resettlement colony popularly known as 'Mankirdia sahi'. The Mankirdia colony now has twenty-five households where 0.56 acre homestead lands with constructed houses have been given to each Mankirdia family.

### **Government Intervention**

The government wanted to settle this nomadic community in various parts of Karanjia, Jashipur and Thakurmunda in the Mayurbhanj district. A colony with constructed houses along with basic facilities such as tube well, school building, community hall, cemented houses, road, goats to each household, poultry farm for livelihood, etc., was provided by the HKMDA. Although the government has provided all basic developmental facilities for minimum income to the Mankirdia, the usage of those facilities has remained unsuccessful. Various flaws in government schemes and programmes were identified, which are described below.

### **GAPS IN GOVERNMENT PLAN AND PRACTICES**

*Lack of knowledge on tribal culture:* The government has provided cemented houses to every Mankirdia family, but the houses could barely provide them shelter during summer. Moreover, the spiritual connection they have with their leaf houses (Khumba) are still under practice by the Mankirdias. The livelihood skills provided to the Mankirdia have remained a big failure. None in the community were seen making proper usage of the skills for generating livelihood options. This gives a clear indication that government officers have little knowledge of tribal culture and have not taken the Mankirdia traditional practices and culture into consideration, especially while designing the houses and implementing livelihood plans and schemes. The consequences of failure of developmental schemes have certainly created unconstructive impact on Mankirdia tribe's livelihood and culture.

*Lack of knowledge on tribal livelihood practices:* Mankirdias are hunters and gatherers by nature and having no agricultural skills; many rely on collecting Siali bark as the major source of livelihood by making rope from the Siali bark. While coming in contact with other tribal populations many Mankirdias were seen with settled agricultural skills. The government did not allot agricultural lands under forest right act to the Mankirdia due to which their livelihood remained unsustainable and less durable. Rather, the government tried its best to restore their livelihood in the form of providing advanced mode of livelihood options, such as honey-brewing boxes, poultry farm, gotary, fishery, leaf-plate stitching machines, jute and murga training. However, these equipments have remained unused by the tribals. The failure of the schemes is mainly due to the lack of proper planning of the tribal development schemes, their implementation procedure, and follow-up on the market linkage, etc. This has also deliberately put a question mark on the sustainability of the existing livelihoods of the tribals.

*Lack of market linkage and unsustainable livelihood programmes:* Mankirdia's are nature friendly, and so getting acquainted with modern equipments like honey-brewing boxes, leaf-plate machines, etc., is a difficult task for the nomadic tribes. The lack of market linkage for the income is also compelling many not to use the skills. The government should have explored more on the self livelihood options like use of Ambeda fruits by the Mankirdia i.e. processing of Ambeda fruits & using the seeds for making cork, such excellent livelihood by the Mankirdias in Kendumundi colony are gaining them more income of (Rs. 20 per kg). If those self-livelihood options can be further enhanced by the government, then the Mankirdias might have improved income generation.

*Lack of awareness on tribal development schemes:* Due to lack of awareness on development programmes and other tribal benefit schemes, many Mankirdias are unable to have access to the benefits which they are entitled to. The government or the local NGOs should take initiative to educate and bring awareness on government provisions to the Mankirdias. Although the multi-purpose coordinators who live in the community try their best to equip the villagers and train them, but constant efforts and cooperation from the line department along with the existing civil society is required for successful implementation of the development programmes.

*Lack of database on Mankirdia community population:* Owing to the nomadic lifestyle of the Mankirdias, the government has taken the initiative to provide settled lifestyles through HKMDA, but there are Mankirdias in many other tribal pockets in the district that still do not come under the purview of the micro-project. This is mainly because of the lack of available database on demographic details of the Mankirdias with the government.

## **IMPACT OF FAULTY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ON MANKIRDIAS**

*Seasonal migration:* Owing to faulty intervention of the livelihood programmes at the Mankirdia colony, many young Mankirdias are migrating out of district for work, and many old people and female groups are moving to different places for agricultural work on the lands of host villagers. Since this has become an alternative livelihood option for the Mankirdias, many have realized that agriculture can be the main source of income. However, if land and ploughs are provided by the government for agricultural work, then there can be sustainable livelihood options for the Mankirdia.

*Community conflict:* Mankirdia being a small group and one of the most primitive tribals in the district, their monkey-eating habits restrict them from



integrating with other host tribal and non-tribal communities. The special provisions of allotting housing in colonies to the Mankirdia communities are now somewhere leading to community conflicts. The Santal tribes are now trying to invade the Mankirdia's area for their own purpose. However, providing a separate colony premises to the Mankirdia will always prevent the Mankirdia's from integrating with other communities and portray them a weaker primitive group.

*Lost tribal culture:* The Mankirdias might have stepped into modern civilization, but they still long for their traditional practices somewhere within their heart. The freedom of free access to the forest to collect Siali bark, catching monkey for food and leading a nomadic life has always given them immense pleasure. The present life in the settlement colony is literally suffocating the older Mankirdias who always desire to go to the forest. Although a settled lifestyle has been injected, at present many young boys and girls are migrating to the nearby city for better livelihood options. The situation is proceeding at a snail's pace affecting tribal culture, and this will further sweep away traditional practices perpetually.

*Faulty forest right act procedure:* In order to bring fairness on historical injustice done to SC and ST, the Forest Right Act was introduced by the government in the year 2006. The Mankirdia who are nomadic in nature, and have no habits of agricultural practices, have not encroached lands for agricultural work, due to which they are legally not eligible for the individual rights. However, the forest they access for their dependency could have been given community rights title. Instead the HKMDA took initiative to facilitate the FRA process erroneously. The Mankirdia community is provided with a small patch of sal forest on road side, i.e., 42.67 ha under community rights, in Kendumundi colony at Tataa village (Tataa Jungle) where they barely get anything for their livelihood. However, the central question is how far the Mankirdias have benefited out of Forest Right Act and other development programmes.

## CONCLUSION

The necessity of development has driven the Mankirdia tribals to such an extent that many young masses are becoming seasonal migrants to earn their living; it has been observed that many young men and women are migrating to nearby urban areas for work. Although the government has introduced a large number of schemes and plans under "conservation-cum-development" for development of the Mankirdia, very little is being done to promote and integrate the traditional lifestyle of the Mankirdia. Rather, they are being

continuously persuaded to give up their traditional and indigenous way of life and assimilate into the main stream. The result is the older generations are constantly fighting with the contemporary lifestyle imposed on them by the government and losing the original indigenousness they have as hunters and gatherers. The younger ones are migrating out for better opportunities. However, the lack of awareness of the tribals with traditional manner and non-inclusive approach has paralysed the tribal development plans. Development programmes should be planned and implemented in pro-people manner as suggested by anthropologists and social scientists so that maximum benefit goes to the community needs. The inclusive approach for implementing any development program has a greater positive impact than the non-inclusive one.

Lately, there has been agreement with the Panchayat Raj Department and SC and ST Development Department by the Odisha state government for effective implementation of development plans and programmes. However, to visualise this practically, if the government would make larger effort to consult the villagers for linking up such development plans with the traditional practices of the Mankirdia, then they would be benefited more from the programmes. The present scenario of the Mankirdias is such that they can neither lead a modern life nor follow the traditional one; it is as though they are caught in a predicament.

The unending debate on gaps in tribal development programs has caught the attention of many for the few decades. However, the time has come now for the anthropologist to consolidate its place in development practice, not merely as frustrated post-project critic but as implementing partner (Sillitoe, 2002: 1).

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