

Traditional Agricultural Wisdom And Livelihood: A Brief Note On Lanjia Saora Tribal In Gajapati District

Mr. Junas Sabar

Research Scholar in Women's Studies,
Women's Studies Research Centre,
Berhampur University, Bhanja Bihar, Odisha

Abstract: The Lanjia Saora tribe are one of the most ancient tribes of Indian. Frequent references to the tribe are found in Hindu mythology. The Lanjia Saora is also an oldest known major tribe of Odisha. They are found all over the state but are largely concentrated in the highlands of Gajapati and Gunupur subdivision of Rayagada district. The Lanjia Saora inhabits the saora country in Gajapati district and Rayagada district. Lying to the western side of the Eastern Ghats, this is a picturesque territory with rolling hills, undulating meadows, lush green forests, roaring rapids, darting hill streams, enchanting waterfalls, gaping valleys and terraced paddy fields. The Lanjia Saora tribe are practiced traditional agricultural wisdoms, shifting cultivators, food gatherers and traditional hunters. Since generations living in hill slopes, mountains slope areas.

Keywords: Lanjia Saora, Agricultural pattern, Shifting Cultivators, Livelihood, terraced cultivators.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Lanjia Saora is also an oldest known major tribe of Odisha. They are found all over the state but are largely concentrated in the highlands of Gajapati District and Rayagada district. According to 2011 census the total population of the tribal in Odisha is 95, 90,756 i.e. 22.8 percent of the total tribal population of the state and Gajapati district total population is 257973 i.e. 54.5 percent of the total tribal population but the Saora tribal in Gajapati District is 84856 i.e. 32.21 percent. Numerically they are the 4th largest tribe among 62 tribes. Their sex ratio comes to 1023 females per 1000 males. Their level of literacy is 40.13 percent i.e. 56.74 percent for males and 25.74 percent for females. The Lanjia Saora inhabits the saora country in Gajapati district and Rayagada district. Lying to the western side of the Eastern Ghats, this is a picturesque territory with rolling hills, undulating meadows, lush green forests, roaring rapids, darting hill streams, enchanting waterfalls, gaping valleys, terraced paddy fields, varied flora and fauna. The lanjia saora love to live on slopes. Therefore their villages are situated on the hill slopes or foothill often inaccessible and mostly lie

hidden in forest clad hills, they select high lands and hill slopes which are free from water logging and lie near the natural water sources. They generally live in small villages. In large villages they live in several hamlets. The terraced paddy fields exhibiting the saora skill and ingenuity in contour bunding, revetments and water management radiate in all possible directions. Tribal communities have lived closely with nature, hunting, gathering and managing natural resources to meet their needs. The Lanjia Saora thrives on a subsistence economy founded on land and forest. Traditionally they were hunters, food gatherers and shifting cultivators. Since generations living in hill slopes and mountain terrains they have been deriving nourishment from the resource bases of the hills and forests in multiple of such ways satiating small needs and making a bare minimum living. The saora started preparing terraced fields by stone bunding methods in an ingenious way.

II. AGRICULTURE

The mainstay of the lanjia saora economy has in recent times taken precedence over shifting cultivation their traditional mode of subsistence, which no longer remained profitable under the cumulative impact of deforestation, ecological imbalance and decline of land man ratio due to pressure of growing population. Since cultivable land is in short supply in their area for undulating nature of hilly terrain, they have found an answer to this problem by mastering the art of preparing and cultivating terraced paddy fields on the lower hill slopes and bottoms, which they call 'saora'. They possess three kinds of farmlands- (i) Saroba the terraced paddy fields, their valuable productive assets.(ii) Baseng- the up and dry land not as fertile as the saroba and (iii) Bagada- mainly they grow rice in terraced fields and a variety of minor millets, cereals, pulses, oilseeds and vegetables in the swiddens (Bagada) and basing. Traditionally for the lanjia saora shifting cultivation (Bagada Chas) has been their way of life. Most of them possess a few patches of swiddens inherited individually to grow a mixed crop of cereals, minor millets and pulses as dictated by their food habits. In their attitude there is all the proud possessiveness of the landowners in the plains who vigorously defend their rights against any illegal encroachment. The land itself, timber, fruit trees and game animals are as dear as life to the saora. Generally speaking the focal point of all activities in saora society is land and they strongly resist land alienation. Agricultural practices mainly revolve around their saroba. The upper terraces which are dry are locally called jyanum and used for cultivating ragi (elusine corocana), biri (phaseolus mungo) and kulthi (dolichos biflorus). In the lower terraces where adequate irrigation is available they raise a second paddy crop in saroba during summer months.

III. TERRACE CULTIVATION

The Lanjia Saora tribals are expert terrace cultivators. They exhibit a high degree of indigenous skill, ingenuity and technological outfit for preparing the terrace with inbuilt water management system. The terraces work of great engineering skill are built right up the beds of the hill streams and ascend hundreds of feet from the depths of the valleys to the hill slopes and even up to the hill tops. The platform of each terrace is flat and the hill of each terrace is packed with stones.

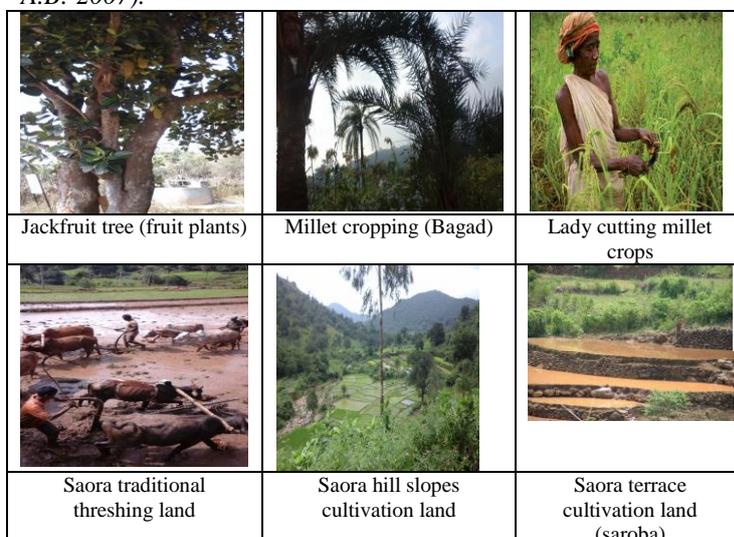
IV. JHOOM CULTIVATION

Now- a- days, the tribals are pushed and up the hills. All the goods fertile land owned by them in the valleys is near the streams now belonging to the non-tribal due to urbanisation. The towns are coming up and industries are constructed resulting in the migration of the peace loving tribals farmers to interior parts of the forest. Ultimately, they have to depend on the uplands of the hill slopes which can hardly give them a cropping during the rainy season. The land and produce both are not sufficient for them. Hence, they search for an alternate source for their sustenance. They grow upland paddy and

other grain crops such as cereals and millets in the upland areas and grow pulses in the bagada (land cleared by them in the forest).

V. HORTICULTURE

The Lanjia Saora love trees and take care to protect the fruit plants like Datepalm, Tamarind, Jackfruit, Mango, Mohul, Ramphal, Sitaphal Salap in their villages, hills and swiddens. Besides, they raise kitchen garden in their backyards or in the vicinity of their houses and orchards if suitable sites are available. They usually grow pumpkin, cucumber, bean, pineapple, tobacco, maize and ginger in their kitchen gardens. Presently, following the diminishing returns from agriculture, shifting cultivation and forestry, they are seeking for a dependable alternative in horticulture. They have started growing new horticultural crops introduced by themselves as well as the development agencies. This programme, introduced as an alternative to swidden cultivation, has become popular. Now besides the development of kitchen gardens and backyard plantations, mixed orchards and commercial cash crops, they have raised cashew in wastelands and hill slopes covering parts of degraded swiddens. The cashew plantation drive has been very popular for its low maintenance and high profitability. Now they are growing cashew on their from which comes a good part of their income. Helping them to enhance their level of income, it has emerged as a gainful pursuit, gradually pushing shifting cultivation to the back stage. The subsistence economy of the tribe rests on slashes, burn and terrace cultivation. It is supplemented by seasonal forest collections, wage earning, occasional hunting and fishing. Among many landmark features of their socio-economic life is their traditional system of labour cooperation ansir that ensures them labour supply for labour intensive operations like swidden cultivation, house construction, terrace making and cultivation and other community activities in the village (Ota, A.B: 2007).



VI. CROPPING PATTERN

They practice crop rotation from time immemorial. Turmeric & cashew is a cash crop mostly grown as annual crops but sometimes it is also grown as a biennial crop, but after a turmeric crop they either leave that land fallow or grow a legume crop such as bold arhar (cajanus cajan), blackgram. In the up-land areas they grow Kuirri (Panicum Milliare), Kandula, Munga, and Biri (Odisha, 2010).

Cash cropping in Area
S.L Items
Cashew
Mango
Lemon
Orange
Banana
Jackfruit
Pineapple

Table 1: Cash cropping in Area

Table -1 show other cash crops in our study area such as mango, banana, cashew, lemon, orange, jackfruit and pineapple case crop. The cash crop in the area mainly citrus fruits, cashew, mango and orange etc.

Income cash-cropping	Male	Female	Total
Less than 8000	-	29.4	17
8000 to 16000	19.2	26.47	23
16000 to 24000	19.2	20.58	20
24000 to 32000	42.3	14.7	27
32000 to 40000	19.2	8.8	13
Total	99.9	99.8	100

Table 2: Income from cash-cropping in families (in per cent)

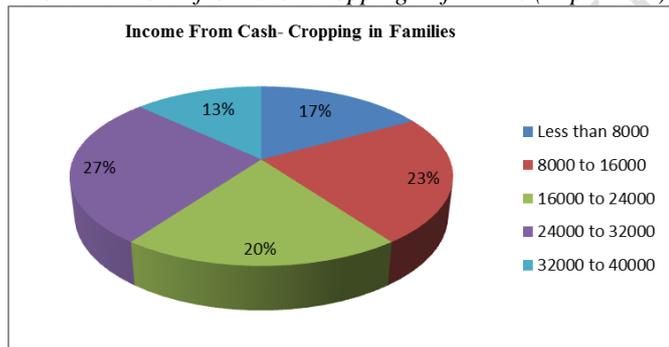


Figure 1: Income from cash-cropping in families (in per cent)

Table no-2 shows the income from cash crops. Nearly 13 per cent of people are earning Rs 32000 to Rs 40000 rupees per year. 27 per cent of people are between Rs 24,000 to Rs 32,000 rupees, 20% of people earn between Rs 16000 to Rs 24000, but 23% of people earn between Rs 8000 to Rs 16000 and 17 per cent earn less than Rs 8000 per year. This an additional income for each family in the area.

VII. SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Tribal communities have lived closely with nature, hunting, gathering and managing natural resources to meet their needs. Shifting cultivation is one such practice that has helped certain tribal groups to be food secure and has also been a repository of agro-biodiversity. Regardless of the

above, mainstream development ideas have mostly rejected these practices and facilitated their conversion to mainstream agriculture. These tribes have historically relied on shifting cultivation agriculture; the collection of forest products; hunting, trapping and gathering; animal husbandry; and of late on wage labour for sustaining their lifestyles. These practices have been intertwined with their social and cultural practices. Shifting cultivation and its impact on the environment is a contested debate. Shifting cultivation has been the backbone of livelihoods for many hill tribes across the globe but it has also attracted the attention of environmentalists for its slash and burn practices that are supposed to be contributing to global warming (Biswal., 2013). The relationship between the time the land is cultivated and the time it is fallowed are critical to the stability of shifting cultivation systems. In a stable shifting cultivation system, the fallow is long enough for the rejuvenation of natural vegetation to the state that it was before it was cleared, and for the soil to recover to the condition it was before cropping began. Stable shifting cultivation systems are closely adapted to micro-environments and carefully managed by farmers during both the cropping and fallow stages. Shifting cultivators may possess a highly developed knowledge and understanding of their local environments and of the crops and native plant species they exploit. Shifting cultivation is a land-use practice that reflects indigenous knowledge accumulated through centuries of trial and error, an intricate balance between product harvest and ecological resilience, and an impressive degree of agro-diversity (Cairns & Garrity, 1999). Shifting cultivation is one such practice that has helped certain tribal groups to be food secure and has also been a repository of agro-biodiversity. Regardless of the above, mainstream development ideas have mostly rejected these practices and facilitated their conversion to mainstream agriculture (Singh, s., etal: 2016).

VIII. TRADITIONAL METHODS OF SHIFTING CULTIVATION

Among the Lanjia Saora tribes, traditional rituals/festivals are used to select a forest patch for shifting cultivation in January/February. Vegetation is cleared and people often take away some amount of timber for their household purposes. In the next month (i.e. February/March) the patch is burnt; usually stumps and roots are left unburnt. Seeds (mostly coarse cereals, oilseeds, vegetables) are sown through dibbling using hand implements in April/May. Cultivation is continued for a few (two or three) years at the end of which the site is abandoned and the community shifts to another site. Most people stated that they collected fruits/nuts to eat from some indigenous forest plants; some of these plants (kusula, kueri) are not available or cannot thrive in settled agriculture areas. As per a study in the area, “in districts like Gajapati and Kandhamal, less than 10% land is owned by tribals. They were growing diverse crops in the shifting fields, namely finger millet, fox tail millet, little millet, kidney beans, turmeric, red gram, green gram, and some tubers. In March-April the community works together to identify land within the village boundary, cut down small thorny shrubs, and thereafter cut down the trees except mango, tamarind, mahua,

and *Palmyra* (used for country liquor making). After a month of drying the cut wood, a small portion of logs are set aside for making temporary hutments (raised shelters) in the shifting fields, while the rest of the dried wood is burnt. Half of the unburnt wood is then collected and used for fencing. During the first year of cultivation in a shifting field, the main crop is finger millet along with a combination of other crops and *kandula* (a variety of pulse). Historically tribal communities have lived closely with nature, hunting, gathering and managing natural resources to meet their needs. Shifting cultivation is one such practice, even though proponents of sedentary agriculture view it as a primordial form of agriculture. The extent of area under shifting cultivation is slowly declining, due to the land use regulations of the authorities, population growth, other sources of livelihoods, migrant work, supply of food grains from the public distribution system, and the institutional promotion of plantation crops like coffee and rubber (Singh, S., et al: 2016). Shifting cultivation, variously known as rotational bush-fallow agriculture, swidden cultivation or slash-and-burn cultivation is an ancient form of agriculture still practiced in many parts of India including the Central region. Shifting cultivation, a primitive system of agriculture, the first step in transition from food gathering and hunting to food production is old agricultural practices and believed to have started during Neolithic period. Under the most recent policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, four targets are identified for a sustainable livelihood among the practitioners of shifting cultivation. These are (i) Ensuring food security, (ii) Commercialization of agricultural productions, (iii) Shifting cultivation stabilization for poverty reduction, and (iv) Sustainable forest management (Dash: 2006). On the other hand, anthropological and sociological interpretations have seen this agricultural practice as a tradition and basic for the livelihood of a community. As different from settled cultivation, shifting cultivation involves traditionally established conventionality and rituals. The shifting cultivation is generally practiced in the following sequence: 1. Selecting a forest patch and clearing the vegetation normally in December and January, 2. Burning of the vegetation (without stumps and roots) in February and March, 3. Sowing of seeds, by dibbling, generally of cereals, vegetables and oil seeds in April–May, 4. Continuing cultivation for a few years, 5. Abandoning the cultivated site and shifting to other forest sites and Returning to the former site, and once again practice shifting cultivation on it. In India, Shifting cultivation has been a traditional cultivation practice in hilly terrains, especially amongst the tribal communities (Biswal, D.K., et al: 2013).

Annual income	Percentage (%)
2000 – 3500	1.66
3500 – 4500	6.66
4500 – 5500	6.66
5500 – 6500	30
6500 – 7500	26.66
7500 – 8500	1.66
8500 – 9500	18.3
9500 - 10,500	1.66
10,500 – 11,500	6.66
Total	100

Table 3: Annual income of Respondent (in per cent)

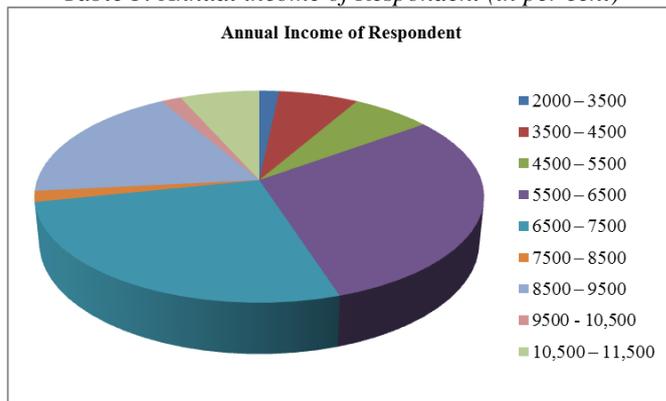


Figure 2: Annual income of Respondent (in per cent)

Annual income of respondent is reflected in table-3. Nearly almost all respondent belong to poorer families earning maximum rupees Rs10, 500 per year. The figure-2 above & table-3 reflects that all among respondent are under PBL categories earning much less than 25,000 per years.

Annual income	Total
13000/-18000/-	10
18000/- 25000/-	18.3
25000/- 40000/-	33.3
40000/- 60000/-	33.3
100000/- 150000/-	3.3
200000/-	1.6
Total	100

Table 4: Annual incomes of family members (in per cent)

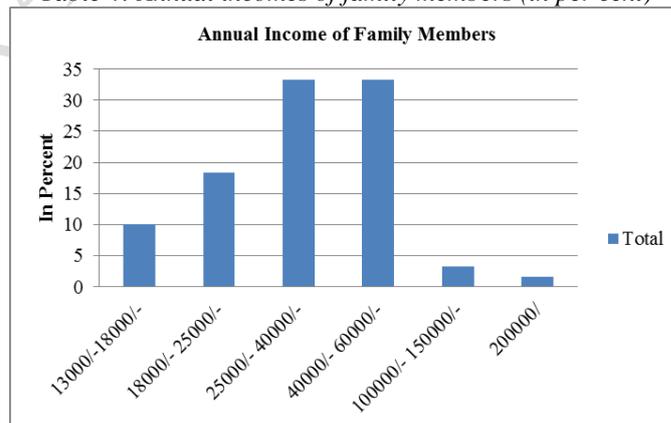


Figure 3: Annual incomes of family members (in per cent)

Reflect our study area nearly more than 28 per cent are under BPL categories and just APL categories constitute 66% of family earning between 25 to 60,000 per year. Only 3% of categories earning between 1 to 1.5 lakh per year and 2% of families earn above 2 lakh per year.

IX. CONCLUSION

Nowadays the issue of food in/security has been a serious concern for the global community. There are some communities like the primitive tribal groups who donot have even the basic amenities for their survival. Shifting cultivation, variously known as rotational bush-fallow agriculture, swidden cultivation or slash-and-burn cultivation is an ancient form of agriculture still practiced in many parts

of India including the Central region. On the one hand, the government has enacted strict forest and land laws to curb shifting cultivation, which is based on the ideas of one school of natural and behavioural scientist, who believe that this primitive form of agriculture results in serious environmental problems. Shifting cultivation and to achieve sustainability in the shifting cultivation tribal areas seems to be difficult as shifting cultivation has a vice versa relationship with socio-cultural, economic and temporal aspects of the communities. For example, poverty and livelihood is deeply rooted in this form of agriculture and without wiping out poverty it is difficult to imagine of sustainability. In Orissa, Shifting cultivation is an age-old practice, which is locally known as the *podu* cultivation. Shifting cultivation is prevalent in Kalahandi, Koraput, Kandhamal and other southern and western districts, covering 119 blocks. The tribal communities, viz. *Kondha, Kutia Kondha, Dongaria Kondha, Lanjia Sauras, Paraja, Godaba, Koya, Didayi, Bonda, Juanga* and *Pauri Bhuyan, Peranga* and *Erenga Kolha* are involved in this practice.

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