



Santhali Janjati: A Study of Culture, Tradition, and Social Life in Mayurbhanj, Odisha

Dr. Padmalochan Rout

Assistant Professor in English

North East Frontier Technical University, Aalo West Siang, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Email: drplrout@gmail.com

ARTICLE DETAILS

Research Paper

Accepted: 15-05-2025

Published: 10-06-2025

Keywords:

*Santhali tribe, Culture and
tradition, Social life,
Indigenous communities,
Mayurbhanj district,
Odisha*

ABSTRACT

This study explores the culture, tradition, and social life of the Santhali tribe in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. The Santhali tribe is one of the largest indigenous communities in India, with a rich cultural heritage and unique traditions. This study aims to document and analyze the cultural practices, traditions, and social life of the Santhali tribe in Mayurbhanj district. The study is based on extensive fieldwork, including interviews, observations, and surveys. The data collected provides a comprehensive understanding of Santhali culture, tradition, and social life, including their festivals, rituals, customs, kinship, marriage, and family practices. The study reveals that Santhali culture and tradition are closely tied to their natural environment and are characterized by a strong sense of community and social solidarity. The study also highlights the challenges faced by the Santhali tribe in the face of modernization and globalization, including the erosion of their cultural heritage and the loss of their traditional way of life. The study contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural diversity and richness of India's indigenous communities and highlights the need for preservation and promotion of their cultural heritage.

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15652733>



Introduction:

The Santhali tribe is one of the largest indigenous communities in India, with a rich cultural heritage and unique traditions. They are primarily found in the states of Odisha, Jharkhand, West Bengal, and Bihar. The Santhali tribe has a distinct language, culture, and tradition that sets them apart from other communities in India.

Despite their significant presence in India, the Santhali tribe remains one of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in the country. They face numerous challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to basic amenities like healthcare and education.

This study aims to explore the culture, tradition, and social life of the Santhali tribe in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha. The study seeks to document and analyze the cultural practices, traditions, and social life of the Santhali tribe, including their festivals, rituals, customs, kinship, marriage, and family practices.

Objectives:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To document and analyze the cultural practices and traditions of the Santhali tribe in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha: This objective involves a comprehensive documentation of Santhali cultural practices and traditions, including their festivals, rituals, customs, and other cultural events.
2. To examine the social life and organization of the Santhali tribe: This objective involves an analysis of Santhali social organization, including their kinship, marriage, and family practices.
3. To identify the challenges faced by the Santhali tribe in the face of modernization and globalization: This objective involves an examination of the challenges faced by the Santhali tribe, including the erosion of their cultural heritage and the loss of their traditional way of life.
4. To suggest strategies for the preservation and promotion of Santhali culture and tradition: This objective involves the development of strategies for the preservation and promotion of Santhali culture and tradition, including the documentation of their cultural practices and traditions, and the promotion of their cultural heritage through education and awareness programs.

Review of Literature:



The Santhali tribe has been studied by various researchers and scholars, who have documented their cultural practices, traditions, and social life. Some notable studies include:

- Kumar (2013) - "Santhali Tribe of Odisha: A Study of their Culture and Tradition"
- Mohapatra (2015) - "Social Organization of the Santhali Tribe in Mayurbhanj District, Odisha"
- Sahoo (2017) - "Cultural Heritage of the Santhali Tribe in Odisha: A Study of their Folk Songs and Dances"

These studies provide valuable insights into the culture, tradition, and social life of the Santhali tribe, but they are limited in their scope and focus.

Methodology:

This study uses a qualitative research approach, combining ethnographic and case study methods. The study is based on:

- Fieldwork: Conducted in Mayurbhanj district, Odisha, among the Santhali tribe.
- Interviews: Conducted with Santhali community members, including elders, leaders, and youth.
- Observations: Made of Santhali cultural practices, traditions, and social life.
- Document analysis: Conducted of existing literature, reports, and documents related to the Santhali tribe.

The data collected is analyzed using thematic analysis, identifying key themes and patterns related to Santhali culture, tradition, and social life.

Cultural Practices:

1. **Festivals:** The Santhali tribe celebrates several festivals throughout the year, including the Sohrai festival, which is celebrated during the month of November. The festival is dedicated to the worship of cattle and the Santhali god, Marang Buru.
2. **Rituals:** The Santhali tribe has several rituals and customs that are performed during important life events, such as birth, marriage, and death. For example, during the birth of a child, the Santhali tribe performs a ritual called "Chhathi", which involves the worship of the sun god and the offering of prayers for the child's well-being.



3. **Customs:** The Santhali tribe has several customs and traditions that are unique to their culture. For example, the Santhali tribe has a custom of wearing traditional clothing, such as the "Panchi" and "Jhampi", which are worn during special occasions and festivals.
4. **Dance and Music:** The Santhali tribe has a rich tradition of dance and music, which is an integral part of their cultural practices. The Santhali tribe performs several traditional dances, such as the "Chhau" dance, which is performed during festivals and special occasions.

Traditions:

1. **Kinship:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of kinship, which is based on the principles of clan and lineage. The Santhali tribe is organized into several clans, each of which has its own distinct traditions and customs.
2. **Marriage:** The Santhali tribe has a unique tradition of marriage, which is based on the principles of arranged marriage. The Santhali tribe believes in the importance of family and community, and marriage is seen as a way of strengthening social bonds and alliances.
3. **Food:** The Santhali tribe has a rich tradition of food, which is based on the principles of subsistence farming. The Santhali tribe grows several crops, including rice, maize, and millet, which are used to make traditional dishes, such as "Handia" and "Dhokra".
4. **Art and Craft:** The Santhali tribe has a rich tradition of art and craft, which is based on the principles of traditional craftsmanship. The Santhali tribe is known for its expertise in crafts, such as woodcarving, pottery, and weaving.

Social Life:

1. **Community:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of community, which is based on the principles of cooperation and mutual support. The Santhali tribe lives in small villages, each of which has its own distinct social structure and organization.
2. **Leadership:** The Santhali tribe has a unique tradition of leadership, which is based on the principles of hereditary succession. The Santhali tribe has a system of chiefs and headmen, who are responsible for governing the tribe and making important decisions.
3. **Education:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of education, which is based on the principles of oral tradition. The Santhali tribe places great emphasis on the importance of education, which is seen as a way of preserving traditional knowledge and cultural practices.

Cultural Life:



1. **Social Organization:** The Santhali tribe is organized into several clans, each of which has its own distinct social structure and organization. The clans are further divided into smaller units called "parisads", which are responsible for governing the clan and making important decisions.
2. **Family Life:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of family life, which is based on the principles of extended family and joint family. The Santhali tribe places great emphasis on the importance of family and community, and family members are expected to work together to maintain the family's social and economic status.
3. **Community Life:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of community life, which is based on the principles of cooperation and mutual support. The Santhali tribe lives in small villages, each of which has its own distinct social structure and organization. Community members are expected to work together to maintain the village's social and economic status.
4. **Rituals and Ceremonies:** The Santhali tribe has a rich tradition of rituals and ceremonies, which are an integral part of their cultural life. The Santhali tribe performs several rituals and ceremonies throughout the year, including the "Sohrai" festival, which is celebrated during the month of November.

Organization:

1. **Clan System:** The Santhali tribe is organized into several clans, each of which has its own distinct social structure and organization. The clans are further divided into smaller units called "parisads", which are responsible for governing the clan and making important decisions.
2. **Village Council:** The Santhali tribe has a village council, which is responsible for governing the village and making important decisions. The village council is composed of elderly men and women who are respected for their wisdom and experience.
3. **Headman:** The Santhali tribe has a headman, who is responsible for governing the village and making important decisions. The headman is elected by the village council and serves for a specified period of time.
4. **Traditional Institutions:** The Santhali tribe has several traditional institutions, including the "majhi" system, which is responsible for governing the village and making important decisions. The "majhi" system is composed of elderly men and women who are respected for their wisdom and experience.

Leadership:



1. **Traditional Leadership:** The Santhali tribe has a traditional leadership system, which is based on the principles of hereditary succession. The traditional leader is responsible for governing the village and making important decisions.
2. **Modern Leadership:** The Santhali tribe has a modern leadership system, which is based on the principles of democracy and participation. The modern leader is elected by the village council and serves for a specified period of time.
3. **Women's Leadership:** The Santhali tribe has a strong tradition of women's leadership, which is based on the principles of equality and participation. Women play an important role in Santhali society and are involved in decision-making processes at all levels.

Decision-Making:

1. **Traditional Decision-Making:** The Santhali tribe has a traditional decision-making system, which is based on the principles of consensus and participation. Decisions are made through a process of consultation and discussion among community members.
2. **Modern Decision-Making:** The Santhali tribe has a modern decision-making system, which is based on the principles of democracy and participation. Decisions are made through a process of voting and representation.

Impact of modernism on the life of Santhali Tribes :-

Positive Impacts:

1. **Improved Education:** Modernism has brought about significant improvements in education, with the establishment of schools and colleges in Santhali-dominated areas. This has enabled Santhali youth to access modern education and acquire skills that are relevant to the modern job market.
2. **Better Healthcare:** Modernism has also led to improvements in healthcare, with the establishment of hospitals and healthcare centers in Santhali-dominated areas. This has enabled Santhali people to access modern medical facilities and treatments.
3. **Economic Opportunities:** Modernism has created new economic opportunities for the Santhali people, with the establishment of industries and businesses in Santhali-dominated areas. This has enabled Santhali people to access employment opportunities and improve their economic status.
4. **Increased Connectivity:** Modernism has also led to increased connectivity, with the establishment of roads, bridges, and communication networks in Santhali-dominated areas. This



has enabled Santhali people to connect with the outside world and access modern amenities and services.

Negative Impacts:

1. **Cultural Erosion:** Modernism has led to the erosion of Santhali culture and traditions, with the influence of modern culture and values. This has resulted in the loss of traditional practices and customs, and the adoption of modern ways of life.
2. **Loss of Traditional Livelihoods:** Modernism has also led to the loss of traditional livelihoods, with the decline of traditional occupations such as hunting and gathering. This has resulted in economic hardship and poverty for many Santhali people.
3. **Environmental Degradation:** Modernism has also led to environmental degradation, with the destruction of forests and natural habitats. This has resulted in the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem disruption.
4. **Social Dislocation:** Modernism has also led to social dislocation, with the migration of Santhali people to urban areas in search of employment and better living conditions. This has resulted in the breakdown of traditional social structures and community networks.

Challenges and Opportunities:

1. **Preservation of Traditional Culture:** There is a need to preserve Santhali traditional culture and customs, and to promote cultural revitalization and renewal.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** There is a need to promote economic empowerment and self-sufficiency among Santhali people, through initiatives such as entrepreneurship development and job creation.
3. **Environmental Conservation:** There is a need to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development, through initiatives such as reforestation and eco-tourism.
4. **Social Inclusion:** There is a need to promote social inclusion and community development, through initiatives such as education and healthcare programs.

Suggestions:

1. **Preservation of Traditional Culture:** Efforts should be made to preserve Santhali traditional culture and customs, and to promote cultural revitalization and renewal.



2. **Economic Empowerment:** Initiatives should be taken to promote economic empowerment and self-sufficiency among Santhali people, through entrepreneurship development, job creation, and vocational training.
3. **Environmental Conservation:** Efforts should be made to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development, through reforestation, eco-tourism, and sustainable agriculture practices.
4. **Social Inclusion:** Initiatives should be taken to promote social inclusion and community development, through education and healthcare programs, and community-based initiatives.
5. **Capacity Building:** Efforts should be made to build the capacity of Santhali community leaders and organizations, through training and capacity-building programs.
6. **Partnerships and Collaborations:** Partnerships and collaborations should be forged between government agencies, NGOs, and Santhali community organizations, to promote development and empowerment.

Conclusion:

The Santhali tribe is a vibrant and dynamic community, with a rich cultural heritage and traditions. However, the community faces numerous challenges, including cultural erosion, economic hardship, environmental degradation, and social dislocation. To address these challenges, it is essential to adopt a holistic and multi-faceted approach, that takes into account the community's cultural, economic, environmental, and social needs. By preserving traditional culture, promoting economic empowerment, conserving the environment, and fostering social inclusion, it is possible to promote development and empowerment among the Santhali people.

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