



Research Paper

## Changing Livelihood Pattern of Mahali Tribe: An Anthropological Appraisal

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**Abstract:** The Mahali tribe of Choukpathra village of Nayagram Block and Jhargram is an artisan tribe. They mainly reside in West Bengal, Jharkhand and Orissa. Their traditional occupation is basketry. Being an artisan tribe and depending on basketry their income is not sufficient for their livelihood now a day; as the markets of the products of basketry are being exchanged with plastic materials. They are losing their market for selling the products. They are losing their profit of the products. They are thinking themselves that their social positions are being deteriorated for this occupation.

**Keywords:** Artisan, Mahali, livelihood, demand, basketry, Market, Plastic'

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### I. Introduction:

The Mahali tribe of Choukpathra village of Nayagram Block and Jhargram District of West Bengal are 58 in family size. Total number of population is 253. Out of total 253 population 125(49.40%) are male and 128(50.59%) are female. Highest numbers of population are ranged from 25 years to 39 years age.

According to Grierson (1904:32) Mahali and the two dialects of Santali are closely related to each other from the standard form of speech. Mahalis are not concentrated at a single locality, they are scattered in the districts of Birbhum, Bankura, Jhargram, Purulia, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur and Jalpaiguri of West Bengal and live in small hamlets located near some caste-peasant or tribal- peasant villages, preferably Santhal. They are like an occupationally specialized tribal group, within the broad framework of the agrarian economic structure of rural West Bengal. In Jhargram district they live in nearby location of Orissa state. They prefer the nearby areas of jungle and bush. In Choukpathra village of Nayagram block and Jhargram district of West Bengal the Mahalis are specialized in crafts and basketry of bamboo made products. They collect these bamboos from jungle or buy these from local inhabitants. The products are sold to the vendors of various districts to sell at various markets of West Bengal.

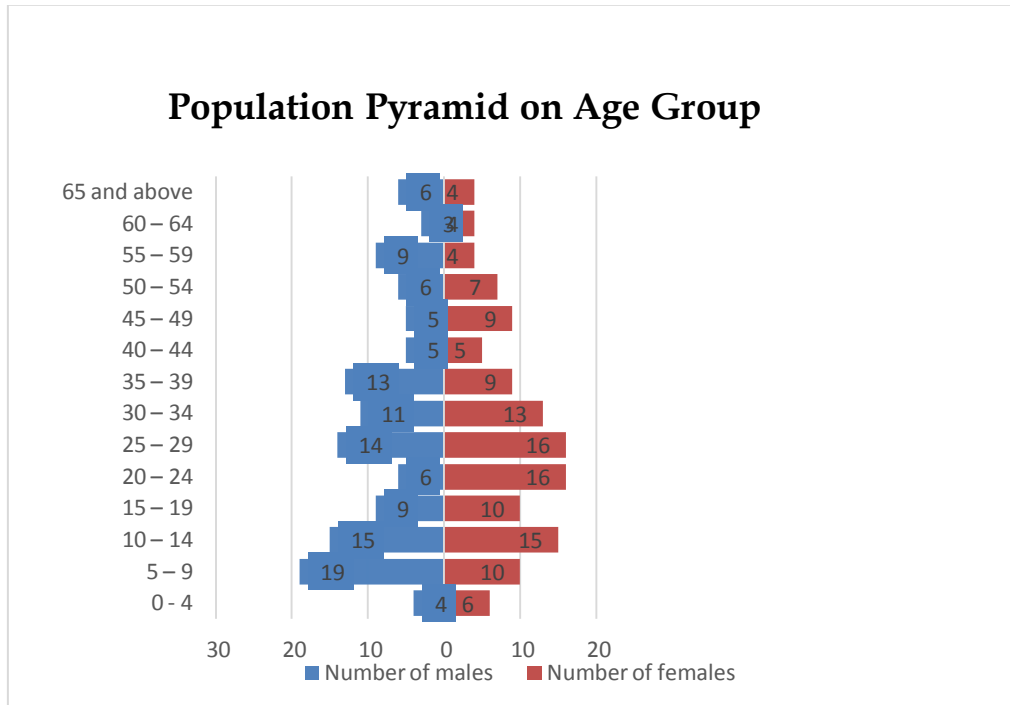
### II. Literature Review:

Mahali people live in multi-caste villages with other caste people in separate hamlets. The Mahali live with others like the Santhal, Ho, Munda, Bhumij, Bhuia, Kurmi and others. Their living standard is little bit uplifted by various tribal developmental programs and facilities provided in the Mahali areas, but still they are living in low socio-economic condition. Mahali Culture and Social Change in West Bengal. (Soni, 2016). The Mahalis are considered to be specialized in making of baskets and bamboo products for their livelihood. In agricultural season, the Mahalis are also engaged as agricultural labourers (Rapti)

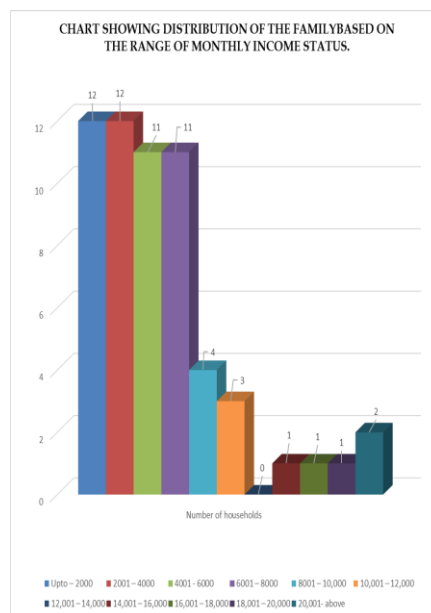
### III. Methodologies:

The study is based on case study and numbers of interview, participant, and non participant observation methods. In this study Primary data and Secondary data from all the 58 famines were collected by using each of these methods and by using some case studies of various procedures of making and marketing of all the basketry products. In this study the data of social coordination of the community for making the basketry products were collected by using these methods and case studies. Focused interview method was also used in this study.

**Discussion:** The Mahali tribe of Choukpathra village of Nayagaram block and Jhargram district of West Bengal are 58 in family size. Total number of population is 253. Out of population 253 population 125(49.40%) are male and 128(50.59%) are female. Highest numbers of population are ranged from 25 years to 39 years age. Out of total 58 households there are 7 types of clans found in the village; they are ‘Murmu’, ‘Beshra’, ‘Baske’, ‘Mandi’, ‘Hasda’, ‘Kanti’, ‘Ganesh’, ‘Shankha’.



From the above table i.e., Table 01, which is based on the distribution of the population according to the age and sex based on the study that is conducted on the 58 households of the Mahali community in Choukpathra village, it is evident that there are 125 males and 128 females among population size of 253 that is the percentage of male is 49.40% while that of the female is 50.59%.



**Analysis:**

From the above table i.e., Table 02 which is based on the income status of the households in the Mahali community of Choukpathra village obtained from the study conducted on the 58 households of that

village, it is evident that among the 58 families, there are 12 families with the range of monthly income status **Upto – Rs 2,000**. There are 12 families with the range of monthly income status of Rs **2,001 – 4,000**. There are 11 families with the range of monthly income status of Rs **4,001 – 6,000**. There are 11 families with the range of monthly income status of Rs **6,001 – 8,000**. There are only 4 families with the range of monthly income status of Rs **8,001 – 10,000**. There are only 3 families with the range of monthly income status of Rs **10,001 – 12,000**. There is no family with the range of monthly income status of Rs **12,001 –14,000**. There is only 1 family with the range of monthly income status of Rs **14,001 –16,000**. There is only 1 family with the range of monthly income status of Rs **16,001 –18,000**. There is only 1 family with the range of monthly income status of Rs **18,001 –20,000**. There are only 2 families with the range of monthly income status **20,001 - above**.

Basketry is one of the prime sources of income among the Mahalis of the Chouka Pathra village. Not just a subsistence strategy but basketry is their traditional work that has been carried by their ancestors and they are maintaining this old tradition of subsistence till now. Most of them are involved in the activity of basket making.

❖ **Different Types of Products:**

There are a variety of products produced in the village made of bamboos, but among them only certain types are practiced mostly due to its demand. These are big baskets or *'pan jhuri'*, small baskets or *'pachiyai'* and kula or *'hatah'*. Among them the demand for the big basket or *'pan jhuri'* and these are mostly sold in bundle wise; each bundle having 40 baskets and half of the bundle having 20 baskets. These are sold to the local Mahajan who sell these products to the markets of different locations and that too are sold on weekly basis. On the other hand, the other two products that is the small baskets or *'pachiyai'* and kula or *'hatah'* are generally sold in the local market mostly in the Kharika market of Kharika Mathani village which is held in every Wednesday. The amount of the production of the rest two of the products are comparatively lower than the big basket. In fact, not all of the families in the village of the Chouka Pathra do manufacture the latter two products but they commonly produce the first one. Beside the **Big Basket/ 'Panjhuri', 'Pachiyai'/ Small Basket they also make kula or 'hatah bamboo made cap, bamboo made bags and dolls and other products': etc**

❖ **Raw materials used: Bamboos, Water, string etc.**

❖ **Instruments used:** The instruments that used for the purpose are *-Plow, Scythe 'Katu'* (Small and large), *'Katan'* and *'Mugur'*. The instruments that are used for the purpose of folding, splitting the bamboos, weaving and sharpening the split of bamboo. With the help of the *'katu'* bamboo splits are inserted in the last layer of the *'charek'*.

**Procuring of Raw Material:** The most important step for manufacturing the baskets is "procuring of raw materials". *Bamboos* are important raw material for the preparation of the bamboo baskets. (Bamboos)

#### IV. Raw material Bamboos:

a. **Local Term:** The bamboo which is the prime raw material in manufacturing procedure of the baskets is locally known as *'bansh'* (in Bengali).

b. **Nature of the Bamboo:**

The bamboo is thick wooden in nature. It is actually a kind of grass having hard node and internodes. The bamboo is generally tall in nature and the outer layer of bamboo is thick and hard. The bamboos are generally greenish in colour from the outer coating when the bamboos are used for basket making by cutting it from the bush.

c. **Types of The Bamboo:**

The bamboos are available in various types based on its quality. Generally, this is of three types- *'bariya'*, *'torol'* and *'chapati'*.

- i. **Bariya** type of bamboo:
- ii. **'torol'** type of bamboo:
- iii. **chapati** type of bamboo:

d. **Sources of the Bamboos:**

There is no such bamboo farm where extensive bamboos are cultivated to meet the need of basket making among the Mahali people of Chouka Pathra village. So, the people of the village mostly visit the neighbouring villages for the collection of bamboos.

**e. Availability of the Bamboo:**

It is procured from specified field under the ownership of the professional bamboo seller. And there are a number of villages having farms of bamboo bushes. So, the availability of bamboo isn't in any kind of crisis.

**f. Networking For Procuring Bamboo:** It is a most important factor in procuring bamboo without which primarily one can't able to get bamboo and secondly, there is high chances of being cheated if networking isn't established well and thus have to compromise with the quality of the bamboo.

**g. Price of the Bamboo:**

Based on the types of the bamboos and size price varies .

- i. **'Bariya' type of bamboo:** In case of bamboos of 7-8 ft in length the price is Rs 80-90 per bamboo
- ii. **'torol' type of bamboo:** In case of bamboos of 7-8 ft in length the price is Rs 40-50 per bamboo

**h. Transportation of the Bamboo:**

Generally, people from the Choukapathra village visit the adjacent villages in search of bamboos either walking or through cycle. They may also appoint motor van for the purpose. Generally, people employed for buying and bringing the bamboo to the workshop are aged between 24-56yrs of age.

**i. Knowledge of Identifying Bamboo:**

There are certain features by which one can identify and differentiate the good quality of bamboo from the other kind of bamboos present. The bamboo can be identified by observing since it appears clearer and shinier.

**Various Steps for Manufacturing and Production of the Basketry:** For manufacturing the bamboos made crafts and baskets there are so many steps followed in the process. They are-

1. Collection of raw materials,
2. Procuring the raw materials
3. Splitting the bamboos as per requirement
4. Sizing the split as per requirement
5. Drying the split
6. Weaving by using katu, mugur instruments,
7. Uses of string as per requirement for tighten up end of the baskets.
8. Gathering the products
9. Selling at the Markets or to the vendors

**Process of Finishing the Baskets:**

The next phase after the process of manufacturing the basket is the finishing of the baskets.

The procedure of the finishing of the basket is quite simple. It involves a part known as '*patacharek*'. Some use it and some don't. After the body structure is complete the next part of the step is to associate the '*patacharek*' to the arrangement. The process is actually binding the '*bada*' together with the help of '*patacharek*'. In this part, '*patacharek*' is taken out from the arranged bundle of '*patacharek*' which is placed at one side of the user. Then the '*patacharek*' is fixed by entering one end of it within last circular layer of the '*charek*' of body arrangement where all the '*bada*' tends to converge and the top have moved to the middle. Then the body of the '*patacharek*' is inserted around the '*bada*' in such a way that it passes under one '*bada*' and over the other lying next to it. In this way alternate insertion of the '*patacharek*' led to the binding of the '*bada*' together on the top most part of the body. some usually left the top end of the basket where the ends of the '*bada*' emerged outside almost of 1 inch in length both for the case of using '*patacharek*' or not. Then that part is being folded and with the help of the '*katu*' it is being inserted in the last layer of the '*charek*'.

During this manufacturing process the steps are followed strictly by the makers. They sit down in the same manner that is spreading one leg outside and the other is being folded to the body at the time of making baskets. In such condition he/she take out one of the '*patacharek*' from the bundle by using three fingers (thumb, index and middle fingers) and then holding the '*bada*' from the top end with one end introduced the '*patacharek*' with the other hand alternately. After all the '*bada*' are attached with the '*patacharek*' on the top the user moves the part downwards and during this movement the top part goes downward and the down part came up. Some usually changes this position frequently along with the wrapping of the '*patacharek*' continues/proceed. And for the folding, they placed the basket in its normal position with the base downward on the ground; they fold the extensions of the '*bada*' by use of the same three fingers.

**Types of Market for the Finished Product:** Generally, these products are mostly sold at the weekly markets of the Kharika Mathani (Wednesday), Bali Geria (Friday), Guriani Sol (Saturday) and Dhumsai (Sunday).

**Other Competing Products (Local Terms):**

There are plastic materials found in the local markets are the primary complete products for the bamboos made basketry.

➤ **Networking for Selling the Product:**

There is no such chain of networks required for selling it except some contacts with vendors, as they reach the weekly market by themselves for selling the products on the respective days.

➤ **Changes Made in Basketry for Marketing:**

There is no such specific design practiced vigorously but they sometimes use '*patacharek*' in the middle of the other '*charek*' to have a design. Bamboo became harder and thus will break when bended. So, it is not suitable for the basket making but is suitable for construction of the house. It is not very good which is used for manufacturing baskets.

**Problems of the occupation:**

There are various problems regarding the production, cost and marketing of this kind of basketry products. During rainy season since bamboo soak too much of moisture, it become much soft to be easily use in manufacturing in basket making. But too much water-soaked condition may be a problematic situation. In that case the bamboos are cut into pieces and inserted within the house. Though water-soaked bamboos are efficient and easy to handle but bringing the material during rainy season is hazardous. Though the cost of the bamboos, labour cost, and production costs were increased, selling price was not increased proportionately as the demands of the baskets or crafts made by bamboos have been decreased. The markets of the products have taken by the plastic products, as plastic products are more sustainable and sophisticated but lesser cost than the bamboos made crafts. The plastic products are easily available and easy to carry. So, many of the inhabitants of the village have left the occupation and young generation is not interested for the occupation. According to the young generation the occupation does not provide proper status in society as the income is poor.

**V. Conclusion:**

The artisan tribe, Mahali, of Choukapathra village is struggling for their livelihood with such low income from the bamboo made crafts. They have not been uplifted themselves to the well income status group of India. They could not able to introduce modern technologies in their occupation. They could not prepare to their occupation as per the modern markets.

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