

# Sustainable Livelihood Practices of the Kutia Kondh Tribe: Preserving Cultural Heritage and Ecological Diversity in Kandhamal, Odisha, India

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**Abstract:** *Sustainable livelihood practices of the Kutia Kondh tribe residing in the hilly regions of Kandhamal district, Odisha, India. The livelihood practices of the Kutia Kondh are deeply rooted in their cultural and ecological location, with agriculture, animal husbandry, hunting and gathering being their primary sources of sustenance. The study draws on primary data collected through fieldwork; including participant observation, semi - structured interviews, and focus group discussions with Kutia Kondh individuals and communities. The findings highlight the difficult relationship between the Kutia Kondh's livelihood practices and their cultural and ecological surroundings. Shifting cultivation, known as "Podu" cultivation, and terrace cultivation are the main agricultural practices employed by the community. Animal husbandry, hunting, fishing, and gathering are carried out sustainably, with a focus on maintaining the balance of the ecosystem. However, the Kutia Kondh face various challenges, including climate change, loss of biodiversity, market - driven co modification, and the impact of modernization on their traditional knowledge systems. The paper emphasizes the importance of recognizing and preserving the traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous communities. It calls for incorporating this knowledge into sustainable development planning to ensure the livelihood security of these communities while safeguarding their cultural heritage and ecological diversity. The study underscores the significance of interventions that address the challenges faced by the Kutia Kondh and promote the preservation and enhancement of their sustainable livelihood practices. By doing so, we can learn from their traditional practices and contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals.*

**Keywords:** Shifting cultivation, sustainable development, livelihood

Odisha is home to 62 tribal communities who are at different levels of development yet possess unique repository of indigenous knowledge basing upon their age old practices for survival needs. The indigenous practices of natural resource management as applicable to agriculture, forestry, human and animal health, soil conservation, water harvesting, and many other sectors has, in matter of fact, preserved grandeur of indigenous knowledge that can be suitably applied in present day context. Application of indigenous knowledge for rural development is an emerging paradigm especially for resource conservation and sustainable use. From the long experience of cultivation, the traditional communities have acquired enormous working knowledge in fields of classification, codification, accumulation and dispensation of knowledge on cultivation. Their understanding of environment and sustainable resource management is largely embedded in their socio - cultural life and manifested in their interactions with the socio - ecological complex they are part of. These knowledge systems reflect their perception of ecologically sensitive interactions with local ecosystems and the changing paradigms under the spell of modern technical knowledge and management practices.

Shifting cultivation is one such area of their interaction with forest ecosystem which showcases age old wisdom in managing environment security and food security and disseminates treasures of indigenous knowledge systems. It is one of the primary means of earning livelihoods for many tribal communities inhabiting mountainous regions of the state. It is synonymous with slash and burn cultivation, swiddening, *jhum*, fallow farming, *podu*, *nella* and many other local denominations. It is a flexible and highly

adaptive means of production. In Odisha, as per an estimate, the extent of shifting cultivation has been spread over 118 Tribal Sub - Plan blocks of which 62 comes under shifting cultivation zone and 56 are partially covered.

It has been accepted fact that the Kutia Kondh's live in harmony with nature and their livelihoods are in tune with it. The nature of relationship between their livelihoods, culture and environment has always been symbolic. This very nature of relationship was responsible for resource conservation and sustainable environment. The present chapter broadly discusses the Kutia Kondh's subsistence activities and livelihood practices in terms of available resources, their access, utilization etc. in the pursuit of livelihood. This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section explains the Kutia Kondh's daily routine work, division of labour, agricultural calendar and available resources. The second section deals with the existing occupational pattern, subsistence activities which majorly focuses on shifting cultivation as it is their main source of survival. The third section tries to discuss livelihood and occupational activities. Further it also tries to understand the diversification of livelihoods.

Considering technological paucity, the quantities harvested for consumption are restricted to subsistence level. The villages are very small and inhabited by agnatic and cognatic groups. The inter - village transaction is very much limited. The notion of private property is at a rudimentary stage, whereas communal holding of property is predominant. The division of labour is practised primarily along the gender lines. Village boundaries are exclusively guarded and the flow of resources across boundaries is scarce. The inflow

and outflow in all spheres of life between the Kutia Kondh domain and the external world are limited. The territorial integrity is observed and more or less intact.

The Kutia Kondh populace may not be putting any large pressure on the local resources, but the general population pressure, both of human and animals, is largely responsible for the fast depletion of fuelwood, fodder, and timber in their forest (*dongar*). Thus, traditional resource use for subsistence by the community has changed due to indiscriminate exploitation of these resources by the general population for commercial gains, such as manufacturing, transporting and value - added commodity production. As a result, the cohesive local communities have undergone a process of disintegration. The market economy has increasingly replaced the traditional barter economy, resulting in massive over - exploitation of resources. Many other development measures, for instance, monoculture plantation and plantation of exotic plants are contributing to the depletion of forest and other elements of wild biodiversity of the Kutia Kondh eco - system.

For generations, the Kutia Kondh have been depending on their surrounding forests for their food requirements. About half a century ago, their dietary habits were based on forest produce collection and less on shifting cultivation, which was introduced later. But things have changed since. Shifting cultivation has attained a prominent position in the Kutia Kondh lifestyle owing to changes in their diet, and it is practised as a mainstay of their economy. Cleared forest patches are cultivated for two to three years followed by a fallow period of several years to allow the natural vegetation to recover. In Kui language, this agricultural technique is called *nellakama* (*dongarchasa*, *bagadachasa*, *gudiachasa*). On their swiddens, the Kutia Kondh grow more than twenty different kinds of crops in a mixed cropping system. Now - a - days settled agriculture in the form of irrigated paddy cultivation is also practiced, but due to the scarcity of suitable land, it contributes little to their subsistence. Gardens in or near the hamlets provide supplementary subsistence. The Kutia Kondh keep livestock such as cattle, buffalo, goats, pigs, and poultry.

Besides shifting and settled cultivation, the gathering of a wide range of forest produce is of immense importance to the community. It bridges food gaps that increase towards the end of the summer i. e. *Jyesthalanju* (May - June) and the beginning of the rainy season i. e. *Asadlanju* (June - July) before the harvest of the cultivated crops begins. Today hunting adds little to the livelihood of the Kutia Kondh, although it was one of the mainstays of their livelihood earlier times. Yet hunting is still highly appreciated and replete with cultural reverence to the Kutia Kondh.

### Input intensiveness

Agriculture in swidden system is gradually becoming input intensive. Labour is the main input in agriculture. It consumes lot of labour in different phases of agricultural interventions, starting from land leveling through land preparation, sowing, weeding, till harvesting and storing. That apart to ensure a good harvest one needs to add enough

fertilizer and also spend on pesticides. Pesticide use was abysmally low in past. However, now it needs lot of pesticide application on standing crops. It also requires manually combing out the insects and pest colonies. The supply of natural *khat*, *kalapani* (nutrient) from forests have reduced, the supply of cow dung has decreased for which the lands require plenty of fertilizer application. Starting from seeds to fertilizers and labourers dependency on market has increased.

The Kutia Kondh folks are feeling the pinch when it comes to money these days. Everything, from food and clothes to schooling and healthcare, requires cash. Even traditional stuff like ceremonies and having guests over need money. Despite good intentions, many development plans haven't worked out. Only some projects like building schools and fixing roads have been successful. But smaller projects like wells, dairy farming, and raising animals have done well. Even though they use better seeds and chemicals on their farms, they're not making much more. Plus, people are starting to prefer regular jobs over farming. This shows that the Kutia Kondh community is moving towards a money - based economy.

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