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SETTLEMENT PATTERNS OF THE KHARIA TRIBE OF BADAMPAHAR REGION, MAYURBHANJ DISTRICT, ODISHA

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Abstract

This article describes the settlement pattern of the Kharia tribe (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) living in the Badampahar region of the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. With an objective to understand the cultural ecology of settlement patterns among the Kharia of this region and its changing dimensions, data were collected from four villages inhabited by them through direct observation and interview methods. Data demonstrate that the settlement and housing patterns of the Kharia people coexist with the local ecological resources. Rituals, omen and belief do influence their decision-making pertaining to the habitation and settlement. The state intervention, especially government housing schemes such as Indira Awas Yojana (AWY), Mo Kudia and Biju Pakka Ghara, are although found to influence those behaviours, traditional beliefs and practices are still attached to their settlement pattern and continue to strengthen their community identity.

Keywords: *Kharia, tribe, settlement, ecology, Mayurbhanj*

Introduction

Recent research on settlement patterns in India has provided valuable insights into how environmental, social, and political factors influence the spatial organization of human settlements across diverse regions (Binda and Chharang 2021; Dey and Bhaduri 2016; Modi 2013; Saminathan, Alaguraja, and Yuvaraj 2018). Studies show that settlements of humans in a spatial setting are shaped by human need to be compatible with social norms and lifestyles (Askarizad, 2019; Memmot and Long, 2002). Rapoport

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(1969) says that the local or cultural tradition has a direct connection with the physical structure of each culture that directly or indirectly articulates people's expression and thinking (Moore 1992). The socio-cultural strengths such as beliefs, family relations, social organization, and social or individual interaction are believed to shape the settlement of a particular human group (Marpaung, 2017). There is also evidence as to how infrastructural growth, migration, and socioeconomic changes are driving forces to influence the settlement, social structure, and lifestyles. Binda and Chharang (2021) attempted to explore the settlement patterns of the Dungarpur District in Rajasthan and claimed that local topography, water availability, and socio-economic activities influence particular settlement behaviour; although has been changed in its structure because of state intervention. A study in rural West Bengal by Dey and Bhaduri (2016) reflects the changing dimension of settlement along with the changing socio-economic landscape, particularly migration and adaptation of conventional agriculture. It has also led to a change in social cohesion and community dynamics. Saminathan *et.al.* (2018) explore the settlement patterns of the Pulaya tribe in Tamil Nadu, focusing on how their traditional settlements, built from mud and thatch, are being replaced by semi-permanent structures under the influence of modernity. In the region, settlements are typically clustered, with only a few individual settlements located slightly farther away, often on elevated sites for safety from wildlife. The settlements have a distinct style, using local materials such as bamboo for construction. In the Thirumoorthy Hills, concrete houses are built with government loans, as the area is closer to the town than other settlements. While semi-bamboo structures are common across villages, brick-and-tile houses are rare, with most settlements primarily made from bamboo and locally available roofing materials.

Several studies are reported on the tribal communities of Odisha (Vidyarthi and Upadhyay 1980; Dash 1998, 2015; Sahoo 2004; Patnaik 2005 Mohanty 2015a, 2015b, 2015; Ota and Mohanty 2015; Das 2015; Rath 2015; Rout *et.al.* 2015; Ota *et.al.* 2016; Tudu 2017) but the study is available on the settlement pattern of the Kharia tribe living in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. Against this background, this present study explores the settlement pattern of the Kharia tribes residing in the Badampahar region of Mayurbhanj District, Odisha. Attempts have been made in this paper to present how socio-cultural and geographical aspects of the Kharia tribe of the study area influence the settlement patterns along with its changing dimensions.

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Objectives of the Study

This present study was conducted among the Kharia tribe of the Badampahar region of the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha with the following research objectives:

1. To understand the settlement and habitation pattern of the Kharia tribe.
2. To understand the cultural ecology involved in the settlement pattern of the Kharia tribe.
3. To understand the changing dimension of settlement patterns among the Kharia of the study area.

Methodology

This study was exploratory and therefore data were collected through an ethnographic approach. An empirical investigation was conducted during February- March 2024 by the first author, accompanied by other authors, to collect the data. Four villages namely Dudhijharan, Purunapani, Bhuyanbasa, and Kantasala of Badampahar block of Mayurbhanj District of Odisha were selected for this study (Fig.1). Dudhijharan and Kantasala come under Talkapakhari Gram Panchyat and the other two villages belong to Chuapani Gram Panchyat. The Kharia of Dudhijharan village are distributed in four hamlets: Dudhijharan, Dalkisahi, Kadalibadi, and Tentulisahi. All the villages are exclusively inhabited by the Kharia tribe except the Dudhijharan and Purunapani which are multi-ethnic villages inhabited by Kharia, Munda, Ho and Bhumij people. This study followed a qualitative approach, involving participant observation, interviews, and surveys within the selected villages. Key informants, including village elders, local leaders, and community members, were interviewed to gather information about the settlement patterns, cultural practices, and socio-economic conditions of the Kharia tribe. Observations focused on the layout of the villages, housing structures, agricultural practices, and community interactions. Additionally, a detailed examination of land selection criteria and house construction techniques was conducted, along with an analysis of the influence of modern government interventions. Photographs, sketches, and field notes were used to document the settlements and the daily life of the Kharias.

People and Area Under Study

The Kharia is one of the tribal groups distributed in the states of Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. In Odisha, they inhabit the north-western region of the State comprising districts like Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj and Jharsuguda. They are divided into different

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the landscape. This arrangement is typical of the Kharias, as they prefer isolated living to avoid disturbances and ensure easy access to forest resources. On the other hand, Purunapani village follows a more clustered settlement pattern, where houses are positioned close together, forming a cohesive community. This may reflect the influence of more recent agricultural practices and government-driven development programs. The distribution of these Kharia villages lies at the edge of forests, near water sources or streams, and in proximity to agricultural fields, which are critical for both subsistence and socio-economic security. The location of the villages near forests allows easy access to resources such as wild plants, fruits, and animal products, which are central to the Kharia's foraging lifestyle.

The studied villages of Dudhijharan, Purunapani, Bhuyanbasa, and Kantasala are situated in areas with difficult terrain, and the communities have built strong interpersonal relationships, both within their villages and with neighbouring communities. The settlement pattern of the Kharias reveals a unique relationship between the land and the people. Their settlements are often spread across several small clusters, with homes built using local materials such as bamboo and thatch. The design of their settlements reflects the need for defence against external threats, with settlements often positioned in areas that provide natural protection, such as a top hill or near dense forests. The proximity to forests and other natural resources is essential for their livelihood, and their homes are typically situated near areas where they can practice subsistence farming or gather forest products. Their settlements are predominantly found in the hilly and remote terrains of the Badampahar region, which are difficult to access. The lack of easy access to town centres, coupled with limited communication infrastructure, has contributed to the underdevelopment and low literacy rates among these communities. There is a general sense of inferiority among these groups, stemming largely from their isolation and lack of access to modern facilities. This geographical seclusion has influenced not just their education but also their socio-economic development, limiting their interaction with other communities and hindering the flow of resources. Despite these challenges, the Kharias have adapted well to their environment. They reside in close-knit settlements, often located in clusters within the hills of Badampahar area.

The settlement pattern of these people is often structured around the availability of resources, water sources, and hilly regions and are primarily rural, with limited urban influence, and they maintain their traditional ways of living, including farming, hunting, and gathering. The villages selected for this study

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are typical examples of tribal settlements in this region which are scattered across the hilly landscapes, with each village showcasing different aspects of the settlement pattern. Some of these villages are more integrated with neighbouring settlements, while others remain largely isolated, reflecting the varying degrees of accessibility and connectivity within the region. These patterns provide valuable insights into the socio-cultural dynamics of the Kharia tribes and how their settlements are influenced by geography, culture, and socio-economic factors.

Housing Patterns

The housing patterns among the Kharia tribe, as revealed by the data, show a mix of traditional and modern construction styles. A significant portion of the houses (37%) are Kuccha, which are traditional dwellings constructed with locally available materials such as bamboo, mud, straw, and thatch. These houses are typically simple and adapted to the rural, hilly environment where the Kharias reside, providing functional shelter while blending seamlessly with the surrounding natural landscape. Another 26% of the houses are Pucca, reflecting a shift towards more permanent structures made from materials like bricks, cement, and stone. These houses are more durable and often result from government housing schemes aimed at improving living standards. The remaining 37% of the houses are a combination of both Kuccha and Pucca styles, where elements like the foundation or walls might be made from modern materials, but the roof or other parts retain traditional construction techniques (Fig.2). This blend of Kuccha and Pucca houses highlights the community's adaptation to both modernity and tradition, maintaining cultural practices while incorporating newer, more durable building methods (Fig.3).

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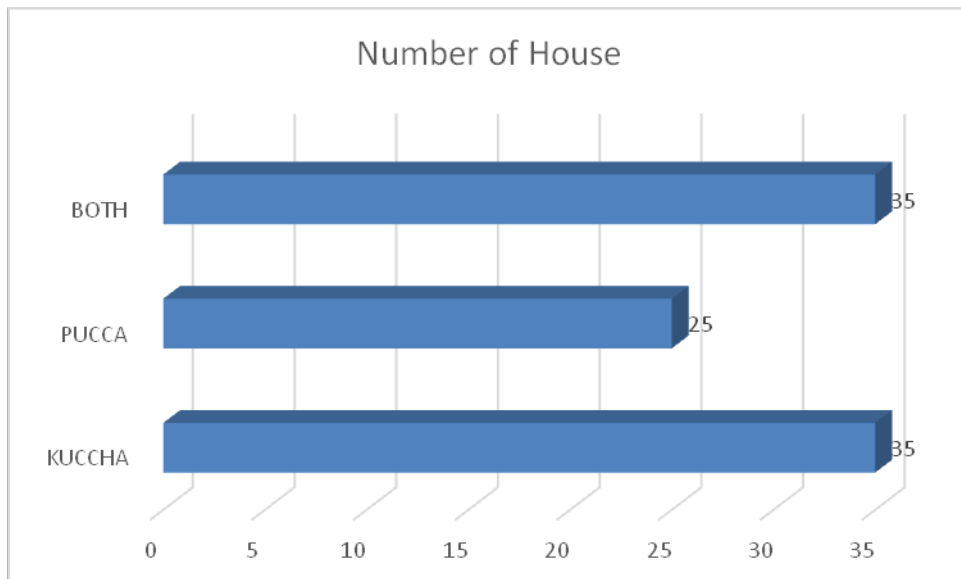
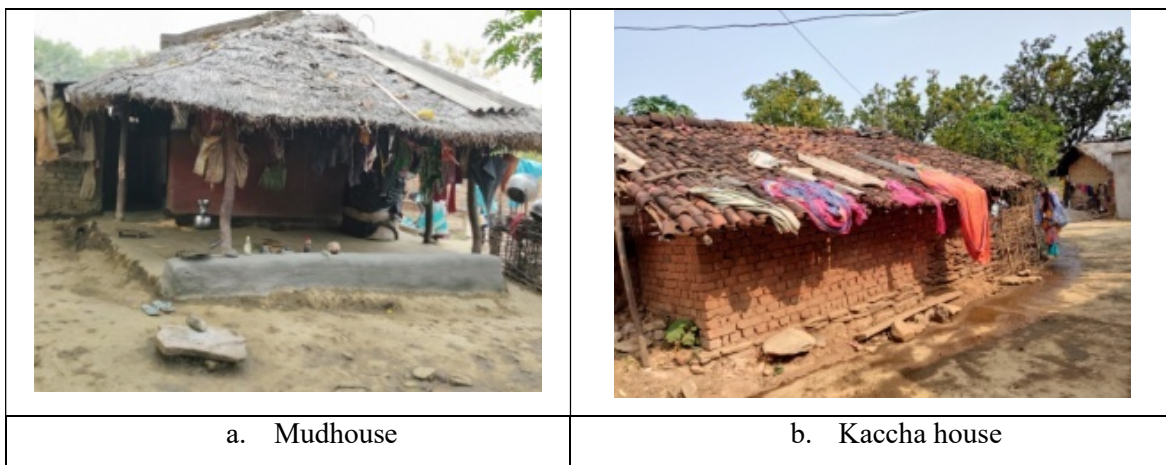
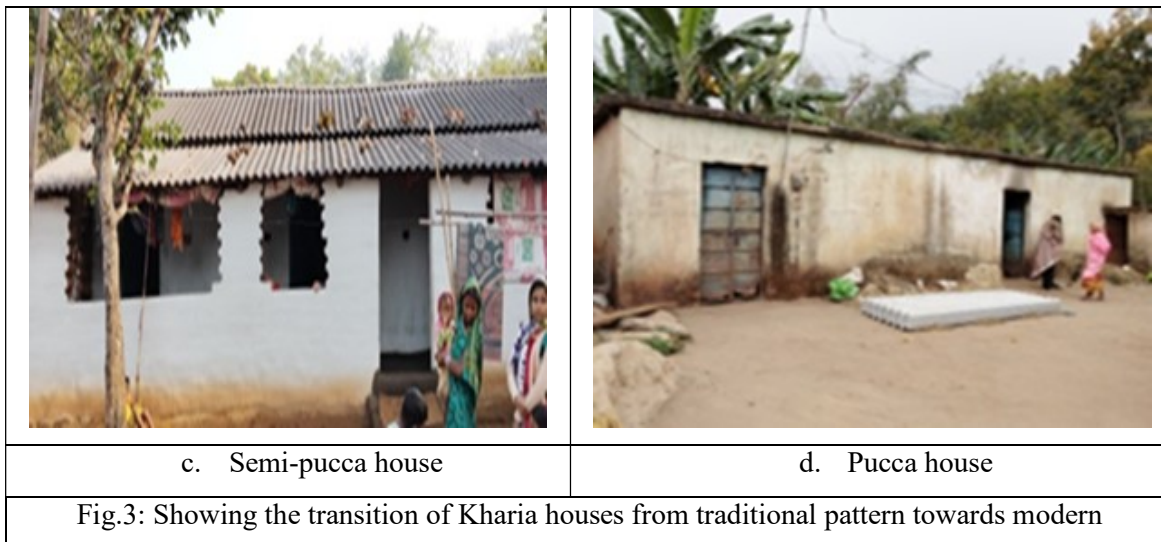


Fig. 2: Types and number of Kharia villages in the study area



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Selection of Land

The Kharias carefully select land based on specific factors such as proximity to water, forests, and agricultural lands, as well as distance from large settlements and market facilities. This practice highlights the importance of natural resources in their daily lives and the community's emphasis on sustainability. The communal approach to house construction, where relatives and friends come together to assist in building a new house, strengthens social bonds and fosters a collective sense of responsibility. Before construction begins, the land is ceremonially worshipped to ensure its auspiciousness. This ritual, which includes offerings such as rice, vermillion, and mustard, signifies the Kharias' deep spiritual connection to the land they occupy. While selecting a plot of land certain points are taken into consideration. The availability of water, distance from forests, distance from large settlements, market facilities, and availability of agricultural land in that area are the key factors for selecting a site for the establishment of a settlement. Likewise, the Kharias also select their lands for settlement. It becomes a communal activity when all the relatives and friends build a house with the help of that house member. Before building a house, a plan is prepared according to which the house is built. At the beginning of the construction of a house, a family-level ceremony is organized where all the villagers also take part.

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House Patterns and Construction Materials

The traditional Kharia houses are small, rectangular, typically constructed with locally available materials such as *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) wood, mud, straw, and bamboo and are used for multipurpose activities. The roof of these houses is built of bamboo beams and are covered with either paddy straw or grass or both. This construction method allows the houses to blend seamlessly into the natural environment while offering shelter from the elements. In more recent times, some of the Kharias have constructed semi-pucca or pucca houses with the financial support of government schemes, like the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana. These traditional houses are generally divided into two main sections: one for sleeping and dining, and another for storage and worship. The latter often includes a space dedicated to the village deity, Thakurani, and other spirits. In addition, most houses are designed with a front and rear door, with the inner door often leading to the storage room or sleeping area, while the outer door is used for daily activities.

Roof, Walls, and Floors

The roofing system of these traditional houses is primarily made of bamboo beams and straw, providing effective insulation against heat and rain. The walls are traditionally made of mud, lateritic stone, and sometimes bamboo, with a plastering of cow dung and clay, creating a natural, eco-friendly structure. The floors are typically made of stone chips, clay, and sometimes mud, with daily cleaning using cow dung — a practice that holds both practical and ritual significance in the community. This daily cleaning serves not only to maintain hygiene but also to ward off negative energies, in keeping with the Kharia's spiritual beliefs.

Conclusion

The settlement patterns of the Kharia tribe of these studied villages of Mayurbhanj offer a fascinating glimpse into how traditional communities balance environmental, socio-cultural, and economic factors in their daily lives. The interplay between natural resources, spiritual beliefs, and modern influences shapes the settlement layout, house construction, and daily routines of the Kharias. Despite changes brought about by government intervention and modernity, the Kharias continue to maintain a close relationship with their environment, reflecting their resilience and adaptability in a rapidly changing world. The study area in Kusumi Block, Badampahar region, provides an ideal setting for exploring the settlement patterns

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of the Kharia tribes. By examining the location, structure, and characteristics of the tribal villages, this study aims to highlight the significance of geographic isolation, socio-economic conditions, and traditional practices in shaping the settlement patterns of these communities. The findings of this study contribute to a broader understanding of tribal life in Odisha and may inform policies aimed at improving the living conditions and literacy rates of these indigenous populations.

The study on the Kharia tribe's settlement patterns in the Badampahar region provides a comprehensive understanding of their relationship with the environment and the factors influencing their settlements. The research highlights how geography, cultural practices, and socio-economic factors shape the Kharia villages, with each settlement reflecting a deep connection to nature. Generally, all the houses are close to each other and no house is found far away from the residential area which shows that the villagers are likely to live in a group so that they can collectively avoid any danger. nevertheless, the house pattern is seen to have been changing a little because of state intervention. The traditional mud houses have been replacing with semi-pucca and pucca houses due to government interventions, such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, *Biju Pakka Ghara and Mo Kudia*. It is gradually impacting on the culture and knowledge associated with the house and ecology together.

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