



RESEARCH ARTICLE

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON COMMUNITY- A CASE STUDY OF THE SNAKE CHARMERS (SAPUA KELA) OF PADMAKESHARIPUR, ODISHA

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of social change has been present in every existing society at all times. As modernity embarked, many communities have undergone changes by the forces of social change. The present paper titled 'Impact of Social Change on Community- A Case Study of the Snake Charmers (Sapua Kela) of Padmakesharipur, Odisha' attempts to find the impact of social change and occupational transition of the community. The research uses exploratory research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used for collecting data. It was found that snake charming tradition of Sapua Kela is quite old (add) as more than three generations of the community has been involved in snake charming. Stricter laws were responsible for the decline of snake charming but more than half of the respondents believed that the popularity of snake charming as a source of entertainment has not reduced yet. The current occupational profile shows that many of them are engaged as daily wage labourer and in private jobs. Job satisfaction as compared to their hereditary profession was found to be low. Despite the ban, snake charming is still in practice but it is practiced by few members of the community that too occasionally. There has been fall in their income as compared to earnings they got from snake charming. The paper concludes with the note that efforts should be made to strike balance between conservation of wildlife and preservation of cultural heritage of the community through sustainable alternatives.

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INTRODUCTION

The reality of change remains constant in every existing society. Both the human beings and the society have undergone changes out of which some have been beneficial and some generated conflicting situations in the society. The social structure is subject to incessant change, growing, decaying, finding renewal, accommodating itself to extremely variant conditions and suffering vast modification in course of time (MacIver & Page). The impact of social change has been different for different communities. One of the communities that has been affected by the social change is the snake charming community of Odisha, the Sapua Kela of Padmakesharipur. Snake charmers of India belong to the communities who make their living by catching, using and displaying snakes and other wild life. Earlier, they use to earn their livelihood by practising their age old tradition which they have learnt from their ancestors. With the advent of Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and the subsequent changes brought by urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation, has put a halt to the age old traditions of the snake charmers in general and Sapua Kela community in particular.

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After the ban on the practice of snake charming, their traditional profession has been hampered and at the same time there is imminent demise of the indigenous culture.

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The modernity has intruded into the sphere of tradition and has unleashed the forces of social change. In the past few decades, the Indian Government has been strict in implementing the laws preventing the snake charmers in collecting snake and practicing snake charming (Murphy, 2010). The Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 has affected the livelihood of snake charmers (Dutt, 2004). On the contrary, the Saperas of Madhya Pradesh have not been facing much problems due to the law enforcing authorities. The factors like sophistication of sources of entertainment, fading mystic value of snakes are the primary reasons for the death of the profession. Most of the Saperas desire to switch over to occupations which are less dangerous, more comfortable and economically beneficial for them (Singh, Pandey & Thakur, 2006). It has been also found that the profession of the Sapua Kela has been restricted by Wild Life Protection Act, 1972, animal right activists and television programmes. The young generation of the Sapua Kela community want to undertake new occupations where as the older generations are not able to adapt to new occupations as they do not possess other skills for earning their livelihood (Mohapatra, Dutta & Mohanty, 2005).

A study on *Hawadiga* and *Qualander* community shows that there is a sense of stigma of criminalisation attached to them along with loss of identity which compels them to work as unskilled labourers or beg for their living. There is conflict of interest between Animal Rights and Human Rights. The law violates the right to promote, preserve and practice one's culture, the right to restitution and rehabilitation under UNDRIP (Khan, 2013). Furthermore, it does not recognise the fundamental right to adopt any kind of livelihood (Article 19(g) of Indian Constitution). One of the main criticisms of the Act is that it has hardly taken into consideration the cultural heritage and age old folk tradition of *Sapua Kela*. While concessions have been granted to the aboriginal tribes of Andaman and Nicobar Island who are dependent on hunting, it has restricted other communities who are similarly dependent on animals like *Sapua Kela* (Mohanty & Mohanty, 2004).

Similar wildlife conflicts in other part of the India have been resolved by integrating the traditional knowledge and skills for conservation as well as sustainable use of wildlife (Whitaker, 1978). The *Bedia* snake charming community of West Bengal been protesting before the govt. and asking them to build snake parks so that they can use their skills to collect venom (Murphy, 2010). Like the *Bedia*, the *Jogi Nath Saperas* are also closely associated with snake trapping and snake charming. The rift between conservation on one hand and livelihood on the other is shown though the study of the *Jogi Nath Saperas*. This multidimensional research suggested that their traditional knowledge and skill can be used for employing them as 'barefoot conservation educators'. NGOs and Govt. sector should contribute in their ways so that alternative option for livelihood can be encouraged and there can be a smooth transition to their new occupations (Dutt, 2004). The research gaps identified from the review of literature are as follows-

- Research undertaken on snake charming communities are few in number, although India is/was known as the land of snake charmers.
- Regional studies particularly on *Sapua Kela* community are scanty. There are some studies but most of them are nearly a decade old.

OBJECTIVE

- To locate the socio economic background of the respondents of *Sapua Kela* community.
- To sketch out the brief historicity of the snake charming tradition.
- To detect the challenges faced by the community in the era of social change.
- To notice the present transit in their livelihood and its impact on the community.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Setting

The present study was conducted in Padmaksharipur which is exclusively inhabited by the *Sapua Kela* community. It is located on the fringe of Bhubaneswar in the Khurda district of Odisha.

Research design and methods used

Exploratory research design has been used in the research as very few researches have been conducted on the community

earlier. Both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used by the researcher to capture the essential findings. The main focus was on primary data which was collected from the selected households. Interview schedule, personal interview, case study were the major tools for data collection. Moreover, observation was present throughout the research.

Sampling

Convenience sampling was used to select 60 households as sample from the hamlet. Male members of the house hold were taken as respondents as the snake charming was done only by the male members of the community.

FINDINGS

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE RESPONDENTS

The *Sapua Kela* community belong to Schedule Caste (M/o SJ&E, 2016). They were socially marginalised, historically disadvantageous group of Odisha. Out of 60 respondents of the *Sapua Kela* community, 48.3 per cent of the respondent belonged to 20-40 age group; 41.6 per cent of them were from 40-60 age group who had been a part of snake charming as profession earlier. There were 10 per cent of the respondents belonging to 60-80 age group who could give coverage of the history of the community.

The educational status of the respondents revealed that 25 per cent of the respondents were illiterate, 50 per cent of them had primary education and 21.6 per cent had received middle school education. It was found that only 3.3 percent of the respondents were graduates. From the total household surveyed it was found that the 76.92 per cent of children of the present generation (below 18 years) who have got enrolled in school as compared to only 46 per cent of the adults of the previous generation who went to school. It was also observed that the dropout rate was higher in case of the previous generation once they had reached primary level.

Nearly 47 per cent of the household monthly income ranged from 2000-4000 rupees; 20 per cent of the household income was above 8000 rupees. The households coming under this income bracket were generally from joint families. Of the other households 15, 10 and 8.6 per cent of households had 4000-6000 rupees, 6000-8000 rupees and below 2000 rupees income respectively.

Amongst the respondents, almost 87 per cent of the respondents were married, 10 per cent were unmarried and 3.3 per cent were widower. It was observed that there exists practice of early age marriage in the community. The average family size was found to be 5, with most of the households being nuclear family.

HISTORICITY OF SNAKE CHARMING TRADITION OF SAPUA KELA

Snake charming as a profession for the *Sapua kela* has been a matter of both livelihood generation and tradition. In the past the kings employed snake charmers as the entertainers in the courts and as experts for treating people bitten by snakes. The snake charmers used to help in keeping away venomous snakes, and treating snake bites by providing medicines and performing rituals.

Different kind of tunes made by them has been unique to the community and addition to the rich folk culture of the State. This tradition of folk music and skill are passes passes from one generation to the next.

During the study, the respondents were asked about how many generations as far as they know has been involved in snake charming. More than half of the respondents replied that from the past three generations they are involved in snake charming, 18.3 per cent of respondents said that snake charming has been their family profession for the last five generations. One fourth of the respondents did not knew from how many generations snake charming was practiced, while only one respondent said that more than five generations were involved in snake charming .

“Our father, forefather and their forefathers were involved in this profession. From more than seven generations snake charming was practiced.....From the time of Raja and Maharaja our community had been performing snake charming...Now I am old, snake charming is banned and now I have to beg for living.”

Table 1. Generations involved in snake charming

Generations	Frequency	Percentage
3 generations	33	55
5 generations	11	18.3
More than 5 generations	1	1.6
Don't know	15	25

To know the level of traditional knowledge three indicators were taken as represented in the Table 2. Out of 60 respondents 65 percent of the respondents knew how to play *dumbroo*, 53.3 percent of the respondents were aware of *Padmatola* song and 60 per cent of them could catch snakes. It should also be noted that gradually the traditional knowledge is decreasing among the present generation of the community. From the above Table 1. It has been found that more than seven generations have been involved in snake charming and it has been passed to their successors as still many of them possess the traditional skill.

Table 2. Traditional knowledge of the respondents

Traditional knowledge	Frequency		Percentage	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Playing <i>dumbroo</i>	39	21	65	35
<i>Padmotolasong</i>	32	28	53.3	46.6
Knowledge of catching snakes	36	24	60	40

IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON THE COMMUNITY

Social change has been a topic of interest for many social sciences. Lauer defines social change as “alterations in social phenomena at various levels of human life from the individual to the global” (Goodwin, 2009). Such levels range from individual attitudes and interactions to organisational, institutional, community, societal, cultural, civilization and global transitions. The sociologists like Spencer, Tonnies, Durkheim, Marx, Weber have given theories related to social change in which there is shift of the society from traditional to a modern one.

One of the important contribution is of Ferdinand Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society). These are two contrasting forms of social life based on ‘natural will’ and ‘rational will’ of actions. They are separate poles on the continuum of change (Tonnies & Loomis, 1957). The *Gesellschaft* corrodes the existence of *Gemeinschaft* and in this process there is struggle to cope up.

Robert Redfield views social organisation of tradition as basis of social and cultural change. The concept of ‘little tradition’ and ‘great tradition’ originated from his study on Mexican communities. Great tradition is the tradition of the reflective few and it is cultivated and recorded in the academics, temples and other urban institutions. It flows into and out of little tradition which is of the unreflective and illiterate mass. Later, Milton Singer and Mac Kim Marriot were influenced by the conceptual framework of Redfield while conducting studies on Indian society (Singh, 2000). Mac Kim Marriot gave the concept of Universalisation and parochialisation as refinement to the concept of Redfield. According to Marriot, the concept of universalization refers to the “carrying forward of materials which are already present in the little tradition which it encompasses”. The opposite process, which he called parochialization, is defined by him as the “downward devolution of great traditional elements and their integration with little traditional elements. It is a process of localization” (Marriot, 1955).

Traditional communities have generally been the victims of the process of rapid social change. The great tradition of the urban centre have been percolating in to the little tradition of the *Sapua Kela* community. The on-going process of urbanisation, modernisation and globalisation has negatively affected the folk tradition and culture of the *Sapua Kela* (Mohanty & Mohanty). These processes have got its impact on the lifestyle and livelihood of this snake charming community. Snake charming has declined today and 87 per cent of the respondents considered stricter laws made by the Government has been responsible for it whereas only 13 per cent of the believed the other forms of entertainment has taken the place of snake charming.

Education

Education has been of the instrument of social change for the community members as snake charming has been banned and people are searching for involvement in other occupations through which they can earn their living. From the socio economic profile of the respondents it has been found that the children of the present generation are getting enrolled in schools which is much higher as compared to the previous generation. When a respondent was asked about the education of their children he said-

“Two of our children go to English medium school...We want them to study and make their lives or else they have to be engaged as labourers.”

Impact of urbanisation

Robert Redfield viewed that primary and secondary urbanisation is also helpful in understanding social and cultural change in relation to urbanisation. Under primary urbanisation process the little tradition gets transferred into great tradition. While primary urbanisation is characterised by homogeneity, secondary urbanisation is marked with heterogeneity.

The reasons of social change should be viewed from various factors. The area where the *Sapua Kela* community reside is rapidly getting urbanised. Bhubaneswar has become an educational and commercial hub and Patia is increasingly getting urbanised because of growing educational and cultural institutions. When asked about the impact of urbanisation on snake charming, one fourth of the respondents replied that urbanisation has affected snake charming and three fourth of the respondents denied it.

Untouchability as form of social exclusion

Considered as impure in the scale of “purity and pollution” and ranked low in the traditional caste hierarchy, the *Sapua Kela* community suffered from the stigma of untouchability. The respondents were asked whether they still faced the stigma of social exclusion through untouchability. Although untouchability is directly not practiced but 25 per cent of the respondents hesitantly said that untouchability is still being practiced today. Three fourth of the respondent said that untouchability is no more practiced today. Although male respondents were taken as sample, a lady was keen to give her thought on this issue.

She said, “No, untouchability is not practiced today. People are preferring cleanliness of the person and surrounding than the caste before interacting... Jati discrimination we don't feel it now. Only two jati exist today, that is 'male' and 'female' and here this discrimination exist.”

Reasons for ban on snake charming

The Indian Wild Life Protection Act, 1972 made the hunting and captivity of the snakes illegal. Originally the law was made for prohibiting catching of snakes for commercial purposes. But in 1990s, due to the pressure from the environmentalists and animal rights groups, the law also was made applicable for the snake charmers. The respondents were asked for the reasons for which snake charming has been banned. Half of the respondents did not know the reason why snake charming has been banned, 15 per cent thought extinction of species was the reason and 35 per cent of the respondents gave other reasons for the ban on snake charming.

Snake charming as a form of entertainment

Snake charming was a popular form of entertainment in rural India and also in some tourist spots. The reasons why snake charming as a form of entertainment has reduced was questioned to the respondents. Fifty five per cent of the respondents stated that it has not been reduced because of ban people are not getting chance to see it. One of the respondents assertively said

“Who will not want to see the show...It was interesting then and many people used to come and watch eagerly; not only in villages but in cities there was a huge rush to watch it. Government has banned it so we are not performing and people are not watching.”

Television, computer and internet have taken the charm of snake charming, this was believed by 13.3 per cent of the respondents, 10 per cent of respondents said that zoological parks has reduced the amusement of spectators of snake charming and 15 per cent did not know the reason why snake charming as a form of entertainment has been reduced.

Table 3. Reasons for the decline of snake charming as a form of entertainment

Reasons	Frequency	Percentage
Television/Internet/computer	8	13.3
Zoological parks	6	10
People don't believe	4	6.6
Not reduced	33	55
Don't know	9	15

Impact of ban on the income of the community

When the *Sapua Kela* were asked how far the ban has affected their income that they use to earn earlier when snake charming was not outlawed, maximum respondents said they had fall in their income. While 87.5 per cent of the respondents reported fall in their income level, 7.5 per cent of them stated rise in their income by shifting to other jobs and 5 per cent said the ban did not affect their income much.

LIVELIHOOD IN TRANSIT

Current occupational profile and job satisfaction

There has been a shift from profession to occupation for the snake charmers. The present occupational profile of the respondents shown Table 4 represents that 31.6 per cent of the respondents are working as daily wage labourers, 26.6 per cent are engaged in private jobs while 21.6 per cent of the respondents sell medicinal plants, and other related items. Snake charming is done by 11.6 per cent of the respondents and 5 per cent of the respondents are doing Government job.

Table 4. Current occupation of the respondents

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Snake charming	7	11.6
Daily wage labour	19	31.6
Medicinal plant business	13	21.6
Private jobs	16	26.6
Govt. job	3	5
Others	2	3.3

Job satisfaction refers to being enthusiastic and happy about the work that a person is doing. Further, it means performing the work that he or she enjoys, does it well and is happy with the reward from the job (Kaliski, 2007). Of the total respondents, 71.66 per cent of them said that they don't get satisfaction from their new job and 28.33 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with their current jobs.

Snake charming –Still in practice?

Despite of strict laws, being jailed and paying fines snake charmers continue snake charming for their survival (Dutt, Kaleta, & Hoshing, 2005). To find out whether snake charming is still being practiced by the community the respondents were questioned with the assurance that their anonymity would be preserved. Of the total respondents, 85 per cent of them don't practice snake charming, 10 per cent of the respondents still practice and 5 per cent of them occasionally perform snake charming. “Snake charming has been banned by Govt. so I don't practice it in these areas. I go to remote villages perform there and earn out of it”replied one of the respondent. Thus, they practice snake charming in the areas where they have least fear of being caught by the law enforcing authorities.

Willingness to practice snake charming

To know the view point of the respondents they were asked if they want to practice snake charming, 71.6 per cent of them wanted to practice snake charming and 28.33 per cent of them were not interested. More than half of the respondents (60.4 per cent) wanted to practice snake charming as it is a part of their caste identity and tradition, 11.6 per cent of them want to practice it for job satisfaction and 27.9 per cent of respondent were willing to practice snake charming to increase their income.

Table 5. Reasons for the willingness to practice snake charming

Reason for willingness (N=43)	Frequency	Percentage
Tradition and caste identity	26	60.4
To increase income	12	27.9
Job satisfaction	5	11.6

Conclusion

The *Sapua Kela* has been trying to cope up with the vicissitudes of modernity introduced into the community. Meanwhile, the age old folk tradition is succumbing to the forces of social change. Wildlife related conflicts in other parts of the country have been resolved by encouraging community involvement in the conservation process. A comprehensive study to understand human-wildlife interaction, socio-economic and cultural study on the community should be done before suggesting livelihood options. Development of snake parks, employing them in research institutes, animal reserves and snake charming can also be used for the promotion of tourism of the state. Efforts for maintaining the cultural continuity should also be sought for the community. The *Padmotola* songs and tunes can be archived so that the coming generations can at least access their traditional folk tunes. There is a need to strike a balance between conservation of wildlife and preservation of cultural heritage of the community through sustainable livelihood opportunities for them.

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