
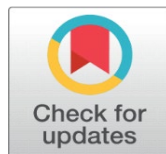
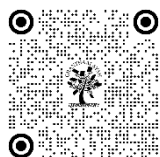


# STUDY ON VISUAL SCENARIOS FOR UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL STRUCTURES, COMMUNITY DYNAMICS, ELDERS' ROLES AND GENDER INFLUENCES IN THE DIDAYI TRIBE OF MALKANGIRI DISTRICT OF ODISHA

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## ABSTRACT

Examining the Social life of the Didayi tribe in the Malkangiri district of Odisha, eastern India is the primary objective of this study. The geographical borders of India are distinct from those of other nations. Odisha contains a variety of tribal communities, just as other Indian states. Now, 62 tribal groups have been identified by the Odisha government, accounting for 22.84 percent of the state's total population. Of the 62 tribal communities in Odisha, only 13 are considered to be undeveloped tribes. One of the PVTGs in the Odisha district of Malkangiri is Didayi tribe. They converse in a unique language known as Gahta Saa. There are 8,000 people living in the district alone, which stretches from the Godavari River basins to the Kondakameru mountain range at an elevation of 2000-3500 feet above sea level, according to the 2011 census. They mainly live in 39 villages of four Gram Panchayats under Khairput, Korukonda and the newly transferred Chitrakonda block. The area inhabited by the Didayi tribe has been divided by the government into three parts. For a living, they usually turn to traditional agriculture, animal husbandry, gathering forest goods, fishing and hunting. These tribes have a social way of life different from other tribes because they have their own culture, traditions, social system, customs, festivals, food, drinks, clothes and religion. The writers and current scholars have conducted an intriguing study for their scholarly work. The scholars have utilised source materials collected from both primary and secondary data.

**Keywords:** Social, Structures, Community, Gender, Influences, Didayi, Tribe, Malkangiri

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Didayis are a primitive tribal group who have been living in the south-eastern part of India since time immemorial. Due to their tiny population, the Didayi tribe was unstable and concealed before independence but in 1974, they came to light while the Balimela hydroelectric project was being built. In 1986, due to geographical divisions limiting access to facilities, the Odisha government identified the Didayi as one of 13 Particularly Vulnerable Groups and established the Didayi

Development Agency at Kudumulugumma to provide assistance such as seeds and modern agricultural equipment. (Gudia, J. & Mohapatra, R., 2023, 73(1), pp.1657-1671) The Didayi have ancient mythological legends, including the belief that the Ista God 'Brahma' created two children in the trunk of a Kendu tree in the middle of a river. The younger brother settled in the coastal areas of the Kondakameru hills, foothill plains and river banks, engaging in shifting cultivation and becoming known as *Gahta Remo*, which the Odisha government named as Didayi. The Didayi tribe resides primarily in Khairaput, Chitrakonda and Korukonda blocks of Malkangiri district in southern Odisha, nestled amidst dense forests, rivers and hills. (Council of Analytical Tribal Studies, 2002, p.167) Their settlements are situated atop hills ranging from 2500 feet to 3500 feet above sea level, between 18° south to 19° south latitude and 81° east to 82° east longitude. Despite a decrease in population since independence from 1978 in 1961 to 8394 in 2011 and 7650 in 2015- the Didayi maintain a distinct cultural identity centred around their language *Gahta Saa*, which is oral with no written form, preserving their traditions through oral storytelling, songs and ceremonies.

Traditionally, the Didayi tribe sustains themselves through agriculture, forest product collection, animal husbandry, poultry farming and fishing in the Chitrakonda river. They possess extensive knowledge of local ecosystems and natural resources, crucial for their daily needs and cultural practices. Despite facing challenges such as land rights deprivation, environmental degradation and limited access to education and healthcare, external and private organizations are actively working to uplift the tribe while preserving their rich cultural heritage. (Mahapatra, B., 2011, p.2)

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Didayi tribe, classified as one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of India, resides in the secluded and hilly terrain of Malkangiri district, Odisha. Their community is characterized by a complex social structure that emphasizes the roles of elders, traditional leadership and the interconnectedness of family units. The patriarchal system remains a defining feature of their society, with elders holding significant authority in decision-making processes and guiding the community through their accumulated wisdom and experience. Community dynamics within the Didayi tribe reflect a strong emphasis on collective living, with mutual cooperation forming the foundation of their social interactions. Traditional practices and customs play a crucial role in maintaining harmony and solidarity among tribe members. Elders act as custodians of cultural knowledge and traditions, often mediating conflicts and ensuring the continuity of age-old practices. Their influence extends beyond decision-making, serving as a source of guidance in social, religious and cultural matters. (Rath, G. C., 2006, pp.140-142) Gender roles within the Didayi tribe are distinct yet complementary, with responsibilities often divided along traditional lines. Men typically engage in subsistence agriculture, hunting and other external activities, while women contribute significantly to household management, food preparation and the creation of traditional crafts. Despite these distinctions, women's participation in cultural and ceremonial practices underscores their vital role in sustaining the tribe's heritage and communal identity. As external influences increasingly permeate their isolated way of life, the Didayi tribe faces evolving challenges. Shifts in traditional power structures, the impact of modernization and the gradual erosion of cultural practices have brought significant changes to their social fabric. Nevertheless, the enduring roles of elders and the

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community's adaptability highlight the resilience of the Didayi tribe in preserving their unique identity amidst change. (Odisha State Gazetteer, 2015, p.52)

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- This study explores the social structures and community dynamics within the Didayi tribe of Malkangiri district, Odisha, focusing on traditional ceremonies, rituals and their role in fostering cohesion.
- The research seeks to investigate the roles of elders in decision-making processes and conflict resolution within the Didayi community, examining their impact on social harmony and governance.
- This study also examines gender roles and their influence on household dynamics, economic activities and cultural preservation among the Didayi tribe in Malkangiri district, Odisha.

### 4. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The present research has been done to critically analyse and review the social life of Didayi tribe living in the eastern part of Malkangiri district in the southern part of Odisha and what social practices are available in their society? As this study involves social science, the present scholar visited the study area and collected the necessary primary data from the local people and collected some of their photos, videos, voice records etc. Information about their social mobility, language, education, health, transportation, communication, political participation etc. has also been collected through some questionnaires. In this study, the data collected from the primary method and the data collected from the secondary method were reviewed and the published original data was used. Most importantly, the method of grounded theory was widely applied as new ideas and concepts emerged from the various reviews. Apart from this, many online sources have been used in the study as secondary data.

### 5. REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Sisa (2020) discussed the cultural counters of the Didayi tribe of Malkangiri district of Odisha, assigning different indices such as the region-wise socio-cultural life. The author has studied many areas such as society, education, healthcare, culture, politics, religion, economy etc. He suggests that culture is an important part of a community which helps to identify and improve each race. Therefore, he mentioned in his book and suggested the government to study as much as possible to sensitize the Didayi tribe through various programs and bring to the people how their culture can be re-preserved.

Ota (2015) has written a book whose title is Didayi Loka Sahitya. Here, he has discussed the literature, poems and folk songs of the Didayi community. As the Didayi is an ancient tribal community in the Malkangiri district of Odisha, they have a lot of stories, from ancient to contemporary. How this tribe has been on earth in ancient times and how the tribe has been developing from generation to generation, the creation of clans, etc. However, the author did not cover any specific field; that's why the current scholar has found some gaps in studying important fields, such as social life.

Pradhan (2015) has discussed in an article the status of women of the Didayi tribe in the Malkangiri district of Odisha. He has discussed the position of women in

their traditional society and how they are empowered. In that article, he also mentioned that the positions of Didayi women are high in their society and their family members support them in different fields when they are participating. Here, the author has covered many fields, such as social life and political life, but did not mention them deeply, so the current scholar is finding some gaps for a new study of the Didayi tribe of Malkangiri district of Odisha.

Mohapatra (2011) studied two blocks of the Malkangiri district about the social, cultural, political, religious and economic life of the Didayi tribe and found that their traditional lifestyle is different from other communities in the district of Odisha. He mentioned strongly, that the traditional political system of this tribe is unique and a geographical barrier to development in education, health care, drinking water, transportation, communication, political involvement in general elections etc. However, the author did not mention their cultural identity which is the main component of the development of each community. The author has suggested to the coming generation for attention on the cultural practices of the Didayi tribe of Malkangiri district which are thirteen Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups of Odisha.

## 6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 6.1. CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITION

The Didayi tribe, residing primarily in the hilly regions of Odisha, India, exhibits a vibrant cultural heritage that is deeply intertwined with their natural surroundings and spiritual beliefs. Their cultural practices are largely centered around their animistic religion, where they worship natural elements, ancestral spirits and a pantheon of deities believed to influence their daily lives. Key among their religious observances is the *Inr chang pande*, it is the beginning festival of the year. (Gudia, J., 2022:664-673) It is also called the festival of mango seed-eating or *Taku parab*. After this festival they will start cultivation. The Second festival *Osa arke pande* will observe in September and they called it *nua khai*. The festival held in the month of January is called *Pus arke pande*. During this time, the animals who helped during the cultivation are bathed, his head is decorated with vermilion and sandalwood crowns and garlands of flowers are offered to him and he is fed with various types of cooked food including khechudi mixed with all vegetables. The most celebrated festival of the Didayi tribe is *Giya pande*, which is also called *Chaita parab* by the local language. This festival lasted for seven days. (Mohanty, S. C., 2015, p.198) During this time, the men will go for hunt and eat the mangoes at that time the women will go to the *danda* of the village to guard them. If the men return after hunting, then the women hold the hunted animal and perform the *Demsa* dance in the village *danda*. During this time, once every three years, girls dress up as boys and dance. Intricate ceremonies, group feasts, traditional music and dance performances are all part of this celebration, which aims to fortify ties within the community and convey appreciation for the abundant crop. (Mohanty, 2015, p.210) The Didayi, an indigenous tribe, have been teaching the younger generation to preserve their traditions in order to keep their heritage alive. In figure 1, a priest and messenger from Muduliguda village gather all the children in front of them to perform a ritual for *Pusarke Pande*, resulting in these young children learning from the activity. This program is conducted annually, with all children, including boys and girls, participating, while older individuals also remain present.



**Figure 1**

**Figure 1:** Sanyasi Palasi (village priest) and Ghenu Chalan (village messenger) of Muduliguda, are performing a ritual in the presence of young children.

**Sources:** The photograph has taken by the scholar.

## 6.2. SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Didayi tribe in Malkangiri district, Odisha, has a traditional social structure centred on a clan-based system that serves as the hub of their communal life. Every clan, or *kul*, is led by elders with a great deal of power who are in charge of upholding social order and settling disputes. The tribe has a patriarchal system in which males are the principal decision-makers and inheritance and ancestry are traced through the male line. (Pradhan, G., 2015, p.241). The following is mentioned in Figure 2: When boys and girls of the Didayi tribe marry individuals from other communities without the permission of their society, the elders of the village resolve such incidents. This reveals the significant role played by the elders in the Didayi community.

In the society, men and women have well-defined roles and responsibilities. Men are usually involved in labour-intensive activities like farming and hunting, while women take care of the home, raise the children and perform traditional crafts like basketry and weaving. Endogamous marriage customs, which are typically negotiated within a clan or between neighbouring clans, strengthen social cohesion. Elopement marriage customs, which are typically negotiated within a clan or between neighbouring clans, strengthen social cohesion. The Didayi place a high value on communal living, with social events, festivals and rituals serving as vital means of fortifying ties within the community and guaranteeing the passing down of cultural values and customs from one generation to the next.

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2:** Udlia Biye (Elopement Marriage of Didayi Tribe in Hill Area.

**Sources:** The photograph has taken by the scholar.

### 6.3. ECONOMIC AND LIVELIHOOD

The Didayi tribe in Malkangiri district, Odisha, relies primarily on agriculture for income, using traditional methods to grow crops such as millet, maize and pulses, often practising shifting agriculture for soil fertility. They supplement their diet and livelihood by hunting, fishing and gathering forest products like fruits and medicinal plants, crucial for fuel and crafts. (Mohapatra, P. K., 2015, p.222) Livestock such as goats, chickens and cattle also contribute significantly to their economy. Traditional crafts such as weaving and basketry, particularly by women, reflect their cultural heritage and are sold in local markets, fostering economic exchange. Despite a barter system and self-sufficiency in economic activities, limited access to healthcare, education and modern agricultural tools poses challenges. Government and non-governmental efforts aim to support the Didayi by improving agricultural productivity, market access and overall living standards, bridging traditional practices with contemporary needs. The members of the Didayi tribe make various items using natural materials and sell them in the nearby market of Kudumulgumma. Below, Kamalu Bishoi, a Didayi person from Muduliguda village, supports his family through a cottage industry where he makes various items in his courtyard to sustain his household. Due to the lack of a market, this cottage industry is slowly gaining traction among the people.



**Figure 3**

**Figure 3:** Kamalu Bishoi of Muduliguda village of the Didayi tribe is making a Kula using bamboo.  
**Sources:** The photograph has taken by the scholar.

#### 6.4. GENDER ROLES AND RELATIONS

The patriarchal social structure and customary division of work define gender roles and relations in the Didayi tribe of Odisha. Women handle home tasks, childcare and traditional crafts like basketry, while men are primarily in charge of agriculture, hunting and communal leadership. Women make important contributions to the economy and household, but they are still viewed as inferior to men in general, with major choices and leadership positions usually going to men. The tribe's traditional politics are also based on a system of patriarchy, with male elders and leaders controlling dispute settlement and decision-making. (Sisa, D., 2020, p.1) Endogamous marriage customs reinforce a woman's secondary status by having her join her husband's family. Nonetheless, women have a critical role in social and economic spheres and the survival and prosperity of the community depend heavily on the labour they do. These old gender roles are gradually being questioned by contemporary influences and social developments, which is creating new dynamics and expanding opportunities for women in the social and political sectors.

**Figure 4**

**Figure 4:** Hari Chalan, the village headman of Muduliguda, is making a decision in the meeting.  
**Sources:** The photograph has taken by the scholar.

## 6.5. EDUCATION AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSMISSION

The elders of the Didayi tribe in Odisha are crucial in teaching the younger generation about their cultural heritage, agricultural methods, hunting techniques and the use of medicinal plants through storytelling, rituals and practical experiences. The tribe has traditionally relied on the oral transmission of knowledge. Their system of informal education guarantees the survival and perpetuation of their traditions and practical knowledge. However, there has been a steady move toward formal education with the introduction of contemporary education and greater engagement with the outside world. In the Didayi regions, schools have been built by the government and non-governmental groups. They promote literacy and provide curricula that cover both general education and cultural topics. With the help of this shift from traditional to modern schooling, the Didayi young will be better prepared to face the problems of the modern world while maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity. To preserve the integrity of culture in the face of changing educational environments, it is nevertheless imperative that traditional knowledge and modern education be balanced. (Mahapatra, B., 2011, p.2) The Didayi people, being an ancient tribe, are dedicated to ensuring that their next generation survives well. Those who miss out on primary education make it their responsibility to provide the best possible education to their sons and daughters. Below, a Didayi person is teaching their child during the evening after completing daily work.

**Figure 5**



**Figure No.5:** Rameshwar Gudia from Muduliguda village is teaching his daughter after finishing his daily work.

**Sources:** The photograph was taken by the scholar.

## 6.6. HEALTH AND MEDICINE

The health practices of the Didayi tribe in Odisha are strongly ingrained in their traditional knowledge and natural surroundings. For the treatment of a wide range of illnesses, they heavily rely on the herbal cures and medicinal plants that grow in the nearby woodlands. The *Disaris*, or traditional healers, are essential in identifying and treating illnesses through the use of herbal remedies and age-old customs. (Mohanti, K. K., 2009, p.210) Common illnesses are frequently treated with readily



available plants, roots and herbs from the area because they are thought to have healing qualities. In addition, the Didayi pray to their ancestors and deities and carry out ceremonies to invoke divine intervention for good health. The tribe has serious health issues, such as hunger, infectious infections and restricted access to modern healthcare facilities, despite their extensive understanding of traditional medicine. Governmental and non-governmental organizations are working to enhance overall health outcomes while honouring and conserving the cultural heritage of the Didayi people by fusing contemporary medical methods with traditional health systems. The Didayi people live far from the nearest clinic, so they continue to use various traditional medicines to stay healthy. Due to their remote location, different types of medicinal plants are readily available in their surroundings and in every Didayi village, there is a medicine person or Dishari. When someone falls ill, they go to the Dishari to get medicine without cost. Below, a Dishari from a remote part of the Didayi tribe is preparing traditional herbal medicine.

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6:** Tribal Medicine man of Cut off area.

**Internet Sources:**

[https://repository.tribal.gov.in/bitstream/123456789/74428/1/SCST\\_2014\\_research\\_0337.pdf](https://repository.tribal.gov.in/bitstream/123456789/74428/1/SCST_2014_research_0337.pdf)

## 6.7. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

The rich and intricate religion of the Didayi tribe of Odisha is based on animism, the veneration of natural objects and ancestral spirits. Their spiritual beliefs are based on a deep respect for a number of nature-related deities, including the soil, rivers, forests and mountains, which they feel have a great deal of power and influence over their lives. Their religious activities revolve around rituals and rites, which are frequently led by tribe priests or shamans who operate as go-betweens for the spiritual and material realms. An important component is ancestral worship, in which the Didayi make regular sacrifices and rites to placate the spirits of their ancestors and ask for their protection and direction. They strengthen their spiritual ties and communal bonds through intricate rituals, communal feasting and traditional music and dance during festivals like Magh Parab, which commemorate the harvest season. The Didayi people's everyday lives are profoundly impacted by their spiritual practices, which shape their outlook on life and how they engage with the natural world. This helps to preserve their rich cultural and religious legacy. (Hasnain, N., 2019, p.96) The Didayi, despite being a primitive tribe, possess their own religious and spiritual consciousness. They worship their deities in the village

and also collectively demonstrate spiritual power. In figure 5, the people of the Didayi tribe are seen showcasing their traditional spiritual power by performing *Shiralati* at the Durga Puja held at Patharipakana in the Kudumulugumma region of Malkangiri district.

**Figure 7**



**Figure 7:** The Didayi community presents Shiralati at the Pathiripakana Durga Puja.

**Sources:** The photograph has taken by the scholar.

## 6.8. INTERACTION WITH OTHER COMMUNITIES

The Didayi tribe is an indigenous group that mostly lives in Odisha, India. Through social, economic and cultural exchanges, it interacts with other tribal communities. Intertribal unions are typical, strengthening family bonds and promoting cultural assimilation. In order to facilitate resource sharing and mutual economic assistance, the Didayi exchange goods with neighbouring tribes, including handicrafts, agricultural output and forest products. Culturally, the Didayi join tribes like the Bonda and Gadaba in local celebrations, rituals and rites, fortifying their ties and guaranteeing the survival of their common history. (Mohanty, S. C., (2015, p.232) Their relationships are further enhanced by cooperative community activities, especially those that are centred upon the preservation of natural resources and traditional lifestyles. These programmes, which frequently entail sharing knowledge on health, education and sustainable practices, show a group effort to raise standards of living both inside and outside of the community. The Didayi tribe's cordial relationship with their neighbours is maintained through these complex exchanges, highlighting the sense of togetherness and mutual support among the tribal populations in the area.

## 6.9. ART AND EXPRESSION

The artistic expression of the Didayi tribe is deeply intertwined with their natural surroundings and cultural traditions. They use intricate beadwork, traditional tattoos like *Gadna* and body art to convey their artistic visions and cultural identity, with tattoos holding symbolic importance for rites of passage and tribal affiliation. Renowned for their skilled beadwork, Didayi women create vibrant jewellery pieces that carry cultural narratives and ancestral significance alongside their aesthetic appeal. Music and dance play a vital role in their cultural expression,

reflecting their spiritual beliefs and strong connection to nature through traditional songs, dances and instrumental accompaniments like flutes and drums. These artistic traditions not only preserve their heritage but also foster community cohesion and transmit their values to future generations while sharing their unique way of life with the broader world. (Vidyarthi, L. P. & Rai, B. K., 1976, p.308) The Didayi, despite being a primitive tribe, possess various unique forms of art. Using their traditional knowledge and skills, they utilize natural materials for decorating their homes, weaving clothes and adorning their bodies with various designs known as Chita, *Gadna*, or body art. In figure 6, it is shown how people traditionally used to decorate their bodies.

**Figure 8**



**Figure 8:** Gadna: traditional body painting of Didayi tribe.

**Internet Sources:** [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Tattooing-process-Fig-8-Tattooed-parts-washed-with-cow-dung-mix\\_fig4\\_320728284](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Tattooing-process-Fig-8-Tattooed-parts-washed-with-cow-dung-mix_fig4_320728284)

## 7. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

- Understanding the social life of the Didayi tribe in Malkangiri district is significant for preserving and promoting their unique cultural heritage and traditions, which are integral to their identity and community resilience.
- Exploring their social dynamics provides insights into Indigenous governance systems, community cohesion strategies and intergenerational knowledge transmission practices that can inform policies for sustainable development and cultural preservation.
- Studying the social life of the Didayi tribe contributes to broader anthropological and ethnographic research, highlighting the diversity of social structures and cultural practices among indigenous communities in Odisha tribal belt.

## 8. FINDING

The Didayi tribe exhibits a distinct social structure centered around clan-based systems. Elders lead these clans, maintaining social harmony and resolving conflicts effectively. The community places significant emphasis on collective living, with festivals, rituals and social events strengthening community bonds. Traditional



patriarchal norms influence decision-making, inheritance and authority distribution, while collective participation ensures cohesion. Elders hold significant roles in guiding the community, resolving disputes and preserving cultural practices. Village councils, governed by the Naik (chief), Dishari (priest) and Chalan (assistant), integrate traditional governance systems with limited participation in India's constitutional processes. Elders act as custodians of cultural heritage and are pivotal in intergenerational knowledge transfer. Gender roles in the Didayi tribe remain distinct, with men handling agriculture and hunting, while women oversee domestic responsibilities, childcare and traditional crafts. Women's contributions are vital in cultural preservation, ensuring the transmission of traditions and economic sustenance, although they lack significant decision-making authority. Contemporary influences are gradually reshaping gender dynamics, expanding roles for women in socio-political spheres. These findings highlight the Didayi tribe's intricate social structure, the critical roles played by elders and the evolving influence of gender dynamics in their community. Despite modern challenges, the tribe exhibits resilience in preserving its cultural heritage and social systems.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The study shows that Didayi living in Malkangiri of Odisha is a primitive tribe but they have their own social structure and social organization like other tribes. They are maintaining harmony in various aspects of their traditional culture, festivals, languages, ceremonies, customs etc. As a result, their traditional practice continues and is getting better day by day. The study found that although they are divided into three groups in terms of geographical boundaries, they share similar characteristics in terms of social decision-making or traditional political participation. Although village councils are administered in each Didayis village, they are also involved in the electoral process of India's constitutional system, with both men and women taking part. The elders are able to resolve any dispute arising in the society together with the village chief. The Didayi tribe in Malkangiri district, Odisha, has gender roles that greatly influence household dynamics, economic activity and cultural preservation, according to the study. The allocation of labour and responsibility inside households is influenced by strongly ingrained traditional gender norms, which see women handling domestic duties and agricultural labour and males largely involved in external economic activities. Notwithstanding these inflexible positions, women are vital to the preservation of cultural knowledge and behaviours, guaranteeing the passing down of traditions from one generation to the next. Even though they are frequently overlooked, women's economic contributions are essential to the tribe's ability to maintain its economy. In the Didayi community, addressing gender inequality and appreciating women's roles could improve cultural preservation and economic growth.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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