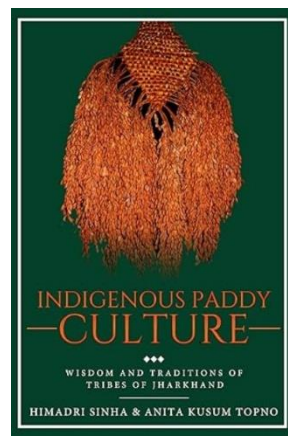


Indigenous Paddy Culture: Wisdom and Traditions of Tribes of Jharkhand

Himadri Sinha¹, Anita Kusum Topno²

Sister Lalita Roshni Lakra, DSA, St. Anne's Convent.



Indigenous Paddy Culture: Wisdom and Traditions of Tribes of Jharkhand, authored by Himadri Sinha and Anita Kusum Topno, serves as a benchmark study on paddy cultivation in Jharkhand. For the tribal communities—particularly the Oraon and Sadan—paddy is far more than a staple food; it is an integral, inseparable aspect of life, deeply woven into their economic, social, spiritual, and cultural existence.

The book's perspective is both compelling and thought-provoking, appealing to scholars and lay readers alike—whether farmers or non-farmers. It demonstrates the intrinsic connection between tribal life and paddy cultivation. The authors make a powerful case for recognizing paddy as not just a crop, but as a vital element of identity, memory, tradition, and survival. It positions paddy as the most sustainable food known to these communities—both in ancient times and in the modern era—and highlights its invaluable worth to both local and global audiences.

Key Highlights of the Book

1. A Profound Understanding of Traditional Wisdom

The first notable strength of the book lies in its documentation of the cultural wisdom embedded in the traditional paddy practices of Jharkhand's indigenous communities. Each chapter offers detailed insights into the processes of cultivation, seed preservation, land preparation, and harvest. The literature is rich and informative, presenting deep knowledge about how paddy farming has contributed to the sustenance of tribal communities and, by extension, to broader human civilization.

Illustrations, diagrams, and photographs enhance this narrative, providing visual representations of various paddy varieties and farming techniques. Readers become familiar with the names of numerous indigenous

rice strains cultivated throughout the seasons and across different geographies. The book explains how diverse environmental conditions—ranging from drought-prone lands to floodplains—affect the choice of paddy, and how local farmers adapt their methods accordingly.

Importantly, the authors also discuss how technological developments, mechanization, and hybrid seeds have brought both change and challenges. These sections are handled with nuance, offering a balanced view of progress and preservation.

2. Paddy Culture as a Way of Life

A second major theme of the book is how deeply paddy culture permeates every sphere of tribal life. As the authors beautifully describe, tribal life revolves around paddy—from the sowing of seeds to harvesting and storage. Every important celebration—such as *Karam* (a festival of youth and harvest), *Nawakhani* (feast of new crops), and *Sarhul* (worship of the Sal tree)—is either directly or indirectly linked to paddy.

These festivals are more than rituals; they are expressions of ecological awareness and community bonding. A harvest is not merely a time of economic gain—it is a moment of communal joy, shared with family, society, and even the natural world. Songs, dances, and stories accompany each step of the agricultural cycle, imbuing farming with rhythm and meaning. As the authors aptly state, in this world, “walking is dancing and talking is singing.” This poetic expression captures the happiness, harmony, and cultural richness that surround paddy cultivation in tribal society.

The indigenous paddy culture is shown as a model of ecological integration, offering valuable lessons to modern humanity. It highlights the harmony between *jal*, *jangal*, and *jamin* (water, forest, and land), a concept that resonates strongly in contemporary environmental discourses.

3. A Spiritual and Moral Worldview

Another unique feature of the book is how it captures the sacred dimension of paddy in tribal thought. To the tribal communities, paddy is a divine gift—bestowed upon them by *Dharmes*, the supreme deity. This belief underscores the moral and spiritual outlook that governs farming practices. Cultivation is not merely a technical or economic endeavour; it is a moral relationship with the land, ancestors, and the divine.

The book convincingly argues that indigenous paddy culture cannot be reduced to rational or scientific frameworks alone. It is also about reverence, gratitude, and ethical restraint. A good harvest is viewed as a blessing, and with that blessing comes responsibility. Before consuming the new rice, tribals offer it to the deity, and only then do they share it with the community. This practice emphasizes humility, thankfulness, and collective joy—values that are often missing in today’s individualistic agricultural economies.

4. Challenges of Modernity

Despite the strengths of traditional paddy culture, the authors do not shy away from addressing the pressing challenges faced by indigenous farmers. Mechanization, market pressures, hybrid seeds, land fragmentation, and climate change are disrupting the age-old rhythms of tribal agriculture. Most tribal farmers own only small plots of land and continue to rely on traditional tools and techniques. They are often unable to compete with the large-scale agribusiness models that dominate modern markets.

This section of the book is particularly important as it highlights the vulnerability of tribal communities in the face of systemic economic and environmental changes. The authors argue for urgent policy interventions that support smallholder farmers, promote indigenous seed varieties, and protect community rights over natural resources. Without such measures, the cultural and ecological knowledge preserved by these communities is at risk of disappearing.

5. Relevance to Global and Local Contexts

A further strength of the book lies in its comparative framework. It not only explores the tribal practices of Jharkhand but also situates them within global discourses on food security, sustainability, and cultural heritage. By presenting the paddy culture of Jharkhand's tribals alongside other agrarian traditions, the authors highlight the enormous contribution of indigenous people to the global food system.

Moreover, the inclusion of the *Sadan* (non-tribal) communities of Jharkhand, and their own paddy traditions, adds a layer of inclusivity and complexity to the analysis. It shows how agricultural identity in Jharkhand is both diverse and interconnected. The blending of tribal and non-tribal narratives enhances the book's depth and reflects the rich mosaic of regional farming cultures.

Final Thoughts

In conclusion, *Indigenous Paddy Culture* is an outstanding contribution to the fields of anthropology, agronomy, cultural studies, and sustainable development. It is both scholarly and accessible, offering a narrative that is intellectually enriching and emotionally resonant. The book invites us to rethink agriculture not as a mere economic activity, but as a way of life—infused with ethics, spirituality, tradition, and ecological wisdom.

Its message is especially timely in an era where industrial agriculture is being questioned for its environmental cost and social inequality. This book reminds us that indigenous knowledge systems offer not only heritage but hope—for building a more just, resilient, and sustainable world.

Key Takeaways:

- Paddy culture is an outward expression of the inbuilt traditions and virtues of indigenous people.
- The harmony of *jal*, *jangal*, and *jamin* (water, forest, and land) is central to tribal worldview.
- “Walking is dancing, and talking is singing”—an expression of the joy and unity found in paddy cultivation.

This book is a treasure trove of insights for anyone interested in sustainable agriculture, indigenous cultures, or community-based development. It deserves to be widely read, discussed, and preserved—just like the ancient seeds it so lovingly documents.



About the Author/Reviewer:

Sr. Lalita Roshni Lakra is a Religious Sister belonging to *the Congregation of the Daughters of St. Anne, Ranchi*. She holds an LL.B. degree from Ranchi University and currently practices law at the Jharkhand High Court in Ranchi. She previously served the Church in India as the Assistant Secretary in the Office for Tribal Affairs at the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), New Delhi. In this role, she actively and passionately worked for the welfare of the Indigenous people of India.

Sr. Lalita also practiced law alongside advocates from the organization *Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)* in Delhi. She presented a paper titled "Continuing Discrimination Against Women: A Tribal Perspective" at the DVK National Seminar on Tribal Women's Rights, which was later published in the 2016 volume *Gender Justice in the Church and Society*.

In addition, she holds a Master's degree in Social Work (M.S.W.) from Bangalore University. Since 2023, she has been serving as the Director of *BEACON*, the Social Development Centre of the Ranchi Province, located in Hulhundu, Ranchi, Jharkhand.