

Economic Organization of the Ho Tribe in Mayurbhanj: Continuity and Change

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Abstract— The economic life of the Ho tribe is a mixed mix of traditional subsistence and modern socio-economic changes. Traditionally, the Ho used to hunt, gather and use forest resources to feed themselves (Ray, 1969; Nayak, 1977), gradually changing to the land use and settlement of the agricultural sector based on interactions with neighbors and changes in environmental conditions. At present, agriculture is the backbone of their economy, complemented by forest-based activity and wage labor (Mohanta, 2003). But these developments have not weakened the Ho's ecological ties to their environment as rooted in traditional knowledge systems and ceremonies. Cultural practices including farming, hunting, and forest tillage are closely bound up with religious faith and cultural practices that control resource use to ensure sustainability (SC/ST Research and Training Institute, Odisha). But factors like industrialization, deforestation, and the dispossession of land have dramatically transformed their traditional economic system, creating new livelihood and livelihood issues. This paper investigates the evolution of the ecosystem in Ho, from farming, forest resources, and the act of performing rituals. It claims that for all its many facets new economic opportunities in this century may offer, the new challenges introduced by modernization have also been to the maintenance of the region's indigenous culture and survival. **Keywords:** Ho Tribe; Economic Life; Subsistence Economy; Agriculture; Forest Economy; Ritual Economy; Indigenous Knowledge; Tribal Development; Odisha.

Index Terms— Ho Tribe; Economic Life; Subsistence Economy; Agriculture; Forest Economy; Ritual Economy; Indigenous Knowledge; Tribal Development; Odisha

I. INTRODUCTION

Understanding the relations between human societies and their natural environment requires examining tribal economies. These have a commonality among many tribal communities, developing livelihood

systems rooted in ecological factors and socio-cultural traditions. A notable such economy is represented by the Ho tribe, a tribe found predominantly in Odisha and Jharkhand which practices both subsistence and environmental adaptation (Nayak, 1977). The Ho's traditional economic life largely consisted of hunting and gathering with a few years of subsistence, and shifting cultivation. (Ray, 1969) and the local people lived in forests as a self-sufficient way of life which was supplemented with the services and material resources of food, shelter and woods. Through prolonged contacts with neighboring agricultural settlements and dependence upon administrative and economic systems, settled agriculture has gradually become the dominant occupation of the Ho (Mohanta, 2003). This marked a fundamentally different economic structure for them - both in terms of population size and means of extraction. In the present-day Ho people's economic system is composed not merely of traditional elements but an amalgamation of it. They still make their living simply from farming, though some part of it is done on the side. Land is classified by its ecological properties to be representative of their knowledge and skill in adapting to the environment (SC/ST Research and Training Institute, Odisha). In contrast, reliance on forest resources remains the major contributor to food security and income generation. The closeness between the Ho economy and ritual practices and belief is a special feature. Procedures of economy such as cultivation, conservation, hunting or harvesting are grounded on ritualized practices in the name of well-being, preservation and ecological harmony. This not only acts as a means to manage or manage use of natural resources but also reinforces social identity and harmony in the community (Nayak, 1977). Yet the Ho tribal lifestyle has itself been materially altered by

foreign influence- industrialization, urbanization, and environmental destruction. The loss of forest resources, more land alienation and reliance on wage labor brought by the erosion of forests is challenging to the community (Ray, 1969). Modernity has made opportunities for the generation of income for the community, but it has also disturbed the traditional system of living and cultures. Against this background, to examine the economic life of the Ho tribe, the current study aims to reflect upon the economic life, including their historical transformation, current organization, and novel set of issues. It also underscores the significance of their Indigenous knowledge and ritual traditions in maintaining their economy. 'There needs to be awareness of these dynamics, and of other factors, before development policies can be designed that are sustainable and culturally sensitive.'

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- Its purpose is to understand the economic life of the Ho with the cultural practices of the people in Ho tribe and new models of economic transactions. The objectives are:
- To get a sense of how the Ho tribe's ancestral economy revolves around agriculture and forestry resources, and whether their subsistence life is based on such economies.
- To inspect the survival of traditional knowledge systems and ways of life of the indigenous people in changing socio-economic settings.
- To test how modernization, forest regulations, and the development of the market economy affect the living patterns and economies of the Ho community.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study of the economic life of the Ho tribe is known through a combination of qualitative research methods. Fieldwork was used to collect the primary data for the study in selected tribal areas. Methods including participant observation, informal interviews, and community engagement were used to collect lived experience on participants' economic activities, rituals, and daily life as well as their daily livelihoods. The primary data are used alongside secondary data (books, articles, official reports by government, and publications from various research institutes). The

latter sources not only aided in explaining history but supplemented them with a historical examination of social/economic transformations over time. The data analysis integrates field observations with secondary data in a manner that provides a comprehensive and credible narrative on the subject, as well as an objective perspective on both continuity and change in the Ho tribe's economic life.

The traditional economic organization of the Ho Tribe represents a subsistence system based on ecological adaptation and community-based resource management that is not dependent on industry/technology. Throughout its history, this ancient society has been deeply connected to forests, land and collective labor patterns. The framework of this economic system is representative of self-sufficiency and sustainability, reflecting indigenous knowledge and the norms of culture.

IV. TRADITIONAL ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION OF THE HO TRIBE

The traditional economic organization of the Ho tribe reflects a subsistence-oriented system deeply rooted in ecological adaptation and community-based resource management. Historically, their economy was characterized by a close relationship with forests, land, and collective labour practices. The structure of this economic system illustrates both self-sufficiency and sustainability, shaped by indigenous knowledge and cultural norms.

(a) Forest-Based Economy

Historically, the Ho economic system has been grounded in the forest. The community relied on forest resources for food, fuel, and raw materials necessary for daily life. Small forest products like sal leaves, firewood, fruits, roots, tubers, and medicinal plants sustained their economy (Ray, 1969). These resources were used not only to support their subsistence needs but contributed to the small-scale trading in the local markets. Gathering and hunting were economic activities of great importance within earlier times. The Ho hunted wild animals with traditional weapons like bows and arrows and gathered food items -honey, mushrooms, and forest fruits. These habits indicated a meticulous appreciation of the natural world and its periodic patterns. Hunting has decreased under the influence of environmental barriers and legal prohibitions, although gathering still provides an

added income and nutrition to their diet (Nayak, 1977).

(b) Agricultural System

Agricultural System of the Ho tribe adopted agricultural production, at a time when hunting and gathering became the natural food of the people of Ho land and gradually replaced hunting and gathering as the predominant subsistence. In the earliest stage, shifting cultivation (sometimes known as slash-and-burn agriculture) was utilized, particularly in woodlands and uplands. This system ultimately gave way to settled cultivation by population pressures, bureaucratic control, and contacts with surrounding agricultural communities (Mohanta, 2003). Rice, millets, and pulses grow most of the major crops available in the Ho region, with paddy being the dominant food crop. Agricultural production relies largely upon the monsoon and is performed with traditional tools and techniques. One important characteristic of this group of farmers is their collective agriculture; members of the family and the wider community engage in practices like sowing, transplanting and harvesting. Such cooperative system, in part, enhances social ties promoting timely completion of agricultural labor (SC/ST Research and Training Institute, Odisha).

(c) Land Ownership Pattern

The Ho people also have the land ownership as their natural resource which originates from community and clan, not based on individual land rights. Customary rights to land varied by clan and land access were controlled by cultural norms and tradition (Nayak, 1977). Community rule over land provided a fair basis of distribution and kept a monopoly on human development. It did help the construction of a collective, social compact that would make them bear the weight of resources equally. With the emergence of formal land laws and forms of private ownership, these traditional patterns have drastically evolved, and communal ownership of land rights have been gradually eroded over time (Ray, 1969).

(d) Livestock Economy

Livestock is an important component of the Ho people's traditional economy. Cattle, goats, pigs and poultry are preserved for economic, social as well as ritual purposes. Cattle are mainly used here to plough

the fields of agriculture and to transport, goats and poultry provide animals and other resources (Mohanta, 2003). Livestock are involved in rituals too and it can be used during religious events or festivals as well, the use of which is a sacrifice. The Ho livestock economy is therefore diverse in its production, agriculture, nutrition and cultural practices.

(e) Barter System

Prior to the rise of the market economy, the Ho system of economy had little money circulation and was predominantly barter based. In order to exchange goods such as grains, forest produce, livestock and craft material within the village and with neighbors, goods such as grain and forest produce were carried out in one's possession (Ray, 1969). This approach allowed resources to flow freely without the formal usage of money. It also engendered communal self-reliance and fostering a mutual sense of cooperation among the members of the society. And while the barter has fallen in the face of market economy and monetization, the exchange of goods and services based on mutual exchange and non-monetary transactions continue to exist at the rural level to some extent (SC/ST Research and Training Institute, Odisha).

V. SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURE

The Ho tribe's economic situation is inextricably linked to their society that is structured around kinship, family unit, clan and traditional practices or institutions. Economic activities tend to not be undertaken without others but within a cooperation-based framework, together with social norms. Ho society ensures all its resources are shared, labour is engaged and regulated in a traditional way by people who use traditional systems of authority.

Role of Kili System or Clan in Economic Cooperation

The clan system or Kili, as it is popularly known here, is fundamental in forging economic cooperation between the Ho. Each clan is part of a group whose individuals and lineage are closely related to that of a common ancestor, with some of their members also performing specific social and ritual obligations. The distinction of clans is often made between exogamous units and groups, a distinction that may help to

simplify what is in reality far more complex than a mere genealogy. Clan members help each other in agricultural farming, during the planting work, in house building, house construction and in hard time and in times of food insecurity when crops fail or are sick or if plants fail and sickness strikes. This kind of collaboration helps people save their livelihood and sustain a subsistence economy. The clan system also has the benefit of controlling access to land and forest resources and collective ownership or control of land which, as well as forest resources has a collective feel of shared ownership and responsibility and thus the clan is further reinforcing sense of common ownership (Das, 1972; Singh, 2003).

Division of Labour

The division of labour among the Ho is largely based on gender and age, ensuring efficiency in economic activities while maintaining social harmony. Men are primarily responsible for tasks that require physical strength and mobility, such as ploughing, hunting, clearing forests, and engaging in wage labour. They also take part in decision-making related to land use and agricultural planning. Women, on the other hand, play a crucial role in sustaining the household economy. Their responsibilities include collecting forest produce, fetching water and firewood, preparing food, and participating in agricultural operations such as sowing, weeding, and harvesting. In addition, women contribute to income generation through the sale of minor forest products. This complementary division of labour highlights the interdependence of men and women in maintaining economic stability (Mohanty, 1997; Mishra, 1987).

VI. MANKI-MUNDA SYSTEM OF VILLAGE COUNCIL

Regulations for Economic Activities Ho's traditional political organization are known as the Manki-Munda system, which governs economic management within the village. The Munda is the village headman, while the Manki supervises a group of villages. Their duties cover the maintenance and settlement of social order and conflict, distribution and management of land and forest resources, and the regulation of their use. They ensure that economic activities abide by customary laws and conflicts over land, use of resources, or labour are resolved amicably. The council also

arranges for collective activities such as agricultural work, festival preparation, communal hunting, etc., which in practice enhances community cooperation and coordination (Roy, 1912; Government of India, 1960-61). Joint Task Forces (Mingling Work Teams)

Collective Labour (Mingling of Work Groups)

Collective labour is a key characteristic of the Ho economic system, rooted in a cultural practice of cooperation and mutual aid. Agricultural work such as ploughing, sowing, and harvesting is commonly done via group-based work with the community working together on each other's fields in rotation. This system, sometimes called the mingling of work groups, is effective in alleviating household workloads and completing labour-intensive activities in a timely manner. It creates stronger social ties and fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility. The collective labour of agriculture extends to house building, festival preparations, community projects, etc. In such a practice, economic production becomes a social endeavour and strengthens both productivity and social cohesion (Sethi & Panda, 1997).

VII. CRAFTS AND HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTION

Crafts in the home play an important role in the traditional economic organization of the Ho people of Mayurbhanj. While agriculture is the dominant occupation, household crafts contribute towards the family economy in supporting everyday life within the domestic sphere. The Ho people prepare household, agricultural, and ritual articles using locally available natural resources like bamboo, forest fibre, grass, wood, clay, and iron. The economic activities include agriculture, animal husbandry, forest resources, handicrafts, handloom, and seasonal migration (Mandal, 2025).

Basket making is a common household craft among the Ho community. Bamboo and other forest materials are used to make baskets, winnowing trays, storage containers, and carrying baskets. These are used for storing grains, transporting forest produce, collecting firewood, and carrying agricultural crops. Thus, baskets are not only a craft but a practical necessity for the agrarian and forest-based life of the Ho people. The women's involvement in basket making and forest collection reflects their active role in the household economy (Kumari, 2024).

Rope making is another important domestic craft. The ropes are made from forest fibres, grasses, and other locally available materials. These ropes are used for tying cattle, carrying loads, agricultural work, house construction, and daily household purposes. These crafts reduce reliance on the market and reflect the self-sufficient nature of the traditional Ho economy. Forest-based materials such as bamboo, fibres, leaves, and grasses are essential in the tribal economy of Mayurbhanj for food, income, medicine, and household items (Patra et al., 2025).

Iron tools also play a major role in the economic functioning of the Ho tribe. Agricultural implements such as sickles, axes, ploughshares, knives, and digging tools are essential for cultivation, forest work, and domestic activities. Traditionally, local artisans prepared or repaired them, and these tools were exchanged within the village economy. The use of iron tools represents the close connection between craft production and agriculture. Since the Ho economy is largely based on cultivation and forest-related activities, such tools remain necessary for production and survival (Mandal, 2025).

Household production also includes weaving and handloom activities. Weaving is a traditional activity associated with women's work and domestic duties in many tribal societies. Cloth, mats, and other household items are made for family use and sometimes for local exchange. Although modern market cloth has reduced the importance of traditional weaving, it still carries cultural value and reflects indigenous skill. Handicraft and handloom continue to be part of the economic activities of the Ho tribe, along with agriculture and forest resources (Mandal, 2025).

Women are the mainstay of the household economy of the Ho tribe. They are engaged in agricultural labour, collection of forest produce, preparation of food, care of children and animals, brewing of rice beer, and production of household crafts. Ho women are active in wild collection and farming, and their labour contributes significantly to both domestic consumption and family income (Kumari, 2024).

In tribal Odisha, women generally work in agriculture, collect forest produce, take care of animals, and create rural crafts besides managing household responsibilities (Tribal Tribune, n.d.). Thus, crafts and household production among the Ho tribe represent both continuity and change. Basket making, rope making, tool use and weaving are some

traditional crafts that help support the domestic economy. Market goods, wage labour, migration and government development programmes have also limited reliance on some traditional crafts. But these crafts remain symbolic of self-reliance, cultural identity and women's economic participation. Market and Exchange

As the Ho economy in Mayurbhanj changes so too does its market and exchange. Traditionally, the Ho economy was basically based on subsistence production, where agriculture, forest collection, animal rearing, animal husbandry and household crafts fulfilled family demands. But by establishing markets in the area, roads, communication and contact with non-tribal communities, the Ho people moved gradually from those of neighboring districts for its trade into a wider system of trade and cash economy system (Mandal, 2025).

The weekly market or haat, locally, is the most vital economic activity hub of tribes Mayurbhanj. It not only serves as a location between the village and their neighboring areas to buy and sell goods, but also serves as a social gathering place for villagers from various quarters. Traditional haats are the most important sources of daily haat-related resources for the tribal members and agricultural or forest produce sale (Sahoo, 2023).

Agricultural products serve as a vital aspect of commercial exchange in marketplace. Paddy, pulses, vegetables, oilseeds and seasonal crops are sold in local markets after filling the needs of family households. In the old days, production was primarily for self-consumption, but now a portion of agricultural produce is sold for cash. This change has made money more relevant in the daily life of Ho people (Mandal, 2025).

Forest products are also essential components of the market economy of the Ho tribe. Many families gather firewood, sal leaves, mahua flowers, tamarind, mushrooms, honey, medicinal plants, bamboo as well as other forest goods from trees and other non-timber forest products. These products are employed in the home and also sold in weekly markets. Non-timber forest products are available for food, income, medicine and household products to its tribal communities of Mayurbhanj (Patra et al., 2025).

Even the haat allows the passing down of handmade and home goods. Baskets, ropes, mats, leaf plates, bamboo items and agricultural tools are sold or

exchanged in local markets. The previous used barter, exchanging goods for other goods or services. This barter network has gradually collapsed and cash transactions have been increasing (Kumari, 2024). But cash economy provides both opportunities and challenges for them. It has also enabled Ho people to buy modern goods, send children to school, get health services and meet social expenditure. Reliance on markets has contributed greatly to increased household expenditure. The price fluctuation and exploitation, as well as the small storage space and bargaining power of middlemen do little to enhance these benefits for tribal producers (Bhowmick, 2023). Market exchange women have a visible influence. They hold vegetables, forest products, fish, birds and small items to local haats for sale or exchange. Thereby, they acquire the items of salt, oil, turmeric, cloth, implements, utensils as household necessities (Kumari, 2024).

So, market and exchange in the Ho tribe are of continuity and change. The old haats and local exchange practices were still utilized but money increasingly changed the organization of money-related activities in the community. The Ho economy is no longer fully self-sufficient, but increasingly linked to the regional commercial system. Nevertheless, agricultural, forest produce and community-based exchange remain the basic building blocks of their economic life (Patra et al., 2025).

The changes in livelihood pattern due to modern education, wage labour, migration, market economy and government welfare schemes have been made, however still many traditional economic practices still exist in Ho culture. The reliance on agriculture, forest resources, community collaboration, and agricultural festivals indicates a continuing existence of traditional economic practices (Mandal, 2025). For Ho tribe, agriculture remains the primary breadwinner. Paddy production and pulses, vegetables, alongside seasonal crops, continue to underpin their household economy. Agriculture tasks like ploughing, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing are family-based and are the work of the majority of families. Even if some members are wage labourers or migrants to work some work, the agricultural land is an important symbol of economic security and identity for people (Singh, 1993).

Forest resources keep supporting the Ho economy. Even as households rely on forest products at home or

supplementing income-including firewood, fruits, leaves, mushrooms, honey, medicinal plants, bamboo and other things -resources collected with them are invaluable. Forest products assist families during a lean agricultural season in which food grains and cash income are scarce. Hence, not only is the forest an economic resource for Ho, but it is also an ecosystem of cultural significance for them (Patra et al., 2025).

This collective aspect has endured as another characteristic of Ho's economic society. A great many agricultural activities are done through mutual assistance, with relatives, neighbours or even villagers helping one another out. During sowing, harvesting, housing, festivals and rituals, people provide support to one another through labour, food sharing and collectively taking part. This collective arrangement alleviates the load of individuals and increases the cohesion in the village (Roy, 1912).

VIII. MARKET AND EXCHANGE

Market and Exchange-in the context of the Ho tribe and exchange-market place an important part in the changing economic life of the Ho tribe in Mayurbhanj. Traditionally, Ho economies were heavily focused on subsistence production, which saw such activities as agriculture, harvesting of smallholder forests, animal husbandry and crafts for the household fulfill basic needs. However, as local markets grew roads for communication improved and contact with non-tribal communities expanded. People gradually moved into a new and more extensive system of exchange and cash exchange from village to village (Mandal 2025). The weekly market (haat) is a major economic activity center in tribal Mayurbhanj. It is a place not just for buying and selling goods but for socializing from the villages from different regions. The majority of tribal households rely on local haats for day-to-day needs and sell agriculture and forest products (Sahoo, 2023). Agricultural products form an important part of market exchange. Paddy, pulses, vegetables, oilseeds and seasonal produce are sold in local markets after serving a local need. Production used to be mainly self-consumable, now it is made for cash for part of the agricultural produce. This shift has enhanced the importance of money in Ho community life (Mandal, 2025).

Ho tribe also makes considerable use of the market economy for its forest products. Firewood, sal leaves,

mahua flowers, tamarind, mushrooms, honey, medicinal plants, bamboo and other non-timber forest products are collected by many of the families. These are items used at home and also sold weekly at markets. Non-timber forest products contribute nutrition, livelihood, medicine and household materials for tribal Mayurbhanj communities (Patra et al., 2025).

In addition, the haat facilitate the exchange of handmade and household products. Baskets, ropes, mats, leaf plates, bamboo items, and agricultural tools are sold or traded in the area's markets. Previously, barter was widespread with goods exchanged for other products or goods. This traditional barter system has decreased over time and more than usual cash transactions (Kumari, 2024).

The cash economy has brought with it both opportunities and challenges. It has enabled Ho people to buy modern goods, send their children to school, get health services and support social needs. At the same time, reliance on markets has raised household spending. The benefits of tribal producers are often eroded due to price fluctuations, exploitation by middlemen and insufficient storage facilities and poor bargaining power (Bhowmick 2023).

Women are visible participants in the market exchange. They bring vegetables, forest produce, fish, birds and other items to the nearest haats for sale or exchange nearby. Through this exchange, they buy salt, oil, turmeric, clothes, tools, utensils and other household goods (Kumari, 2024).

They have both continuity and change in the Ho tribe market and exchange. Traditional haats and the means of local exchange persist, but increasing amounts of money have dramatically reconfigured the economic institution of the community. The Ho economy is not fully self-sufficient with growing interdependence. Agriculture, forest produce and community-based exchange continue to govern their economic life (Patra et al., 2025).

IX. CONTINUITY

Continuity is a key to how the Ho tribe in Mayurbhanj is organised economically. While their livelihood pattern is affected by modern times with the advancement of literacy, wage labour, migration, market economy, government income, education and welfare schemes, some of the old ways of economic life in Ho Society remained. In addition to food

production, dependency on agriculture, forest resources, community collaboration and farming festivals reveals the survival of older economy traditions (Mandal, 2025).

Ho tribe continues to rely on agriculture as a source of livelihood. Paddy farming – also pulses, vegetables and seasonal crops – still comprises the backbone of their household economy. Most families rely on family labor in farming such as tillage, sowing, transplanting, weeding, harvesting and threshing. Even where some members are wage labourers or migrate for employment, agricultural land is still a significant symbol for economic security and social identity (Singh, 1993). Forest resources also support the Ho economy. The production of firewood, fruits, leaves, mushrooms, honey, medicinal plants, bamboo and other forest products is still important both for household use and for supplemental earnings. Forest products offer income during the lean agricultural season to families who find food grains and cash income restricted when harvest is poor. Therefore, the forest is not only an economic resource but also a cultural and ecological feature of the people (Patra et al., 2025).

Community support is also a continuation concept in Ho economic practices. Most agricultural enterprises are conducted by assistance from family, neighbors and villagers. During sowing, harvesting, house construction, festivals and ritual, in labor, food production or sharing people also give to each other support. This mode of cooperation takes some burden off individual households and strengthens social ties within the village (Roy, 1912).

Traditional Ho festivals are closely tied with agriculture. Festivals are given after sowing, harvesting, among other key harvesting phases. The festivals are meant to recognize thanks to deities, ancestors and nature for crops, rain and disease prevention. Mage Porob, for instance, is traditionally celebrated immediately after the paddy field has been harvested, where households have enough grain and rice beer for food and ritual offerings (Elwin 1964).

Consequently, in the context changes on social and economic sides, continuity is obvious in Ho's economy. Agriculture and reliance on the wild continue to be central to their existence. Production and social relations as usual are still guided by the community. Traditional agricultural cycle-based festivals maintain their cultural identity and show the

strong bond of Ho culture, which draws together Ho and their relationships to land, forest and nature (Xaxa, 1999).

X. CHANGE

This is reflected with striking accuracy in the way in which economic structure of the Ho tribe of Mayurbhanj. Agriculture still has importance, and forest resources along with new tools such as education, wage labour, migration, government programmes, and market economy have gradually reshaped their traditional way of life (Mandal, 2025). Schools have played a key role in the transformation of Ho society. Before, most households relied on agriculture, forest collection and traditional occupations. With the rise of schools, hostels, and government educational programmes, many Ho children are now getting into formal education. New aspirations emerge amongst the youth: Education has instilled them. Some highly educated youths are transitioning to jobs in government, private, small business and other non-agricultural positions (Xaxa, 1999).

Wage labour is also an increasingly important source of revenue. Because of the small landholdings, seasonal agriculture and limited irrigation, many Ho families cannot rely exclusively on cultivation all year round. Consequently, men and women are active working daily in agriculture, construction, road work, brick kilns, mines, factories and other local activities. Wage labour contributes cash incomes needed for provision of food, education, healthcare, clothing, mobile phones and social participation (Singh, 1993). Migration is another major development in the Ho economy. Many young people move, on a temporary or seasonal basis, to neighbouring towns, industrial zones and other states for work. Migration supports families to make cash, but it also alters village life. Young labourers stay away from the village for extended periods and participate little in farming, festivals and community events too (Kumari, 2024). The economic life of the Ho tribe is also affected by governmental schemes. Rural employment, housing, education, health, food security, self-help groups, irrigation, tribal welfare etc have led to new opportunities. Programmes such as MGNREGA, public distribution system, scholarships, housing and women's self-help initiatives have supported many tribal households. However, due to a lack of public

awareness, poor implementation and middlemen, the benefits of these schemes can sometimes be reduced (Bhowmick, 2023).

The pattern of production and consumption has been altered by modern day market economy. The Ho economy in the past was largely self-directed and reliant on local exchange. Cash transactions now have a greater volume of business. People sell agricultural products, forest produce and labour in the market and buy clothes, utensils, packaged food, mobile phones, fertilizers, seeds and other goods. Its integration into the overall market has been significant to the Ho economy (Patra et al., 2025).

And, a number of traditional occupations are also declining. Basket making, rope making, weaving, hunting, traditional tool making and barter exchange have reduced as cheap market goods and legal restrictions on forest and hunting activities became available. The younger generation is less interested in some of the traditional crafts because they provide a low income compared to wage labour and modern jobs (Mandal, 2025).

Internally and externally, thus, change in the Ho economy can be thought about as having both external and internal causes. New opportunities in education, migration, wage labour, government welfare schemes and market contact have appeared along with the undermining of many traditional jobs and community-oriented economic practices. The Ho economy of Mayurbhanj today exhibits a mixture of traditional agricultural and forest dependent along with contemporary cash-based livelihood (Xaxa, 1999).

XI. PROBLEMS

The Ho Tribe in Mayurbhanj faces many issues related to their economic life. Agriculture, forest collection and wage labour provide livelihoods for them, yet poverty, land alienation, forest restrictions, lack of irrigation, unemployment and migration still impact their economic security (Bandia & Mohapatra, 2025). Among the Ho people, poverty is one of the biggest issues. Most homes rely on small parcels of land, seasonal farming and forest produce. Their income is intermittent, partly because agricultural production depends on rainfall, and forest products are available only in particular seasons. Consequently, many households struggle to pay for food, education, health care, and social rituals (Kujur, 2026).

Land alienation has also undermined the traditional economies of tribal settlements. Land is not only a source of income, but also a means of social identity and sense of community and culture. In several tribal communities within Odisha, it has been lost through debt, fraud, transfer to non-tribals, development projects, classification of customary lands as forest or government land as well as other forms of settlement. These processes have disrupted the use of land for cultivation and forced tribal families to rely on wage labour (Mishra, 2020).

Another major problem is forest restrictions, which create further problems. For example, Ho people depend on forests to provide firewood, fruits, leaves, bamboo, honey, medicinal plants and other non-timber forest products. But laws and restrictions limiting their access to these resources in forested areas hinder them. Poor access to the forest adversely affects food security and traditional craft production (Padhi, 2007).

A major hindrance to agricultural development is a lack of irrigation. Monsoon rainfall is the major source of income for most tribal farmers. If there is poor or irregular rainfall, production of crops declines. Many families also cannot cultivate more than one crop at a time each year due to limited irrigation facilities. This maintains agriculture's seasonal nature and decreases the chances for consistent income (Shah, 2010).

Unemployment and underemployment are other crucial challenges. Agriculture does not generate work year-round, and unemployment in non-farm local jobs remains. For many young people, lack of education, skills and access to markets and the lack of technical facilities are the primary reasons for not having regular jobs. As a consequence, they rely on daily wage labour or seasonal migration (Department of Water Resources, Odisha, 2022).

XII. CONCLUSION

The economic organization of the Ho tribe in Mayurbhanj represents a balanced picture of continuity and change. Traditional practices such as agriculture, forest collection, community cooperation, household crafts and festival-based economic activities still remain important in their daily life. These practices show the close relationship of the Ho people with land, forest, nature and community values. At the same time, modern forces have brought visible changes in their livelihood pattern. Education, wage

labour, migration, government schemes and market economy have created new opportunities as well as new challenges. The younger generation is gradually moving towards non-traditional occupations, while many traditional crafts and exchange practices are declining.

Thus, the Ho economy cannot be understood as completely traditional or completely modern. It is a mixed economy where old practices survive along with new economic changes. Agriculture and forest resources continue to provide the base of livelihood, but cash income, migration and market relations are increasingly transforming their economic life. Therefore, the Ho economy of Mayurbhanj reflects both the resilience of tribal tradition and the impact of modern socio-economic transformation.

Glossary

Ho / Local Term	English Meaning
Ho	A tribal community mainly found in Odisha and Jharkhand
Kili	Clan or lineage group
Manki	Traditional head of a group of villages
Munda	Traditional village headman
Manki–Munda System	Traditional village council/administrative system
Haat	Weekly market
Mage Porob	A major Ho festival celebrated after paddy harvest
Porob	Festival
Saarjam pata	Leaves of the sal tree used for plates and household purposes
Madkam	A forest flower used for food, drink, and income
Baba	Rice crop/Paddy
Bapadal	Exchange of goods without money
Burureyah ja-Phala	Items collected from forest such as fruits, leaves, honey, bamboo, etc.
Ho-Hoga Ko Depenga	Help among members of the same clan
Diyenga	Traditional fermented drink used in rituals and festivals

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