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An Analytical Study of Socio-Cultural Life of the Raji Tribe

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Abstract

One of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) of India is the Raji tribe, which makes the tribe a distinct socio-cultural group and is predominant in the woodland regions of Uttarakhand. The Raji people have been socio-economically ignored, culturally weak and faced with the high rate of change of their traditional lifestyles regardless of the provisions of the constitution and the development activities. The present study analytically examines the socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe regarding the social organization, how they relate to one another through the kinship, the life of marriage, the life of religion, economic life, health practices and how the cultural identity will change taking modernization and state interventions. The research study also has a descriptive and analytical research design, basing on the primary data collected through the ethnographic method, that is, participant observation, in-depth interviewing, focus group discussions, and ultimate application of secondary sources, such as census reports, anthropological researches, and government documents. Based on the results, despite the existing good and relevant traditional institutions that the Raji tribe has relationship with the forest ecology, much is shifting in the livelihood patterns, education and health care accessibility and value systems due to the resettlement policies, membership in the market and exposure to the mainstream society. The paper observes the conflict between culture and socio-economic development and the way that the policy structures ought to be sensitive to culture. This research can also be extended to tribal studies since it documents the transformation of the socio-cultural processes of the Raji tribe over the years and can provide information to policy makers on sustainable inclusive development of the tribes.

Keywords: Raji Tribe, Socio-Cultural Life, PVTGs, Tribal Studies, Cultural Change, Uttarakhand

Introduction

The Indian nation is an advanced culturally heterogenous group composed of tribal Indians that present own social institutions, belief systems, and economic activities and ecological knowledge that have evolved throughout centuries. Such communities have an especially problematic status particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) due to small population, geographical isolation, pre-agricultural level of technological development, plunging or negative population growth and low literacy levels. One such tribe is the Raji tribe; it is a tribe that is a PVTG; a tribe that is hardly known and least understood in India. The Raji tribe has traditionally inhabited the woody and hilly areas of Uttarakhand especially in the districts of Pithoragarh, Champawat, Udham Singh Nagar and Nainital where the Raji tribe has traditionally shown a strong symbiosis with the forest ecosystem. Hunting, gathering, shifting cultivation, forest based livelihood has always been a way of life, the Rajis have always adhered to the mores of nature, through a customary way of living as a collective to evolve as a socio-cultural system based on the traditional practices of indigenous knowledge. However, sheer socio-economic metamorphoses, the development works of the state and the policy of forest conservation along with the increased contact with the mainstream society have significantly transformed their traditional way of life.

Socio-cultural life of a tribe is a holistic account of the social organization, pattern of kinship, marriage, religion, customs and revelations of the tribe and the value system. The case of the Raji tribe has all these factors closely intertwined with the subsistence activities, and the ecological environment. Rajis was once an autocratic social system that was very-networked in terms of kinship, endogamous and community-based decision making. It was possible to note both, egalitarian and adaptive orientations out of their setting in marriage, the structure of family and inheritance pattern. These are the religious lives of the Rajis which were largely animistic and which were marked with the belief in the spirits of nature and ancestors deities

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and supernatural spirits in the areas that were thought to influence the health, fertility and prosperity. Knowledge that concerns cultures has been passed down the generations particularly through rituals, myths and oral customs. These practices, in addition to the fact that they enhanced social bond in the society, contained the natural world in relation that the tribe had.

Raji tribe has not been given academic attention and policy discussion because some time ago, they possessed a rich heritage and cultural heritage. The early ethnography was more inclined to include an image of a community, which is a disconnected and undynamic and adaptatory society. However, in recent decades, increasing attention is paid to the knowledge of the problems experienced by PVTGs in the state of development, displacement and cultural change. The state controls such as the protection laws of the forests, the resettlement plans, welfare programs and introduction of formal education have created the prospects as well as the shocks on the Rajis. Despite the fact that education and accessibility to health care and wage employment has led to better living standards amid some members of the society, the social relationship and common knowledge systems has been distorted and in the long run, customary activity has been worn down over the decades.

The infrastructural growth and exposure to the mass media, have increased the acculturation and assimilation into the mainstream economy only. The younger generations of the Raji tribe are very much demanding of education, regular paying employment and live in the city, a fact that brings about a gap in the attitudes, values, and cultural behaviours of the generations. The occupational activities such as hunting and gathering are nearly nonexistent and they are replaced by agriculture, employment in the governments, and local markets. These transitions have resulted in the change of the patterns of gender, family and authority in the community. At the same time, socio-cultural sustainability of the Raji tribe remains to be a notion that is getting increasingly problematic because of such issues as alienation of lands and joblessness, health susceptibility and cultural marginalization.

In this regard, the analytical study of the socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe would become the determinant of registration of the traditional aspects of life, as well as the further implementation of the dynamics of the change and continuity. One such research shows some information of how the Rajis bargain their cultural position on the outsourcing pressure and the insourcing changes. Another implication is that there is a necessity of a culturally sensitive participatory style in the tribal development policies. The proposed research papers will result into the incorporation of the present research in the tribal studies, cultural resilience, and inclusive development by examining the social institution, belief systems and everyday activities of the Raji tribe. It should be understood about the socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe, to maintain their cultural heritage, to protect their integrity, independence and life style because this is done by providing interventions of development and it never interferes their dignity.

Literature Review

The publications related to the tribal settlements in Uttarakhand have been a rich source of information related to socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe, but there are intensive and comprehensive based researches sparse regarding the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG). The supposed problems of tribal identity, language heritage, socio-cultural change, the role of the state and the impact of the globalization of people native to the land has been the discussed issues of the previous studies. All these researches are indicative of retention of traditions and growing intervention of the external socio-economic forces.

The first effort to record in a systematic manner the language variety of tribal population in India is the Grierson Linguistic Survey of India (1909) in this instance the term tribe denotes the tribes that dwell in Himalayans region. Although it is not a work devoted to the Raji tribe, this is a pioneering work, which provides the historical linguistic typology to help trace the origin of the tribal languages in the northern India and their classification. It provided the basis of the later linguistic and ethnographic studies of the Rajis, in particular the language sources

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of Tibetan origin and patterns of language use.

Using the project of people of India, Singh K. S. (1994) gives a comprehensive ethnographic report of the various tribal groups of community like the Raji tribe. It documents their demographic patterns, social system, and economic activities as well as cultural practice therefore offering unique grounds of the conventional socio-cultural life of the Rajis. The role of Singh is particularly essential to put the tribe of Raji in general perspective of the Indian tribal diversity and demonstrate that this group of people is lost and exposed.

Naswa (2001) in the article Tribes of Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal provides a region specific report on tribal population and intricately describes their culture, rituals, mode of livelihood and their social institution. Although the paper acknowledges the distinctiveness of the Raji tribe, it also mentions the issues that they are facing including geographical isolation, poverty and inability to do so in reference to education and healthcare services. The article by Naswa assists one to understand the local conditions in which the socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe has been constructed.

Kapoor and Tyagi (2009) also address the role of the state interventions in identity of the tribal where the authors refer specifically to the Raji tribe. Their paper is a critical discourse through studying the effect of the development programs, resettlement policies and forest conservation among the traditional institutions, the cultural practices and self image of the Rajis. The authors follow up the conclusion that state attempts are aimed at causing a socio-economical good to individuals but this usually leads to cultural dislocation and identity sNktt and, therefore, the necessity of creating culturally sensitive policies.

In the current paper, Pandey and Sharma (2015) explain socio-cultural changes of the Raji tribe with references to globalization. In their interpretation, they direct their attention to the transformations in the working patterns, education, and even values, and especially the younger generations. The paper indicates how the traditional knowledge and community-based practice are gradually being eroded as contacts with the market economy and mainstream society continue to grow, as well as the process of adaptational strategies that the tribe is undergoing in order to keep up with the emerging changes.

The multifaceted analysis of the language, performed by Rastogi (2002, 2012, 2015), may be viewed as one of the critical approaches of studying the language, language endangerment and the effect of language contact. The author states that the use of the Raji language is said to be on the decrease and cites the problems of bilingualism, migration and formal education as the contributory factors (Rastogi, 2002). In addition to that, Rastogi (2012) and Rastogi (2015) also address sociolinguistic factors and the language contact phenomenon with a focus on the linguistic change that can be discussed as the reflection of the socio-cultural changes in the Raji community.

Although it is about Jaunsari tribe, Ahmed and Singh (2018) make an indirect contribution to the understanding of socio-cultural interaction of tribes, as they also focus on the economic and social life of women. Their findings can be considered a comparative prism that can be put into use in studying the role of gender and the role of women in the socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe community.

Singh R. (2019) offers a socio-cultural outline of the tribes in Uttarakhand which is more generalized and provides some of the common problems associated with them such as marginalization, cultural erosion, and unequal development. The Raji tribe has been put within the wider regional and policy framework in this paper, and this explains the necessity of adopting the inclusive and culturally sensitive development approaches.

All in all, what is being read through the literature review shows that gaps in the compilation of linguistic, cultural and developmental dynamics of the Raji tribe remain because an integrated analytical literature is a gap in the comprehensive and holistic approach to the social-cultural existence of the tribe. The given information gap is what the current research tends to fill in by presenting the analytical and analytical explanation on the socio-cultural institutions,

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practice, and changes of the Raji tribe in the current days.

Objectives of the Study

1. To document the traditional socio-cultural practices of the Raji tribe.
2. To analyze the social organization and kinship patterns of the Raji community.
3. To examine marriage, family, and inheritance practices within the tribe.

Research Methodology

The research design of the study under consideration is descriptive and analytical research design in learning the socio-cultural life of the tribe of Raji. As it is devoted to the explanation of the traditional ways and the modern shifts, the research is carried out in the context of the mixed-methods approach, which involves the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. Ethnographic technique like the participant observation, in-depth interviewing of the members of the community and focus group discussions with the elders, ladies and the young people were used to collect primary data. The interview schedules were designed and semi structured to give the information on the social organization, family ties, matrimonial affairs, religion, rituals and festivals and modes of livelihood. The secondary data were provided through published literature, government reports, census rates and past anthropological studies which were utilized in attempts to place the outputs in the larger historical and policy perspective. The sampled households and respondents were sampled based on purposive sampling selection criteria since they could provide rich and relevant information and hence they represented a variety of age, gender and social roles within the community. Their data analysis involved thematic penance of qualitative responses, cross-reflections with the secondary sources and interpretation of data within the context of the socio-cultural and developmental theories. The ethical issues that were followed carefully during the research included informed consent, data privacy and confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity. One can note that this methodology enables the intensive and profound experience of the socio-cultural existence of the Raji tribe, and it is related to both continuity and transition in both traditional and modern status.

Discussion on Objective 1: Traditional Socio-Cultural Practices of the Raji Tribe

The socio-cultural value of the tribe Raji is on the close attachment that they have with the nature and the way of life around the region which has been adapting to the forest-and-hill like the topography of Uttarakhand. The Raja community used to depend on forest-based jobs in terms of hunting, collection of wild fruits and tubers and seasonal collection of forest products to satisfy the basic subsistence requirements, and cultural rituals, social exogenous uses and seasonal celebrations. These economic activities are credit intertwined with social norms and values and they created the system in which management of resources was taken by the collective responsibility and respect to the ecological balance. Raja tribe is social and this also lies on the foundation of kinship which consists of extended family and this is the fundamental social organization of the tribe. They are subjugated by the kinship patterns based on the clans affiliation, lineage and the marital cooperation: these are the elements of social cohesions and the system of obligations in the community is subjugated by them. Marriage activities are endogamous wherein some of the clans (traditional rituals that do not merely focus on spiritual convictions, yet, nature symbolism) reflect a high attachment between the tribe and their natural habitat. The family and inheritance practice is an equilibrium of the control of the family by the male, and the decision making of the majority by the elders of the community, where elders of the community make significant contribution in facilitating the family affairs, in resolving the conflicts and securing continuation of culture. It is basically an animistic religious belief and practice of the Raji tribe where they worship the spirits in the bushes, ancestors and the natural aspects such as rivers, trees and mountains among others. The analogous that is manifested in cultural practises and environmental rhythms is that festivals and ceremonies coincide with the ecological cycles and agricultural practices and hunting periods. As a major source in the continuation of cultural knowledge, morals and the recollection of the past, oral

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traditions, songs, folklore and stories are important channels of the information dissemination between generations. The traditional arts and crafts and tools, which are mainly utilitarian, also assume a symbolical and cultural meaning and focus since they articulate the identity of the tribe, like the aesthetic sense. However, there has been a tendency towards a change in the socio-cultural attitudes of the Raji tribe due to exposure to modern education, state intervention of development, resettlement and mix up with the mainstream society. Heralds have found the meek window dressing of some of its aspects such as subsistence hunting and forest rites but others such as community jubilation, and kinship rules and family institutionalized choice making have remained and were allowed and adjustive to change. The government through schooling, health and welfare arrangements have introduced newer dynamics of social life and have done so particularly at younger ages which has brought in the changing occupational dreams, gender roles and systems of value. Despite this change, the Raji tribe is able to bargain the identity by maintaining its traditional values and customizing the cultural elements to suit the existing reality and specific adaptation strategies to the external forms without sacrificing on its ancestral values. Documenting these social-cultural practices is not only necessary to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage of the tribe, but also to warn the culturally sensitive development policies that the tribe will be granted a level of autonomy, ecological knowledge and traditional wisdom. The study whose socio-cultural life will be looked into in much detail will be effectively added to the larger discourse of tribal resilience, cultural continuity and interface of traditional societies and development pressures in the modern society, and it will imply the frailty of preservation and adaptation to the demands of the emerging social environment.

Discussion on Objective 2: Social Organization and Kinship Patterns of the Raji Community

The hierarchies in the family are basically the social organization means of the Raji tribe as it is socialized in terms of kinship and clan affiliation with the family, which is the system which has been established during centuries based on the principles of social cohesion, cooperation and preservation of cultures. Raji people are their government dominated by a powerful kinship that regulates the relationships among individuals, right to inheritance, marriage and responsibilities. The tribe can be characterized to have mostly followed the patrilineal structure whereby lineage and descent is created on men and lastly, the fact that one belongs to a clan is also a significant determinant in socialization. The community is associated with its identity in both of the clans and taboos and the traditional rules regulate the marriage partners they are prohibited to have incest relations and are obliged to share each other with no change of their responsibilities. Marriage in the tribe is at community level and exogenous at the clan level i.e. members of the same tribe are married but not within the same clan and this guarantees that genes are not mixed and assists in the inter clan relationships. Traditional marriage processes are glamorous ceremonies that involve rituality, ecological symbolism and participation in the community too. They involve sacrifice as a way of worshiping the dead people, blessings by the aged people, physical movements bringing out social relations and spiritual solidarity. The Raji tribe also practice marital flexibility, some marriages are levirate and sororate; this they find to be adaptive to ensure stability of the family and social order.

The Rajis family formation commonly comprises of large family set up with multiple generations of the family living or living together. Besides socialization, family is the primary socialization institution over and above education and economic collaboration. Older individuals are individuals who enjoy the benefits of control in making decisions in the family, conflict management and guidance of the younger individuals besides the observation of cultural norms. The division of social roles was clear in all the families and in most of the instances role of the man was marked with the activities in the forest, hunting and external activities whereas the role of the woman was only limited to the collection, family care, child care and taking care of the ritualistic and economic activities. Youthsters are also assimilated

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into society because at a young age they are imparted the norms, values and the skills needed to exist in the society and these include forest knowledge, crafts and oral traditions.

It is not only that the Raji people are locked up within the nuclear family but within a larger community that comprise of interrelated networks of clans and households which work together in the management of the resources, conflict solving as well as ritual performance. These informal counsel of elders which is often made up of the representatives of more than one clan practices the community issues, conflicts and customary laws. These councils are the guardians of the tradition the preservation of the cultural practices and support the changing socio-economic situation. Close social commitments such as collective work during the harvest season, collective hunting and collective feast reinforce the union and help one another within the community members.

The kinship patterns are also relied upon to inheritance and property rights. These values of Raji tribe conform to the application of patrilineal line of descent, however, women are also endowed with rights in areas of movable properties, and the rituals. The degree of land and resource management can be clan-based in certain cases, which are the reflection of the norms of collective responsibility and ecological development by a community. The ceremonies related to the time of birth, maturation, marriage, and death are structured according to the kinship lines and imposed social relationships, cultural identity, as well as continuity between generations.

This has seen the social organization and the kinship pattern begin to change as a result of extraneous influences such as developmental endeavors by the state, formal education, contact with the cities as well as integration into the marketplace. The younger generations tend to gravitate towards formal education and employment opportunities both outside of the community and the old forms of power, gender dynamics, and family standards are slowly starting to evolve. The migration and intermarriage with other non-tribal causes the introduction of new standards which derail some of the traditional practices, yet the tribe turns out to be quite resilient and selective with preserving the traditional way of doing things, preservation of the identity based on a particular clan and capacities to adapt the ceremonial practices to contemporary circumstances.

The combination of the traditional kinship system with the modernity gives an impression as to why the Raji social system is dynamic in nature. Even though the uniformity of the society is offered by the rules, guidance and belonging to the culture, adaptive strategies create a possibility allowing the society to adapt to external forces without losing their identity. The study suggests the intricate relationship of family, clan, community and cultural activities using the social structure and kin patterns of the Raji tribe and how the three structures are the foundations of social cohesiveness, management of resources and sense of identity. These trends can be interpreted to develop culturally sensitive development intervention initiatives that will value the traditional institutions of the Raji tribe and guide them to triumph the battle to socio-economic upward mobility and integration into the society in general.

Discussion on Objective 3: Marriage, Family, and Inheritance Practices of the Raji Tribe

The marital tradition, family and heritage of the Raji tribe constitute an adequate part of their socio-cultural oneness which was used to demonstrate not only the traditional regulations but the innovative proposals to the surrounding and social conditions as well. The clan membership, the kinship rules, and the traditional guidelines guide the Rajis on their marriage prescriptions through the use of which the social cohesion and intra-clan marriages are avoided. It is the endogamy within a community and the exogamy within a clan that possesses both cultural and genetic diversity. The ceremonies of marriage are also lavish such as offerings to the spirits of the ancestors, ritual ceremonies and the community is not locked out and hence enhancement of social relations and states of collective conscience is high. The family unit of the Riji community is normally the extended family that comprises of multiple generations living or residing near one another. With these arrangements, there is the ease of collaborating

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on everyday subsistence activities, rearing children as well as participating in cultural and religious rituals. It is the older individuals that are the ones in the authoritative position within the family and their personalities are to resolve the conflict, make the decisions and keep the culture alive. The gendering roles are complementary to one another and are externally employed through hunting, forest collection and the externally employed labor unlike the females who work within the house management, gathering as well as the ritual practices. The Rajis people are largely patrician in the inheritance system where property and other provisions are incorporated by male offspring yet women are entitled with some rights that involve locomotion of property and their involvement towards gestational rituals. Veteran laws and traditions give good share and sustainability of family resources and the social control is achieved by communal control by elders and chiefs of clans. These traditional systems in the previous years have been influenced by education, state policy alongside the external economic opportunities that brought about the change in the marital practices, family structure and practices relating to inheritance. Nevertheless, the tribe of Raji is also resilient, because it still retains the primeval customs, reinvigorates the rituals in a manner that is dependent on the situation, and passing the cultural knowledge across generations. such practices are analyzed as a significant insight into how the Raji community is able to engage in social cohesion, cultural identity and continuity despite the dynamics of socio-economic change.

Overall Discussion

Socio-cultural life of Raji tribe is complex that consists of traditional forms of way of doing things, social make up, and adaptive mechanisms that were instituted by centuries of co-existence in their interactions with their natural environment and evolving socio-economic conditions. Being a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), and being in the process of learning about mostly forested lands in Uttarakhand, the Rajis have traditionally followed subsistence ways in life like hunting, gathering and collection of forest produce as a dam-sure form of subsistence ways of life, highly ritualistic and cultural in nature. They exist not merely in the sense of their economic activities as a mere survival strategy but in a larger context of social norms, ecological knowledge and communal obligations which is observed to favor the survival of culture and their handling of the resources.

Raji tribe social structure is fundamentally kinship based thus the fundamental unit of community life is clans, lineages and extended families in the social set up. Alliances among people in terms of marriage, inheritance and status of sociality are regulated by the patterns of kinship and provide continuity between generations and sustainability in conveying the knowledge to the new generation. Marriage is well systems and structured as far as clan exogamy and community endogamy is concerned and is backed by rituals which strengthen men in society and group identity. The extended family through its assistance may have some assistance in the daily subsistence and child rearing as well as in rituals and the elders has power in making decisions and resolving conflicts. The division of gender roles is complementary as the men are in order of hunting and outside work and women in charge of the household, ritual practices, and collection of forest products. Complementary practices which are founded on the basis of inheritance are primarily patrilineal and the family and clan resources are supervised by the communal surveillance in order to ensure that the family and clan inheritance is fairly shared and bountiful.

The tribe has animistic worldview and the tribe is connected with nature, this is shown through religious beliefs, rituals, festivals and oral traditions. There is the idea of spirituality and environmentalism which may be illustrated by veneration of the spirits of ancestors and forest, river, tree, and mountain spirits. Oral traditions, folklore and story telling are fundamental channels of preserving the historical, moral and cultural knowledge in the generations and create a sense of belonging and identity.

Although the Raji tribe is a strong one, the modernization, formal education, government interventions, and exposure to the rest of the mainstream society is subjecting the tribe to

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colossal socio-cultural transformations. The traditional lifestyles are altered, the new generation is less restrictive about choosing to take heads of pay and even the roles between the two genders are evolving gradually. Though some of the traditions such as hunting, forest rituals existed, most of the traditional way has been preserved due to adaptive continuity since most of the practices which involve the norms of the kinship, community councils and the practice of rituals still exist.

The overall discussion shows the thin thread that the Raji people are walking on as they seek to preserve the cultural information and be in position to cope with the socio-economic change. Their resilience is reflected in their socio cultural systems which are exemplary on matters of flexibility and reliance on nature. Knowledge of such dynamics is very instrumental in coming up with culture sensitive development projects whereby the tradition is treasured, livelihoods are maintained and individual identity is not lost amidst the challenges of modernization.

Overall Conclusion

The socio-cultural life of the Raji tribe undergoes the analytical in-depth observation, and it turns out that this society is deeply absorbed in its traditional activities, the ecological awareness, and the social unity, and at the same time it is placed in the realm of modernization, the state activities, and the globalization in all its forms. The Raji people social structure on Jainism is founded on the concept of kinship, clans and extended family norms, which ensures the order in the marriage, inheritance and social obligations and consequently delivers a sense of stability and continuity of the culture as well. The way the traditions of marriage, families are constituted and they are inherited speaks volumes of the fact that the tribe believes in collective decision making, the value given to the old people and the complementary roles of the men and women in securing livelihoods and cultural practices. Nature has a close rapport, animistic spirituality and cultural wisdom among people of different generations which could be traced back in religious beliefs, celebrations and oral traditions.

Even though the research indicates that the Raji tribe has experienced significant socio changes as a result of economic changes, it displays amazing resilience since the Raji people have been adapting the traditional ways of doing things to the new reality without losing important aspects of their identity. The availability of education, market opportunity and access to state resources has led to changes in job trend, family life and social relationship, yet the availability of community solidarity, relatives and kin standards and rituals are the same. These findings mean that processes of cultural preservation and adaptation are two way, and the Rajis are negotiating change without necessarily discarding their culture.

Overall, the paper shows the importance of cultural sensitive and participative approaches in the development process of the tribes and the importance of transforming compromising focus between the socio-economic development on the one hand and sustainability of indigenous knowledge, social structures and cultural identity on the other hand. The research sheds light into the tenacity of tribal culture, continuity and inclusive development that is widely talked about by scribes and scholars in most books on social development and offers an insight to policy makers, anthropologists and practitioners in the social development field on the need to approach vulnerable tribes like the Raji tribe in a sustainable and respectful way.

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