



**Pratibha International Interdisciplinary Journal – Vol. 01,
Issue 01, Jan-June 2025. ISSN-XXX-XXX**

**Impact of Seasonal Migration on Cultural Heritage of
Korku Tribe in Melghat Region of Maharashtra: An
Ethno-cultural Study**

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ABSTRACT

Due to modernization and migration tribal people are facing cultural alienation and ultimately they are losing their cultural heritage. In the present study which was a part of ICSSR funded Minor Research Project we attempted to analyze the impact of seasonal migration on the cultural heritage of Korku tribal. The sample was comprised of 161 tribal; 72 from Chikhaldara Block and 89 from Dharni block. A questionnaire covering twelve research questions comprising of 39 questions was administered. Percentage and Chi Square values were computed. A significant number of Korku tribal have acknowledged that the modernization is eroding their cultural heritage, and their art is diminishing over time. However, there is a strong desire to pass down traditional practices to future generations. Family structure, clothing style, use of dialect has greatly affected but spiritual cultural remain unaffected.

Key words: *Cultural heritage, Korku tribe, Melghat*

(a) Introduction:

Tribes in India are diverse, responding differently to modernization and migration. In this process of transition some have benefited, others are struggling some tribes have integrated into modern society, while others, like the Korku tribe, face challenges. Despite their historical and cultural significance, the Korku people suffer from severe malnutrition (infants and mothers) and tribal exploitation, with reports of high child mortality due to malnutrition in Melghat. This is mainly because most of the Korkus live in remote areas with inadequate medical facilities, poor transportation, and a lack of healthcare professionals. Moreover,

superstition, traditional belief system and apathy towards modern medical facilities exacerbated by early marriages, poor maternal health, and food insecurity has made more complications. As a result, many still rely on traditional healers and malnutrition remains a severe issue, especially among tribal women and children. However, State Government has introduced several schemes to improve health care facilities and maternal health including maternal nutrition which has resulted in significant decline in maternal and infant mortality rate in Melghat.

Korkus are the natural habitants of Melghat, comprising of almost 80% of the total population of the region. They have a rich cultural heritage, mostly non-material culture which is widely reflected in their traditions, rituals, dialect, festivals and different ceremonies. As there is lack of industrialization and limitations in agricultural activities and restrictions of forest laws; a significant number of Korku tribal has to relocate to the nearby cities. The rate of migration remains high from September to March, with some choosing to settle permanently in search of better opportunities. This movement has altered their traditional way of life and cultural heritage, including their religious practices. Despite government and NGO efforts to uplift them, many Korkus continue to migrate for survival and remain below the poverty line. On this backdrop the project aimed to analyze the impact of seasonal migration on the cultural heritage of the Korku tribal in Melghat region of Amravati District.

(b) Literature Review: The tribal population once upon a time known as alien culture, nowadays it has been exposed to a rapidly changing world. Their socio-cultural customs are now in transition whereas on all fronts of life they are lagging far behind from others. The current literature available on Korkus has focused mainly on three aspects. The first domain is health and nutrition. A series of studies, including the above-cited studies, discussed the issue of malnutrition, health practices, and its possible causes. The second domain, which is thoroughly discussed in the literature in the context of Korku people, is their ethno-medicinal practices. The third domain discussed in the literature is about culture, life, and living pattern of the Korkus, though most of them did not employ empirically grounded methods (Devarkar & Bhogaonkar, 2018)

Chaudhary and Azeez (2020) documented the perturbing socioeconomic and developmental issues of the Korku tribe. In an ethnographic fieldwork carried in 10 villages of Melghat region of Maharashtra for a period of 1 year the authors studied the life, lifestyles, and the socioeconomic and developmental indices of the community. The authors reported there is a

major shift in the socioeconomic and cultural life of the Korkus including basic amenities, livelihood, health, education, and political affairs. Further, child- and women-related issues are emphasized. The evidence from the study urges the need for focused attention on the developmental strategies for the community.

Salvikar, S. (2015) studied the impact of seasonal migration on the lifestyle of 100 Korku families. The author found due to low economical status that 95.5 % tribal preferred seasonal migration and they are unorganized, hence become victim of exploitation. 92.5% reported that due migration their cultural practices have changed and they are going away from their cultural heritage.

Sonowal (2010) studied the impact of socio-cultural, political, economic and nutritional status of tribal children. The author analyzed the primary and secondary data of 55 villages in Maharashtra. The author observed that shortage of cultivated land and restrictions to use forest resources and lack of job opportunities are very prevalent. Pathetic attitude like children are gift of god and they should grow up with nature and their life is already set by god are major obstacles in health of tribal children. Early marriage has direct bearing on child's health and around 80% of the tribal girls got married within the age of 17 years. The author concluded that in most of the villages due to low female literacy rate health related awareness programmes are not working properly.

Jaiswal and Kumar (2024) studied Korku Tribe's practices of self-governance, livelihood and education. The authors cited the Korku's long standing system of self governance. ChavadiSwashasan is the term for Korku's traditional form of self governments. The non Korkus are not allowed to take part in this. Under Chawriself governance all village issues are resolved. This self governance system is led by Ada Patel. The villagers together choose Ada Patel on the basis of leadership qualities. Every year the Chavadiself government meets on the eve of Holi where the entire village population is present the objective of this meeting is to assess Ada Patel's performance if his work meets the satisfaction of the village he gets re-elected for another year.

International studies of tribal community are mostly confined with race, racial discrimination, health and education. Schultz, et al. (2006) found strong associations between racial discrimination and common mental health problems. Even definitions and conceptions of health are affected by cultural settings. Hjelm, et al. (2005) reported that Swedish and Arabs tended to define health as the absence of illness, while Yugoslavians defined health in terms

of strength and described it as the most important resource in life. Arabs and Yugoslavians also emphasized the ability to function, to work and to be financially independent as well as sexual functioning as health indicators. Similarly, Chinese and U. S. adolescents define health in terms of wholeness among physical, mental and spiritual aspects of self. They believe that being healthy means having healthy relationships with others (Torsch and Ma, 2000). Landrine and Klonoff (1992) explored etiological beliefs of illness among American cultural groups and found greater adherence to supernatural factors among Haitian, Mexican, Puerto Rican and Chinese peoples.

(c) Methodology:

Aim: Main aim of the project is to study the cultural heritage of Korku tribe and the impact of seasonal migration and modernization on the Korku tribe.

Research Questions: Considering the objectives of the work, attempt was made to search the answer of the following research questions.

1. Are Korkus losing their cultural heritage in the process of modernization?
2. What is the impact of seasonal migration on family structure of Korku tribe?
3. What is the impact of seasonal migration on clothing style of Korku tribe?
4. What is the impact of seasonal migration on dietary habits of Korku tribe?
5. What is the impact of seasonal migration on source of income of Korku tribe?
6. What is the impact of seasonal migration on language and education of Korku tribe?
7. What is the impact of seasonal migration on the village structure of Korku tribe?
8. What is the impact of seasonal migration on religious faiths of Korku tribe?
9. What is the impact of seasonal migration on practices related to rituals at birth, marriage and death?
10. What is the the impact of seasonal migration on Ghungru Bazar and practices related to it?
11. What is the impact of seasonal migration political and social institutions of Korku tribe?
12. What is the impact of seasonal migration on ignorance, magic superstitions and beliefs of Korku tribe?

Procedure: For data collection the survey method was used. Field work was carried out in two phases; December-2024 and March-2025. During the field visits we attempted to collect

the information from the elder tribal, especially during the early morning or in the evening time when they are easily available. In remote areas there was a language problem; moreover, due to shy nature they hesitate to share their responses. Therefore, four tribal students from the same community were requested to accompany for data collection.

In order to search the effect of seasonal migration on cultural heritage of Korku tribe, the literature cited in 'The Korku Tribals', a book written by Deogaonkar and Deogaonkar (1990) was treated as baseline. An attempt was made to find the cultural changes that took place in last thirty five years. The focus was given to reveal the answers of twelve main research questions that covered broad aspects of Korku culture. All main research questions were divided into thirty nine sub questions.

(d) Results and discussion: In total we collected the information from 161 tribal; 72 from Chikhaldara Block and 89 from Dharni block. After due scrutiny and coding; percentage and Chi Square values for within group and between group data were computed. Percentage were computed for respondent frequencies; whereas, while computing within group (Chikhaldara and Dharni block separately) Chi Square, total scores of 'No' and 'Yes' responses and for between group (Chikhaldara and Chikhaldara combined) only total scores of 'yes' responses were incorporated. The Chi Square Values are depicted in the following table. Due to the constraints of space percentage of the responses to all thirty nine questions are not mentioned in the given table.

Research Question	Within Group Chi Square		Between Group Chi Square
	Chikhaldara Block	Dharni Block	Chikhaldara and Dharni
1) Are Korkus losing their cultural heritage in the process of modernization?	130.66**, df=1, p>.01	106.95**, df=1, p>.01	1.64 df=1, p<.05
2) What is the impact of seasonal migration on family structure of Korku	32.10**, df=1, p>.01	3.78, df=1, p<.05	0.076, df=1, p<.05

tribe?			
3) What is the impact of seasonal migration on clothing style of Korku tribe?	0.026, df=1, p<.05	4.40* df=1, p>.05	0.10, df=1, p<.05
4) What is the impact of seasonal migration on dietary habits of Korku tribe?			1.22, df=1, p<.05
5) What is the impact of seasonal migration on source of income of Korku tribe?	106.96**, df=1, p>.01	76.58**, df=1, p>.01	1.12, df=1, p<.05
6) What is the impact of seasonal migration on language and education of Korku tribe?	28.16**, df=1, p>.01	17.82**, df=1, p>.01	1.40, df=1, p<.05
7) What is the impact of seasonal migration/modernization on the village	10.88**, df=1, p>.01	17.08, df=1, p>.01	
8) What is the impact of seasonal migration on religious faiths of Korku tribe?	106.96**, df=1, p>.01	96.48**, df=1, p>.01	2.70 df=1, p<.05
9) What is the impact of seasonal migration on practices related to rituals at birth, marriage			3.76, df=1, p<.05

and death?			
10) What is the impact of seasonal migration on Ghungru Bazar and practices related to it?	0.44, df=1, p<.05	0.80, df=1, p<.05	1.48 df=1, p<.05
11) What is the impact of seasonal migration political and social institutions of Korku tribe?	14.40**, df=1, p>.01	32.89, df=1, p>.01	8.00**, df=1, p>.01
12) What is the impact of seasonal migration on ignorance, magic superstitions and beliefs of Korku tribe?	0.44, df=1, p<.05	0.56, df=1, p<.05	1.90, df=1, p<.05

Korkus have a rich cultural heritage, but modernization and migration are causing its decline. Elders worry about cultural loss, though some remain hopeful about preserving traditions alongside modern progress. This study explores the impact of seasonal migration on their cultural identity. The answers of the research questions are discussed in the following section. The study explored whether the Korkus are losing their cultural heritage due to modernization. Findings reveal a strong consensus, particularly among elders, that their traditions and art forms are fading. While elders believe the youth should carry forward these traditions, they also acknowledge that modernization and materialism have widened the generational gap, causing a cultural dilemma. Despite these changes, especially in areas near Dharni, interior villages still preserve many traditions. Cultural resilience persists due to their communal lifestyle and close relationship with nature. Traditional practices, such as using hand grinding tools, musical instruments, and participating in rituals like *Ghungru Bazar* and *Holi Fagava*, are largely upheld by the older generation, indicating a shift but not a complete loss of heritage.

Illiteracy often correlates with larger family sizes. This research explores how seasonal migration affects the Korku tribe's family structure. Findings show a shift toward smaller, nuclear families, especially in Dharni tehsil. Despite low literacy and early marriages, studies (e.g., Takote et al., 2024; Nayak, 2012) indicate a growing preference for nuclear families, typically with four members. Limited land and property ownership compel newlyweds to move out in search of jobs, leaving behind smaller households.

The study examined the impact of seasonal migration on the Korku tribe's clothing style. A clear shift toward modern attire—like trousers, T-shirts, and Punjabi dresses—was observed among youth, especially in villages near Dharni. Elders continue wearing traditional outfits such as dhoti, saree, and bandi. Changes are influenced by comfort, availability, and factors like media, cultural exchange, and shifting demographics (Sarkar & Bairagi, 2023).

The study explored how seasonal migration affects the dietary habits of the Korku tribe. While some traditional foods and beliefs persist, government food schemes have shifted diets toward wheat, rice, pulses, and vegetables, improving nutrition and reducing child and maternal mortality in Melghat. Traditional meals once relied on forest produce like roots and leaves, but modernization and better food access have brought positive health outcomes. Beliefs around pregnancy still influence diet, but overall, malnutrition-related deaths have declined significantly.

The Korku tribe's livelihood, once forest-based, now primarily depends on agriculture, daily wages, and schemes like MANREGA. Seasonal migration has become common due to a lack of stable income, affecting family structures. Many migrate to cities in search of work, with women increasingly participating in economic decisions. Though agriculture remains central, forest laws and wildlife conservation have limited traditional practices. MANREGA is a key income source, despite issues like delayed payments.

The Korku tribe's interest in education has grown, but seasonal migration hinders children's schooling and contributes to the decline of the Korku dialect. Despite government efforts, literacy remains low—only 30.3%, with female literacy at 6%. Migration, inadequate educational programs, and emotional, linguistic, and resource barriers affect learning outcomes. The use of Korku at home, Marathi at school, and Hindi in public adds to the challenge, creating a language gap that impacts academic success.

Korku villages, traditionally built with mud, straw, and bamboo, are undergoing changes due to modernization and forest regulations. Government housing schemes have encouraged the use of modern materials like tiles and iron sheets, especially in Chikhaldara and Dharni.

While remote villages still retain traditional layouts, modern construction is gradually replacing older structures.

Despite seasonal migration and modernization, the Korku tribe's religious beliefs remain largely unchanged. Most Korkus continue practicing traditional rituals and worship Hindu deities linked to nature. These beliefs, passed down generations, strengthen cultural identity and family bonds. Studies confirm high religious adherence among Korkus, with younger generations maintaining these traditions.

Despite seasonal migration and modernization, the Korku tribe continues to observe traditional rituals related to birth, marriage, and death. Birth involves home rituals and purification rites; marriage includes customs like bride price ('Gonom') and symbolic ceremonies. Ancestor worship, through festivals like Milani and rituals like Sidoli, remains central. These practices are passed down generations, reinforcing family and cultural bonds.

Ghungru Bazar, a traditional folk event among the Gawali and Korku communities in Melghat, is declining due to seasonal migration and modernization. Held after Diwali, it involves unmarried youth dancing in circles with ghungrus tied to their legs, traveling from village to village. Historically, it served as a platform for matchmaking. However, its purpose has shifted toward celebration, and marriages are now mostly arranged by families or through independent selection at markets like Bhongdu-Hati. Youth dormitories no longer exist, and traditional practices are fading.

The Korku tribe's traditional self-governance system, *Chavadi Swashasan*, led by the *Aada Patel*, is losing relevance due to modernization and seasonal migration. Though institutions like the *Jat Panchayat* still exist and handle social matters, their authority is declining as the legally recognized *Gram Panchayat* takes precedence, especially for official matters. This shift reflects a broader erosion of indigenous governance among tribal communities in India.

Modernization and seasonal migration have reduced the prevalence of ignorance, superstitions, and magical beliefs among the Korku tribe, though such practices still persist. Traditional beliefs include omens, black magic, animal sacrifices, and rituals for healing or rainmaking. Some still rely on figures like the *Padiyal* for spiritual healing. While modern medicine is gaining acceptance, incidents of violence driven by superstition—such as branding and torture of suspected witches—still occur, reflecting a cultural struggle. Younger generations are moving toward modern values, while elders mourn the erosion of tradition. This reflects a broader cultural dilemma within the community.

(e) Conclusions: Considering the Chi Square values and percentage of responses following conclusions are drawn.

1. A significant number of Korku tribal have acknowledged that the modernization is eroding their cultural heritage, and their art is diminishing over time. However, there is a strong desire to pass down traditional practices to future generations. Statistical analysis confirmed this trend, indicating the ongoing challenge of balancing cultural preservation with modernization.
2. Seasonal migration, along with modernization, is influencing the transition from joint to nuclear family structures, but the degree of change varies between regions. In Chikhaldara Block, the majority of respondents still live in joint families, but there is a noticeable trend toward smaller family units. Similarly, in Dharni Block, while joint families remain common, a significant proportion of the population has shifted to nuclear family system.
3. Seasonal migration is influencing the clothing style of the Korku tribe, leading to a decline in the preference for traditional attire and ornaments. In Chikhaldara region, the transition is gradual, with some individual still favoring traditional clothing, while in Dharni, the shift towards modern fashion is more apparent.
4. Consumption of 'Siddu' (local alcohol) remains a common practice during social gatherings, and seasonal vegetables are widely included in their diet. Incidents of child mortality due to malnutrition have significantly reduced, reflecting an improvement in nutritional access and overall well-being.
5. Korku tribal women actively participate in financial decision-making within their households, demonstrating their significant influence on economic choices. Seasonal migration is a common livelihood strategy among Korku tribe members, Chikhaldara region relying on it more than Dharni. Migration has disrupted traditional family dynamics, leading to noticeable changes in household structures and social roles. Despite regional variations, members of the Korku tribe generally share similar experiences and perspectives regarding the effects of migration.
6. Seasonal migration disrupting children's education, leading to negative long-term consequences for their academic progress and future opportunities. **There is**noticeable decline in the public use of the Korku dialect, with many individuals gradually shifting to Hindi language for communication, however, the Korku language remains actively spoken within households, demonstrating cultural resilience.
7. Seasonal migration and modernization have significantly altered the traditional village structure of the Korku tribe. There is a clear shift from traditional to modern housing,

reflecting broader and substantial impact on the cultural and structural aspects of Korku settlements.

8. External influences have little to no impact on the religious faiths of the Korku tribe. The Korkus in both blocks (Chikhaldara and Dharni) exhibited strong incline to belief in God, active participation in religious rituals and its continuation across the generations still persists.
9. Despite seasonal migration, a significant proportion of Korkus in both Chikhaldara and Dharni blocks continue to observe traditional rituals during childbirth and marriage. Specific rituals such as 'Pachvi Puja' at childbirth and traditional marriage ceremonies remain integral to the community's cultural practices.
10. 'Ghungru Bazar' remains an important tradition among the Gawali, Korku, Bhilala and Gond communities; however, seasonal migration and modernization are contributing to its decline. Although participation levels remain similar across groups, the social and cultural relevance of the tradition is weakening over time.
11. Traditional governance systems, such as the 'Jat (Caste) Panchayat' and the role of the 'Ada Patel' continue to exist but their influence is gradually declining. The preference for the Gram Panchayat over traditional governance mechanisms is increasing, indicating a significant transformation in governance and social organization.
12. Migration and modernization have led to a decline in ignorance, superstitions and magical thinking. A significant number of Korkus prefer modern medical treatments over traditional healers, indicating a shift in cultural and social attitudes.

Declaration of conflict of interests:

Authors wish to confirm that there are no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication. We confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by me and there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed.

We confirm that we have given due consideration to the protection of intellectual property associated with this work and that there are no impediments to publication, including the timing of publication, with respect to intellectual property.

Plagiarism statement (Mandatory):

We declare that this research paper is my original work, and we have properly cited all sources used in this study. We have not submitted this work or any part of it for publication

or academic credit elsewhere. I understand that plagiarism is a serious academic offense and take full responsibility for the content of this paper.

Acknowledgment: The paper is a part of Minor Research Project, funded by ICSSR-WRC, MUMBAI.

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