

Dongria Kandha



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Dongria Kandha

FOREWORD

In the remote mountainous wilderness of the Eastern Ghats region of South Orissa lives a fascinating Kuvi-speaking tribe called, the Dongria Kandha who are a primitive section of the Kandha - numerically the most preponderant tribe of Orissa. They inhabit the lofty Niyamgiri hill ranges in the district of Rayagada. These mountainous tracts are away from the main arteries of travel.

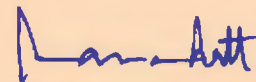
Endowed with rich cultural distinctions, they occupy a very special place in the heart of Anthropologists.

One can see in the Niyamgiri hills vast stretches of land in the hill slopes under banana and pineapple plantation amidst jackfruit trees which the master hands of the Dongria Kandha have grown. Expert horticulturists as they are, the Dongria Kandha have proved that the skill, ingenuity and perseverance of Man can tame any rugged terrain without the application of any improved technology.

To a stranger the Dongria Kandha strike as a very important tribal community for their simplicity, quickness in observation and sensibility. In almost all activities the tribesmen reveal a corporate life. They help each other in economic activities, and drink, dance and sing all in congregation. Religious ceremonies and festivals are performed communally. Crime is rare and adultery is uncommon and the individual behaviour is marked by honesty and truthfulness. Ideally hospitable, exceptionally candid and remarkably simple, the Dongrias live amidst Nature. To the Dongria the nature is the greatest impeller, the scenery around forming the grand arena where the human drama of vicissitudes of the mortal life is staged.

A photographic presentation of the life and work of this important tribal community will not only serve the academic interest but also the curiosity of inquisitive tourists, laymen and development practitioners concerned for development of the tribe. In this book both aesthetic and humanistic interests have been interwoven to present the thought-ways and work-ways of a people who lead a life of indigence and relative deprivation in the midst of plenty.

I am thankful to Dr. A.B. Ota, Director and Sri S.C. Mohanty, Research Officer who have painstakingly conceived, designed and produced this colourful Photo Hand Book. This is the 2nd publication in the series of 5 Photo Hand Books on 5 selected Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) of Orissa. I hope learned readers will find this book interesting and useful.



Commissioner cum-Secretary
ST & SC Development Department
Government of Orissa

Dongria Kandha



DONGRIA KANDHA



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Dongria Kandha

INTRODUCTION



For being the denizens of hills, forests and highlands (dongar), their neighbours name them Dongria but, they call themselves 'Dongran Kuan' or 'Drili Kuan'.

Dongria men and women are quite fashionable in their personal adornments, that makes them attractive and distinguish them from others.

Dongria men put on a long and narrow piece of loin cloth in such a way that the two embroidered ends hang in the front and the back. This piece of cloth is termed, drili .



Dongria women use two pieces of cloth (Kapda-Ganda), each, 3 - 4 feet in length and one-and half feet in width. The first piece is wrapped round the waist with a knot in the front. The second piece covers the upper part of the body, like an apron.

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Dongria men grow long hair to distinguish themselves from other sections of the Kandha and prepare braided locks, like the females at their scalps.



A wooden comb (Kokuya) is fixed at the hair knot of men and women which adorns the hair-lock and keeps the hair tight. A tiny knife (Pipli) with colourful thread balls at its metal handle, adorns the hair-lock of women that also serves the purpose of cutting as and when required. A variety of hairpins and clips enhances the beauty of the unique hair style of men and women.



Dongria men and women are very fond of beautifying themselves with a variety of ornaments.



Both the sexes wear earrings and nose-rings (Murma) with brass-made pointed sticks (Kulti).



KATRI Ornamental Small Knife

Men and women put on aluminum neck rings, beads & coin necklaces (Kekodika), finger rings in bunches. In addition to that women wear bangles, anklets, toe rings.



SIPINA Aluminum Hair Pins



BRASS WAIST CHAIN



KAGUDIKA
Brass Neck Ring

KAJA TEDUA Brass Bangle



ANDU - Brass Anklet

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HABITAT



The Dongria Kandha inhabit the lofty Niyamgiri hill ranges spread across Bissamcuttack, Kalyansingpur, Muniguda blocks in Rayagada district. It is an enchanting hill country endowed with bounties of nature. As a part of the Eastern Ghats, the Niyamgiris, situated on the borders of Rayagada and Gunupur subdivision rise steeply from 1,000 feet to a number of peaks, of which the highest is 4,970 feet above the sea level.

As Sons of nature the Dongrias love to live in their natural abode far away from the madding crowds of civilization. The high altitude of the Dongria Kandha habitat has made the climate cool and pleasant. The soil and climate are favourable for raising horticultural plantations.



It is indeed a feast to eyes to see in the Niyamgiri hills, vast stretches of banana and pineapple plantations amidst jackfruit trees in the hill slopes raised by the Dongria Kandha. Side by side they carry on shifting cultivation in hills at a higher altitude close to the hill-top. Nevertheless the threat of the indiscriminate axe which is steadily stripping the country bare of its vegetational cover is as frightening and real in the Dongria area as elsewhere.

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SETTLEMENT



The Dongria Kandha villages are located in the hill-slopes hilltops or valleys in a tangle of thickly wooded hill ranges. The habitation site is chosen upon the availability of sufficient land for shifting cultivation and a perennial source of water.



At the village entrance within mango grove and jack-fruit trees the shrine of the village deity- Jatrakudi Penu is installed in a thatched shed. Its walls are painted with beautiful coloured geometric designs. It protects the people from evil-eye.



In the middle of the village street another thatched shrine (kuddi) accommodates the Earth-Goddess (Darani Penu), the supreme deity. Close to the kuddi, there stands beautifully designed and carved wooden posts representing the consort (Jhankad or Kotebali Penu) of Darani Penu.



At the other end, close to the hill stream lies the girls' dormitory (Da-Sha-Hada or Hada Sala).



It is a preparatory home for the unmarried girls to learn about their life ways before entering into the family life. The boys build this structure and girls maintain it.

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HOUSING

The typical Dongria Kandha houses have low thatched roofs hardly 2-3 ft above the ground.

Built upon a rectangular ground plan it consists of a spacious rectangular room and another small room (Dhapa) at the back with verandahs in front and back.



The living room is used for sleeping and dining. Often a ceiling like platform is built inside to store food grains and other sundry articles.



A small partition wall separates the kitchen from the main room and keeps it out of the sight of outsiders.



Cattle are tethered to the wooden posts in the cowshed (Hada sala), built near the house.

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FOOD, DRINKS AND STIMULANTS

The Dongria eat three times a day, - morning, midday and evening. Seasonal cereals, pulses and vegetables viz, maize, millet, Kandul, Kating, Baila and Jhudang etc, roots like Rani Kanda and Langala Kanda, fruits, green leaves and mushrooms are cooked and eaten.



They relish non veg items prepared out of fish, chicken, mutton, buffalo meat, pork and beef. They like to eat dried fish-baked on fire with their evening meal.



They are very fond of Mahua liquor (Irpi Kalu) and Sago palm juice (Mada-Kalu). Besides they also brew and drink Kadali - Kalu (Banana -liquor) and Guda kalu (Molasses-liquor).

Liquor is used as medicine, as ritual offering to appease deities and ancestors, to entertain friends and relatives. It is indispensable in many occasions. It is part of their life.

They consume various narcotics and stimulant, like Kara, Dhungla, Kundeli and Chunga. Kara- prepared out of raw tobacco leaf and fine ash for chewing. Dhungla is chewing of raw tobacco.



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ECONOMY & LIVELIHOOD

Daily Routine



The Dongria Kandha are very early risers. They leave their bed by 3 to 4 A.M. and gather at Kuddi (Shrine of village deity) to relax with Pika and gossip. After an hour with the cocks' first crow, they disperse to work on their Dongar lands. Keep themselves busy there till afternoon with short breaks for lunch, drinks and rest. The whole family works and eats together in the field. There is no gender based division of work.



After 4.00 P.M. they visit their orchards and collect ripened fruits for sale and own consumption. Older family members also do not sit idle but do some light works. Children above 7 years help their parents at home and in the field.



Shifting Cultivation



Paucity of plain and wet lands and natural conditions have made them shifting cultivators. In their swiddens, called Haru they grow a variety of crops comprising cereals, pulses, legumens, fruits and vegetables, roots and tubers. A Haru owned individually is cultivated for 3 - 4 years and left fallow for 4 - 5 years for regeneration.



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Horticulture



Dongrias are skilled horticulturists. Taking advantage of favourable climatic conditions they raise jackfruit, mango, citrus, banana, pineapple and turmeric plantations in vast stretches in the hill slopes right from valley bottom to the hill top. In their kitchen gardens (Bada) lying close to the settlement site they also grow mango, jackfruit and vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, bean, brinjal, chilly etc.



Traditionally a Dongria has indisputable right to plant fruit trees any where besides his own land and enjoy the fruits of his trees. The main environmental factors, which have favoured fruit growing in the Niyamgiri hills, are high altitude/good drainage and longer duration of low temperature period. They produce tons of fruits but earn less due to exploitation by middlemen. They have proved that the skill, ingenuity and perseverance of Man can tame any rugged terrain without the help of modern technology.



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Forest Collections

Dongria continue their age old subsistence activity of food gathering from the forest. Seasonal food collection is still an indispensable part of their economic life. Their food is greatly supplemented by a seasonal variety of fruits, roots and tubers, mushrooms, green leaves etc collected from the jungle. Besides the edibles, they also collect firewood, timber and forest produce for their own consumption. It is a family affair and both the sexes take part in it.



Animal Husbandry

Dongria Kandha raise livestock, like buffalo (Kodra), cow (Kodi), goat (Adda), sheep (Mendha), pig (Paji), dog (Neudi), fowl (Koyu) and pigeon (Parua) for meeting the demands of prestations and for their own use in ritual occasions. They do not draw milk from cows and buffaloes. They believe it is meant for their calves. The animals are sheltered in their respective sheds.



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Wage Earning

To the Dongria, the descendants of the Niyam Raja of the Niyamgiri hills, wage earning is not a very respectable job. They prefer to work for the members of their own community either on nominal payment or on labour-exchange basis. Among them, there is no employer-employee feeling and no demand for payment of wages. They treat each other as equals.

Mutual exchange of labour is essentially still in vogue, and traditional labour cooperatives based on age and sex continue to be functional till today.



Trade & Barter



Though they produce tons of fruits and crops they usually do not carry it to the nearby markets to get a better price. While visiting the local weekly markets as a matter of routine, Dongria women carry small head loads of fruits for sale.

A major portion of their surplus products is sold to their Domb neighbours to whom they are indebted. They are not good at sale, barter, purchase and such other economic transactions and hence quite vulnerable to economic exploitations by unscrupulous traders, money lenders and middlemen.



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SOCIAL LIFE

FAMILY



Mostly, Dongria family is nuclear, monogamous and patrilineal consisting of parents and their unmarried children. When a son is grown up and gets married he sets up his own house and lives there with his wife and children.



The family acts as an economic unit. All the capable adults and children above 8 years of age toil in the field and contribute to the economic pool of the family. Men do the hardest works, such as ploughing cutting trees and digging holes etc.



Women besides their routine housekeeping and child care activities also take up subsistence activities, like cleaning of bush, thorns and thickets in the fields and hill slopes and make the field, dibble seeds, weeding, reaping etc.



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Indoors and outdoors, hard working Dongria women work more than men. Both husband and wife visit the markets to trade their commodities and buy provisions.

Life in a Dongria Kandha family is very peaceful. Husband and wife are partners in all walks of life. They work together and have mutual respect for each other. Husband seeks his wife's advice in all social and economic matters. The older people are highly respected. Children obey their parents.



MARRIAGE (Haidi)

A Dongria man marries to have children and continue his progeny. It elevates his status to a full-fledged adult member of the society. Grown up boys and girls enjoy freedom to meet and love each other, talk, crack jokes, exchange sweets, gifts and pleasantries and choose their mates for marriage. Boys and girls belonging to the same clan are considered brothers and sisters. Hence marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited.





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The Dongrias prefer adult marriage and arranged marriage. Payment of bride price is customary for acquiring an eligible bride. Demand for high bride price often leads to clan feuds.



PREGNANCY & CHILD BIRTH

After marriage Dongria welcome pregnancy and child birth.

The Dongria believe that an ancestor is likely to be born. During the last month of pregnancy offerings are made to the ancestors and gods. Feasts are given to friends and relatives before delivery of the child. The delivery takes place in the back room (Dhapa) of the husband's house with the help of a midwife. In case of any trouble, the whole village rises for help. A shaman or shamanin is called to conduct rituals for smooth delivery. The pollution period lasts for 21 days.



Name-Giving (Mila-Daru) Ear & Nose Piercing (Ki-Ka-Patpikamu):

When the child is about a month old, the Mila-Daru - name giving ceremony is performed. Maternal uncle and grand-parents are invited. Nose and ear piercing are conducted both for the male and female children. When the child of is six months old, a woman of the village, proficient in the art of piercing is invited. She pierces in four places at the ear-lobes and septum of the child with the help of thorns. After piercing, she inserts four neem-sticks there and applies castor oil or baked-turmeric paste to stop bleeding.

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Puberty Rite

On her first menstruation the girl is kept in seclusion for a week in the Dhpa room of her house. On the seventh day, a Bejuni is called to invoke the spirit, Gangu Penu, to spare the girl. She conducts a ritual beside the stream, puffs the spirit away from the girl's body and sacrifices a chick to please the spirit. After this the girl takes bath and gets free from pollution.

YOUTH DORMITORY (DA-SHA-HADA/ ADASBETTA)



Their dormitory is called Da-sha-hada/Da-sha-sika/ Dhangdi Sala/ Adasbetta meaning unmarried girl's (Da-sha) house (Hada/Hala). Unmarried boys, (Dhangda) do not have any dormitory house. They sleep on some one's verandah in small groups and the sleeping place is known as dhangrenga duki.

Da-sha-hada is located behind residential houses at the extreme end of the village near the stream. It looks different for its decorated walls. Boys and girls build and maintain it.

It is the place where the unmarried girls spend their night, sing and dance in open space. Here boys and girls meet, mix freely, dance and sing together, cut jokes, make friends, exchange gifts, and love each other and choose their life partners. Sometimes married men join them but married women are not allowed.

Following clan rules, the boys of the same clan and village are not allowed to visit the girls in the Dormitory in night. Only the boys of other clan and village are allowed. They come in late evening and leave before dawn.



As they grow up Dongria boys and girls enter into the traditional youth organization i.e., the labour cooperative and the youth dormitory.



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It is also a training centre. Here girls learn from their seniors, the needle work of embroidery, the art of playing their traditional musical instrument, Goani, the techniques of living, the cultural practices, social values, customs, traditions, economic pursuits, folklores, arts and crafts.

The boys and girls form their respective labour cooperatives. Their services are requisitioned by the villagers for specific works. The income goes to a common fund that is utilized in arranging common feasts. By working, they learn the techniques of community life, living and livelihood, arts and crafts.



DEATH RITES

The Dongria believe that, life (Jarmana or Jurma) and death (Hateyas) are determined by the Supreme Being, Darani Penu who has created this world. The cause of death is attributed to malicious agencies, like the evil spirits, black magic or the wrath of gods and deities. They fight tooth and nail to save a person till his/her last gasp by administering their folk medicines and performing all sorts of magico-religious rites.



The dead are cremated and the pollution lasts for two days only. On the second day, Jani conducts mortuary rite (Karja-ki-manamu) at the altar of the ancestor-spirits- Ghar-Dumba and Kandha Dumba. After this the departed soul is happily admitted into the rank of ancestors and does not harass his family members. Relatives, community members and neighbours are invited on this occasion to participate in a feast. A feast is arranged for the villagers, kith and kin.

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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Dongria strongly believe in the existence of a large number of Supernatural beings who exercise control on various aspects of their mundane life. Their pantheon is composed of Gods, deities and spirits-both benevolent and malevolent.

PANTHEON

The Supreme Deity :

Goddess Mother Earth, called Darani Penu or Jhankar is their benevolent Supreme Goddess. In every village street She sits in a hut called Kudi represented by three elevated stones.



Her consort Kotebali Penu, represented by a big vertical stone with crossed wooden pole (Munda) at its back lie at the back of Kuddi. He watches the village and protects its inhabitants from mishaps. He is worshipped with Darani Penu.

Village Deities :

Jatrakudi Penu: Installed at the village outskirts in the shades of a groove he watches the conduct of the villagers and never excuses any one. He has a bad temper and punishes deviant conduct causing calamities. To please him Shamanin worships him with sacrifices.

Hira Penu: is a female deity considered - the maid servant of Takrani Penu with whom she is worshipped. She inflicts pain and tortures the children if she is neglected.

Niyam-Raja Penu: is a male deity, represented by a sword and worshipped during Dasara and Jura Parab. He saves the people from unnatural deaths and accidents.





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Deities of Nature

Lahi Penu or **Dongar Penu** : A male deity worshipped by the Shamanins during April-May (Baisakh Lenju) after which trees are felled in the swiddens.

Lada Penu: is the forest deity who resides under a banyan tree at the entrance of the forest. She is worshipped with Lahi Penu by the Jani in the month of May (Sarua) before onset of communal hunting. She protects the people from attack of wild animals and grants them success in hunting.

Household Spirits (Dumba)

A wooden post (Tuli Munda) inside the sleeping room of each house represents the "Ancestor Spirits" who can be dreadful if not appeased properly.

Lai-Penu: is a female spirit who brings prosperity to the house if worshipped properly during the month of September (Dela Lenju) by the Bejuni.

Sita Penu: is a female spirit represented by a dry gourd containing seeds hung from the ceiling at the western corner of the sleeping room. She is Goddess Laxmi- the deity of wealth and worshipped by the housewife during the full-moon-day of December (Push) after harvest of all the crops.

Danda Penu: a female spirit represented by another small post in the sleeping room. She is the guardian deity of the granaries (Duli). After she is worshipped in the month of September (Dela lenju), the granaries are replastered and grains like Kosla and ragi are kept.



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Chhatar Penu : is a male spirit, represented by another post (Munda). He is worshipped by the Bejuni inside the house during Meria festival. He is very pernicious and brings diseases if not properly appeased. To please him a buffalo is sacrificed.

Bhairo Penu is a harmful male spirit who can cause accidental deaths in the family if not appeased with the sacrifice like a cow by the Bejuni during Meria festival. He is represented by a big wooden post in the sleeping room.

These ancestor spirits are also invoked ceremoniously by the Jani during the Meria festival. For each spirit a lump of sun dried rice is kept inside separate icons over which blood of a chick is sprinkled to please them. If satisfied, they save the household members from odds and evils.

Malevolent Spirits

They are Mieli-Penu, Buru Penu and Suka Penu who intentionally harass people with different diseases and cannot be satisfied by ordinary shamans except the Bejunis. There are also ghosts (Mahane) of bad persons who died unnaturally. They roam here and there, especially near the cremation ground and in forlorn places. Only experienced Bejunis can deal with them.



RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES

Dongrias have many kinds of magico-religious functionaries and specialists who act as people's representatives to mediate between humans and supernaturals.

Jani is the ritual head of the village. This post is hereditary. He performs all village rituals and gets a special share of sacrificial animals.

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Lamba - the specialist Jani who belongs to Nishka Mutha and officiates in the rituals of Meria festival

I chan Jani - the Jani's assistant who sacrifices animals, arranges puja items and participates with the Jani in the recitation of the incantations.

Pujari - plays a special role in Meria Puja. He prepares an umbrella out of a bamboo collected from the forest in the dead of night, unnoticed by anybody and dangles it in the Meria procession to ward off the evil-eyes and pernicious spirits. He strikes at the head of Meria animal first and then others follow. In other religious functions, he also presides along with Jani and Ichan Jani.

Beju - Bejuni: (Shamans and Shamanins) - the divination specialists. Through divination, prayer and rites, they get into trance and communicate with spirits responsible for causing mishap. When they regain senses, they adopt rice-supplication process called, puchna to ascertain various types of sacrifices required to appease different spirits. He/she also practices both black and white magic.

Dishari: the medicine man who practises herbal medicines backed by magical powers.



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Annual Festival Calendar

Sl No	Name of the ritual	Date of observance	Purpose	Offering	Deities worshipped	Who worships	Communal or Individual
1.	<i>Ghanta Parab</i>	Baisakh <i>Sarua</i> April-May	Fulfillment of vows and to improve economic condition	Animals are sacrificed by vow makers, Lamb-1, Liquor-80-90 bottles	<i>Sita Penu</i> <i>Takrani Penu</i> <i>Hirapenu</i> <i>Jatrakudi Penu</i>	Bejunis	Communal
2.	<i>Salangi</i>	<i>Jaistha (Jet)</i> May-June	To save cattle from diseases & epidemics	Fowl-2, Pigeon-1, Liquor-15 bottles	Ancestors	family Head	Individual
3.	<i>Mandia Rani</i>	<i>Shravana (Sabna)</i> July-August	For bumper harvest of ragi	Buffalo-1, Fowl-1, Liquor-110 bottles	Kotiasal	Jani / Bejuni	Communal/individual
4.	<i>Dhan-Nuakhia</i>	Bhadra (Bhada) (August-September)	First rice offered in honour of <i>Jhankad</i>	Fowl-1, Pigeon-1, Pig-1, New rice, Fruits, Vegetables purchased individually	<i>Jhankad</i> and evil spirits	Jani	Communal
5.	<i>Pidika</i>	<i>Ashin (Dashara)</i> Sept.-Oct.	For ample growth of castor seeds and to save it from insects	Buffalo-1, Fowl-3, Pigeon-1	<i>Jatrakudi Penu</i>	Jani / Bejuni	Communal
6.	<i>Punapadi</i>	<i>Kartik (Dewali)</i> Oct.-Nov.	First eating of <i>Kosla, Kandul, Arka, Janaand</i> other seeds and fruits	Buffalo-1, Pigeon-1, Fowl-2	<i>Jatrakudi Penu</i>	Bejuni	Communal
7.	<i>Dongar Puja</i>	<i>Margasira (Pand)</i> Nov.-Dec.	To get more crops	Pig-1, Fowl-1	<i>Haru Penu</i>	Bejuni	Individual
8.	<i>Meria Puja</i>	<i>Magha (Maghe)</i> Jan.-Feb.	For betterment and prosperity of the village	Buffalo-1, Fowl-1, Goat-5 and sacrifice of animals by vow-takers	<i>Jhankad</i>	Lamba, Jani, Pujari Bejuni	Communal
9.	<i>Bihan Puja or Sadrangi Laka</i>	<i>Chaitra (Setar)</i> March-April	Before sowing season	Fowl-1, Pigeon-1	<i>Darani Penu, Sita Penu, Haru Penu</i>	Jani / Bejuni	Individual

Meria Festival:

It is biggest and most important festival observed communally in any one of the villages of a Mutha for 8 days during January-February in which people of other Muthas too participate. This festival is dedicated to the Supreme Goddess, *Darani Penu*, and Her disciples and all other deities and spirits. If there is no good harvest, this expensive festival may be postponed to the next year.



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Arrangements are made at least a month in advance. Till the festival is over, all the works are suspended and people remain jubilant awaiting the celebrations.

Four days before the festival, the Pujari brings a bamboo pole from the forest unnoticed to prepare Meria umbrella (chhatra). To make the bamboo pole strong, it is soaked in the stream for two days. Before the day of the festival, a coloured cloth fitted with coloured glasses is fixed on the bamboo pole and posted before the Jhankad to be dangled by the Pujari in the Meria procession.



Four days before the guests arrive in their respective relative's houses with gifts like bottles of liquor, kosla rice or paddy and one sacrificial animal - a goat or a lamb or a fowl. Bishmajhi collects them and keeps them for use in the festival.

Festival begins on the fixed day. Lamba assisted by Janis, Ichan-Janis and Pujaris leads the ritual proceedings. Friday is considered an auspicious day for the festival.



1st Day

The Lamba and other religious functionaries accompanied by the drum-beaters and musicians go to a banyan tree to take out the Meria utensils kept there. On return, the Lamba places those articles in the Kuddi. There he starts the proceedings to invoke all deities and spirits by reciting mantras with other Janis for the whole night.

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2nd Day

In the morning the Bejunis reach the Jhankad and dance in batches to please the deities. The Lamba and Janis take rest. When the Pat-Bejuni gets into trance, Lamba rushes in to take note of the presence of the spirit. In the evening they host a feast to entertain all the invitees. After the feast, the third sitting starts with Lamba, Ichan-Janis and the Pat-Bejuni, invoking the Darani Penu together. In late night three post-pubescent girls bring three brass-wares from the Pujari's house. Then they go straight to the stream to bring three pitcherful of water without looking back.



They come to the Meria animal - a big buffalo tied to a big wooden post and bathe it with the water to make it purified for sacrifice. Then, they take the podokandi (iron-chain and plate) from the Lamba to tie the forelegs of the buffalo. All the people reach the Jhankad and get ready with their axes and knives to strike at the animal. Invoking the deities the Lamba and the Pat-Bejuni get into trance amidst the beating of drums. After regaining senses they make arrangements for the Meria sacrifice.

3rd Day

Little before the dawn, all go to the the village outskirts in a grand procession led by the Lamba and Janis. The Dishari, Pat-Bejuni and Ichan-Jani carry the brass-wares with water. The Pujari dangles the umbrella before the procession to ward off the evil-eyes and spirits. The Bejunis rejuvenate their energy and dance rhythmically with the beating of drums. The young boys howl and ululate in chorus. People fall upon each other to hold the ropes of the Meria animal tied to a big wooden-pole. Other vow-takers too, tie their sacrificial animals.



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Just at the break of dawn, the animal is sacrificed and the first blow is given by the Pujari. Other blows fall one after the other and thus the animal is hacked to death. Even when blows are being showered, the entire belly of the buffalo is torn apart and its intestine etc. are pulled out nibbled and rubbed over the body out of joy and revelry by the participants. It is believed, more the animal is tortured the more the Penu is satisfied.

After that, the Meria head is brought back in the procession by an outsider (Padria) other than the Mutha clan-members. It is tabooed for the Mutha clan-members to touch it. Reaching the Jhankad, the Lamba draws a big square diagram on which the Meria head is placed. The Lamba offers it to Darani Penu by putting on vermilion over it and pouring five gourdful of wine over it. This marks the end of the ritual.



4th - 8th Day

Padrias customarily go to Lamba and ask for a portion of Meria-animal he got the previous day. After mock exchanges the Lamba concedes. The Padrias cook the meat with rice and feed the host villagers. The next two days, boys and girls sing and dance before Darani Penu.

On the last day, Lamba himself kills a goat, cooks it with rice and offers it to Darani Penu. He distributes this ritual food (Lamba-Begu) among all the Mutha families. In the evening the young boys and girls exchange rice to apologize for offending each other by joking. Boys touch the hands of the girls parents to beg excuse offering a bottle of liquor.

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AESTHETIC LIFE



As denizens of hills and forests Dongria Kondh live in close harmony with nature. Both the material and non material aspects of their culture are profoundly influenced by nature. This has generated a sense of beauty among them and given birth to a natural artist within each of them. They are lovers of beauty which is reflected in their colourful lifestyle and more conspicuously in their distinct style of dress and ornaments, dance and music and arts and crafts.



In this context their traditional youth dormitory functions as a school of learning for the youngsters. The dormitory members get the scope to learn the rhythms of dance and music, and techniques of making art and crafts, often by imitating the seniors. It serves as a centre for preserving their cultural heritage and folk tradition, in addition to transmitting the same from generation to generation.

Dongria Kandha



The Dongria girls make beautiful embroidered shawls, called Kapda Ganda. It is a fine piece of needle work in which bright coloured i.e., mostly red, yellow and green coloured threads are used. The younger girls in the dormitory learn needlework from the elders. They are also taught the art of playing their traditional musical instrument, Goani.



The Dongria men and women sing songs and dance in all festive and ceremonial occasions. Men play the musicals instruments and women locking their hands behind each other dance in a line in front of the male drummers. They wear their colourful costumes during dancing. The young women do not dance in front of their elders. Their songs and dances reflect lyrics expressing love and devotion, narration of different aspects of their socio-cultural and economic life.



DHAPU - Tambourine



Double Membrane Drum

Dongria Kandha



SOCIAL CONTROL

At the village level, a set of traditional village leaders and the village council exercise control. They shoulder all responsibilities, participate in all social activities and influence the life of their fellowmen.

Jani, the priest, is formal secular and ritual head of the village and village council. He presides over the village council meetings.

He is the custodian of the norms, customs and social sanctions. All important matters are brought to his notice for opinion and intervention. Depending on the gravity of the matter, he may convene a meeting of the village council to decide the issue or may settle it himself. In the event of any of his fellow-villager having been offended or assailed by a person of another village he takes the issue to the headman of the aggressor's village. He fixes dates for various meetings, rituals, ceremonies, feasts and festivals in consultation with other leaders and village elders and participates in all events in family, lineage and village levels. He can alone worship the Supreme Deity, Darani-penu. His post is hereditary. He does not demand any remuneration for his services. But villagers give him the head and a large share of the meat of sacrificial animals in communal rituals and hunts.

He holds the highest and prestigious post in the village and commands respect from his fellow villagers.



Bishmajhi is the revenue collector and village fund manager, whose secular position comes next to Jani. He collects land and forest revenue from the households of the village and fines imposed on offenders by the village council. He presides over the village meetings in absence of Jani. He fixes up the rate of subscription for communal feasts and festivals in consultation with the Jani. He assists Jani in all social and religious events. Like Jani, he does not get any remuneration.

Barika is the village messenger who belongs to Domb community. He circulates news around the village about important events, such as-death, birth etc, summons people and leaders to the village meetings, collects cash or grains from the villagers on the headman's instructions. His presence is necessary in all village meetings. He accompanies the villagers to deposit land and forest revenues at Bissamkatak. He being an Oriya knowing man, is the liaison between the villagers and outsiders. He arranges petty loans for the villagers. He fixes rates for each produce

Dongria Kandha

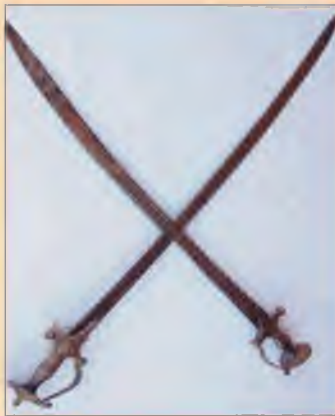
to be sold in the market by the villagers. He assists the village youth in the bride capture and bride-price fixation and intra-clan disputes. He reports criminal offences to the police in consultation with Bishmajhi and Jani.

For his fees, he gets about 5 kilograms of ragi or kosla rice from each household during harvest. Besides, he also collects cooked rice every day from each household.

MODERN LEADERSHIP

The statutory Panchayat Raj system has created a set of elected leaders like Ward Member, Sarpanch and Block / Zilla parishad Chairman. They act as the spokesmen of the people and look after development works liasioning between the people and government and other external agencies.

Well to do and resourceful persons are elected for these positions. They exercise influence on the people and in the process of decision making.



Traditional Village Council (Sabha)

It is composed of household heads and village leaders. The Jani convenes the meeting. Barika informs one and all. The council discusses matters of common interest and deals with customary affairs. The topic is generally initiated by the Barika and all members freely participate in the discussion. The accused and the aggrieved are called to explain their positions. The council may depute the Barika and other elderly persons to make further enquiries in the matter and attempt for reconciliation if possible. Decisions are taken unanimously. The council handles matters like inter-personal quarrels, breach of taboos and customs, offences committed in drunken state, partition of joint families, inheritance cases, irksome love affairs, adultery etc. The offenders are fined in shape of cash and or kinds of liquor bottles.

MUTHA ORGANIZATION

Mutha' is an important feature of social and political organization of the Dongria Kandha. It consists of group of adjoining villages and is treated as an administrative - cum- social unit. It is led by a head designated as Mandal. The entire Dongria area has been divided into 21 Muthas. This organization had received recognition from the ex- feudatory set up.



Dongria Kandha



CHANGING SCENE

Dongria say "We are Paroja Logu (subjects), We are happy with our Dongra chasa (Hill cultivation) and do not like Pada Desia (outsider)". With this attitude they lived in isolation in their remote mountainous habitat segregated from the outside world by natural barriers for centuries keeping their culture and cultural identity intact.

Development interventions were made during British regime from the late 19th century though the Kondh territory was later declared as a Partially Excluded Area.



Formal tribal development policy and programmes were evolved after independence. But after the establishment of Community Development Blocks in the Dongria Kandha area, introduction of Purchase-Sale and Fair Price Shop Scheme in 1964 and with developed communication facilities, the Dongria Kandha are frequently coming in contact with the outside world. The process of change has put them in a transitional phase. But they are still in the mooring of their traditional way of life.

After adoption of Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) Approach from the 5th Plan period development of Dongria Kandha is being looked after by the dedicated agencies such as two Integrated Tribal Development Agencies of Gunupur and Rayagada and two Micro Projects i.e., Dongria Kandha Development Agencies (DKDA) of Chatikona and Parsali, all operating in Rayagada District.



The impact of planned change and modernization are visible in their way of life. On the other side, their traditional dormitory and kinship organizations are weakening.

The Dongria are in a state of flux. Old customs, beliefs and values still hold good. In spite of the changes, their social structure has retained many of its basic characteristic features.





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