

MATYA



Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

2015

FOREWORD

Odisha is the cradle of 62 culturally vibrant and colourful tribal communities many of whom are little known to the world outside. Among them Matya is one. The SCSTRTI has taken a step in producing photo handbooks on different Scheduled Tribes of Odisha including the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs). The present hand book on the tribe called “Matya” is the photographic representation of socio-cultural life of the tribe along with various changes and development taking place among them.

The Matya also known as Mati-Bhumiya mainly inhabits in the Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Malkangiri districts of Odisha. Their name Matya comes from the fact that they are expert earth (mati) diggers and more often employed by the neighbouring communities for this kind of work.

They generally live in separate wards in multiethnic village with other Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes maintaining their distinct cultural identity. “Dulari Devi” is their principal village deity. They also observe different festivals on different occasions. They are settled agriculturists. They cultivate paddy, pulses, and different type of vegetables in their agricultural field. But those who are landless, migrates to the city in search of work as daily wage labourer.

Now-a-days, they are in process of change as various developmental programmes are taken up by both government and non-government organizations for their upliftment.

I extend my heartiest thanks to Dr. A.B Ota, IAS, Director, N. Kanhar and A. Kodamasingh, who have laboriously conceived, and produced this colourful Photo Hand Book. I also thank Shri S.C. Mohanty, OSD (R) SCSTRTI, and Dr. P. Patnaik for rendering data and editorial support for this hand book.

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

MATYA



A.B. Ota
N. Kanhar
A. Kodamasingh

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute
(SCSTRI), C.R.P. Square, Bhubaneswar -751003

2015

IDENTITY

Among the 62 Scheduled Tribe communities of Odisha, Matya is a minor tribe. The name 'Matya' comes from the fact that they are expert earth (*mati*) diggers and more often employed by the neighbouring communities for earth work. The tribe is also known as Mati-Bhumiya. The name Mati Bhumiya is derived from two words such as 'Mati' meaning 'soil' and 'Bhu' meaning 'earth' which denotes their long association with the land and soil. They have close cultural affinities with the Mirdha, Kisan and Oraon tribes. They mainly inhabit the Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Malkangiri districts of Odisha. Small sections of them are also found in other districts like Sundargarh, Balasore and Cuttack.

Being expert earth diggers they are mostly engaged in earth works. They speak Odia, Telugu and Laria languages depending upon their place of residence. So far as their physical characteristics are concerned, they are of medium to tall stature, dark complexion having broad and flat faces with a broad nose and thick lips. They possess wavy hair.



Population & Literacy:

According to 2011 census the total population of Matyas in Odisha is 30,169 (males 15149 and females 15020). Their sex ratio is 991 females per 1000 males. Their rate of literacy is 51.05 % (63.89 % for the males and 38.16 % for females). The Decadal population growth rate among the Matya during the period from 1991 to 2011 is 71.91 percent.

Dress & Ornaments:

The traditional pattern of dress and ornaments is very simple and similar to those of Mirdha, Kisan and Oraon tribes. Generally, the Matya men wear a narrow strip of white loin cloth known as 'Lenguti' and the women wear coloured sarees, hand woven by the neighbouring Scheduled Caste community known as 'Dom'. But at present due to their frequent contact and migrations to cities,



their dress patterns have changed. Matya men now prefer to wear banyan, shirt with napkin and chadar which is available in local market and women in addition to saree prefer to use petticoat and blouse. The Matya women also like to adorn themselves with various traditional ornaments made of silver, brass and aluminum.



SETTLEMENT



The Matyas usually live in multi-ethnic villages with other communities including Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes but in separate hamlets maintaining their distinct cultural identity. Their villages are located in hill bottoms, forests and plains close to hill streams for water supply. In these days, sanitary wells and tube wells have been provided by the government in their habitations for supply of safe and potable drinking water.



The houses in the village are randomly distributed. They usually construct a new house in the months of February and March. For selection of a new site they observe some ritual. The head of the house with other male members go to the chosen site carrying some grains of rice (*arua chaula*) and turmeric. At the four corner of the selected site, the head of the house keeps some rice mixed with turmeric. These are covered with *sal* leaf and left there overnight. On the next morning, they go to the site to observe whether the grains are disturbed or not. If they find the rice remaining intact, the site is considered to be auspicious and suitable to construct a new house.



& HOUSING





The typical Matya house is built upon a rectangular ground plan. These houses are small in size. Each house consists of two rooms. One room is used as sleeping-cum-store room and the other, as the kitchen. The cowshed is located at the back side of the house. A narrow verandah is attached to the house where they keep their agricultural implements. In their kitchen they keep the utensils and make one or two mortar holes embedded on the ground for husking food grains. The walls of the house are made of wattle frames plastered with mud and the outer walls of the house are plastered with red earth for looking beautiful. The gable shaped roof is thatched with straw.

For their use in day to day life, the Matya keep a number of household articles. They usually keep earthen vessels, gourd containers and leaf containers for storing purpose, utensils, husking levers (*kutuni*) etc. in their kitchen. They keep earth digging implements and agricultural implements in their house.

Recently, some of the Matya people have constructed Pacca houses under Indira Awas Yojana and Mo Kudia Yojana.



SOCIAL LIFE

The Matya community is divided into several exogamous totemic clans such as Bagh (tiger), Nag (cobra), Chili (goat) and Kochimo (tortoise). The members of each clan believe to have been descended from a common ancestor and they have some mystic ties with their totem. A strong sense of reciprocity and co-operation exists among all the members of each clan as they consider themselves as brothers and sisters. The clans are further subdivided into lineages such as Galapalli, Kondipilli, Naka, Majhi etc. The members of different clans have different surnames like Kape, Prema, Pujari, Naek, Chalan, Putia, Dora etc.

Family is the smallest and an important social unit in their society. They prefer to live in nuclear family. Joint family is rarely found. As soon as a boy gets married, he builds a new house of his own and stays separately from his parents.



Matya families are patrilineal, partilocal and patriarchal. Father is the head of the family. He receives the highest respect and exercises his authority in all the affairs of his family. The role of mother is also very important in all domestic matters. Ancestral property is inherited equally by the sons but, the eldest son who succeeds to the authority of his father after the latter's death gets a little extra.





LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Pregnancy and Child Birth

Pregnancy and child birth are important landmarks in the life cycle of Matya. The Matya family rejoices at the birth of a child. They believe that one of their ancestors will take birth in their family. The pregnant mother becomes happy for her motherhood. They prefer the birth of son as he will continue their family line.

During pregnancy the woman observes some taboos and restrictions. She is prohibited to go to the cremation ground, to come out of the house during lunar and solar eclipses, to attend any rituals and festivals and eat the meat of any ritually sacrificed animal.





Usually the birth of the child takes place in a separate room and an experienced woman of the family or community helps in the delivery of the child. After the delivery of the child, she cuts the umbilical cord with a knife and buries it with the placenta in a pit in the backyard of the house. The mother and child are kept warm by the nuptial fire in the laying in room.

Birth pollution is observed for seven days but, in case of the birth of a male child, the pollution period extends to nine days. On the seventh day, the purificatory rite is observed. On this day, the mother pares her nails and after taking a complete bath, she takes tulsi (*osmium sanctum*) leaves with water for her purification. The child is also given a bath.

On the 21st day, the name giving ceremony is held. The name is usually chosen by the 'Disari' (traditional Astrologer) who selects the name

through the rice divination. He drops two grains of rice into turmeric water while uttering the names of the ancestors. If both the grains float and meet each other, the name being uttered at that time is given to the child. Besides, the child is also named according to name of the day of birth. If the household can afford, a feast is hosted to all the kith and kin on that day and the mother and child is given new cloths to wear on this occasion.





Puberty:

Generally in Matya society, adolescent girls observe puberty rite for seven days on the onset of their first menstruation. During this period of menstrual pollution, the menstruating girl stays separately in an isolated room. In that time she has to observe some taboos like, to avoid to see and talk to male members, to attend any rituals and festivals, to attend to any indoor or outdoor works. On the 7th day she takes purificatory bath in the nearby stream or river by anointing turmeric paste mixed with oil and wears new clothes. Her family hosts a mini feast to the kith and kin on that day.

Marriage:

Marriage is an important event in the life cycle of Matyas. Mostly they practise adult marriage and monogamy. Polygyny is permitted in specific cases of barrenness or perpetual sickness of the first wife. Sororal and non-sororal polygyny is also prevalent in their society. Marriages arranged by negotiation (jhia maga) is most common, prestigious and popular form of marriage. Besides, other forms of marriage like marriage by elopement, marriage by capture, marriage by service and cross-cousin marriage are also practiced among them. Marriage with their mother's brother's daughter, father's sister's daughter or the elder sister's daughter is preferred. Payment of bride price (jhola) is obligatory in all regular kinds of marriage.

In the negotiation marriage, the initiative is taken by the groom's parents to select the bride. They put forth the marriage proposal before the parents of their chosen bride. If the proposal is accepted, a pot of liquor is presented to the bride's parents. At a later date, they go with another pot of liquor and rice to the bride's house and fix the amount of the bride price and the date of marriage in consultation with the Disari. The liquor is distributed among the bride's family members and villagers. If they accept the drink, it indicates their consent to the matrimonial alliance.

On the preceding day of marriage, the bride accompanied by a number of villagers, relatives and girls of her village is brought to the groom's village in a procession with music played by "Dom" musicians. They are greeted warmly, entertained with food and liquor and



accommodated in a separate house by the groom's family.

A raised platform i.e., "pendal" is erected in front of the groom's house for conducting the wedding rites. On the wedding day, both the bride and groom take bath in turmeric water, wear new clothes and take their seats on this platform. The Disari usually conducts the wedding ritual. The hands of both the couple are joined together and then they move around the branch of a mahul tree

planted on the ground near the wedding altar for seven times and enter into the groom's house. At the time of entry into the house, the relatives of the groom stand on their way and make them promise two things- that they will remain faithful to each other for the entire life and that they will behave properly with their kith and kin. After that the groom's family hosts a grand feast for all invited guests, villagers and all kith and kin.

The whole of wedding night is enjoyed by all by singing, dancing, merry making and drinking. On

the next morning, the bride's party returns home with their bride price (jhola) which usually consists of a pair of cows or bullocks. At present, cash is being paid instead of animals by the well-to-do and advanced families.

The remarriage of widow, widower and divorcee are allowed in the Matya society. When a married woman goes out with another man, her new husband has to pay some compensation known as sagarta to her first husband.



Divorce :

Divorce is permissible in Matya society. Either husband or wife can seek divorce. Divorce is permitted on the grounds of adultery, maladjustment and cruelty. Divorce compensation is paid to the aggrieved party and children usually live with their father. The cases of divorce are finalized by their traditional community council in presence of both the parties.



Death :

The Matyas believe that death is a natural phenomenon. Both burial and cremation system is adopted by them for the disposal of the dead. The corpses of men of outstanding position are cremated whereas those of the common flock are buried in sleeping posture with salt and flank thrown around, below and above.

Death pollution is observed for 3 days. On the third day, the purificatory rite is observed. The clothes, utensils and other household articles are washed and the house and its surrounding are cleaned and smeared with a mixture of cow dung and water. All the bereaved family members cut hair and nails and take a purificatory bath. Then a feast is hosted for all the kith and kin. In case of cremation, on the 4th day, the cremation spot is cleared up, milk is poured on and a small hut like structure is raised at the spot. In certain places

instead of hut like structure, a bamboo pole or wooden pole is set up and the dead man's rags is attached to it. The earthen wares are broken and thrown there. They conduct ancestor worship on the twelfth day of death.

After a year, they perform annual death rite (*buda*) for which they invite all relatives and host a feast. They offer rice, meat beer etc. to the deceased, who is considered as Duma and erect a Gudum in his name.





LIVELIHOOD

The Matya's main occupation is agriculture. They are settled agriculturists. They cultivate paddy, maize, *suan*, pulses, tobacco and various types of vegetables in their lands. Like other tribal communities they have fascination to domesticate cows, bullocks, buffaloes for agricultural work and transportation as well as goats, chicken, sheep for ceremonial sacrifice, domestic consumption and often, for sale in the market. Traditionally being skilled in earth works, they go for digging tanks, ponds, canals, house

foundations on contractual or daily wage as and when called for.

From the nearby forest they collect fodder, firewood and the seasonal minor forest produce such as edible fruits, roots, leaves, tubers, resin, *sal* and *siali* leaves and seeds, *mahua* flowers and fruits, herbs etc. for consumption and sale. Occasionally, they go for hunting of animals and birds to the forest and take up fishing in the nearby ponds, streams and rivers.

Now due to impact of urbanization and industrialization, many of them have migrated to the cities and live in slums. They are employed as daily wage labourers in different construction works and factories and some of them are also employed in private and government sectors.



Food & Drinks :

The Matyas are non-vegetarians. Rice is their staple food. Usually they take meals thrice in a day. In the early morning, they take watered rice with salt, green chili and fried green leaves and vegetables and in their lunch and dinner they take boiled rice along with the dishes of pulses, vegetables, green leaves, edible roots, tubers and mushrooms collected from the nearby forests seasonally. Like other tribal communities they also prefer to eat non-vegetarian foods like

chicken, mutton, eggs and fishes. They prepare and take some special type of food items like cakes and sweetmeats of different type and non-veg dishes on the occasions of ceremonies, festivals and rituals.

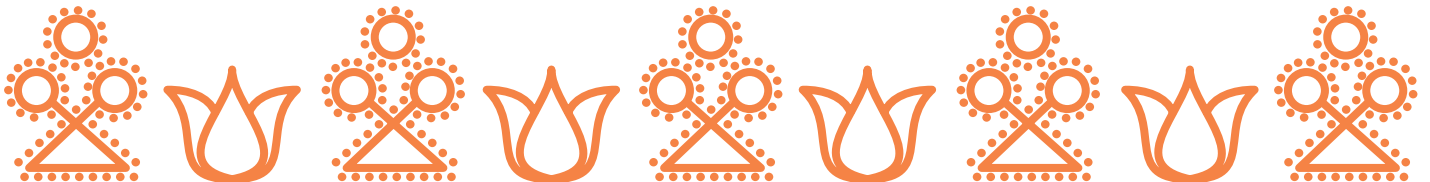
The Matya men usually consume alcoholic drinks which are often home-made or sometimes, bought from the local market. Besides drinking they also smoke cigar (*pika*), beedi and chew betel leaves and tobacco.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Like other tribal communities, the Matya believe in existence of different god and goddess. They regard their village deity “called Dulari Devi” or “Thakurani” as their patron deity. She is represented by her carriers (bahans) like elephants, horses etc. They also worship a number of ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits are worshipped by the elder male member of the house for the well-being of the family members.

Pujari is the religious head of the village who officiate in all the rituals and festivals and worships the village deity regularly. He is assisted by Disari – the astrologer, who is expected to forecast the annual crops and auspicious days.



The Matyas still believe in their traditional magico-religious practices to cure diseases. Few of them are aware of modern systems of health care and they go to hospitals for treatment of diseases. But majority of them still go to the village shaman for indigenous treatment. For his services the shaman is paid in terms of both cash and kind. To appease god and goddess and thereby cure the diseases, they sacrifice different animals and birds.



Festivals :

The Matyas observe a number of festivals in a year. Their main festival is Dhan-nuakhai i.e., the new rice eating ceremony that is observed in the month of August-September (*Bhadrab*). They observe Dulari Dei puja in October (*Asen*), new *simb* and *sara* eating ceremony and *Pusa punia* in the month of *Pusa* (December-January), new mango eating ceremony and *Chait Parab* in the months of *Chaitra* and *Baisakh* (April and May). They offer all new fruits to gods and ancestors and before that they don't eat and sell them.

During the month of *Aswin* (September-October), the village deity-'Dulari Devi is worshipped for 3 days from Saturday to Monday

in the 2nd week. The Disari fixes up the time of worship. Different types of animals and birds are sacrificed to appease the deity. The Disari gets the heads of sacrificed animals and the rest is divided into four parts. One part is taken by Disari as his share, one by the headman of the village, one by the Pujari and the remaining part is distributed among the villagers.

They also participate in the local festivals of Dasara, Rathajatra and Trinath Mela.

They have special dances and music on the occasions of different festivals and rituals but Dhemsa dance is one of their importance dance.





SOCIAL CONTROL

The Matyas have simple political organization constituted by their traditional leaders like Naek, Barik and Challan. The secular headman is known as 'Naek'. The post of Naek is hereditary. His responsibility is to maintain peace and order in the community. All the cases of disputes, conflicts, theft, violation of customary rules, witchcraft and sorcery, partition of property, sale and mortgage of land, marriage, bride price, divorce, adultery and the like are settled in the traditional village council meetings. Naek as the secular headman presides over the meetings and gives his final decision in consultation with other elderly members of the village who are present in the meetings. Punishment is given to the culprit according to the gravity of the offence. The culprit is imposed to pay fine in shape of cash and kind and also sometimes the culprit is excommunicated for serious offences. The 'Naek' is assisted by 'Barik' who belong to a Scheduled Caste. He acts as the village messenger and the assistant to Naek. There is another assistant called 'Challan' who also assists the Naek in organizing and conducting the meetings. At the end of the meeting the fine which is collected from the culprit is distributed among Naek, Barik and Challan.





Due to the impact of planned change and modernization, their traditional political organization is gradually declining and they now follow the statutory three tier Panchayat Raj system.

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

Trends of modernization and introduction of planned development intervention by the Government and Non-Government agencies have brought notable changes in the life style of the Matya. Development in the fields of health and sanitation, education, poverty eradication, communication, agriculture and infrastructure has taken place. Now they have adopted modern agricultural practices, by using of high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers and better irrigation facilities. Some of them have adopted poultry, goat and fishery schemes for their livelihood enhancement.





Since education is the most important input for the socio-economic development, the STs and SCs Development Department have run a number of educational institutions like EMRS (Ekalavya Model Residential Schools), Higher Secondary Schools (Science and Commerce), High Schools, Girls High Schools, Residential and Non-Residential Ashram and Sevashram Schools in their area. It has brought noticeable changes in their life style, dress pattern and belief system. Under various socio-economic development schemes the Matya women now form SHGs which have also played a major role for the upliftment of their economic and social life.



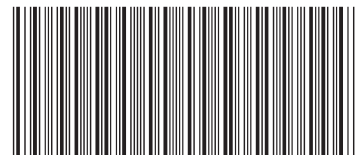
Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series 33 "MATYA"

@SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar - 751003

Web site-scstrti.in, Email- scstrti@yahoo.co.in,

Telephone : 0674-2563649/2561635



978-93-80705-35-4