



# BHOTTADA

**Sch. Castes & Sch. Tribes Research and Training Institute  
Bhubaneswar, Odisha  
(2014)**

# FOREWORD

The Bhottadas are one of the major tribes of Odisha. The name 'Bhottada' comes from *bhu*, meaning land and *tara*, meaning *chase*. Ethnographers believe that ethnically the Bhottadas are akin to the Murias of Bastar, both of whom are sub-divisions of the Gond tribe. They are largely distributed in Nawrangpur, Koraput and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. Their mother tongue is called Bhatri, a semi autonomous dialect of Indo-Aryan family with an established tribal identity. They are also conversant in local Odia language.

The Bhottada habitat is located in picturesque landscapes stretching beyond the mountain ranges in the Nawarangpur district of Odisha and its adjoining districts of Bastar, at about 2000 feet above the sea level. Their material culture is very simple. Primarily, they are settled agriculturists and non-vegetarians. They do not practice shifting cultivation.

Like other tribes, they are an endogamous community divided into three endogamous divisions such as *bada*, *madhya* and *sana* among whom the *bada* claim social superiority over other two for their purity of descent. In their society marriage is an elaborate and expensive affair. Their religion is animism with admixture of elements of Hinduism. Goddess Basumata (the Earth Goddess) and her consort, the Surya Debta (the Sun God) are their supreme deities. Now-a-days due to culture contact, modernization and development intervention their way of life is undergoing transformation.

This photographic documentation of the life style of the Bhottada tribe is a part of the series on "The tribes of Odisha" published by SCSTRTI. Prof. (Dr) A. B. Ota, Director and Sri S.C. Patnaik, R.A. of SCSTRTI have worked hard in preparing this colourful booklet. I thank them sincerely. My genuine thanks also go to Sri S.C. Mohanty, O.S.D. (Research) for his contribution in making the attempt flawless by adding relevant data and organizing the document. Lastly I hope it would be useful for all those who are interested in the tribal culture of Odisha.

Shri Sanjeeb Kumar Mishra, IAS  
Commissioner-cum-Secretary  
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## IDENTITY

The Bhottadas are one of the numerically major agricultural tribe of Odisha. They are also known as Bhotara, Bhottara and Dhottada. The term “Bhottara” has been derived from *bhu*, meaning land and *tara*, meaning *chase*. They are sparsely distributed in Nawrangpur, Koraput and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. They are considered as the original settlers of Barthagada from where they migrated to Visakhapatnam and then to Bastar area of Madhya Pradesh and finally to the neighbouring undivided Koraput district of Odisha. Ethnographers believe that ethnically the Bhottadas are akin to the Murias of Bastar, both of whom are sub- divisions of the Gond tribe. Some other ethnographers opine that they are basically Hindus who have been influenced by prolonged contact with the aboriginals.







They speak Bhatri, a semi autonomous and non-literary dialect with an established tribal identity that is linguistically grouped under southern branch of Indo-Aryan family of languages. They are conversant in Odia language and use its script for inter group communication.

As per 2001 census, the total population of the tribe is 375845 (Males 1 88 584 and Females 1 87 261). Their sex ratio is 993. The total literacy is 24.29%, out of which the male literacy is 37.39% and the female literacy is 11.09%. The Decadal growth rate of this tribe is 23.58% according to 2001 Census.





## PERSONAL APPEARANCE

By their physical traits the Bhottada are of medium height; have a long and narrow head and moderately broad face with broad nasal features. In the past Bhottada men used to wear a short piece of loin cloth (*langoti*) only leaving the upper portion fully naked and the women folk used to wear a short piece of coarse cloth purchased from the local weavers which barely covered their body up to the knee. Children below seven years of age went naked. Tattooing was a fashion among women in the past which have been abandoned at present.

At present due to their close culture contact with the Hindu neighbours, their dress pattern has been influenced. Now-a-days, the Bhottada men wear pants, shirts, *lungi*, *banian* and women wear printed sarees and blouses purchased from the local market. Their women's modern adornments consist of brass *khadu* and various types of armlets, glass bangles, nose ornaments such as *noli* and nose rings, necklace made of beads or brass, old coins or silver and varieties of *ghagla*, finger rings made of brass, aluminum or old coins and toe rings and *pahud* in their legs to look attractive and charming. Women of well-to-do families also wear golden ornaments.







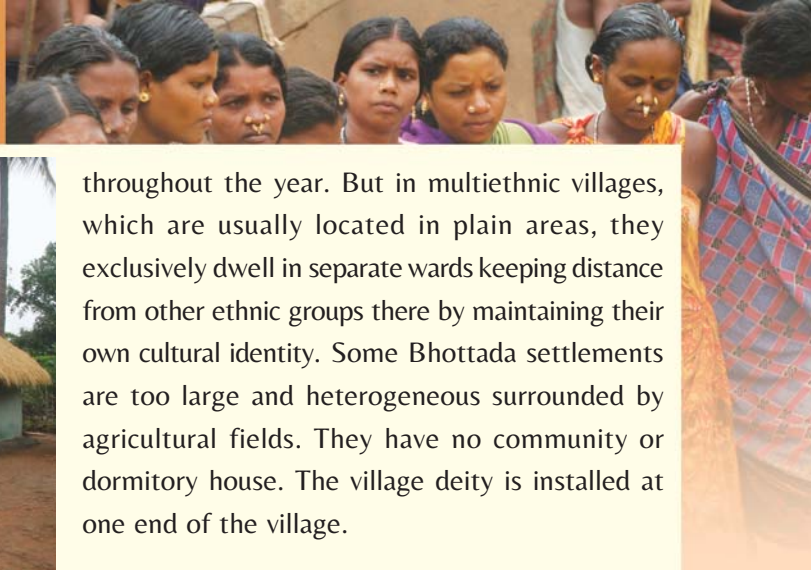
## SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The Bhottada habitat is generally located in undulating terrains with picturesque landscapes that stretch beyond the mountain ranges in the southern belt of Nawarangpur district of Odisha and its adjoining districts of Bastar, at about 2000 feet above the sea level.

The Bhottada settlements are generally homogenous and are located near foot hills or hill slopes where perennial hill streams are flowing to provide them drinking water







throughout the year. But in multiethnic villages, which are usually located in plain areas, they exclusively dwell in separate wards keeping distance from other ethnic groups there by maintaining their own cultural identity. Some Bhattada settlements are too large and heterogeneous surrounded by agricultural fields. They have no community or dormitory house. The village deity is installed at one end of the village.

Their houses are arranged in a linear pattern, leaving a narrow village street. Individual houses are built with low roofs thatched with *piri* grass and mud walls cleanly polished using white or red clay by their women folk. The houses mostly have one room in the Kalahandi area and two to three rooms in the Koraput area. The bigger room is used as their living room and to store their grains and the smaller one is used as their kitchen. There are no windows for ventilation. They construct a separate shed in the rear of the house to accommodate their livestock.

The houses have wide verandas polished with black clay which is found to be higher than the plinth of their houses to be used as sitting place and to provide shelter to their guests. The doors of the rooms open to the veranda. Some of them also construct a separate shed in a corner of their rear verandah to seclude the girls during attainment of their first menarche.





They consult their traditional priest - Disari, who fixes an auspicious moment for construction of a new house. The Bhottadas normally keep their surroundings neat, clean and green.

Their material culture is very simple and they have scanty household belongings. String cots are used for sitting and sleeping. For carrying, storing water and cooking, they use earthen pots made by the local

potter. Aluminum utensils, brass jars and pots are possessed by well-to-do families. They make straw bins to store grains. They have the husking lever and the hand-pounder or *kituni*. Their agricultural implements include the ploughshare, plough, sickle, bullock cart and wooden sticks etc. They make their own ploughs. Their musical instruments are known as *Nangara*, *Dhol*, *Tamak*, *Tudubudi*, *Mahuri*, *Gini* and *Thala*.





## LIVELIHOOD

The Bhottadas are primarily settled agriculturists. As such cultivation is their major source of livelihood. They do not practise shifting cultivation. It is supplemented by allied pursuits like seasonal forest collections, animal husbandry, carpentry, bamboo basketry, fishing and wage earning both in private as well as industrial sectors. Few of them are also recruited in Government institutions.

Paddy is their major crop which they raise in their wet lands. In their up lands they cultivate varieties of crops such as hill paddies namely *dongar dhan* / *beda dhan*, *ragi*, sugarcane, minor millets like *kangu*, *kosla* and in their dry land they grow oil seeds like *alsi*, *til (rasi)*, pulses like *kandul*, *dongrani*, *bodei*,







*ganthia*, *kulthi* (horse gram), *biri* (black gram) and cereals like *janna* and *khet janna* etc. They possess small kitchen gardens adjacent to their house where they grow varieties of vegetables like brinjal, potato, *patal ghanta* (tomato), cabbages, pumpkin (*kumuda*), gourd, *jhudung* (cow pea), *lau* (gourd), *kakudi* (cucumber), *semi* (sesame), maize and different types of edible tubers and green leaves. During lean season they also







collect varieties of seasonal forest produce like roots, fruits, tubers viz, *karadi*, *pita kanda*, *tarek kanda*, *sereng kanda* as well as green leaves, mushrooms, medicinal herbs, fibers, timbers, fuel wood, bamboo kernel, fodders and wild grasses to thatch their roofs.





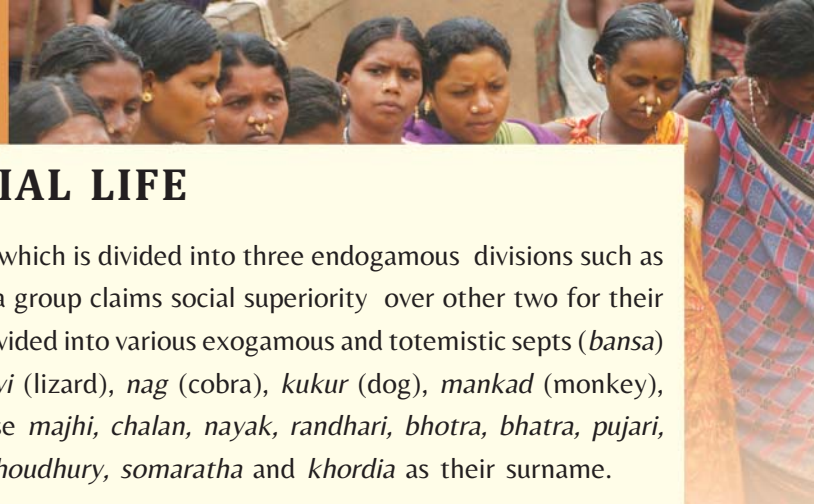


## FOOD AND DRINKS

The Bhottadas are non-vegetarians. Rice and ragi are their staple food. They relish on fish and dry fish, meat, chicken and eggs etc but do not take beef or pork. They also consume alcoholic drinks like rice beer (*pendum*), sago palm juice (*salap*), country liquor (*mohuli*) and ragi beer (*landa*). During food scarcity, they manage with the gruel of dried and powdered mango kernel and tamarind seeds. Both men and women smoke hand rolled cigar - *pika*, *bidi* and chew tobacco paste too.







## SOCIAL LIFE

The Bhottadas are an endogamous community which is divided into three endogamous divisions such as *bada*, *madhya* and *sana*. Among them the Bada group claims social superiority over other two for their purer descent. These divisions are further sub-divided into various exogamous and totemistic septs (*bansa*) such as *kachchimo* (tortoise), *bhag* (tiger), *goyi* (lizard), *nag* (cobra), *kukur* (dog), *mankad* (monkey), *cheli* (goat) and *pandiki* (pigeon) etc. They use *majhi*, *chalan*, *nayak*, *randhari*, *bhotra*, *bhatra*, *pujari*, *bhandarkaria*, *panigirit*, *bhatnayak*, *padhani*, *choudhury*, *somaratha* and *khordia* as their surname.





## FAMILY

The Bhottada families are mostly nuclear and patrilineal in structure. The lineage members (*kutumb*) consider themselves as descendants of a common ancestor. The patri-lineage breaks up after seven generations following the death of the eldest male member. Vertically and horizontally extended families are also found in few cases. Inheritance of ancestral property follows the rule of primogeniture in male line only. In families having no male successor, the daughters inherit the paternal property and the family having no issue may adopt a male child from the nearest patri-lineage who inherits the property. The Bhottada women play an important role in agricultural, religious, ritual and social activities in addition to performing their routine domestic chores.





## LIFE CYCLE

### Pre-delivery Conditions

For the Bhattadas pregnancy of a woman is a joyful event in their family as they think that some ancestor might take rebirth soon. For that reason they offer various sweetmeats to the pregnant woman during the sixth month of her pregnancy. For the well being of the pregnant mother and the baby in her womb, she is tabooed to eat the meat of the sacrificial animal, to sleep in an isolated room, to go to the burial place and to touch a corpse. She is also prohibited to be exposed during solar or lunar eclipse.

### Child birth

The birth of a Bhattada baby usually takes place in a separate confinement constructed for the purpose in their rear verandah. They engage an experienced old woman of Dom community or from their own as midwife to assist the pregnant woman for easy and safe delivery. The naval chord of the baby is cut using a knife and the placenta is buried outside the lying-in-room. Birth pollution continues for nine days.

### Post Delivery Rituals

On the third day of child birth the mother and the baby are given a ceremonial bath, anointed with turmeric paste. The pollution ends on the ninth day when the house is cleaned and the used earthen wares are thrown away. On this day the naming ceremony (*nao-dharani*) is







conducted and the new born baby is given a name by their traditional astrologer (Disari) by the rice divination method. Generally, the names of their ancestors are chosen. When the child is about one year of age they observe the tonsure (*sevore-bal*) rite and the ear piercing ceremony of the baby. There is no specific time for thread ceremony, but they observe it before the marriage of the boy.



## Puberty Rite

The Bhottadas observe puberty rite (*nahān buruna*) for the adolescent girl on her first menarche. The girl is kept in seclusion in a chamber built for the purpose at the rear verandah of the house. The pollution lasts for seven days. During this time she is prohibited to look or be exposed to any male person. On the dawn of the eighth day, she takes her purificatory bath in the nearby hill stream





or river being anointed with turmeric paste and mustard oil and wears new cloths. Their traditional priest sprinkles holy water after which she becomes purified to resume her routine activities. In the evening her family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to guests, relatives and kinsmen.

### Marriage

In the Bhattoda society adult marriage and monogamy is the norm. Instances of polygyny are also seen where the first wife is barren or physically unfit for serious handicaps. They consider marriage arranged through negotiation (*magni*) as the most ideal and prestigious way of acquiring a life partner. In their marriage, payment of bride price (*jholla*), both in cash and kind, is customary.

The arranged marriage (*magni*) in the Bhattoda society is an elaborate and expensive affair involving a series of proceedings to settle the matrimony. The groom's parents engage a mediator from among







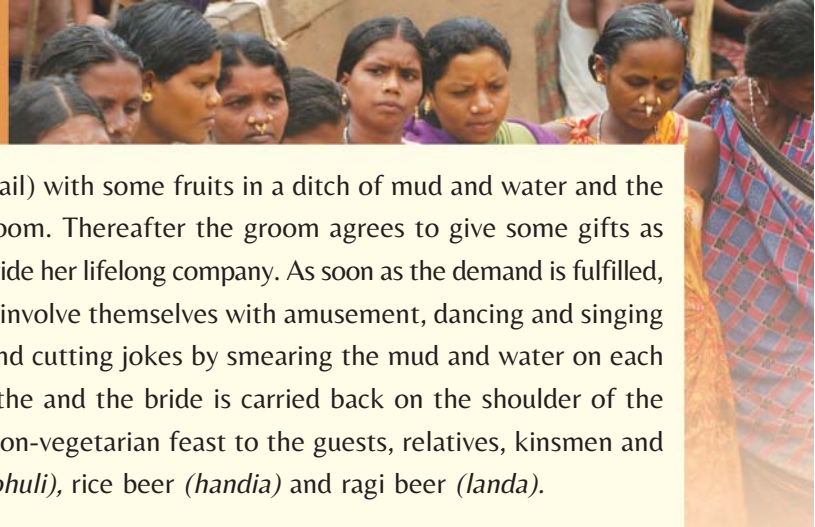
their *bandhu* clans to negotiate with the bride's side. If the bride's guardians agree to consider the proposal, the groom's parents pay their first visit to the bride's residence with a jar of county liquor (*mohuli*) and some sweetmeats to seek the views of the bride's parents which is called *manguni*. If they get a positive response, they make the second visit (*sugajanki*) accompanied by their kinsmen to get the approval of the lineage members of the bride on the proposal. It is followed by the third visit (*chidni*) to confirm the proposal in presence of the kinsfolk of both the sides. Then the fourth visit (*balarani*) is made to settle the bride price (*jholla*). In the fifth visit, the groom, accompanied by his kins, goes to the bride's house (*guojokni*) where the bride's father greets and entertains them by offering sweetmeats and a betel nut which indicates

finalization of the matrimony. Thereafter on a fixed day, the groom's parents pay the sixth visit to pay the bride price to the bride's father.

The marriage rites are conducted at the groom's residence, to which the bride is escorted in a marriage procession accompanied by her parents, friends and relatives singing their traditional wedding folk songs and dancing with the tune of music played by the Dom musicians. A marriage altar is made using seven *sal* poles and on the center pole they tie an earthen pot filled with turmeric water. Their traditional priest (Disari) presides over the marriage rite and unites the hands of the couple who later move around the marriage altar seven times. Then the groom puts vermilion mark on the forehead of the bride by using the pointed edge of a sword (*tika*) which has now been replaced by putting turmeric paste with *arua* rice mark on the bride's forehead by the groom and the vice-versa. It is followed by the *kada handi* rite in







which the groom puts a *cowri* (shell of a sea snail) with some fruits in a ditch of mud and water and the bride tries to find it out and offer it to the groom. Thereafter the groom agrees to give some gifts as demanded by the bride with the promise to provide her lifelong company. As soon as the demand is fulfilled, the bride and the groom along with their friends involve themselves with amusement, dancing and singing their traditional amorous wedding folk songs and cutting jokes by smearing the mud and water on each other's face. Then they go to the river and bathe and the bride is carried back on the shoulder of the groom. After that the groom's parents host a non-vegetarian feast to the guests, relatives, kinsmen and the bride's party along with country liquor (*mohuli*), rice beer (*handia*) and ragi beer (*landa*).

On the ninth day of marriage the newlywed couple with five young men and women and five old men and women go to the girl's parent's house carrying rice, pulses, vegetables, fowls, etc., where they entertained with a grand feast and then the party returns home. The next day, the bride cooks using new pots and serves her husband, in-laws and their relatives. The ancestors are also offered the food after which she becomes a member of her husband's family.

In the Bhattada society, the other modes of marriages are by capture, by service, by consent and by elopement. Cross-cousin marriage, junior levirate, junior sororate and remarriage of widows, widowers and divorces are also permitted in their society.

Marriage by capture is resorted to avoid the complexity and expenses of the arranged marriage. The boy with the help of his friends captures a girl from the market or during the Chait Parab and keeps her in his place. After getting the news, her kith and kin rush to the boy's place to threaten the boy and demand her release.







If the girl is willing to marry her abductor, she stays at the boy's place where the wedding is arranged after negotiation of the bride price between both the sides. If she does not agree, she is returned to her father who demands compensation from her abductor.

Sometimes a poor boy who is unable to afford the expenses of the arranged marriage and the bride price seeks relief by resorting to marriage by service. He goes to serve in the family of his perspective father-in-law with the aim of obtaining the latter's daughter or sister in marriage after the stipulated period of service is over. The term of service extends from five to ten years. During this time he is only provided with food and clothes by the girl's guardian. After the period of service is over the girl is given in marriage to the boy. If he wishes, he may stay with his father-in-law or he may build his own house or may go back to his parent's place.

### Divorce

In the Bhottada society, either of the spouses can demand divorce on the ground of maladjustment in conjugal life, illness from contagious diseases, barrenness or impotency, indulgence in adultery and extramarital relationship etc.

Generally a special session of the traditional inter-village council is held to adjudicate the divorce cases which is usually presided over by their regional secular head (*bhat naik*), his assistant (*panigrahi*) and messenger (*desia ganda*) in which both the groom and the bride's village chiefs (*naik* and *chalan*), their relatives and family heads including the appellants take part. The appellant generally arranges the food and drinks for the assembly.

In the case, where the wife desires to divorce her husband, her parents have to return the bride price (*jhollatanka*), but if she marries another person deserting her husband, the later has to repay the bride price with a stipulated fine to





her former husband as has been settled by the council. Similar penalties are also awarded in case of the girls who eloped with someone else, after their engagements and payment of the bride price (*jholatanka*) for them.

The father keeps the grown up children after the divorce but the mother is allowed to keep the breast feeding child for the time being and has to return the child to her former husband after he/she is grown up.

### Death Rites

During the past the Bhottadas practised burial of their dead but at present they practise both burial and cremation. In case of unnatural or premature deaths occurred during infancy and due to snake bite, tiger attack, accident, suicide, pregnancy or child birth, illness for diseases like cholera, smallpox, the corpses are buried in a distant jungle as they believe that the soul of the deceased might become an evil spirit and cause harm to the family as well as to the villagers.







The death news (*mada khabar*) is first communicated to the deceased's sister's house and then to all relatives and to villagers by special messengers soon after the mishap (*madaghar*). After the congregation of the kinsfolk, the corpse is given a bath, anointed with turmeric paste mixed with castor oil and then dressed with a new white cloth. The kinsfolk and family members offer some coins, *arua* rice, paddy, ragi or millets etc over the cloth.

The pall bearers (*mada buha*) prepare the pall using seven *sal* poles tied with *siali* fiber to carry the corpse for funeral. At the cremation ground, they collect the cloth, coins and grains which they exchange for country liquor (*mohua*) and tobacco (*dhungia*). The senior person of the family or the eldest son of the deceased first digs the burial pit or if they cremate the dead, he sets fire on the pyre. They dispose the dead in a sleeping position keeping its face upward and head towards north.

The mourning period continues for ten days, during which the bereaved family does not cook food and the families of their lineage supply food for them. During this period, observance of rituals and festivals, consumption of non-vegetarian dishes and sweet meats, visiting sacred shrines, worshipping deities, giving alms to beggars and sexual union are strictly tabooed and all the agricultural operations are suspended for the bereaved family and its lineage.

The first purificatory rite is observed on the following day of cremation, when the eldest son of the deceased accompanied by the pall bearers visits the cremation/ burial spot with an earthen pot filled with water and sand and plant a banyan or *pipal* tree over that spot hanging a water pot over its branch with a small hole under it to supply water for the tree. It is planted to provide shelter for the departed soul and to offer foods like fried rice and water in new earthen pots there for the dead.

On the third day, the *pitakhia* rite is observed. On this day, they eat rice, nim, dried fish and brinjal. The nails are pared. The final purificatory rite (*dassah*) is observed on the tenth day presided over by their traditional priest (Disari). The eldest son is shaved, and everyone is given a cloth and a napkin. The barber does not serve them: instead the sister's son does the work and gets the presents. On the eleventh day, the family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to kinsfolk, relatives and villagers. They believe in rebirth of the soul, but do not observe any annual Sradha rites.



## RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Bhattada profess their traditional tribal religion of animism with admixture of some elements of Hinduism. Goddess Basumata (Mother Earth) and her consort, the Surya Debta (Sun God) are their supreme deities. Besides that, their pantheon includes a number of deities such as Budhi Thakurani, Bhairabi, Pardeshi, Banadurga,







Kandhuni and Bhima which they install under shady trees in their village outskirts and propitiate them during festive occasions with great reverence by sacrificing goats, sheeps, fowls and offering country liquor (*mohuli*), rice beer (*pendum*), ragi beer (*landa*) and sago palm (*salap*) juice etc. Their traditional magico-religious head (*pujari*) worships them praying for their mercy for the betterment and well being of humans as well as their domestic animals and for the bumper harvest of their crops.

Their major festivals are the *pus parab* held during *pus punia*, *surya yatra* during *magh*, *nuakhia* during *osha/ bhod*, *mandiarani* and *bali yatra* during *diwali/ kartik*, *am nua* during *chait* and *bandapan* during *sravan (bandapa)*. They observe these events with great pomp and ceremony amidst dancing, singing, feasting merry making.

Apart from those, they also worship some Hindu deities like Lord Jagannath, Lord Shiva, Durga, Kali and Laxmi etc and observe many Hindu festivals such as Rathayatra, Diwali, Holi, Luxmipuja and Kalipuja etc with great festivity.







## DANCE AND MUSIC

The Bhottadas possess rich oral traditions and their aesthetic life is extensively elaborate as they are naturally talented in the skill of their traditional folk dance, folk song and folk music. Dhemsa is their popular form of dance which they perform during many festive occasions. Besides, they also perform *cherechera* dance during observance of *pus parab* and *daunidar nat* dance during their weddings. Both boys and girls are skilled in composing their folk songs instantly, coping with the present circumstances, depicting vivid imagination and describing humors, jokes, romance, criticism and satire etc while dancing with cheerful contentment.



During performance of dance, the Dom musicians provide the concert with the tune of indigenous musical instruments like *dhol* (double membrane drum), *ghumura*, *tamak*, *tudubudi*, *baisi* (flute), *tal* (cymbal) *mairi* (*mohuri*), *dhapa* (circular drum) and *jhumka* etc.







## SOCIAL CONTROL

The Bhottadas possess their own traditional community council both at village and regional level to handle their customary affairs. Their village level council is headed by their secular head (*naik*), his assistant (*chalan*), the magico-religious head (*pujari*) and a messenger (*ganda*). All these posts are hereditary except that of the messenger (*ganda*) who is appointed by nomination from the Dom community and is paid some remuneration annually for his services in kinds of grains like paddy, ragi or minor millets by every individual family. These office bearers along with other elderly persons of the village constitute the traditional village council and adjudicate all cases in the village.





Their regional community council called *desh panchayat* is constituted by a group of villages called *desh*. It is headed by a *bhatnaik* who is assisted by a *panigrahi*, and a messenger called *desia ganda* of Dom community.



Their traditional community council adjudicates cases pertaining to family disputes, adultery, and illicit premarital pregnancy, partition of property and violation of traditional norms and customs. The complicated cases, which are not settled in the village council, are referred to the regional council (*desh panchayat*) for final decision. It also decides inter-village disputes, divorce cases and also mitigates intra-community and inter-community conflicts. The Bhatnaik watches the violation of taboos and expels offenders and also readmits the expelled offender to the society after a suitable purification ceremony.

Gobadh (killing of cow) and Machiapatak (formation of maggots in the wounds) are two offences leading to ex-communication of the offender, who is restored to the society by the Bhatnaik and Panigrahi. The Bhatnaik performs a ritual, gives him Mahaprasad and brings him back into the community. The Bhottadas honour the traditional leaders of their community council with great esteem.







## CHANGING ARENA

Change is a continuous process. With the advancement of science and technology, noticeable changes have occurred in Bhottada way of life during last few decades. Education and mass media play a great role in effecting such changes in their society. Besides, the Bhottadas have accepted many new cultural, social and religious elements from their neighbouring castes and tribes owing to their long association with them. Their material culture have changed to some extent. Their household articles have been replaced by many modern gadgets. Now many well-to-do Bhottada families have radio, watches, cycle, motor cycle, television, mobile phone, modern dresses, wooden and synthetic furniture.





Government has launched many development programmes for the tribal people including the Bhattadas through various Income Generating and Infrastructure Development Schemes. Government has also made massive development interventions for education, agriculture, communication, drinking water, housing, social security, health and sanitation. Awareness has also been created among them on different development schemes so that they can reap the benefits. As a result, transformation is going on in their living style, economic pursuits, social life, food habits, dress pattern, cultural and religious activities.

The ST and SC Development Department, Government of Odisha under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs has established a Tribal Museum in the premises of SC and ST Research and Training Institute







(SCSTRTI) at CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar for preservation and exhibition of the diverse material culture of different tribes of Odisha. In this tribal museum, the dress and ornaments, hunting weapons, fishing implements, and musical instruments of the Bhottada tribe have been displayed in the different show cases which reflect their inherent talent in arts and crafts. Besides, the live performance of the Bhottada dancers in different District, State and National level cultural events including the Annual State Level Adivasi Exhibition organized by the ST and SC Development Department, Government of Odisha and National Tribal Dance Festival organized by the SCSTRTI every year exposé the richness of the Bhottada culture to the world outside.

It is true that the Bhottadas still maintain a colourful cultural life in their green surroundings. The core of their age old culture is less influenced by the external agencies.





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