# KANDHA

Sch. Castes & Sch. Tribes Research and Training Institute Bhubaneswar, Odisha (2013)

# FOREWORD

After publishing a series of Photo Handbooks on 13 PTGs (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups) of Odisha, now Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) has taken an endeavour to publish Photo Handbooks on other Scheduled Tribes of Odisha. The present Handbook is a vibrant photographic presentation of the life style and culture of the Kandha tribe.

Among the 62 tribal communities, the Kandhas are numerically the largest and territorially widespread tribe of Odisha. Though their population is unevenly spread throughout the State in all the 30 districts, their main concentration is in southern Odisha covering districts like Rayagada, Kandhamal, Kalahandi and Koraput. As such they are territorially and socio-culturally divided into a number of segments/sections bearing different names and exhibiting diversity as well as commonness of cultural traits among themselves.

The Kandhas are at various stages of development. The Kutia Kandha of Belghar area and the Dongria Kandha of Bissamcuttack area represent the primitive sections and the Desia Kandha living in the plains of Phulbani district, and other districts represent the Hinduised section of the tribe. In between these two polarities are various sections of the Kandha who are at different stages of development.

They belong to Dravidian linguistic group and speak Kui in Kandhamal and Kuvi in Koraput. While others call them Kandha, they identify themselves as 'Kui loku' "Kui enju," or "Kuinga". Traditionally the Kandha women are distinguished by their different tattooing designs on the face.

They live in homogenous and heterogenous villages. Their sacred place (penu basa) is located at the centre of the village and their supreme deity - the Earth Goddess (Darni Penu) is located at one side of the village. The cremation ground (*tunenji*) is located in the nearby forest.

They practice both shifting cultivation and plough cultivation. They live in the lap of nature and are keenly devoted to worship nature and natural objects throughout the year. Meria festival is a symbol of their cultural identity. Previously in past they used to sacrifice human beings on this occasion. Presently, the impact of planned change and modernization have brought changes in their way of life

I offer my heartiest thanks to Prof. (Dr.) A. B. Ota, IAS, Shri N. Kanhar and Ms. A. Kodamasingh, who have worked hard for preparing this colourful handbook. Shri S.C Mohanty, OSD (R) and Shri T. Sahoo, former Jt. Director deserves thanks for editing the Handbook. I hope this book will be a valuable document for the tourists, researchers and academicians alike.

(Santosh Sarangi) Commissioner-cum-Secretary ST & SC Development Department Government of Odisha

# KANDHA



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# **IDENTITY**

In Odisha, the Kandha is numerically the most populous tribe. In this regard it is a major tribe of the state as well as the country. Though their population is unevenly spread throughout the State, their main concentration is in south Odisha. Geographically, their stronghold lies in the central region (Boudh & Kandhamal districts), Rayagada region (Rayagada district) and south-western part (erstwhile Kasipur and Mahulpatna areas) of Eastern Ghats Region.

The word 'Kandha'is derived from the Telugu word *Konda* which means a small hill as well as the hill men. Originally they were hill dwellers. Kandha is the name the non-tribal people have given them and in course of time, the tribesmen have accepted the name. But they identify themselves



as 'Kui loku' "Kui enju" or "Kuinga" because they speak 'Kui' or 'Kuvi' language belonging to Dravidian linguistic group. 'Kui' and 'Kuvi' are two regional linguistic variations. While **'Kuvi'** is spoken by a majority of the Kandha of undivided Koraput, Kalahandi and Bolangir districts, **'Kui'**, is spoken by the Kandha of Phulbani district. Kuvi appears to have original structural composition while Kui, an acculturated and transformed form of Kuvi language.

On the basis of the socio-cultural characteristics, the Kandha may be divided into several sections such as; Desia Kandha, Dongria Kandha, Kutia Kandha, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, Malua Kandha, etc. Among the several sections of the Kandha communities, two sub-sections such as Kutia Kandha and Dongria Kandha have been identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs).

The name of Kutia Kandha refers to their house floor which is about 2ft. below the level of the village road and this low lying floor of the house is known as 'Kutti.' Accordingly, they are named as Kutti-dwellers or Kutia Kandha. They mostly inhabit the Tumudibandha Block of Kandhamal district and Lanjigarh Block of Kalahandi district of Odisha. The word 'Dongria' in Kuvi language means 'Hill'. As Dongria Kandhas inhabit the high altitude hilly terrain of Odisha, they are popularly called as Dongria Kandha. They are mostly found in Bissamkattack and Muniguda blocks of



Rayagada district of Odisha. Other sub-groups of the Kandha tribe like Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Desia Kandha and Malua Kandha live in Koraput, Kandhamal and Bolangir districts of Odisha. The Sitha Kandhas (*Sitaranga*) are basket makers. The Malua Kandhas are well-known for their patterns of living in groups in hilly areas for which they are called so. On the other hand the Desia Kandhas are found in 'desh' or plains area for which they are called Desia Kandha. We also find a group



of Kandha people who incorrectly pronounce the word 'Bengo' (frog) as 'Pengo' and relish the flesh of frogs. They are locally known as "Pengo Kandha."

#### **Population and Concentration**

According to 2001 census the total population of Kandha tribe is 13, 95, 643, (male 6 88 402 & female 7 07 241) which is numerically highest among all the 62 tribes of Odisha. The Kandhas comprise 17.13% of the total tribal population of Odisha. Their sex ratio is 1027 per 1000 males and their literacy rate is 31.87 per cent (13.89 % for male and 17.98% for female). The Decadal population growth rate among the Kandha during the period from 1991 to 2001 is 22.38 percent.

#### **Dress and Ornaments**

The dress pattern of the Kandha is very simple. The women of the community used to wear two pieces of clothes (*sinda*), one around the waist up to the knees and another for the upper portion of the body. But now they prefer to wear one piece saree which is available in the local market. They prefer to adorn themselves with various types of ornaments like coloured bead necklace (*sursuria mali*), silver bangle (*bala*), neckband (*gogla*), nose flower (*naka putuki*), hairpin (*pujupaka*), ear ring (*kichedka*) etc. Traditionally Kandha women are very fond of making different tattoo (*tikanguhpa*) designs on the face. Now-a-days tattooing (*tikanguhpa*) is not preferred by the women of younger generation. The Kandha men wear *dhoti* (loin cloth) and *ganji* (banyan). On special occasions, a headgear is also worn. A coloured turban is worn by the groom during his marriage ceremony.





# SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

Generally the Kandha villages are surrounded by mountains (saru). Their house settlement pattern is scattered throughout with large patches of land (keta) adjoining the homesteads. They grow vegetables, turmeric (singa), jackfruit (ponosi) tree, date palm (tadi) tree, sag-palm (mada) tree in those patches of land. The mango (maha) groves as well as mahua (irpi) trees are found at the village borders. In the village there are a number of footpaths crossing each other. Generally a village consists of a number of hamlets, which are locally known as sahi or pada. The Kandhas



cremate their dead body in the cremation ground (*tunenji*) which is situated in groves adjoining the village. In every village there is an altar for the Earth Goddess (*Darni penu*) located at the side of the village.



#### HOUSE:

The Kandha houses are identical with regard to design and building materials used for construction. Their houses face almost every direction. Generally a new house (edu) is constructed in the month of February (Mag), March (Paagan), April (Baisaak) and May (Jeset). Before selecting a place for construction of a new house, the male elders of the household go to the proposed site at night (nadangi). They carry with them



some rice (pranga), mahua liquor (irpi kalu) and few cups made of siali leaves (paeri aaka). At the site, they keep those leaf cups (chaukuni) containing a few grains of rice. In each cup they pour



the liquor on the rice and offer it to their ancestors (*pideri penu*). After the ritual is over, they themselves enjoy the surplus liquor (*kalu*) and return home. Next morning (*beea diesi*) they again visit the same site to verify whether the grains are in order and intact or not. If not found intact there is presence of some evil spirits (*doi pideri*). Hence, the place is considered inauspicious and unsuitable for house construction. If the grains are found to be intact, then it is considered to be an auspicious place by the ancestors. They sacrifice hen (*kaju*) at that place to mother goddess (*darni penu*) and build the house (*edu*).

The construction of a Kandha house (edu) is very simple. The walls of the house are made of planks of sal trees (jargi mrahanui) covered with mud and trellis made of bamboo splits and its roof is thatched with wild grass. The house is of very low height, not exceeding 10ft. and its entrance is at a height of about 4ft. from the ground level. A typical house consists of one or two rooms with a separate kitchen room (baja edu) and a cowshed (goheli) at its backside. A narrow verandah (pinduli) is found in the front as well as at the backside of the house. In each house paddy husking pedals (dhinki) is installed on the verandah (pinduli). The front verandah is always kept clean and used as a meeting place where leisure hours





are spent for recreational activities. They stock and store fire wood (erpa beska) and forest products on the backside of the house. Each house has two doors (dara) one at the front side and another at the backside. The front door is made-up of wood with different carved designs and the back door is made-up of bamboo (mani pata).

Inside the house one room is used as kitchen (baja edu) and storage of household utensils (*muta mand*) and the other room which is comparatively large is used as living room (dopa edu). In this portion one

or two mortar holes for husking grains are embedded on the ground. On one side of the living room a large wooden shelve is built for keeping household objects and the grain bin (*duli*) is kept on the wooden platform (*dadi*). Their wall (*kudu*) is coloured with red soil and verandah is polished by smooth stone. Their agricultural and household implements such as plough (*nangeli*), yoke (*jueli*), spade (*rapa*), leveler (*patasingh/kurli*), sickle (*kele*), winnowing fan (*sesi*), measuring pot (*tambi*), gourd (*laka*) etc. are kept inside their house along with their hunting weapons such as bow (*wilu*), arrow (*ambu*), axe (*tangi*) spear (*garka*), gum stick (*sindu nala*) etc. and fishing implements. The Kandha also keep different Dhokra (*linga/darba*) objects.

Currently, under the impact of modernization and development, the Kandha houses are constructed by bricks, cement and concrete under the Indira Awas Yojana.



# **SOCIAL LIFE**

Family is the smallest social unit in Kandha society. Nuclear family is common and joint family is rarely found. The members of the partilineage help their head of family during birth, marriage and death rituals etc. They use surname like Kanhar, Mallick, Pradhan, Majhi etc.

As soon as a boy gets married, he builds a new house of his own and lives there separately from his parents. In their society the Kandha people call daughter-in-laws by name of (clan) *mutha*. There are fifty *muthas* in Kandha society namely Saiti, Paba, Jurapi, Bongodi, Baka, Bidu, Teriki, Damsing, Pira etc. As per the rule of exogamy, a man cannot marry within his clan or *mutha*, because members of a *mutha* consider themselves as brothers and sisters.

The Kandha lineage is exogamous and marriage within the lineage group is strictly forbidden. It comprises a number of blood related families living in different hamlets or in a group of villages. They trace their decent from common ancestors and occupy a distinct territory belonging to their *mutha*.







#### LIFE CYCLE:

#### **Pregnancy and Child birth**

Pregnancy and child birth are welcome events in the Kandha society. A new born child is considered as a gift of nature. During pregnancy women observe many taboos against going to the cremation ground (*tunenji*) and eating food offered to the deities. Even they don't allow her to come out at the time of solar eclipse or lunar eclipse, because they believe that the baby may be affected by the eclipse and become garna khandia (kanduna).

The delivery is attended by an old and experienced lady. It takes place in a secluded room or near the verandah (*pinduli*). It is the duty of the father to cut the umbilical cord (*pudenji bahi*) of the child. In case of a male child it is cut with an arrow head or oyster (*samuka*) and in case of a female child it is cut with a





small knife (*kude*). Then the new born baby is given a thorough wash in lukewarm water mixed with turmeric power. On the sixth day, a ritual called *sana handi* is observed. In that ritual, a chicken is sacrificed to the dead ancestors. The blood is smeared on the wall using a piece of bark from a mango tree. A portion of it is hung at the entrance door to avert the eyes of the evil spirits. Till twenty days, both the child and its mother remain confined in the back side of the house (*edu*). On the 21<sup>st</sup> day, the head of the blessed family conducts a ritual again with



sacrifice of chicken to the dead ancestors, which is known as *handi sara*. On that day they wash their clothes, plaster their house with cow dung (goberi) and use new earthen pot (*teki*) for cooking. Naming of the child is also performed on this day. These rituals are performed in different ways at different places. In the Kandha society their children help their parents when they grow up to five or six year of age.

#### Puberty

A Kandha girl on reaching her first menstruation stays in seclusion in an isolated room. During that time she is not allowed to talk to her kins and eat worshipped food. After that period she takes bath with oil and turmeric to get rid of pollution.

#### Marriage

Marriage (rdanja) is one of the important social functions in the Kandha community. Marriages are

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conducted by either negotiation or service. Adult marriage is practiced among them. An adult boy marries at the age of 20 to 21 years and girl at 15 to 18 years of age.



In negotiation marriage, first the groom's family visit the bride's house with a basket of rice. If the bride's family accepts the gift, it indicates that they agree for marriage. Next time the groom's father with other male members visits the bride's house to fix the date for marriage. They go with some country liquor (*irpi kalu*) which is called agreement liquor (gati kalu). Next day the groom's party pays the customary bride price (*suhupa*) of Rs. 101/- in cash, two cows or buffalos, brass vessel and an axe to bride's father to finalize the matrimony.

On the marriage day the groom's kinsfolk present gifts to bride such as rice (*pranga*), goat (aada), and utensil etc. which are required and used for weeding feast. During the marriage the bride puts vermilion mark on the bride's forehead. After marriage, the newlywed couple set up new residence.

Another type of marriage is marriage by capture (*dripa sedi*) in which the groom's friends help him to capture the bride of his choice, after an offer of liquor and food. Then the girl's father visits the groom's house with his villagers. That matter is decided in the bride's village. This village council levies a fine of Rs. 300/- in cash and a buffalo to the groom's party. Then the captured bride is brought back to her father's house and later she is taken back to the groom's village.

In the Kandha society, sororate, widow remarriage, cross-cousin marriages are prevalent. Polygyny is allowed in case the first wife is barren.

#### Divorce

Divorce is allowed on the ground of mis-understanding between couple; barrenness etc and such cases are finalized by their traditional *panchayats*. The bride's side has to return the bride price in case she leaves her husband for her own fault. Divorced (*sadri*) persons are also allowed to remarry.

#### Death

The Kandhas believe that death is a natural phenomenon. When a person dies his family member start crying before the deceased person remembering his day-to-day activities and what he had done in his life time. Dead body is kept in the north- south direction with the head towards north. Their lineage members remain present





there and carry the dead body covered with a new cloth to the burial ground. Then fire is set to it. After cremation is over their relatives take bath and return to home. The family of the deceased and the lineage members observe death pollution for 11 days. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day they observe mortuary ritual, which is locally known as *mana*. In that day they clean their house, clothes and all other materials used by them. They cut their hair, beard and nails. A feast is arranged on this occasion. The family members of the deceased and their relative's take part in the feast and the ritual comes to an end.

### LIVELIHOOD

The Kandhas are agriculturists. They practice both shifting cultivation (dahi) on the hill tops and hill-slopes and plough cultivation (nela) in valleys and low lands. They cultivate on three types of lands namely dhipa -upper land (depa keta), Berena (jodi keta) and Sarada (suruda keta) for paddy cultivation and they cultivate Kandala (kanga), Jununga (judungaga), Biri (masangaga) etc in their hilly areas.

They cultivate different kinds of crops such as paddy (*kudinga*),



ragi (tedi), maize (jaylaka), black gram (biridi), horse gram (kadpaka), sesamum (rasi), mustard (saras), bean (sainga), etc. Also they cultivate vegetables in their kitchen garden (akali bada) for their own consumption and also for sale in the local market. They collect important forest produce like timber (beska), fire wood (erpa beska), bamboo, siali creepers, kendu and sal leaves etc. They use timber and bamboo for house construction and making their hunting implements and





fishing traps. They collect fire wood for their own use and also for sale in the local market. Collection of kendu and sal leaves is an important source of their income. They make leaf cups (chaukuni) and plates (khali) for their own use and often for sale. They collect different seeds and flowers such as Karanja (ponagamia glatera), Kusuma (Keheli), gora (seed) for extracting oil and mahua







(*irpi*) flower for making wine (*kalu*), which is important for ritual and ceremonial offer to the Earth Goddesses. They also collect juice from different trees such as Sago-palm (salap), Date-palm(tadi) and palm (*tala*) and also gather edible roots, tuber (*tasa*), *lac*, *jhuna* (*tadili*), tamarind (*nedi*) from the forest (gosa). Therefore, the Kandha consider forest as their treasure house. They go for



hunting when they are not busy with agricultural work. Now as hunting is being prohibited, they only go on hunting during rituals. Fishing is an occasional pursuit. The Kandhas are also working as daily wage labourers and doing business to maintain their livelihood at present.





#### Food habits:

Watered rice is their staple food. Generally the Kandhas take meals thrice in a day. In the morning (*diesi*) they take watered rice (*pakali eju/basi eju*). After ploughing land they take boiled rice (*tila bela eju*) during the day. In the evening they take meal (*benda eju*) with curry (*kusa*) and in dinner, they take boiled rice (*nadang eju*) or (*pala*) with curry (*kusa*). They take seasonal cereals, pulses and vegetables like maize (*jayalaka*), mustard



(sarsa), Kandul (kanga), Jhudunga (jhudangakasa), Beans (sainga) green leaves (kusa), mushrooms (kutka) etc. which are cooked and consumed. Sometimes they eat non-veg items like fish curry (minka- kusa), chicken (kajunga), mutton (ada unga), and the flesh of wild pig (braha kusa). They are very fond of different liquors (kalu) such as mahua liquor (irpi kalu) and juice from sago-palm (mada kalu/ salap) and date palm (gajuri). Mahua liquor (irpi kalu or ago kalu) is used as medicine and also as ritual offering to appease deities (penu) and ancestors (pideri penu) in different ritual and festive occasions. They also chew (dua) and smoke (kaheli) tobacco.







# **RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

The Kandhas are very religious and believe in animism. Their belief system centres around nature. They worship a number of gods, goddesses, spirits (*pideri*) and various natural objects. To appease Gods and spirits, they perform various magico-religious practices which include sacrifice of different animals.

In their settlements certain symbolic structures like wooden poles, stones with vermilion markings (*baddi*), leaf plates, bamboo baskets (*boga*) etc. are found representing their ritual objects. Each spot has its own supernatural significance because it provides shelter to spirits and deities of certain special power. The Earth Goddess (Darni Penu) is their supreme deity. Other deities namely Saru Penu (mountain god) Suga Penu (stream god), Piju Penu (rain god), Naju Penu (village deity),



Pideri Penu (ancestor aod) Bela Penu (sun god), Pilanu Penu (hunting god), Jakeri Penu (sister of earth god), Jori Penu (river god), Burpi Penu (first fruit god), Ruju Juga Penu (calamity god), Sande Penu (border aod) and the village deities like Budi Maa Thakurani, Baral Devi, etc. are worshipped in different occasions and festivals.

Every village has its own magico-religious





specialists namely jani, jhankar, dehuri, bahaka, mati guru who worship their deities. mati guru (priest) worships only the Earth Goddess (darni penu). In his absence, jhankar worships the darni Penu. In their magico-religious practices, there are some taboos for women. They are not allowed





to touch the sacrificial food and pregnant women are not allowed to eat that food. Their magicoreligious performance is associated with several types of sacrifices and observances. These are followed by dance, music and drinking. These occasions give an opportunity to enhance the unity and integrity of the village. During the observance of rituals necessary sacred articles like wine (kalu), arua rice (pranga), egg (tola), jhuna (tadali), turmeric (singa), gourd (loka), etc. are collected and kept by the villagers. Observance of Meria festival is considered as a symbol of Kandha cultural identity.



# **AESTHETIC LIFE**

The Kandhas perform different dances like marriage dance, Dhangidi- dhangada dance etc. to grace their festive occasions by using horn trumpet (*singa*), *dhol* (*dhula*), *dola*, clarinet (*maheri*) and circular drum (*sangu*). At the time of *dhangadi-dhangada* dance, they wear their traditional costumes and young girls and boys dance together with small membrane drum (*kandra*), clapping and singing songs. It provides an opportunity for them to choose their life partners.



## SOCIAL VALUE AND WORLD VIEW

The Kandhas are very straight forward and they express their feeling before the people whom they trust. Their intimate relationships emerge from the core of their heart. They are kind, open hearted, honest, bold, trustworthy and ready to sacrifice life for their true friends. They are emotionally attached to nature and natural resources like land, deities, spirit, mountain, river, forest etc. which are precious for them. They believe in work and





worship and never disregard or misbehave anybody unless they are very seriously hurt. They dislike people who cheat and betray them and are afraid of evil spirits, black magic and taboo. They hate people who take bribe and exploit them by grabbing their land and by depriving them of their rights. They are very sympathetic and helpful at the time of crises. They give equal importance and respect to the women. The Kandha women consider their husband's elder brother's children as their own children.



# SOCIAL CONTROL

The Kandhas have simple political organization. In past, during British regime, the administration in their area ran through Sardar, the village headman and his post was hereditary. The responsibility of the Sardar was to maintain law and order in his trrritory. He was presiding over the village council meetings and receiving guests at the time of village functions. He used to negotiate with the headmen of other villages when such occasion arises. *bismajhi* - the revenue collector was responsible for collection of revenues from different *muthas* and the *chowkidar* was working as the protector of the village in case of criminal violence. The *barik* was appointed as village messenger from Domb or Pano community. He was an assistant of the *bismajhi*. Cases like family dispute, conflict, adultery, theft etc. were being decided in the village council sitting at the seat of Darni Penu. But at present the Ward Member is acting as the head man of the village instead of Sardar. He is elected by the villagers.

Under the Influence of modernization now they follow the Panchayatraj system. So their traditional political system is gradually declining. The office bearers of the statutory Panchayatraj institutions are elected representatives of the people such as Ward Members, *Sarpanch*, Chairman of Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad etc. They look after the planned development programmes undertaken in their villages.



# CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

The impact of modernization, introduction of planned development intervention by Government and Non-government agencies have brought developments in the fields of health and sanitation, education, agriculture, communication and infrastructure. During last six decades Government has initiated various welfare measures to bring about socio-economic development of the Kandha. The Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) functioning at Phulbani and Balliguda of Kandhamal district and the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) of Kandhamal district have implemented various socio-economic development programmes for development and modernization of horticulture, agriculture communication and irrigation for the sustainable development of the Kandhas. So now they have gradually adopted modern agricultural practices, by using High Yielding Varieties of seeds, better irrigation facilities, and chemical fertilizers. Some of them have adopted horticulture, poultry 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 has run a number of educational institutions like EMRS (Ekalavya Model Residential School), Higher Secondary Schools (Science and Commerce), High Schools, Girl's High Schools, Ashram Schools, Secondary Teacher Training Schools, Residential and Non-



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Residential Sevashrams in their area. Many students including girl students are attending these institutions. It has brought noticeable changes in their life style, dress pattern and belief system.

In the past infant mortality rate was high in the Kandha society, as they had strong belief in their traditional healing system. But now due to awareness and establishment of hospitals the infant mortality rate is gradually declining.

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) and ST and SC Development Department of Odisha are organizing Live Demonstration Programme of Arts and Craft of different tribes including the Kandha tribe. By their participation in these events they are exhibiting their traditional skills in wood carving, painting and basketry works. The National Tribal Dance Festival and State level Annual Adivasi Mela being organized by SCSTRTI and ST and SC Development Department has also helped them to exhibit their traditional dances and songs and promote their cultural identity.

The ST and SC Development Department under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India has established a Museum of Tribal Arts and Artefacts in the premises of SCSTRTI, CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar for preservation of material culture of different tribes. The personal adornments and belongings, photographs, implements, weapons of offence and defence, agriculture and household objects, dance and musical instruments and *dhokra* objects of Kandha tribe have been exhibited in different show cases in the Tribal Museum which reflect their colourful life style. Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series 22 "KANDHA"

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