

Lodha

**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
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FOREWORD

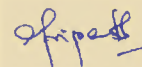
This photo handbook on the Lodha tribal community is based on socio-anthropological study highlighting their life style, and culture. The Lodha were formerly designated as criminal tribes and persecuted and looked down upon with suspicion and aversion by their neighbours. Criminality is not hereditary, and the criminal propensity of the Lodha is more due to the integration of their social moorings under economic and territorial displacement due to unavoidable reasons. In the present century, we find a new outlook has developed in the mindset of this community. They are today identified as a primitive tribal group of Orissa. Of course they have undergone profound changes in the pattern of their livelihood and culture. However, government is trying its level best and finding adequate means for fitting them into the general social fabric so that they could develop a progressive life. Special plans are being formulated and implemented by stages for their uplift. Such efforts have resulted into development of new inter ethnic relationship which could help the process of integration with neighbouring groups.

The Lodha depend on agriculture for their sustenance. However, their traditional occupation is collection of jungle produce, such as cocoons, lac, resin, honey, wax, etc. Even today they depend on food gathering and are in great demand for agricultural labour by the local land holders. There is also a shift towards other occupations like leaf plate making, Sabai grass rope making and bamboo craft. Moreover, hunting and fishing are two other important economic pursuits of the Lodha people.

The Lodha are basically an endogamous community and they have frequent interaction with other tribal communities and Hindu castes who live adjoining their habitat. Some of the elderly Lodha people are the treasure house of traditional folk tales and oral literature.

Clan organization is an important feature of the Lodha community. Their magico-religious life is associated with gods, goddess, deities, benevolent and malevolent spirits as well as ceremonies and festivals. They struggle hard to survive amidst frustration and lack of self reliance.

It is needless to mention that Lodha were neglected for generations and they were branded as criminals. This social stigma very often put them into unavoidable peril. However, it is high time that SCST Development department, police department and local administration take a joint endeavour to resolve their ongoing socio cultural and economic problems by promoting alternative livelihood pursuits.



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THE LODHA

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&

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Introdruction

The Lodha, an identified Primitive Tribal Group of Orissa, were a denotified tribal community, who claim their ancestry to the Savar tribe of the state. Notorious for their criminal propensity, this tribe was formerly designated as criminal. History indicates that because of their unusual social behaviour and unaccepted profession, the Lodha were persecuted and looked down with suspicion and aversion in their respective areas of habitation.

In fact, the background of the Lodha being identified as felony prone dates back to British era when under a Govt Notification, No-7022-23, dated 20th May, 1916, Calcutta the tribe was declared as criminal. Accordingly, on 8th Sept 1916 a crime register was opened to make an entry of crimes committed by the

Lodha. By a further

amendment it was applied to whole of British India in 1924. Later on in another notification 'Memo No-1560-61, dated 16th March, 1928' it was laid down that, "any Lodha on his first conviction under nonbailable offences and under section 109/110 of the criminal procedure code, should be treated as a registered member under the Criminal Tribes Act."

This incriminatory law was eventually repealed in 1952, and as per a new law in independent India the Lodha became equal with every other citizen of India. Nonetheless, the stigma remained as the people, administration as well as the police had their doubts about this tribal group. Even today, one-time procedures adopted by the





Britishers that “once a criminal, always a criminal” holds strong and the perception of the tribe as law-breakers is deeply set in the minds of the people.

It is unfortunate that social distancing and suspicious eyes of neighboring ethnocultural groups have led to the Lodha being pushed into helpless conditions. Of course attempts have been made by the government to redress the situation by declaring them as a Primitive Tribal Group. A micro project has been set up for their socio-economic development and welfare. Attempts have been made at different fora to provide them with adequate means for making them acceptable to others. Further, efforts have also been made to develop

inter community relationship between the Lodha and other close groups with a view to integrate them into the general social fabric.

In terms of numbers, population of the Lodha in Orissa as per 2001 census is 7458(3650M+3808F). Main hamlets are in Suliapada and Morada, C.D. Blocks. Other regions having the populace are in Baripada, Badasahi, Khunta, Udala & Kaptipada C.D. Blocks of Mayurbhanj. Outside the state Lodha are also found in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

In Orissa the Lodha live with other tribal communities, such as the Santal, Munda, Bhumija, Kolha, Mahali, Bathudi, Mankidia, Khadia, and other caste groups like Brahmana, Khandayat, Teli, Gudia, Kamar, Dhoba, Tanti, Mahato, Gauda etc.





In general, their settlements are very close to forests having adequate supply of water throughout the year. It is observed that the Lodha do not mind living in multi-caste and multi-tribal villages yet they mostly end up setting abode amongst their own in isolation from other communities and tribes. Thus, it is not unusual to see the Lodha hamlets inside dense forests in inaccessible areas.

The Lodha speak a mixture of corrupt Oriya 'Mundari and Bengali. Their physique is very strong, robust and torso muscular. The skin colour is brown to light brown and height is medium. The main perennial rivers in their area are the Khaira, Mahanti, Jambhira, and Bhudhabalanga. Rivulets like Pal and Gumpha are the most popular. Their forest is very rich in Sal, Mahul, Piasala, Kendu, Asana, Harida, Char, Bamboo and varieties of herbal plants which are most useful in one way or other in their day to day life.





Settlement Pattern and House type



The Lodha prefer to construct their homes in villages inhabited by own men. Their settlements have got no definite ground plan. The hamlets located in plains areas are found to have some access to infrastructural facilities, like dug-wells, tube-wells, schools, G.P Headquarters, Police Station, P.H.C and the like. However, incase of villages in forest and hilly belts, they are largely devoid of any amenities and infrastructure is at a very low level.

In every village there are community level landmarks, where clan deities- Chandi and Sitala are enshrined under a tree located a little away from the main habitat. This tree is usually in a virgin grove, or sometimes it is a huge one with extensive branches, situated very close to the village.

High in the social hierarchy of the Lodha is the “Dehuri”, a religious head with magical powers The “Dehuri” has the honour of conducting rituals for community level festivals and ceremonies. He is privileged with a very small pavilion in the back-side of his house that is en-circled by bamboo splits. A thatched hut is also constructed beside this structure where, Gunias impart training to his disciples in the matter relating to gods & goddesses,





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benevolent and malevolent deities and spirits. At the end of the village are installed earthen horse and elephant representing important village deities. The villagers organize their traditional council meeting underneath a tree or a grove according to its feasibility.

All the Lodha irrespective of their socio-economic status go to the forest in different seasons to collect varieties of edibles and minor forest produce. Every village has a suitable place for dance on different occasions and a play ground for boys and girls. The cremation ground is earmarked in a bushy jungle area located a little away from the village settlement.

The houses in a typical Lodha settlement are clustered in two rows in an irregular fashion. Houses in all traditional villages are situated in a dispersed manner. Thatched with mud walls they are made





out of locally available materials. The living area is usually constructed in a rectangular ground plan. The walls are made of tree branches or bamboo poles placed vertically and plastered with a mixture of mud and cow-dung. They use Sal poles as pillars and frame work of the house roof is made by wooden poles and bamboo splits. Houses are usually thatched with straw but lately the preference is for 'Khapper', a type of locally made burnt clay tile.

Traditionally Lodha homes have no windows. Door openings are narrow, although they have bamboo shutters that can be closed. Each house has just a single room that is used for all purposes. In other words, for domestic purposes-from birth of a child, propitiation of the ancestral spirits, cooking or sleeping to storing household materials etc. Lately trends have changed so houses have more than two rooms. Rooms are sufficiently wide having windows, doors and shutters. The families have an attached kitchen garden including a small courtyard, fenced with bamboo poles.





As for livestock, previously there were no sheds for cattle and goats rather they were kept in one side verandah. Now there is a cattle shed very close to the courtyard. Mostly costly items are kept inside the house and the agricultural implements are kept in front verandah. The verandah is spacious at times where different activities of the

family are carried on. The women remain busy in the courtyard by preparing leaf cups and leaf plates and ropes out of sabai grass.

Old houses of the Lodha require periodical maintenance. They change or repair thatched roof each year. Sometimes it may be done in the following year unfailingly. They also replace bamboo and wooden beams



and poles according to necessity. Similarly, the mud walls are patched and plastered with cow dung and earth to keep it strong and durable.

The government has also been providing houses to the Lodha, that are fire proof and having facility of windows for ventilation. These are Khapper thatched, safe and durable. Some of the Lodha are skilled in carpentry. They make beautifully carved shutters which attract attention of outsiders.



Economic Life

In the recent past settled cultivation was said to be their main source of livelihood and tribesmen also depended on forest produce. But, depletion of forest and alienation of land have compelled the Lodha to involve themselves in all sorts of antisocial activities. They are allegedly involved in robbery, theft and dacoity. Whenever any case of robbery is reported to the police, many of them are suspected, harassed and arrested without considering the actual involvement of tribe members.

A few households practise cultivation in their own land and the land of their neighbours. But wage earning is limited to the requirement of the local cultivators. They need the help of more outsiders as labourers at the time of transplanting and weeding. Sometimes, they work as labourers in developmental work of the Government.

They usually make Sabai ropes which have a good market. Collection of tassar cocoons and sale of firewood is also another avenue of supplementing their meagre income. At present, the main occupation of the majority of the households is cultivation and forest collection which are occasionally supplemented by wage earning.






The females are more hard working than their male counterparts. Males generally take care of their children, collect fuel-wood, graze the cattle, harvest paddy, sometimes cook food, and collect tassarr cocoons, plough fields and work as labour in road construction. They also do carpentry as well as perform agricultural operations such as transplantation, weeding, harvesting, carrying, threshing, staking etc. Females perform almost all the works stated above except ploughing.

Sale of fuel wood is one of an important economic pursuits. They have bows and arrows and different varieties of traps and snares for catching and hunting game animals. Catching fish is their hobby and they use basket traps and hand nets for fishing. Catching of tortoise is another important and interesting pursuit.





Previously the Lodha were practising shifting cultivation but they have abandoned it in favour of settled agriculture. Some of the Lodha have wet land for paddy cultivation and few of them practise share cropping. It is noticed that some of the neighbouring non-Lodha have forcibly occupied the land belonging to the Lodha. Paddy is the main item of production but the cultivation of Sabai-grass is found to be the most profitable. The Lodha have great fascination for cattle wealth and domestication of animals. Usually they domesticate cows, bullocks, goats and raise poultry. These animals are mainly kept for ceremonial sacrifices and for their own consumption.

Since time immemorial Lodha were associated with breeding and collection of tassars cocoons. But at present, due to deforestation, they are deprived of this profitable occupation. Now-a-days tassars cocoons are collected only by a few Lodha families who rear the cocoons in small forest patches and sell the cocoons to the traders. Generally the virgin forest of Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*) and Sal (*Sorea robusta*) trees are preferred for multiplication and rearing of tassars cocoons. During the summer a patch of jungle is cleared and a watch hut is built with twigs or branches of a particular

tree (*Semicarpus anacardiun*). According to the Lodha this particular tree is believed to have some magical powers to counteract the evil eyes of a Sorcerer, who may destroy tassars moths at its embryonic stage. In the hut a new earthen ware pot is kept for storing cocoons. Generally in the month of June, tassars moths come out of the cocoon and mate with each other. Then they lay eggs which are spread profusely on Asan and Sal trees. Later the eggs hatch





into cocoons on the leaves of nursery trees. These cocoons are collected and boiled in order to kill the insect inside it. It is then sold to the traders. According to the people, this particular economic pursuit is a paying enterprise but the Lodha being ignorant of the value of the trees are indiscriminately cutting and felling trees thereby loosing much. They are also interested in carpentry.

Though physically robust and healthy, the Lodha are not very industrious and painstaking. So, unemployment among the youths is one of the major factors which stimulates to involve themselves in anti-social activities and to practise dacoity, robbery and theft.

Their economic pursuit is directly linked with their forest economy, agricultural cycle and various other sources particularly wage earning leaf, plate making and preparation of Sabai grass ropes. In the harvest season Lodha get adequate food materials because of sufficient availability and cheaper rates. Many of them are also employed in harvesting operations. They



get their wages, both in cash and kind. During the summer months they collect jungle produce and catch tortoise and snakes which are available in plenty at that time. Autumn is a lean period when they depend mainly on forest for their day to day livelihood.

Major part of their earnings is spent towards purchase of daily food items followed by dress and ornaments and house maintenance. Very often they manage with the minimum quantity of food. The standard of living and the nature of food consumed by the Lodha vary from household to household. Edible roots and tubers are gathered in sufficient quantities and consumed as supplementary food. Major part of their cash earnings are spent in purchasing rice beer.



Their food mainly consist of rice, pulses, potatoes, brinjal, fish, meat, eggs, tubers, roots and leaves, During summer their food is supplemented with mango, Mahua and tamarind, Generally the Lodha take two meals a day, seasonal variations in food habits is markedly noticed and August, September and October are said to be lean months.

Clothing is another important item of expenditure. Males use dhotis, vests and shirts. Females wear Sarees, blouses and skirts. Young boys and girls up to about seven years of age go without any dress. Old Lodha are dressed with a small piece of loin cloth tied to a cord around the waist at both the ends. All the cloths are purchased from the local markets. They cannot afford to purchase winter clothing and small wooden logs are kept burning inside the hut during the winter.



Expenditure on education is found to be very low. Their cooking implements mainly consist of a few earthen ware vessels, iron pans, aluminum utensils and plates. Their musical instruments consist of "Changu" (tambourine) and 'Madal'. These instruments are regarded as property of the individual family. Women folk use bangles or necklace made of glass beads. Gold and silver ornaments are rarely used.



Social Life

The Clan organization is an important feature of the Lodha society. Each clan has a totem and the totemic animal objects associated with the clan or 'gotra' are considered to be sacred. Marriage within the clan is prohibited. The Lodha clan is a patrilineal unit. After marriage girls are initiated into their husband's clan. There are nine clans among the Lodha viz: (1) Bugta, Bhukta, Bhakta (2) Mallik, (3) Kotal, (4) Nayak or Laik or Layak, (5) Digar, (6) Parmanik, (7) Dandapat, (8) Aris Ahari (9) Bhuya or Bhunia.

Bugta, Bhukta, Bhukta or Bag clan names are found in almost all the villages.

Members of this clan think that 'Chirka Alu' a kind of wild yam is their totem. The clan members do not consume or collect this particular variety of yam. The Bhukta clan is divided into two sub-clans and within these sub-clans marriage is not possible. Malliks are distributed in almost all the villages except a few. The clan members have adopted Makar, a kind of shark as their totem. People belonging to Kotal clan have adopted moon or grasshopper as their totem. When the moon disappears during 'Amabasya', members of the Kotal clan go into ceremonial pollution. Kotals enjoy higher status in the Lodha society.





Nayak literally means leaders, connotes a country soldier. Members belonging to Nayak clan consider Sal fish as their totem. Parmanik clan have chosen 'Manik; a kind of large bird as their totem. The members of the Digar clan have adopted porpoise as their totem. They never touch or injure a porpoise. Dandapata clan considers tiger as their totem. The members of the Ahiri gotra have a kind of fish as their totem which is flat and circular in shape and silvery white in colour known as Chanda fish. Bhuiya clan people consider Salfish as their totem.

According to the size of the family and their economic cooperation, Lodha families may be grouped into two types i.e. nuclear and extended. Lodha families are patrilineal, patrilocal, and patriarchal. Father is the head of the family who manages the family affairs. He allots specific duties and responsibilities to the individual member in consultation with all grown up members. After death of the father, the mother or the eldest brother manages the family affairs. The paternal uncle is respected and his advices are sought in many social and economic matters. In case of death, near and distant relatives are informed. Co-villagers also participate in the funeral rites but only blood relatives attend purificatory ceremony.



Grown up boys and girls help their parents in domestic as well as out door work. A son is usually preferred over a daughter. The mother keeps constant watch over the movements and chastity of her daughter. Role of female is comparatively more important than the male in domestic affairs. Lodha wives are expert in disposing of the theft materials. Females go for wages to support the household economy. Wives strongly support even the misdeeds of their husbands. In the absence of the husband

for a longer period especially when the husbands are in jail, the wives generally take the responsibility to manage the household.

Village is regarded as an important social unit with territorial boundary. The families of different clans extend mutual help in different socio-religious and economic activities. Lodha boys marry usually at the age of 20 to 25 years and girls marry between the ages of 16 to 20 years. Role of the mediator in negotiation is found to be very important. The bride price usually consists of three cloths, a saree for the mother of the bride, a dhoti for the maternal uncle and a dhoti for the eldest brother-in-law. Apart from these items, some cash is also paid as bride price. The bride price is received by the mother of the bride. The wedding ceremony consists of a series of rituals. Unfaithful, idle and barren wives are usually divorced. Divorce is freely practised. A widower can remarry without any problem.





Magico-religious Life

Magico-religious life of the Lodha is associated with several ceremonies. The Dehuri is the priest of the village. He presides over all ritual functions held in common by the people of the village. The post of Dehuri is hereditary. The Chhatia is also an important religious functionary who assists the Dehuri.

The Lodha believe in innumerable malevolent and benevolent gods and goddesses. Lodha believe in the existence of "Bhagaban" the Supreme God. "Basumata" or mother earth is another goddess who is worshipped.

"Sitala" is considered to be the chief deity and worshipped very carefully because of her unlimited power. "Sitala" is worshipped more than once in a year. Whenever there is out-break of epidemics, like cholera,

small-pox etc. The people worship this deity with a special sacrifice.

Apart from "Sitala", "Chand" is also considered as very powerful deity. She has been referred to as the Goddess worshipped by the Lodha at the time of hunting. The magico-religious centre for this deity is marked by some large earthen were elephants. "Chandi" is worshipped in Makar Sankranti and on the last day of Pausa. She is also evoked occasionally as well as in Chait Sankranti, Generally earthen ware horses are offered in her name and sacrifices are made to appease her. The Lodha also believe in malevolent spirits. Conception about heaven, soul, and unseen power are in vogue. The faith in witches and their evil





influences are also widely prevalent. As a safeguard against witchcraft, the placenta of a child is buried inside the room to avoid evil eye. Certain Magico-religious activities are performed to cure some diseases.

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A large number of festivals are observed among the Lodha. Some of the festivals are held on some fixed dates while others are observed according to socio-economic convenience. A number of festive occasions are connected with economic-life of the Lodha in the month of October and November just before the collection of tassar cocoons. Generally these festive occasions are celebrated with much pomp.





Political Life

The traditional village council has currently lost its importance, especially after establishment of rehabilitation colonies. But in the traditional villages its importance is felt very seriously. Administration of justice, settlement of disputes among individuals, families and villages are some of the important functions of traditional village council. Even now, the maintenance of peace and promotion of social welfare activities are managed by the same council. The set up of the traditional council is more or less same in every village and receives popular appreciation. The office bearers or the prominent councilors enjoy special prestige and privilege. Permission for marriages, to attend other's religious ceremony, imposition of fine or to boycott someone for his mischievous action are some of the judicial powers of the traditional council. Elderly and experienced persons are usually taken as the members of the traditional council. Women and children are not allowed to be its members. Adultery, illicit love, sorcery and breach of traditional taboos are generally dealt with in varying degrees and punishments are awarded.

Each Lodha village has a secular headman known as "Pradhan" and his assistant is called "Chhatia" or "Dakua". Pradhan acts as the head of the traditional village council and adjudicator of all cases which are referred to the council.

Recently there have been changes in the composition and activities of the traditional council of different villages. The rehabilitation colonies are



under the absolute control of their respective Sardar, who has been selected by the district administration. Moreover, some Ward-Members are also conducting some development works for the betterment of the villagers. Previously the traditional councils were very strong and were the final authority for all decisions. Now-a-days there is a growing tendency to seek help from the police. This is a sign of disintegration of the traditional political organization which shows that the fabric of traditional council is changing very fast with the passage of time and under economic and administrative impact.



Life-cycle Rituals



From birth to death a Lodha passes through a series of rituals which entail heavy expenditure. For an easy delivery local deities are offered fowl sacrifice. At the time of delivery an elderly and experienced woman is asked to serve as midwife. After the child birth the midwife cuts the umbilical cord by a sharp bamboo split and the placenta is buried inside the house premises.

In the early childhood the child is brought up with much care and affection. But, on growing up children are put to work. Lodha boys are comparatively more free, independent and dynamic whereas the girls are sober, hard working and submissive. Marriage by negotiation is the most common practice. Monogamy is the general rule. Payment of bride-price both in cash and kind is in vogue. Some of the ceremonies like tying of turban, wearing of the iron bangle by the bridegroom, return of the bride on 8th day are the characteristic features of a Lodha marriage.

Marrying a widow or a divorced woman known as "Sango" is in vogue among the Lodha. This marriage ceremony is less expensive than the usual one. When one's wife dies or becomes barren, a second wife is needed. There is no ritual associated with keeping a concubine.



Life after marriage is an important phase of the Lodha life because it is in this stage; they are re-socialized and develop altogether a new personality which stimulates them to get involved in antisocial activities.

When a man dies, his kin kinsmen are informed and the corpse is disposed of. There are two traditional ways of disposing of the corpse. One is cremation and the other is burial. On the tenth day the purification ceremony takes place. In the evening a special feast is given to persons who had helped in cremation. The cooked food is first offered to the spirit of the deceased and then the food is served to other members. Offerings to the ancestors are made annually on the last date of Chaitra. On the whole, the death rites of the Lodha are associated with a number of ceremonies, invocations and feasts.



Development and Change



The Lodha suffer from the abject poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Since development and change are inevitable the Lodha are no exception to it. Basically all inhabitants of one village once upon a time were like members of one family, but it is gradually disappearing. The attitude

towards community behaviour and group personality is changing. The poor Lodha wish to take up jobs as wage earners but they are denied at times of these opportunities. There is an urge for small business, vending shops and petty contracts but they are hardly provided with this opportunity. The changes in the traditional political council have been fast. The traditional council of village elders is more or less defunct. They have accepted the new Panchayatiraj system because the authority of old traditional councils are defunct. People now prefer to go to a court of law for adjudication of disputes. The local persons are lodging complaints against them in





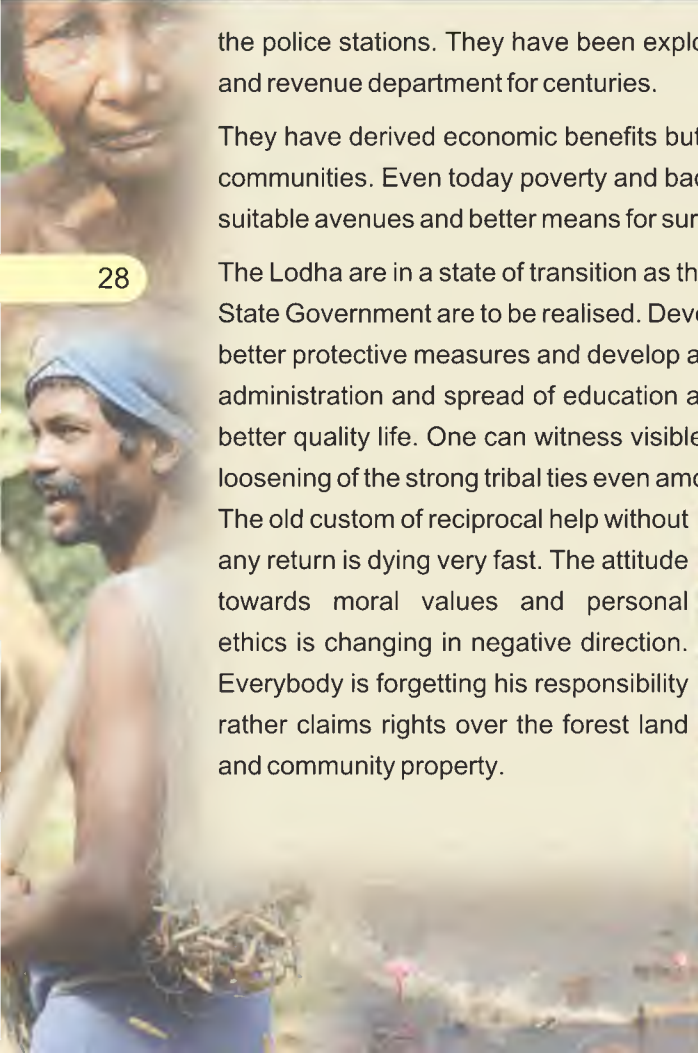
the police stations. They have been exploited by officials of police department, forest department and revenue department for centuries.

They have derived economic benefits but at the same time looked down upon by the neighboring communities. Even today poverty and backwardness compel them to revive the old habits, even if suitable avenues and better means for survival are open to them.

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The Lodha are in a state of transition as the results of decade's special endeavor of the Central and State Government are to be realised. Development agencies are trying to provide them greater and better protective measures and develop awareness for new ways of life. Special care of the L.D.A. administration and spread of education and economic development have lead them to foresee a better quality life. One can witness visible changes in their dress and living standard. But there is loosening of the strong tribal ties even among the villagers, clansmen, lineage and family members.

The old custom of reciprocal help without any return is dying very fast. The attitude towards moral values and personal ethics is changing in negative direction. Everybody is forgetting his responsibility rather claims rights over the forest land and community property.





The socio-economic development activities have brought immense change in their cultural pattern and lifestyle. The state Government is trying to focus on their holistic development to raise their standard of living and quality of life. Multifarious development programmes relating to health and sanitation, education, environment, infrastructural development, individual benefit schemes etc.

have to some extent transformed their outlook. Introduction of modern agriculture, multiple cropping, use of high yielding variety of seeds, provision of irrigation facility, input assistance, market assurance for their hand made products etc. have brought quite visible changes in their life pattern.

Since its inception in the year 1986, the Micro project, known as the Lodha Development Agency, Morada in Mayurbhanj district has undertaken a number of socio-economic development programmes for their sustainable development. The agency has spent money in horticulture, agriculture, communication, irrigation etc. The residential school close to the Lodha area has attracted the attention of a number of





students of the area. Non- formal educational centre popularly known as Gyan Mandir are having good contribution for development of children. Government has done a lot of good works through multiple ways to protect them and bring their holistic development. Enormous efforts have been made for improvement of their quality of life and to increase their per capita income. Sincere attempts have been made to effect planned change while preserving their cultural growth and positive values. Attempts have been made to ensure connectivity and substantial achievements relating to provision of safe drinking water facilities through tube wells and provisions of tap water supply. The most alluring and successful programme among the Lodha is fire proof roofing house to needy families.



Construction of check dams, mini irrigation projects, cross bunds, irrigation tanks and provision of dug wells etc. are some of the eye catching achievements. The most important activities, like spread of education, special health care provisions, provision of fair price shops for their commodities are some of the outstanding achievements that deserve special mention.

The development organizations and welfare institutions like primary health centre, police check post, office of the agricultural extension officer, veterinary hospitals, post office, and weekly market, big shops, establishment of banks, LAMPs and several others in their area have contributed to the changing life of the Lodha.



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