



KAWAR

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

2017

FOREWORD

This photographic documentation on the life style of the Kawar is a part of the series on the 'Tribes of Odisha' published by SCSTRTI. The Kawar is one of the 62 tribes living in Odisha who are very simple and tradition bound. This photo hand book on the Kawar is an outcome of anthropological study reflecting their way of life and living, ecology, culture and the process of change and development.

Numerically, a small tribal community, the Kawars are largely concentrated in Sundergarh district. It is said that they are immigrants to Odisha from their original habitat in Ranchi district in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand. They are a Dravidian tribe, may be an off shoot of the Gond tribe who trace their origin from the Kauravas of ancient era.

They mostly depend on agriculture supplemented by wage earning and forest collections for their subsistence. They are very much community oriented and custom bound who faithfully obey the culturally established norms to maintain social harmony. During their leisure time they enjoy their life by performance of traditional dance and songs in different festivals and the marriage ceremony. Both men and women take part in Karma folk dance and songs. As a small tribal group, the Kawars have preserved their cultural identity.

Although the Kawars have come across the development process in these days, they have tried to make the best of both the worlds by keeping the time tested values of their culture and at the same time accepting the change that is inevitable. This has brought some noticeable transformation in their life style.

Prof. (Dr) A. B. Ota, Commissioner-cum-Director and Shri A.K. Gamango, Deputy Director have taken pains in preparing this colourful booklet. My genuine thanks must go to Sri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant (Research & Publications) for his extra inputs in making the attempt complete and flawless in all respects. I hope this book would be of immense help for the tribal lovers, tourists, researchers and general readers.

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

KAWAR



A.B. Ota
S.C. Mohanty
A.K. Gamango

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

2017



IDENTITY

The tribe Kavar or Kanwar is numerically a small and little known Scheduled Tribe community inhabiting Sundargarh, Jharsuguda and Nuapada districts of western Odisha and the adjoining areas of undivided Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, West-Bengal and are also distributed in Rajasthan and Maharashtra States. Their habitat is generally located in an irregular topography with pictorial landscapes of mountain ranges surrounded by lush green vegetation of deep forest. It is said that they are immigrants to Odisha from their original habitat in Ranchi district in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand.

The community has been listed in the ST list of Odisha as Kavar, Kanwar but has synonyms/phonetic variations like Kaur, Kavar, Kuanr, Kuanwar, Konwar. They use surnames like Sai (common), Kuanr, Kuanwar, Konwar, Chhatar, Kapat, Banjar, Singar, Badaik, Endua, Bag, Ray, Chitra, Kuanar, Bati, Katri, Libri, Bardi, Baikhar, etc.

They are a Dravidian tribe, may be an off shoot of the Gond tribe. According to Singh (1997: 485) "on the whole, they maintain a distinct biological identity from the numerically dominant central India tribal groups of Gondid strains." Captain Blunt (1794) in his report in Asiatic Researches, described the community as a "hill tribe called Cowhirs".



The Kawars trace their origin from the Kauravas of ancient era. Early ethnographer, Dalton (1872) opined them as an aboriginal tribe, cling to tradition of their origin who stated themselves as descendants of survivors of the sons of Kuru who formed the armies of Hasthinapur and after their defeat in the great Mahabharat war, took refuge in the hill countries of central India. But Singh (1997) stated them as Tomar, a Kshatriya clan, to whom they trace their origin. He also cited Trivedi (1971), who reported them as trusted soldiers of Haidibanshi chiefs of Ratanpur. They are a migrating community and have left their original home land during long past to other States in search of sustainable pursuits. Dalton (1872:133) reported them as having "resemblance to the offspring of Nishad."

They are bilingual. They have already forgotten their original mother tongue belonging to the Dravidian family of languages and now speak Laria or Sadri, a non literary semi-autonomous Indo-Aryan language among themselves. They are well versed with the local tongue Odia, Hindi or Bengali and also use its script for inter-group communication.

According to 2011 Census, their total population in the state is 5225 out of which 2627 are males and 2598 are females and the sex ratio is 989 females per 1000 males. Total literacy of the tribe is 64.44% out of which male literacy is 76.73% and female literacy is 52.38%. The decadal growth rate of the tribe is - 29.20%.

Personal Appearance:

In the remote past the Kawars were aboriginal and primitive hill tribe and living in a stage of isolation, ignorance, poverty and pursuing food gathering for their subsistence. In those days their dress was scanty. Their males were wearing a short piece of loin cloth (*lengti*) to conceal their pubic regions and women were wearing short piece of towel around their waist leaving the upper parts of body fully bare. Little children, below seven years of age were completely naked.

At present, their dress pattern resembles that of neighbouring Hindu communities due to cultural assimilation and impact of modernity, influenced by close contact with civilized neighbouring societies. Men wear dhoti, *kurta* (shirt), *lungi*, *gamucha* (napkin), banian, and women wear saree, blouse etc. Children as well as well to do persons wear pants and shirts etc.



Kawar women are fond of adorning themselves with various beautiful ornaments to look attractive and charming. Female ornaments consist of brass *khadu*,

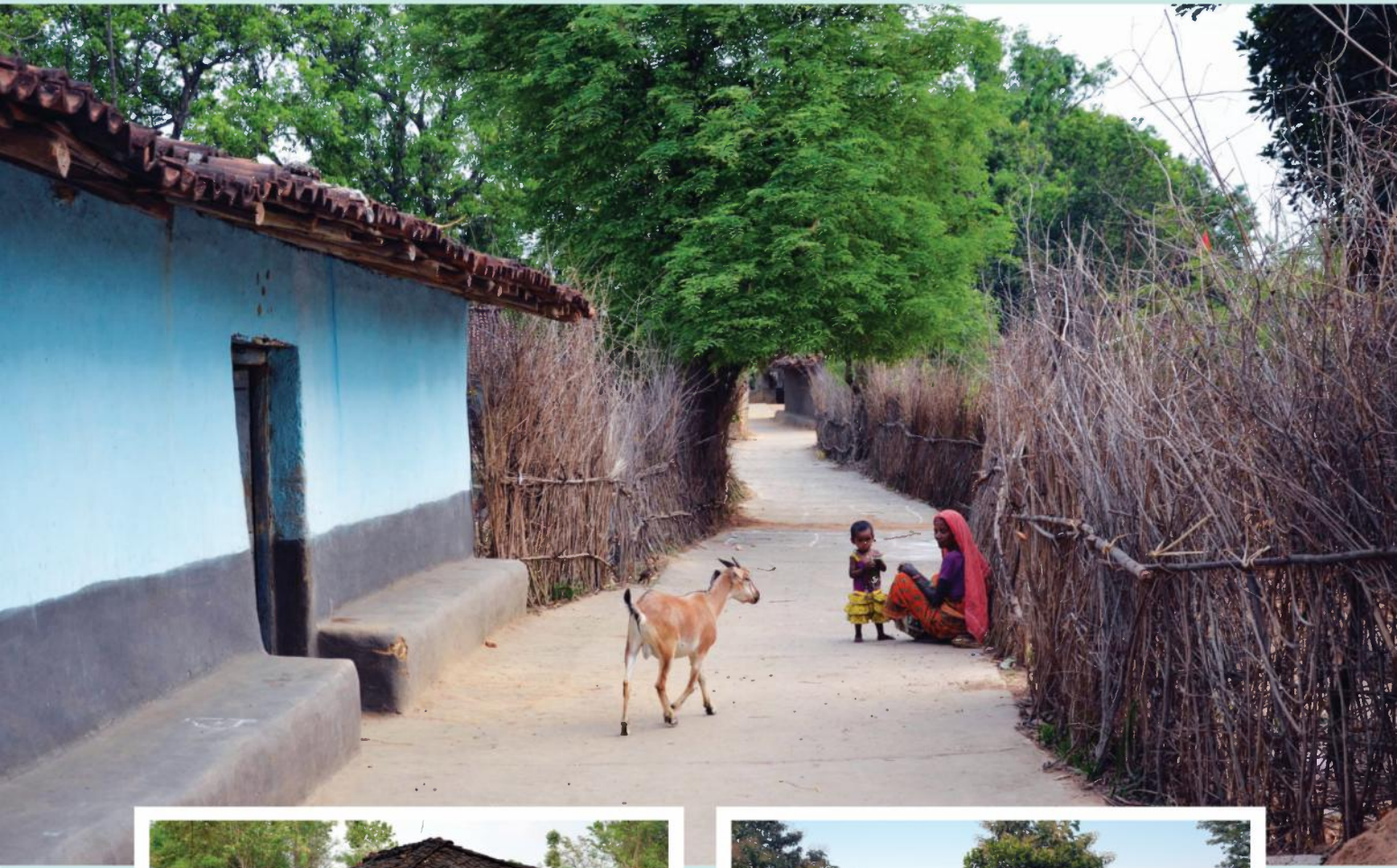
armlets, glass bangles, necklaces of various designs, *ghagla* made of brass, copper, lead, aluminum or alloy, finger rings made of brass or old coins, toe rings and *pahud* in their legs, silver pendants on their ear lobes. They like to put on these ornaments on festive occasions but according to their custom they do not use any nose ornaments.

Tattooing (*godna*) has become an old fashion. In the past, it was being done just after the marriage of a girl. The tattoos were of various designs and beautiful motifs printed on the chest, arm and legs. Now for the women of the younger generation tattooing have gone out of fashion.

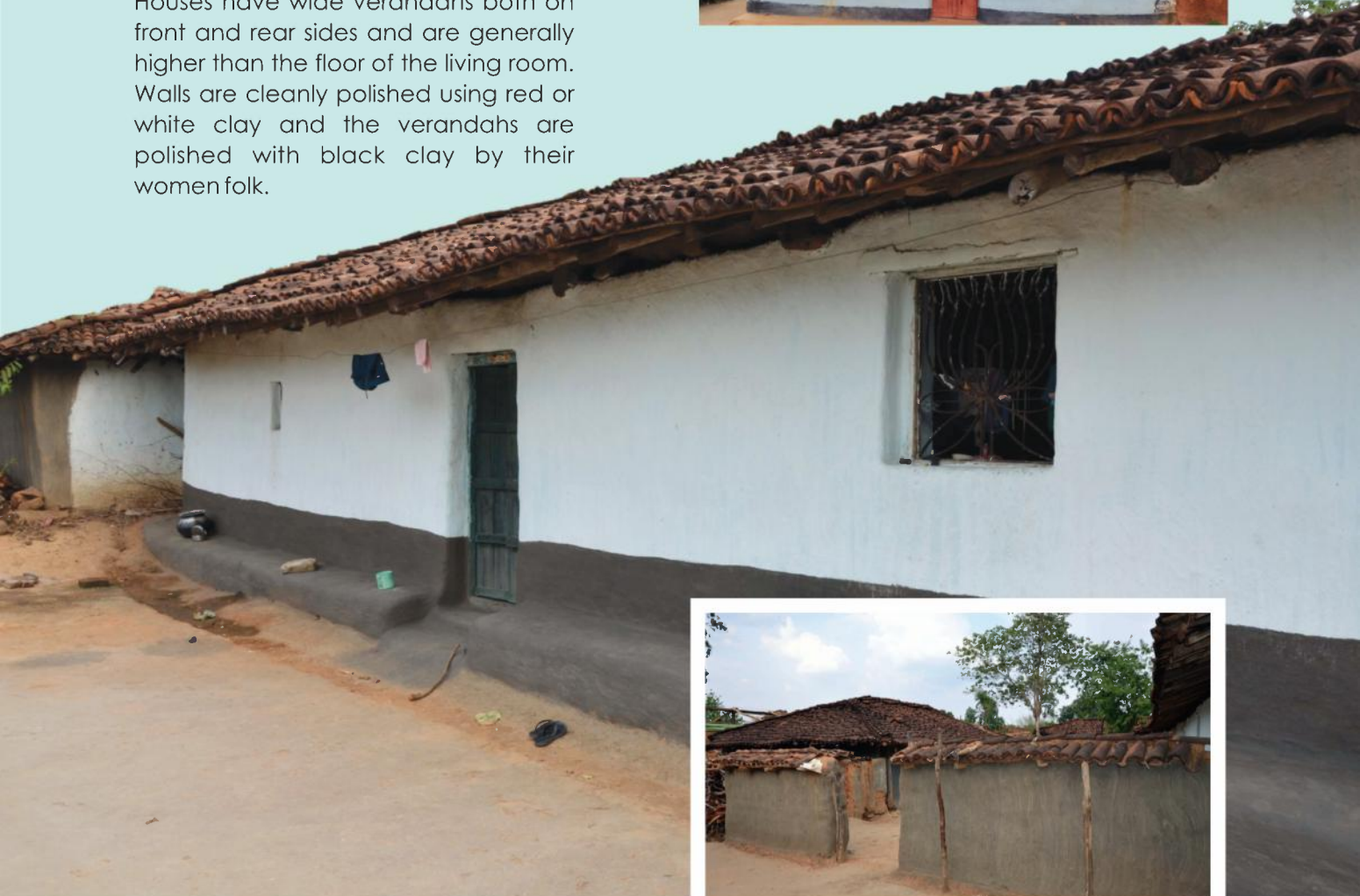


SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

Kawar settlements are generally homogenous and are located in hill slope area amidst forest, near perennial hill stream which provides them drinking water throughout the year. In heterogeneous settlements, they exclusively dwell in separate wards, maintaining their own cultural identity while keeping social distance from the neighbouring communities. Their houses are arranged in linear pattern leaving a narrow space in between as Village Street.



Individual houses are made with mud walls thatched with paddy straw, date palm leaves or with country made tiles (*khappar*) and are always low roofed. Some well to do families construct the walls using bricks with asbestos roofs. Houses have wide verandahs both on front and rear sides and are generally higher than the floor of the living room. Walls are cleanly polished using red or white clay and the verandahs are polished with black clay by their women folk.

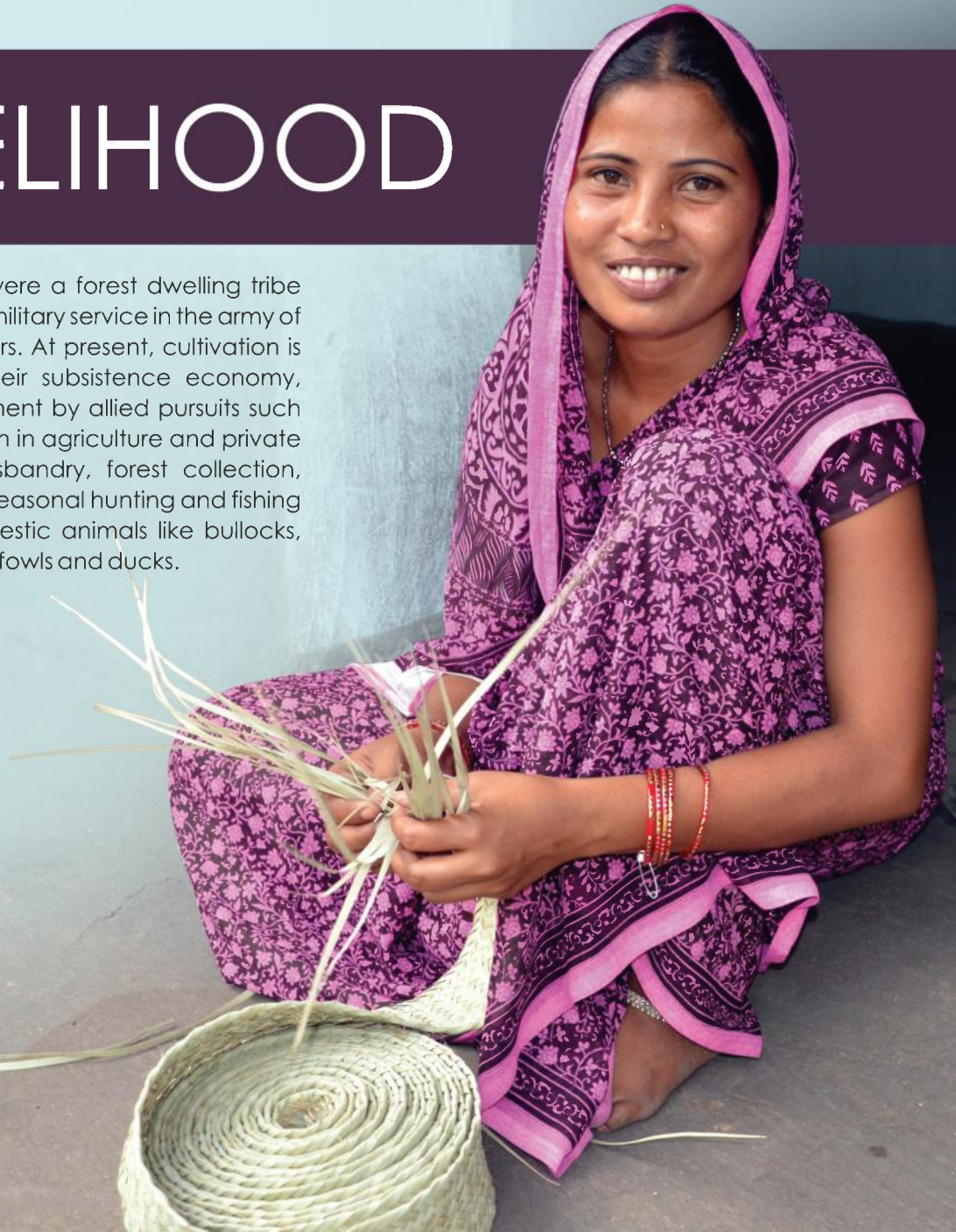


Kawar houses are two roomed and have no windows for ventilation. The front room near the entrance is generally bigger and is used as the living room as well as to store their grains and the smaller one is used as kitchen. They install their household deity at one corner of their kitchen room. They have a separate shed at the rear side of their verandah to accommodate their domestic animals. The front verandah is used as sitting place in their leisure hours as well as to accommodate their guests at night. They keep their surrounding neat and clean.



LIVELIHOOD

In the past, they were a forest dwelling tribe who they took up military service in the army of the then feudal rulers. At present, cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy, which they supplement by allied pursuits such as wage labour both in agriculture and private sectors, animal husbandry, forest collection, petty business and seasonal hunting and fishing etc. They rear domestic animals like bullocks, cows, goats, sheep, fowls and ducks.





Paddy is their major crop, which they grow in their wet lands. In their up lands they produce a varieties of crops like hill paddy (*bedadhan*), ragi, minor millets like *kangu*, *kosla*, *janna*, oil seeds such as *alsi*, *rasi* and ground nut, pulses like *arhar*, *kandul*, *dangarani*, *ganthia*, *bodei*, *kulthi* (horse gram), *biri* (black gram) and *buta* (red gram) etc.

All of them possess small patches of kitchen at the backside of their dwelling house where they grow varieties of vegetables such as brinjal (*baigun*), potato, tomato (*patal ghanta*), cabbage (*gobi*), radish (*mula*), pumpkin (*kumuda*), cow-pea (*jhudung*), lau (water melon), semi (*seasum*), chilly and maize etc. Women contribute substantially to their family income, participating in cultivation, wage earning, forest collection etc besides attending to their routine household chores.



Some families among them form a "traditional labour cooperative" (*pancha*) to help each other in agricultural activities without any remuneration. They also have another form of labour cooperative (*madat*) under which one who lends help in agricultural activities is given some food.

Food Habits:

Kawars are generally non-vegetarians. Rice and ragi constitute their staple diet. They relish on fish, dry fish, chicken, meat, eggs etc, but abstain from taking beef or pork. Both male and female are addicted to alcoholic drinks like country liquor (*mohulia*), rice beer (*handia*) and ragi beer (*kusuna*) and some among them brew it at their home fermenting the grains for home consumption as well as for marketing. Both male and female smoke hand rolled cigars (*pika, bidi*) and chew tobacco paste (*gudaku*).

SOCIAL LIFE

The tribe Kavar is an endogamous community which is broadly divided into eight endogamous divisions such as (a) *Tanwar* or *Umrao* (b) *Kamal banshi* - the stock of the lotus, (c) *Paikara*- the foot soldier, (d) *Dudh Kavar* - the milk or cream of Kavar, (e) *Rathia* - the immigrants from chariot, (f) *Chanti* - who derive their name from the ant, (g) *Cherwa* - an illegal off shoot of Kavar father and *Chero* tribe woman and (h) *Rautia*- the herdsman. The *Tanwar* group is regarded as superior among them in social hierarchy and *Chanti* and *Cherwa* are inferior as they rear pigs. The *Chanti* occupies the lowest rank in *Kavar* society.





All these divisions are again sub-divided into as many as 117 exogamous and totemistic lineages (*gotiar/gotra*) named after plants, animals and objects to regulate their matrimonial alliances. Some of these are as follows; *andil* (originated from egg), *bagh* (tiger), *bichhi* (scorpion), *bilwa* (wild cat), *bokra* (goat), *chandrama* (moon), *chanwar* (a whisk or broom for dance), *chita* (leopard), *chuva* (a well), *motiyo* (shaman), *singar* (well dressed), *kapat* (door), *pharsa* (a tree), *jhap* (basket), *champa* (a flower), *dhenki* (pounding lever), *darpan* (mirror), *gobira* (dung insect), *hundar* (wolf), *sikta* (jackal), *kolma* (fox), *janta* (grinding mill), *kothi* (grain store), *khumari/ chhatar* (leaf umbrella), *lodha* (wild dog), *chak* (grinder maker), *enua* (bullock), *besra* (praying bird), *khukhuri* (hen), *jada* (grinder), *mama* (maternal uncle), *mahadeo* (lord Siva), *nunmutaria* (salt pocket), *sendur* (vermilion), *sua* (parrot), *telasi* (oily), *mutungal*, *sarjal*, *baikar*, *bandi*, *katar*, *libri*, *badi*, *karsayal* (dear) and *thath mura* (pressed in sugar cane press) etc.

The people, whose clans are named after plants or animals, generally think themselves as descended from the totem and usually abstain from doing any harm to it but where the clan is called after some inanimate object, the rule of legitimacy is repudiated. The community does not worship their totemic objects nor observe any ritual in honour of their totem.

Family:

Kawar family is less nuclear in structure and more in the form of either vertically extended or joint. They follow patrilocal rule of residence and patrilineal rule of descent. The ancestral property is distributed, equally among all the sons leaving an extra share for the eldest son. The daughters do not get any share from the paternal property but in the family having no male successor, the married daughters inherit the paternal property. The family, having no male issues may adopt a male child from the family of nearest patri-lineage, who later on inherits the property.



Pre-Delivery Ritual:

Kawar do not observe any pre-delivery ritual for a pregnant woman before the child birth, but if the woman suffers from any disease during this period, they seek the help of their traditional witch doctor - the Baiga/ Gunia for magico-religious healing. The pregnant woman is prohibited to sleep alone, travel alone in dark night or be exposed during lunar or solar eclipses and also imposed with some food restrictions.





Child Birth:

Usually, the birth of a child is arranged in a separate confinement in their rear verandah. They engage an experienced woman as midwife (*sutherain*) to assist the pregnant woman for easy and safe delivery of the child. The midwife cuts the umbilical cord using a knife (*chhura*) or a blade. The placenta (*putaphula*) is buried in a dung heap near the hearth (*chulla*) and the naval stump is buried near the threshold of the door way. After delivery of the baby the mother observes food restrictions and is provided with little diet for three days.

Post-Delivery Ritual:

Birth pollution continues for twelve days. They observe the rite, *chhati* on the sixth day of the child birth when the house is purified and the mother is allowed to take light food. The tonsure ceremony (*mundane*) and naming ceremony is also observed on this day and according to their custom, the name of day or month, the child takes birth is chosen. In the evening the family entertains the kinsfolk with sweetmeats along with rice beer.

The purificatory rite is observed on the twelfth day (*borein*) in which the mother takes her purificatory bath applying turmeric paste and drinking few drops of turmeric water after which she is allowed to resume cooking and other household chores.

The first cereal feeding ceremony is observed when the baby becomes six months old and the ear piercing ceremony is observed after three to five years of the child birth. Men of Tanwar clan wear sacred thread and the threading ceremony is observed when the boy is above twelve years of age.

Puberty Rite:

The Kavar do not observe puberty rite for adolescent girls attaining their first menarche. But the menstruating girl is imposed with certain social taboos and is prohibited to perform any household chores, entry into kitchen, touch the foods and water stored in the house for family use during this period. The pollution continues for seven days. On the eighth day morning, she takes purificatory bath anointing turmeric paste, in the nearby hillstream or pond.

Marriage:

In Kavar society monogamy and adult marriage is the rule. In early days, child marriage was prevalent among them. Polygynous families are also seen in few cases where the first wife is found to be a barren or suffers from incurable diseases. Marriage, arranged through negotiation (*bhiha*) is considered ideal and prestigious mode of acquiring a spouse.



As a rule, the groom's family first initiates the marriage proposal as the bride's parents think it undignified to seek a mate for their daughter from their side. The groom's family engages a mediator (*karbaria*) to negotiate the proposal. On an appointed day, the boy accompanied by his friends, visit the chosen girl's house (*rangabula*), where both the boy and girl meet and talk with each other. If they chose each other then the marriage proposal is settled. Payment of bride price (*suk/ sukumal/ sukdam/ kaniamol*) is obligatory and is paid by both in cash and kind, consisting some cash, paddy/ rice, dal, khadi (clothes) and seven pieces of sarees and three to four goats.

The wedding rites are held at the bride's patrilocal residence. On the marriage day, the groom accompanied by his family members, friends, relatives and guests proceeds to the bride's house in a marriage procession with a band of music provided by Dom musicians. The bride's family, kins and villagers receive the party and entertain them with food and drinks.

An elder man, belonging to own community presides over the marriage ritual. A marriage *pendal* (*mandua*) is constructed for the purpose where the wedding rites are conducted. The bride and the groom revolve seven times around the sacred pole of the marriage altar and then the parents of the bride wash the feet of the newly wedded couple in milk. After that the marriage rites come to an end and the groom's party with the couple return to their home. The marriage is consummated in the patrilocal residence of the groom.

The other modes of marriages are by consent (*uderiya dhuk*), by capture (*ghichhra bhiha*), by service (*gharajinha*), by elopement (*uderiya bhagad*) etc. Another mode of marriage (*dharua bhiha*) is prevalent in their society in which a poor boy's family, financially incapable to pay the bride price to the bride's parents, sends the boy to render his service for a period of one or two years to bride's family.

Junior levirate (*deor bhiha*), junior sororate (*sari bhiha*) and cross-cousin marriage is permitted in their society. Remarriage of widows or widowers (*sagai*) and divorcees (*chadra-chadri*) are also permitted. Divorce is allowed and either party can divorce his/her spouse on the grounds of maladjustment in conjugal life, barrenness or impotency, extra marital relationship, cruelty or sickness from contagious diseases etc.

They maintain marital links with their tribesmen living in a number of villages of neighbouring Chhatisgarh State.



Death Rites:

The Kavar generally practise burial to dispose of their dead. Well-to-do families, who can afford, go for cremation. The corpses of infants, small pox or cholera victims and for deaths occurred due to tiger attack or snake bite and the dead body of pregnant women are buried in a separate burial ground (*mareghat*).

They generally lay the corpse in the burial pit in sleeping posture with its head towards north and face facing east. There they put some seed grains of til, cotton, urad (pulses) rice and the dead person's used cooking pot, drinking vessel and dish plate with the idea that the dead person's soul in the other world might cultivate and arrange for his/her own survival and will not disturb the family members. After disposal of the dead, the pal-bearers bathe in the nearest hill stream and return home. Near the entrance of the village, the man on the front collects a pebble from the road and passes it to others and after each of them touches it, the last man throws it to back with the belief that the departed soul will not follow them to their village and home to make any disturbances.

On the third day of the death, they visit the burial spot, where their priest cooks food

and offers it with milk in a leaf cup to the departed soul. If they had cremated the dead, the priest collects a piece of bone to be immersed in holy water for salvation of the dead person's soul.

Death pollution continues for ten days and during the period, observance of rituals and festivals, relishing on non-vegetarian foods, visiting the sacred shrines, using oil, giving alms and sexual union are strictly tabooed. The purificatory rite is performed on the tenth day conducted by their community priest and the bereaved family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to kinsfolk, relatives and guests.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Kawar profess animism with admixture of some elements of Hinduism. Their supreme deity is *Bhagwan*, the Sun God. Their pantheon includes a number of deities like *Thakur deo* - the deity of agriculture and his consort *Dulha deo* -the rain god, *Jhagara Khanda* or two edged sword, *Bagharra deo* - the tiger god, the mythical snake god who live in forest in Sheshkund etc. Besides, there are many other deities like *Mandwa Rani*- the goddess of Mandwa hill, the river goddess- Sat Bahini, forest god who resides in sacred groves (*demulu*) at the village outskirts, Patul Paharia Budha (Ashada), *Bhataparasi* (deity of wealth), *Kalamal*, *Rakasin* (the witch deity), *Raksha*, *Baharan*, *Talaparia*, *Gajanpot*, *Rakmauli* and *Mati Paharia* etc.



Even their gun, axe, individual swords and spear each possess a special deity. Their village deities - *Gaongasai*, *Mahamai* are installed at the outskirts of village under shady trees. They worship their ancestors as their household deity. They propitiate their deities with great reverence with the help of *Baiga*, their traditional priest during festive occasions, begging their mercy for the betterment of human lives, well being of their livestock, good rainfall as well as for bumper harvest of crops in their cornfields. Besides that they also worship Hindu deities and observe Hindu festivals like, *Rathayatra*, *Diwali*, *Sivaratri*, and *Holi* etc.



They believe in black magic and existence of ghosts, witches and spirits, among whom some are benevolent and some are malevolent who cause calamities such as spread of epidemics, ill health in human life as well as their livestock. To appease these evil spirits, they seek the help of their traditional witch doctor called *tonhi/ gunia* and perform rituals near hill stream by offering coconut, country liquor and sacrificing hen or goat etc.

Their major festivals are *cherchera*, *akti*, *harelip*, *pitare manna*, *nayakhani* (new cereal eating), *sarhul*, *sohrai*, *karma* and *phogun*, etc. They have rich oral tradition of folk songs and folk tales relating to their origin, migration, origin of deities, earth and animals, plants and their famous folk dance, *karma nach* and *jhanjer nach* etc.

SOCIAL CONTROL

They have their own traditional community council called *Jati Panchayat*/*Jati Samaj* both at village level and regional level. Sian is the head of the community council in a village. He is selected by the community members for five years term to look after their customary affairs. The other office bearers who assist him are *Panch Bhadrak* and community elites.



Their traditional community council acts as the guardian of their social norms and traditions. The Sian presides over its meetings and with the help of council members decides cases of pertaining to family disputes, quarrels, misbehaviour, theft, rape, adultery, incest, divorce etc. It imposes penalty (*jarimana*) on the guilty persons in cash or kinds including a feast for community members. In some severe cases when girls / boys marry in lower castes, they are expelled from the community. Unsolved cases are referred to *Khetra Adhykshya* (regional chief) or *Kendriya Adhykshya* (central chief)



CHANGING SCENE

Since independence, remarkable changes have been taking place in all sections of the tribal population. This is also true in the case of Kawar, who are rising from their threshold and are marching ahead keeping pace with the changing times.



Now, in the context of the Kavar, development efforts by the Government have a positive effect even though the Kawars are tradition bound. Their poor economic condition now never stands in their way and the Kawars shown interest in educating their children and accepting the development programmes. Because they have realized that the spread of education among them has a pride of place in the priorities of developmental needs of the people. It brings knowledge to the community and helps in acquiring a new strength to face the challenges of the dynamic and developing society. Earlier,

their low economic conditions did not allow their children to go beyond the level of primary school and the girls, mostly dropped out at the primary level. This situation has changed now.



They have become aware of various development and welfare programmes introduced by the Government which has brought noticeable improvements to their socio-economic conditions. Introduction of modern agriculture, supply of improved variety of seeds, irrigation facility, market support for their surplus produce by the Government have brought confidence in them which has led to a remarkable change among them. Use of indigenous methods for their health care has been changed and they are now using both modern and traditional method of treatment but more inclined to modern methods of treatment. Attitude towards family planning is positive and favourable. But usually women get sterilized. The Kawars prefer small family of two or three children. They have improved their sanitary habits and get drinking water from tube wells, sanitary wells and other safe sources. Some well-to-do people possess radios, televisions, motor cycles, modern furniture and educated persons read newspapers. Now few of them are engaged in different institutional services. They are undergoing a phase of transition.



Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series 45, Kawar
@SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute**
CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar : 751003
Website : scstrti.in, Email-scstrti@yahoo.co.in,
Telephone : 0674-2563649/251635



ISBN : 978-93-80705-55-2

Photography : Suman Vision, Bhubaneswar
Layout, Design & Printing : Capital Business
Service & Consultancy, Bhubaneswar