

RAJUJAR



Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute,
C.R.P. Square, Bhubaneswar

2016

FOREWORD

The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute have undertaken an initiative for producing Photo Handbooks on the tribes of Odisha including the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The present handbook is the photographic representation of the socio-cultural life of the tribal community known as Rajuar concluding with various developmental changes occurring in their present way of life.

The Rajuar also known as Rajual and Rajwar in Odisha is mainly concentrated in Mayurbhanj and Baleswar districts. They are more influenced by non tribal people. They are conversant with the regional language “Odia”. They generally live in multiethnic villages. Ma Mahisashuri is their village deity residing at one end of the village. They also worship various Hindu gods and goddesses and observe various festivals. Traditionally they lived on shifting cultivation but now they are settled agriculturalists. They also depend on hunting and fishing for their livelihood. Some of them also do the business of pounded rice.

Now-a-days due to impact of modernization, industrializations as well as various developmental programmes, the Rajuar are in the process development. This change has been reflected in their cultural, social and economic life.

I extend my heartiest thanks to Dr. A.B.Ota, IAS, Director, SCSTRTI, A. Kodamasingh and N.Kanhar, Museum Guides who have painstakingly conceived and produced this colourful photo handbook. Shri S.C. Mohanty, OSD (R), Dr. P.Patanaik, Curator also deserve my thanks for rendering editorial support for the handbook.

I hope this book will be helpful to the researchers, administrators, planners and also laymen who have keen interest to know about the socio-cultural life of our tribal communities.

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


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INTRODUCTION



Out of 62 scheduled tribal communities of Odisha, the Rajuar constitutes a numerically small cultivating tribe. Besides Odisha, the Rajuars are also concentrated in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. They are also known by the name Rajual, Rajuad or Rajwar. Some of the authorities are of opinion that the tribe is probably an offshoot of the Bhuyan. The Rajuars of Bengal admit that they are the descendants of mixed union between Kurmis and Kols. According to Risely, the Rajuars are descended from a Rishi who had two sons. From the eldest, the Rajuars are descended who became soldiers and obtained their noble title and from the youngest, the Musahars who got their name for eating 'chapatti' which the Rajuars do not.

Population and Concentration

The Rajuars mainly inhabit Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts of Odisha. Those residing in Balasore claim that they had migrated from Handibhanga of Mayurbhanj district long ago.

As per 2011 census, the total population of Rajuar in Odisha is 3518 including 1753 males and 1765 females. Their rate of literacy is 51.97 percent .i.e. 63.62 percent for males and 40.42 percent for females.



SOCIO CULTURAL IDENTITY

Rajuars feel proud of identifying themselves as “Nagabansi” as they believe that they are the descendants of 'Nagabansa' (cobra dynasty). They are known for their simplicity, honesty and co-operative attitudes.

So far as their physical characteristics are concerned they are of both short and tall stature with dark complexion. Their main source of livelihood is agriculture and side by side they also prepare flattened rice and sale it from door to door.

As they are the immigrants from Chhotanagpur to Odisha, the languages they speak are a mixture of Hindi, Bengali and Odia. However, they are conversant with regional language “Odia” now.



The Rajuars assert that their ancestors placed them on equal footing with the Bhuyan, as a result of which they exchange water, food and social visits with the Bhuyans. But they usually claim a higher social status than that of Kurmis, Kol, Bathudi etc. So they do not exchange water and food with these communities.

Dress and Ornaments

There is no such uniqueness reflected in their dress pattern. As usual like the non tribal people, the Rajuar men wear short dhotis (loin cloth) and banyan and women wear short cotton sarees, blouse and petticoats. But the younger generation prefers to use modern dress as available in the market. Rajuar women adorn themselves with different types of ornaments like necklace (harmala), earring (kanaphula),



nose ring (lulukphul), toe ring (jhantial), anklet (panjan), armulet (baju), glass bangles (churi), silver bangles (chujrhal), hairpin (munda ganja kanta), coin necklace (charini mala) etc. The old ladies decorate their bodies with tattoo marks especially on their foreheads, eye corners, and in both hands and legs.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Rajuars live in multiethnic villages, thus, forming part of a composite rural society. The rural ethnic groups are socio-economically interdependent on each other. When setting up a new settlement or a hamlet in multiethnic village, they give first priority to the availability of natural water resources. Each settlement consists of two or three hamlets locally known as “sahi”. The houses remain scattered and the internal road is very narrow.





At the west of the village, the village deity “Maa Mahisashuri” resides. The cremation ground is found at the village outskirts.

Before selecting a place for construction of a new house, the male elders of the household go to the proposed site where they clean a patch of the land, plaster it with the paste of cow dung and mud, keep there a jug filled with water covered with a cap in the name of the supreme god and leave it there overnight. Next morning if they find the level of water in the jug decreased, it signifies that the place is very inauspicious for house construction. Alternatively, they keep few grains of rice in that place and cover it with a bamboo basket. Next day morning if they find the grains disturbed, the site is considered inauspicious.





The Rajuars build their houses over a rectangular ground plan. The gable shaped roofs are usually thatched with straw. The walls are made of mud .The half of the walls are coloured with red ochre by the female folk. In average the length of the house is about 15 feet and the breadth is 7/8 feet. At the front of the house there is a narrow verandah attached to the house which is always kept clean and used as a place for meeting or recreation for family and relatives. In most of the houses, the paddy husking lever (dthinki) is installed on one side of the verandah. Floors are plastered with the mixture of cow dung and mud.

Each house consists of 3 rooms namely bed room (staba ghara), kitchen (randha ghar) and store room (badaghar). The front room of the house is used as the bed room. The store room or badaghar is adjacent to the bedroom where they keep grain bins and agricultural produce. Rajuar believe that the presiding deity of the household (esta debata) resides in the corner of the store room. The kitchen room is used for cooking and keeping utensils. At the backside of the house, there is a separate cowshed.

Household Articles

The Rajuar use a number of articles in their day to day life. Some of the articles are made by themselves and others are purchased from the local market. For agricultural works they keep plough (har), yoke (juant), leveler (mer), spade (kodar), digging hoe (kurala), carrying pole (bHINGA) etc. in their houses. For cooking and storing purposes they use earthen wares (handini) and aluminum vessels. Besides these other

important household articles like wooden framed cots woven with strings (daudia khata), wooden stools (pirha), broomsticks (batin), winnowing fans (sup), bamboo baskets (jhudi), Grain bins (khanchi), etc are also used by them in their day to day activities. For hunting purpose they keep bow, arrow, spear, bird traps, rabbit traps etc. During leisure time, they go for fishing to nearby streams and rivulets for which they also keep various types of fishing traps and nets in their house.



LIVELIHOOD

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Rajuar economy. Previously they were practicing shifting cultivation but now they have abandoned it in favour of settled agriculture. Usually they cultivate three types of lands like bada bil (wet land), dhip bil (up land) and dahi bil (up land). Once in a year they cultivate rice. Besides rice they also cultivate other cereals and pulses like millets, black grams, ragi, suan, kandula etc. Now besides cultivating rice and other cereals and pulses, they

prefer to cultivate the cash crop 'sabai' grass on their agricultural field which is found to be most profitable. They also grow different types of vegetables in their kitchen garden like brinjal (baigan), bitter gourd (karla), ladis finger (bhendia), ridge gourd (jhinga), beans (nauka), green pea (simbi), snake gourd (kaita jhanga), pumpkin (kakhur), gourd (laaa) etc. for their day to day consumption and also for the market.



Like other tribal communities, the Rajuar prefer to domesticate different type of animals and birds. Usually they rear cows, bullocks, buffaloes for consumption of milk and to utilize them in agricultural work. They rear sheep, goat, and fowls for ceremonial sacrifices, for domestic consumption and often for the market to meet contingent expenses. They also domesticate dogs for watching the house and helping in hunting. From social point of view, it is believed that the households who have more number of domesticated animals and birds, they are considered well to do families.



They also depend upon the forest to collect minor forest produce seasonally for the purpose of marketing and consumption. They usually collect different seasonal edible roots and tubers, mushrooms, green leaves, mango, black berry and the like mainly for consumption purpose and also collect bamboos, sal leaves and raisin for the market to earn money. During leisure time they also go for hunting small game animals and birds to supplement their food. Previously when they went for hunting, first of all they worshipped Baba Bajinath for getting success in hunting and also for the protection from the attack of the wild animals. Sometimes, only for consumption purpose, they go to the nearby streams and rivers for catching fishes by using fishing traps.

Now due the impact of industrialization, most of the Rajuar men and women go for daily wage labour in the local mining and factories. Some of them who are educated are also employed in different private and government sectors. In addition to agricultural activities, some of them also carry on the business of flattened rice. They prepare it themselves purchasing paddy from the local market and sell it for cash in the neighboring villages moving from door to door.



Food Habits

Rice is their staple food which is supplemented by pulses and curry prepared out of mushrooms, vegetables, fishes, meat and green leaves etc. In the morning, the Rajuar usually take watered rice with fried green leaves, vegetables, tamarind, green chilly and salt. Some of the people also prefer to take flattened rice (chuda) and puffed rice (mudhi) with tea. In the lunch as well as dinner they eat boiled rice with pulses and curry prepared out of vegetables.



They are mainly non vegetarians and very fond of eating egg, meat of different small birds and animals like goat and sheep along with different type of fishes caught from nearby rivers and streams. They are strictly forbidden to eat beef, pork and flesh of buffaloes as they consider them as unclean food. During fairs and festivals like Dussera, Asadhi, Jantal, Magha and Raja, they prepare special type of cakes like chakuli pitha, jhankar pitha, tala pitha (palm cake), poda pitha (baked cakes), patei sijha pitha (cakes of boiled green leaves), rice gruel and curry of meats of scarified birds and animals. These items are taken by them along with the boiled rice and country liquor.

Rajuars like other tribal people take intoxicating traditional drinks such as 'Handia', 'Tadi' and 'Mahua'. Sometimes, these liquors are prepared by them and sometimes they purchase it from the market. Chewing tobacco and smoking ganja (sun hemp) are quite popular among the adult males.

SOCIAL LIFE

The Rajuar community is divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal clans (gotra) such as 'Kashyapa', 'Nageswar', 'Sankhua' etc. The members of each clan believe to have been descended from a common ancestor or to have some mystic ties with its totem. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. After marriage, girls change their clan (gotra) and become members of husband's clan (gotra). A strong sense of reciprocity and co-operation exists among clan member as they consider themselves as brothers and sisters. Some of the common surnames like 'Ram', 'Ray', 'Parmanik' and 'Behera' are used by the people of the Rajuar community.

In the Rajuar community, village is also regarded as an important social unit. Inter-family linkages of different clans in the village are mostly characterized by mutual understanding and co-operation.



Family

In the Rajuar society all the members of a family act as a well-knit group. Occurrence of nuclear families is the maximum followed by the occurrence of extended families. In all cases, the eldest male member is the head of the family. The relation between the parents and the grown up children is more of mutual obligation than that of love and fear and the relationship between husband and wife is of mutual help and co-operation .After the death of the father, the property is equally shared by sons but in some cases the eldest or the youngest sons may receive a little more extra share than the other brothers but in absence of sons, daughters may inherit the paternal properties.



Life Cycle

Pregnancy and Child Birth

In the Rajuar community, child birth irrespective of sex is believed to be the rebirth of their ancestors because of which all the family members take special care of the pregnant woman. During pregnancy the woman observes certain taboos and prohibitions regarding her food, drink and mobility. She is forbidden to eat a particular type of fish locally known as 'Dhandi' and especially, the fishes caught by angling. She is prohibited to eat mushrooms growing on the anthills known as Hunkachhata. Furthermore, she is not allowed to go alone to the stream side or to a river for bathing or fetching water and also forbidden to cross them.

Usually the delivery of the child takes place in a corner of the living room. An old and experienced woman of the 'Karua' caste assists in child birth. Immediately after the delivery, boiled water of 'kolatha dal' (horse-gram) is given to the mother to drink. The umbilical cord of the baby is cut with an oyster shell and along with the placenta it is buried by the midwife in the premises of the house. The midwife is remunerated with food and a new saree for her services.



Birth pollution is observed for nine days at the end of which purification ceremony called 'nasta' is observed by the family members. On this day, the barber and the washer man serve them before they take their bath and after the bath they worship on the embankment of a water source.

The name giving ceremony is organized on the 10th day or the 21st day of the birth of the child. Usually members from the maternal uncle's side or old men and women of the community select a name for the child. Nursing of the child is left to the mother. Mother has an important role to take care of the child and its socialization.



Puberty

On attainment of menarche, the girl is treated as impure and confined for a week in a secluded room. She has to follow some taboos. She is forbidden to participate in any ritual and to look at or talk to any male person. On the eighth day, she anoints turmeric paste mixed with oil, takes a purificatory bath in the nearby river or stream and wears new clothes. Sometimes a feast is also hosted by her parents for the kith and kin.



Marriage

Marriage is the most important hall mark of Rajuar life cycle. The suitable age to get married is 20 to 22 years for the boys and 14 to 15 years for the girls. Marriage by negotiation is the most common and ideal form of marriage. However, other types of marriages like love marriage, widow remarriage, junior levirate and junior sororate are also practiced. In rare cases marriage by exchange and marriage by service are also practiced. Monogamy is the rule but in some cases polygyny is also permitted when the first wife is found to be barren, diseased or abnormal. Widow or widower remarriage though permissible is not appreciated in their society. They can remarry a year after the death of their spouse.



Divorce

The practice of the divorce is present in the Rajuar community. Either husband or wife can seek divorce. Divorce is effected with the consent of the traditional community panchayat on grounds like adultery, bareness, cruelty, insanity, chronic illness, impotency and maladjustment. Divorce compensation is paid by the husband as decided in the panchayat. Status of the children is also determined as per the customary divorce rules. A divorcee can also remarry but after a year of the dissolution of the marriage.



Death

Both burial and cremation are done for the disposal of the dead. The corpse of a child and of those dying of epidemic and other infectious diseases like small pox, cholera, leprosy etc. are buried. When a pregnant woman dies, her abdomen is incised but when a woman dies during child birth, a gourd, pumpkin or the inflorescences of a banana plant is buried along with her.

News of death is disseminated to all friends and relatives who assemble in the house of the deceased. The corpse (Mala) is washed with a pot of water fetched by the son of the deceased from a tank or a stream. Then a new white cloth is covered over the corpse. Its forehead is anointed with vermilion and sandal wood paste. Then a bier is prepared with bamboo poles to carry the corpse to the funeral ground along with a basket, a pitcher and spade.



In negotiation marriage, the initiative is always taken by the parents of the groom. Preliminary enquiries are made from both sides regarding economic condition and suitability of the prospective mates. If the proposal is accepted then the date of negotiation and the amount of the bride price is fixed.

The wedding ritual is performed in the bride's house and a low grade Brahmin priest conducts marriage by usual Vedic rites. The bride and groom after the completion of wedding rites are

led to the house of the groom under a canopy of cloth held over their heads. A non-veg feast known as "desakhia" is hosted by the bride's side to all the relatives. When the girl goes with her husband to his house it gives an immense sorrow to the girl's friends and relatives. So the groom has to pay some money to the bride's friends which is known as "Sanga Chhalani".

The groom's side also has to host a feast to their relatives at the groom's residence. Some rituals are also performed in the groom's house.



The corpse is lowered at a spot on the out skirts of the village where cooked food is offered to the departed soul from the third day of death till the 10th day rite (dasa) is performed. The eldest son of the deceased leads the funeral procession. Both in burial and cremation, the dead body is placed in the north and south direction with head pointing north wards and face upwards. Then the eldest son by closing his left eye lights the funeral pyre. After cremation, a small piece of bone of the deceased is collected from the spot and brought home which is kept in the backside of the house and worshipped regularly.

The third day of the death is known as Telkhai. On this day, the house is cleaned with cow dung. Then all the kin members take bath anointing with oil and turmeric paste. After that they enter into the house by sprinkling water with Tulasi leaves (*Osmium sanctum*) over their heads. The purification ceremony (dasaghar) is conducted on the 10th day of the death. On this day, the house is cleaned and used clothes are washed. All the clan members cut their hair, pare their nails, take a purificatory bath and wear new clothes. On the 11th day, the Brahmin priest performs a homa and a feast is hosted for all kith and kin.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Rajuars are polytheists. They strongly believe in the existence of innumerable malevolent and benevolent spirits. At the end of the village, under trees of the sacred grove, the village deity, Ma Mahisashuri resides who protects the whole village from all crises. With her “Baichha budha”- the village god is also worshipped by the people for the wellbeing of the villagers. The trees of the sacred grove under which these deities reside are also treated as sacred and the people are forbidden to cut the branches or pluck the leaves of the trees.

“Dehuri” is the religious head or priest of the village. The village gods and goddess are worshipped by him every day and he officiates in all the village and community level rituals. All the community level festivals and rituals are celebrated before the village deity “Ma Mahisashuri”. To appease her people also sacrifice of birds and animals before her.





The post of Dehuri is hereditary. He gets specific remuneration from the people to conduct different rituals and festivals and also gets a good deal of prestige and status from the village people. He is assisted by 'Ghalaharia' who is not paid any remuneration but only some share from the Dehuri.

At the family level, they also perform various rituals. They believe that ancestral spirits reside in one corner of the kitchen room. This corner is locally known as 'Esana'. In different rituals and festivals they propitiate them as they always protect the family members from the crises and bring peace and order in the family.

Now under the influence of Hinduism they worship various Hindu gods and goddesses in their houses by keeping the photos of Mahalaxmi, Shrikrishna, Shiva, Parbati, Ganesh and few others.

They have also faith in magical practices. The sorcerer is known as 'Gurabudha'. The centre of



the magico-religious practices is known as "Akhada". This is adjacent to the backside of the sorcerer's house. The size of the house is very small. There is no window but one door. The sorcerer always works for the wellbeing of the people. He also acts as a traditional magico-religious-cum-herbal healer to diagnose and treat different diseases.

Festivals

The Rajuar observe various festivals to appease their gods and goddess round the year. As they are agriculturalists, most of their festivals revolve around different agricultural activities of the year. Dhulia festival is observed in the month of April - May before the village deity Ma Mahisashuri. This is a community level festival and its main objective is to have rain in right time for better agricultural yields.



Jantal festival is one of the harvesting festivals observed by the Rajuar in the month of November - December. It is also a community level festival conducted by the Dehuri. Before four to five days of this festival, Dehuri collects paddy grains from the agricultural fields of every household. Then pressed rice is prepared from these paddy grains and offered to the village deity after which it is taken by the people present in that festival. They also arrange a communal festival by sacrificing animals and birds before the deity.

Magha festival (Magha Puja) is another important festival of the Rajuar celebrated in the month of January-February. For the protection of wild animals and for better collection of forest produce they worship 'Baichha pat' / 'Baichha budha' during this festival. To appease the god, they sacrifice small animals and birds before them.

Karma festival is another important festival observed in the month of August when a 'Karma' twig is brought and worshipped. This festival is performed by household heads. Likewise Bandhana festival is observed on the day following Kalipuja. On this occasion they worship their cattle. They celebrate Makara festival for two days starting with the first day of Magha (January-February). During this festival they sacrifice a goat before the Ganjhavar arani (a village deity). Both the days are spent in dance, music and drinks. Members of the community wear new clothes after a ceremonial bath.

Besides the above, festivals like Chhatuar, Muthi, Andhari, Ashadhi, some Hindu festivals like Chaitra Sankranti, Laxmi Puja, Durga Puja, Ganesh Puja and Rathayatra are also observed by the Rajuar. All these events are celebrated with singing and dancing to the tune of music.



SOCIAL CONTROL

To maintain peace and order in the Rajuar community, there is a well organized traditional village council locally known as “Gaonke Vichar”. It is constituted of traditional authorities like Parmanik (secular headman), Dehury (priest), Chhatia or Dakua (village messenger and assistant to Parmanik) and village elders.

The post of 'Parmanik' is hereditary and his role is very important. He presides over all the meetings of the village council. All the members are free to participate in the discussion and women are not allowed to do so but they may be summoned as parties to the disputes and as witnesses. The final decision in secular matters is given by Parmanik where as Dehury decides the magico-religious issues. The decision given by the Parmanik is unanimously accepted. He does not receive any remuneration but gets a good deal of prestige and social status for his services. The post of





Dakua or Chhatia is hereditary but sometimes he is nominated by the village elders. For his services he is paid in terms of cash or kinds by the villagers.

Generally the village meetings are held in the village street or in the verandah of any household. The offences and disputes regarding theft, conflict, violation of customary rules, witchcraft and sorcery, partition of property, sale and mortgage of land, marriage, bride price, divorce, adultery and the like are all settled in the Gaonke Vichar.

Punishment given to the offender varies according to the gravity of the offence. Usually the offender is asked to host a feast for the villagers and/or pay fines in cash. For commitment of serious offences, the culprit is ex-communicated. When the

accused does not admit his guilt he is asked to plead his innocence by swearing in the name of God, by touching the earth goddess, cow, grass or a small baby in front of the village council. Since the Rajuar people have a strong faith in their gods and goddess, they believe that telling a lie after swearing the liar will be severely punished by the god.

Consequent upon the introduction of Panchayat Raj institutions, their traditional political system is gradually declining. People take the help of law, police and court to settle disputes relating to murder, theft but small disputes like, conflict in family, violation of customary rules, conflicts relating to marriage, bride price, divorce etc. are usually settled in Gaonke Vichar. There is a co-existence of both the systems in the Rajuar society.

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Change and development is inevitable in every society. The Rajuar community is not an exception to it. Both the Government and Non Government Organizations now take a lot of initiatives for their holistic development to raise their standard of living and quality of life. So the Rajuar community is in the process of development and change. These changes have

been noticed in their social system, techno-economic and religious spheres too.

Education is the prime indicator of development. Traditionally till the recent past, they were showing little interest in educating their children irrespective of gender as they were utilizing their children's capabilities in economic pursuits, but now various plans and programmes are initiated



by ST & SC Development Department and other concerned departments to raise their level of literacy and education. Various categories of school like Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, +2 Colleges, High Schools, Girls High School, Ashram and Sevashram Schools are running in interior tribal areas. To attract number of students they are also provided with free residential facilities, mid-day meals, stipend, free text books, reading and writing materials, dresses, bicycles, laptops etc. This initiative has produced remarkable results.



In the economic field, they have also shown a remarkable change. Traditionally, they adopted archaic method of cultivation but now due to introduction of irrigation facility, market assurance, use of modern pesticide, use of modern tools and techniques they are able to produce more and also besides rice now they cultivate other cash crops like 'sabai' grass. Apart from that most of them now also prefer to take up jobs as wage earners. The recent development interventions through the formation of SHGs both by men and women have brought significant changes in the socio economic life of Rajuar.



Primary Health Centers, Police Check Posts, Veterinary Hospitals, Post Offices, weekly markets, big shops, PDS Centers, Anganwadi Centers and Commercial Banks are now established in their areas which effect a lot of change in their life pattern. Their villages are also linked with pucca roads under the scheme of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Electricity has reached their houses under the scheme of Rajiv Gandhi Biduyut Yojana. Under Indira Awas, Mo Kudia and Biju Pucca Ghar Yojana, they are also provided with pucca houses.

There have been visible changes in the material aspects of their culture. Now they, like other communities, use mobile phones, T.V. sets, computer and other modern and sophisticated accessories. While accepting the changes the old guards of the Rajuar society are struggling hard to preserve the time tested best elements of their culture to maintain their cultural identity.





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