



GANDIA

SCHEDULED CASTES AND SCHEDULED TRIBES
RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE
(SCSTRIT) C.R.P. SQUARE, BHUBANESWAR-751003

P R E F A C E

Traditionally being a Gondid community of shifting cultivators and pastoralists the Gandia lives in the southernmost part of Odisha. They are said to be a section of the Koya tribe with whom they have close socio-cultural similarities.

The Gandia are largely concentrated in the Malkanagiri district. They speak Dravidian Language 'Gondi' that belongs to the central Gondi dialect of the Proto-Dravidian group. Numerically they are a very small ethnic group numbering only 1854 individuals as per 2011 Census

Typical bamboo palisade fencing all around is a distinguishing feature of Gandia settlements. Very close to their settlements one notices stone pillars and wooden posts (menhirs) erected in memory of their dead ancestors. The number of houses in a village varies from ten to thirty. They have mud houses beautifully thatched by a type of jungle grass. Houses are rectangular giving shelters to humans along with the livestock like pigs and fowls. Herds of cattle are put or tethered in front courtyard. Each house, its courtyard and adjoining kitchen garden are nicely fenced by bamboo splits.

Traditionally, the Gandia were shifting cultivators. But now-a-days, for various reasons, they have taken to settled cultivation. Yet they still go for seasonal forest collections to supplement their livelihood. Being pastoralists, the Gandia have large herds of cows and bullocks. According to their traditional system, wealth means cattle, because a Gandia without cattle has no status in the society.

Their original belief system centers around two cults namely the cult of Earth Goddess and the cult of village Goddess called Gamma. The seat of Gamma lies under a Mohul or Tamarind tree inside the village. There are many deities of nature residing in hills, forests and streams like: Lely - the forest Goddess; Kad - the water deity etc. They also have the cult of ancestor worship at the family level.

In spite of impact of modernization, they have retained their rich cultural heritage in different forms.

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A. B. Ota
Director & Special Secretary

GANDIA

A.B. Ota
P. Patel
B.K. Paikray



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

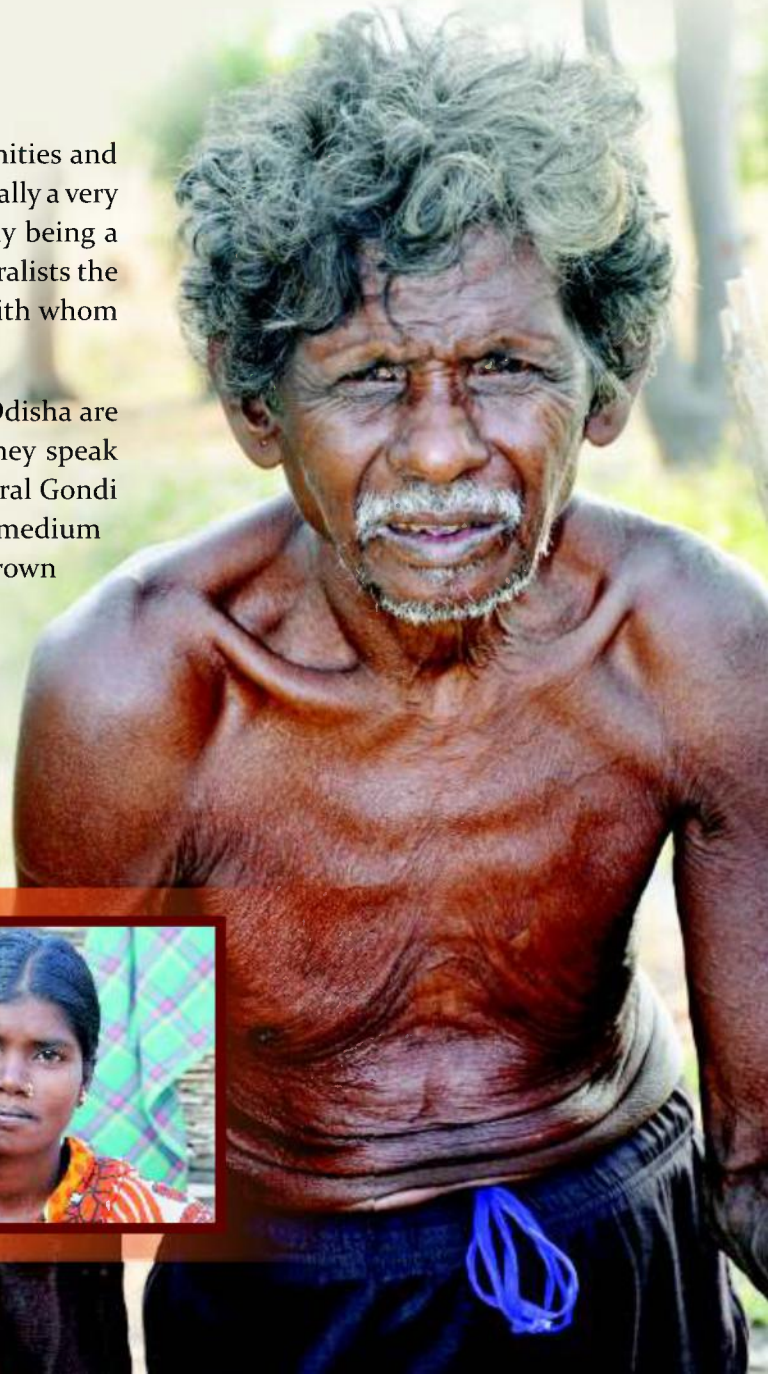
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IDENTITY

Odisha is homeland of sixty two tribal communities and Gandia is one among them. Gandia is numerically a very small and little known tribe of Odisha. Traditionally being a Gondid community of shifting cultivators and pastoralists the Gandias are said to be a section of the Koya tribe with whom they have close socio-cultural similarities.

The Gandia who live in the southern most part of Odisha are largely concentrated in the Malkanagiri district. They speak Dravidian Language 'Gondi' that belongs to the central Gondi dialect of the Proto-Dravidian group. They are of medium stature; their colour varies from light brown to dark brown and have stout shoulder, stubby hair or bristles.

According to 2011 Census their population in Odisha is 1854 out of which male population is 884 and female population is 970. The sex ratio is 1097 females per 1000 males. Their level of literacy is very low i.e. 35.81 percent.



Dress and Ornaments

Men and grown up boys wear the simplest possible loin cloth hung on the waist cord in the front and passed in between the legs and hung in the cord at the back. Very few of them wear shirts and some men have brass ring around the wrist or arm. When the girls reach the age of nine or ten they are taught by their mothers how to wear goladudsa, the way in which women folk wear their clothes. Now-a-days, the women wear sarees and blouses. Men are putting on turban on their head whereas women are using brass bands around their head.



The necklaces of beads are very much liked and are purchased from the local markets. Armlets made of brass and aluminum is used. The ear-lobes are completely covered with rings.



SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The Gandia villages are more or less permanent in nature which lies in the midst of forest in patches of clearing. There is no proper road to enter into the village and most of the villages are approached by narrow footpaths. The village site with surrounding lands and forest belongs to the founder clan. Typical bamboo palisade fencing all around is a distinguishing feature of Gandia settlements. Very close to their settlements one notices stone pillars and wooden posts (menhirs) erected in memory of their dead ancestors.



Their settlement has a central place which is called 'End Bayul' or the dancing ground. This is also wide open space sometimes situated in front of the house of the village priest or headman. The village burial ground is always situated at a distance from the village to keep away the departed the souls, the ghosts and evil spirits away from village.

They have two important deities: Bijagudi, the house deity and Gudimata, the village deity. They worship goddess mother-earth as village deity. In each village there is one "House of God". This is not always situated inside the village. There are also places that are considered sacred such as a *Mahul trees* inside or near a village, where the villagers worship *Gudimata*, the village goddess. In the Gandia village, a dormitory house called 'Pikin-Kudma' is constructed for the unmarried young girls where they gather during the night for singing and gossiping. In all Gandia villages, a Chaudi (guest house) is built to accommodate their visiting guests. Among the trees that are found in their village *Mahul* and *Salap* are very common.



The House:

The number of houses in a village varies from ten to thirty or more but not exceeding 100 households. They have mud houses beautifully thatched by a type of jungle grass. Houses are rectangular in shape giving shelters to humans along with the livestock like pigs and fowls. Herds of cattle are put or tethered in front courtyard. Each house, its courtyard and adjoining kitchen garden are nicely fenced by bamboosplits.





The Gandia house is a self-contained unit. There are houses which have a length of 30 to 40 feet and a breadth of 6 to 15 feet. The houses are constructed on the basis of cooperative labour. A verandah is provided in front and in addition to that a narrow verandah runs around the remaining three sides of the house. The house is partitioned into two rooms. The smaller room is used as kitchen and the bigger one, as the living room. The roof of the house is thatched with a type of jungle grass. Each house has a pigsty and a goat pen and a kitchen garden behind the house in which they produce different seasonal vegetables for their household consumption and tobacco to smoke and sale the surplus in weekly hat for cash. The roof of every Gondia house is covered with vegetable creepers.

The newly married couples often make their own small living house. They use the wide open spaces in front of each house for tying their cattle. Long ropes to posts or the trunks of nearby trees are used to tether the animals.

SOCIAL LIFE



Gandia is an endogamous community which is socially divided into several exogamous clans. Marriage within the same clan is strictly tabooed as they consider the clan members as brothers and sisters descended from a common ancestor. Therefore community endogamy and clan exogamy is the traditional norm in their community.

Gandia family is exclusively nuclear composed of parents and their unmarried children. Joint families and extended families are also seen in rare cases including the grandparents, brothers and their wives and children. As soon as the sons become adult and get married they build their own houses near the parental house to live separately with their wives but the cooking for the whole family is done in one place. If any adult son wants to live separately, then he asks his father to give him some land to cultivate. This practice has become very common now-days.

Gandia family is predominantly monogamous but cases of polygyny are also seen where the first wife is found to be a barren or physically incapacitated. Some well-to-do husbands prefer polygyny to cultivate extra hand and get help in economic pursuits. Besides this, marrying more than one woman is a status symbol in their community.

The father is head of the family and all authority is vested in him. He directs other members to work and also works himself with them. He owns all the property of the family. He is succeeded by his eldest son. He is the man through whom descent is traced and therefore the Gandia family is patrilineal.



The mother trains the daughters and the father trains the sons to work as per the division of labour. All the members of a family work together in all kinds of economic activities along the lines of division of labour. When the father becomes old the eldest son takes up the responsibility of managing the family.



The Gandia villages comprise different clans, and therefore the people of a village do not have difficulty in finding out girls of different clans to marry. Kinship terms are both classificatory and descriptive. One classificatory term is Mama which is used for mother's brother, father's sister's husband and wife's father. And another classificatory term is Poya, which is used for mother's brother's wife and father's sister and mother-in-law. These two terms clearly shows that custom of cross-cousin marriage is prevalent.

In Gandia society joking relations prevail between grandfathers and grandchildren, younger brother and elder brother's wife, a man and his younger brother. Likewise avoidance relationship prevails between a woman and her husband's elder brother and a man and his wife's elder sister. Juniors respect the seniors and seniors deal with the juniors with love and affection.



LIFE-CYCLE

Child birth & associated Rituals

When a woman conceives, they accept it as a God's gift. A pregnant woman carries on her routine works until the expected month of delivery. When the symptoms of delivery appear, the woman is confined to a separate room to be used as a lying in chamber that is erected behind the house, where the presence of men is forbidden except the Wadde - the shaman. The Wadde does the necessary rituals to save the baby and mother from the evil spirits and facilitate smooth delivery.



They engage an experienced old lady of their own community as midwife to assist the pregnant woman for safe delivery. The old lady along with two or more ladies constitutes the team of nurses to facilitate the delivery. They cut umbilical cord of the newborn with the help of a heat treated arrowhead or a sharp piece of broken new earthen pot after tying the base of the cord and apply turmeric mixed oil on it for quick healings. The newborn and the mother are applied turmeric mixed oil twice and bathed with Luke warm water.



Name giving ceremony of the new born is a special ceremony of the Gandia and is performed after 2 to 3 months of child birth preferably when they have the means to afford to conduct the ritual. On the day of the ceremony, all the village ladies take bath and assemble in the house of the new born along with the team of elderly women present at the time of delivery. Maternal uncles and grandparents are invited to attend the function. On that day all invitees and functionaries assemble and apply little turmeric paste on the forehead of the child and place some coins on a plate. The lady who had cut the umbilical cord holds the child in her lap and starts singing song.

Until seven years of age the mother takes care of the child. Gandia boys learn, their traditional knowledge of making bows and arrows and other things early, even before they become adolescents. The boys and girls are expected to show proper behavior to others in their early childhood before they reach the stage of maturity.



Puberty

Attainment of first menarche of pubescent girls is known as erata. After a girl attains her physical maturity some of her relations go to an adjacent forest, select an isolated area and make two small huts under a tree. An old lady accompanies the girl and both of them stay in these two different huts where they sleep in the night. The old lady cooks for the girl. Then the villagers are informed about the stay of the girl in the particular forest area and for 7 days entry of males to that forest area is strictly prohibited. On the last day, she takes bath in nearby hill stream anointed with turmeric paste. The hut and the utensils used by the girl are burnt and the used water pot is broken over a road crossing. During these 7 days no ritual or festivals are observed in the village.

Unmarried Gandia girls after they reach the age of ten go to sleep with their grandmothers or with any other old woman of the village living alone. The boys above the age of ten also sleep in different places in groups or in a single group if accommodation is available.

Till the recent past, the youth dormitories of Gandia played a major role in keeping their culture and tradition afloat. The dormitories were the learning institution for unmarried youths. The Gandia girls and boys gather in the night for singing and dancing. But this age-old social institution has declined in these days.



Marriage

The age for marriage is fixed at the physical maturity of both the sexes. The Gandia think a boy attains maturity when he grows moustache. Usually these things happen when a boy is aged between twelve to thirteen. Hence the marriageable age for boys starts at thirteen or fourteen. A girl becomes marriageable when she attains puberty, irrespective of her age. Therefore, in many cases it is seen that the wife is older than her husband.

Gandia marriage season begins soon after the first harvest is over and continues till the month of April. Freedom in the selection of a spouse is very limited and it is only the parents who take the initiative in marriage negotiations. The commonly practiced form of marriage is known as Pendul. In selection of spouse, preference is given to the cross-cousin marriage like maternal uncle's daughter or father's sister's daughter. In their society it is considered as approved form of marriage.





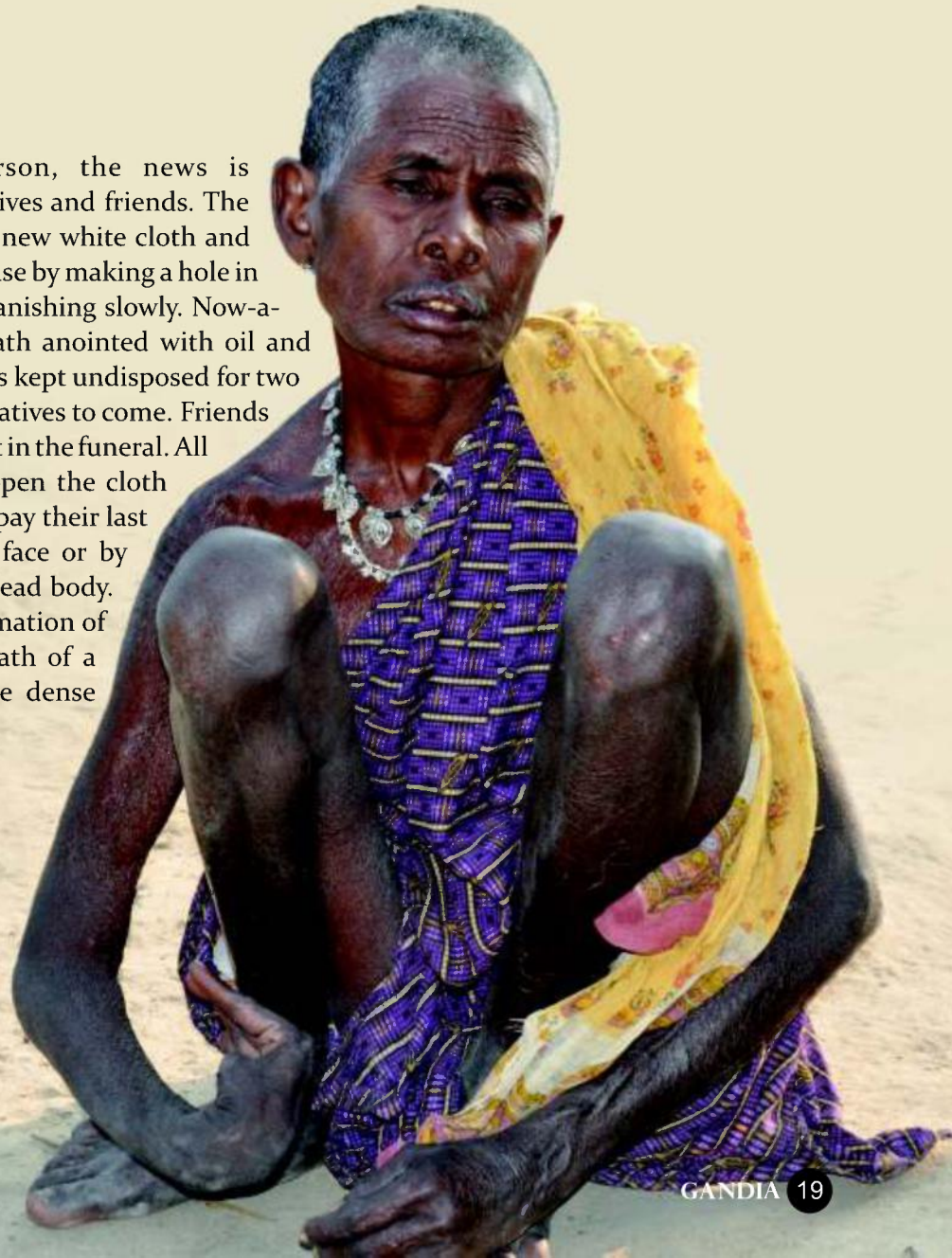
The proceedings of marriage ceremony continue for three days. It begins by the ceremonial fetching of the water from nearby water source by the elder brother's wife of the groom. She is accompanied by a group of women to do this. They sing songs while bringing water. On the second day the bringing of water by the elder brother's wife continues. The groom sits on the lap of his elder brother's wife and a paste of tamarind, turmeric and ghee is smeared on his body. Water is poured over him and he wears new clothes. Then he is made to visit all other families in that village belonging to his own clan.

A group of young boys are appointed by the groom's parents, to go to the village of the bride and bring her for wedding. The next day they escort the bride to the groom's house. She comes there accompanied by her friends and relatives. The marriage ritual is conducted in groom's patrilocal residence on that day. The Gandias also perform ceremonial dance, wearing bison horns on their heads during the marriage.



Death

After the death of a person, the news is communicated to all the relatives and friends. The dead body is wrapped with a new white cloth and usually removed out of the house by making a hole in the roof. But this practice is vanishing slowly. Now-a-days, the corpse is given a bath anointed with oil and turmeric paste. Sometimes it is kept undisposed for two days waiting for the distant relatives to come. Friends and dear ones come to take part in the funeral. All those who come, weep and open the cloth over the dead body's face and pay their last tribute by just touching the face or by putting a new cloth over the dead body. Logs of wood are used for cremation of the dead body. In case of death of a child, the body is laid inside dense forest or is buried.



After the cremation, a rite is conducted in which rice with turmeric is cooked and a small flag of cloth applied with turmeric is fixed with a bamboo stick. Salt, moong, paddy, til etc. are mixed and an idol is made on the floor. Over the head of it a pot with a hole is hanged. This is closed partially with grass. All the friends and relatives put milk and water in to the pot and it drips down to the mouth of the idol. Then all of them return home after taking bath. The same day after the completion of the last rites, friends and relatives leave the home of the deceased consoling the bereaved family.

On the ninth day, an idol of a deity is made with rice and flour. All the family members and relatives put water in the mouth of the deity so prepared. If the deceased have a nephew, he holds a cloth and all friends and relatives donate money according to their wish. Then the purificatory rite ends.



LIVELIHOOD

Traditionally, the Gandia were shifting cultivators. But now-a-days, for various reasons, they have taken to settled cultivation. At the start of the rainy season, they plough their fields and sow seeds. When the plants grow to a certain height they store water in the fields and take care of the crops until the harvest. But they get a very poor yield because their method of cultivation is archaic, adequate rainfall is uncertain and there is no assured irrigation facilities and depredations of wild animals.

Just before the harvest, the villagers go to watch their crops in the field against the depredations of wild animals and birds. The children are engaged in driving off birds. During the harvest all the families go to their respective huts raised in their crop fields, where they spend the whole day and come back to the village in the evening.



Traditionally being pastoralists, the Gandia have large herds of cows and bullocks. In the interior areas, they do not properly maintain their livestock. No shed is constructed for them and they are exposed to weather throughout the year. The forest nearby is used for grazing and no other provision is made to feed them. The Gandia use the wide open space in front of each house for keeping their cattle. Long ropes to posts or the trunks of the nearby trees are used to tether the cattle. According to their traditional system, wealth means cattle, because a Gandia without cattle has no status in the society. No marriage can take place without cattle, which are given to the bride's father as bride price. Secondly, they exchange of cattle for procuring their household needs but now-a-days, this barter system is less common and cattle are sold for money. Thirdly, cattle are used to plough fields and cows are no exception. Fourthly, cattle are slaughtered as offerings to the deities in funerals and other festivals.





Gandia were primarily hunters and gathers but in the later stages when their population increased and natural resources depleted they depended more on shifting cultivation and animal husbandry. Yet they still go for seasonal forest collections to supplement their livelihood. They collect edible fruits, roots, leaves and tubers from the nearby forest for domestic consumption. They also catch fish and crabs from the hill streams.

Food & Drinks

The food of Gandia is of wide variety. Paddy is husked and the rice from it is boiled to prepare gruel (jawa) which they mostly eat instead of cooked rice. Pulses like Biri, Peshi and Mung are also mixed with rice and gruel is made. Gruel is also made by boiling Suan, Maize and Mandia. The vegetables like pumpkin, gourd are eaten as curry. Kandul is fried with little Mahua oil and eaten. It is mostly eaten at the time of scarcity

The collection of fruits roots and tubers, from the forest substantially help the Gandia to solve their food problems. Mahua trees abound in the Gandia habitat and during the months of March and April large quantities of mahul are collected, dried and stored for future use as food. During the months from July to September several types of flowers, roots and tubers are collected from the jungle and eaten.



Kendu fruits are collected in large quantities when they are ripe and are stored after being dried in sun to be consumed during the lean period. The women folk collect a large variety of wild greens for eating. Fishes, crabs, snails, tortoise are eaten by preparing curry. They also store dry fish for future use. The meats of all kinds of animals and birds except tiger and bear are eaten without hesitation.

The Gandias, both males and females, are very much addicted to liquor. No marriage or religious ceremonies can be performed without liquor. The most commonly used alcoholic beverage is the Landa or rice beer. The mohuli liquor prepared from Mahul flower is also taken, but all the Gandia cannot afford to drink it. Sago-palm juice (Salap) and toddy-palm juice are also consumed by the Gandias as intoxicating drinks.

They are also habituated to smoking tobacco grown in their own kitchen garden in shape of handmade pika by rolling it in Kendu leaves and they also offer it to their guests to smoke when they visit their home.




MAGICO-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

The Gandia are animists and they profess their own tribal autonomous religion. They believe that, their world does not belong to the mortals alone but there invisible supernatural beings superior to man whose shadowy impact has a bearing in all the spheres of their mundane life. Deud, the Creator is their Supreme God and Bhumata or Adimata (i.e. Mother Earth) is their Supreme Goddesses. The most important God in the Gandia pantheon is the Rain God called Bimud. Then there territorial Gods like Sun (Pardu), Moon (Nela), lightening (Gurugata), thunder (Merchit) etc.

Their original belief system centers around two cults namely the cult of Earth Goddess and the cult of village Goddess called Gamma. The seat of Gamma lies under a Mohul or Tamarind tree inside the village. There are many deities of nature residing in hills, forests and streams like: Lely - the forest Goddess; Kad - the water deity etc. They also have the cult of ancestor worship at the family level. Ancestral spirits are called Gandi.

They observe various festivals in different seasons. Bija Pandu is a agricultural festival which is held in the month of June (Jyesta-Asadha). Itt Pandu, the tamarind festival is observed during February to March to commence collection of ripe tamarind which is an important food item for the Gandia. Karta Pandu, the new rice eating ceremony is held during September-October. Sikud Pandu or the new bean eating festival is observed in the month of February. Marak Pandu festival is observed in the month of June-July for the new mango eating.



In Gandia society, both magic and religion are complementary to each other. The Gandias worship their Gods to appease them and get their blessings. They believe that there are some supernatural powers among whom some are benevolent and others are malevolent in nature and when aggrieved they can cause ill health and death to human beings and domesticated animals. So to gratify those evil spirits as and when so required they solicit the help of their traditional witch doctor-cum-religious practitioner wadde to perform magical rites to cure diseases, effect smooth delivery of a child and ward off the calamities and epidemic.



Music & Dance:

The Gandias are good musicians, dancers as well as good singers. They observe several festivals throughout the year. Music and dance form most important part of observance of these festivals. During the festival of Bija Pandu, male members of the community go for ceremonial hunting in the forest while women engage themselves in dance and music in the village. On other occasions both men and women participate in the sessions of dance music.

The Gandia dances are composed of different types of steppings. At first the dancers stand in a circle keeping the right leg forward and begin their dance. The men and women stand face to face and move forward in slanting direction with simple steps while the male drummers dance in a circular form. The rhythm of the beating of drums matches perfectly with the graceful movements of the dancers. The aesthetic value of the songs of the Gandia can be observed from the songs which they sing on ceremonial as well as other social occasions.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Gandias have their own traditional community council both at village level as well as in regional level to deal with their customary affairs. These bodies function under the leaderships of a set of traditional leaders viz, the secular headman (Pedda), sacerdotal headman (Pujari) and magico-religious headman the (Wadde). They are assisted by a functionary called Kotwal.

The traditional community council acts as the guardian of their traditional norms and customs and the office bearers are regarded as highly esteemed persons in their society. The council is empowered to adjudicate cases pertaining to family disputes, theft, rape, molestation, adultery, incest, divorce, partition of family property and intra community rifts and to organize and look after their communal feasts and festivals. The council's decision is final and it is empowered to ostracize a person for committing serious offences.



Leadership, both political and social, revolves around the secular headman of each village. Till the recent past, he had certain economic prerogatives which made him virtually a powerful person in his village. Even in religious matters he is the first man to take the initiative to ask the priest and the villagers to perform religious ceremonies on various occasions. Usually the office of the headman is hereditary and after his death his eldest son succeeds him. If the headman has no son to succeed him, preference is given to his brother's son. In the absence of any such kin, the priest of the village is selected as the headman who works as such in addition to his religious duties and responsibilities.

Next to the secular headman comes the village priest called Pujari in the authority structure of Gandia village. His office is also hereditary. If the priest dies without leaving a heir, a son of his brother may assume the post. Then the magician (Wadde) occupies an important position in the Gandia society because like the priest, he has the power to communicate with supernatural beings. The Katwal helps the headman in his works.



DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO

In these rapidly changing times the Gandia till now has maintained their cultural identity to a considerable extent. The Gandia's social organization, economic life, political structure and religious beliefs and practices are so varied, unique and focused on each and every aspect of their life and works that external forces of change have penetrated in to their socio-cultural life to a limited extent.

After independence, various development programmes have been implemented for them in various sectors like, education, health care, drinking water, sanitation, communication, land development, agriculture, horticulture, irrigation and animal husbandry. Some of their lands especially, those lying in the hill slopes have been brought under economic plantations.



Basing on their development perception, it is apt to point out that they have very simple and limited aspirations with the primary focus on their livelihood pattern. Now some positive changes are noticed in their way of life.



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**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar : 751003

Website : scstrti.in, Email-scstrti@yahoo.co.in,

Telephone : 0674-2563649/251635

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