



# THE SAORA

*Popular Series on Tribes-4*

# **THE SAORA**

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TRIBAL AND HARIJAN RESEARCH-CUM-TRAINING  
INSTITUTE, H. & T. W. DEPARTMENT  
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## ***Foreword***

The objective behind the publication of a popular series of booklets on the various tribal communities is to make known their particular socio-economic characteristics and cultural profiles to the general public. These booklets are meant for those who are not very well informed about the Scheduled Tribes but are keen on knowing about such communities. Keeping such a target group in view, it was felt that the ethnographic and developmental accounts of these tribes should be presented in such a manner as would create and sustain interest in the readers without being too scholastic or technical.

Demographically, some tribal communities are very large and some, very small. In the matter of development also, there are large variations-some of them are quite progressive while a few small communities are still at a primitive stage. These booklets would cover both the numerically large groups as well as the small communities which are presently recognised as primitive tribes.

The Tribal & Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute (THRTI) of the Government of Orissa in the Department of Harijan & Tribal Welfare has prepared these booklets. The booklets being published now on the Bondo, the Juang, the Saora and the Kondh tribes are the beginning of a series of such publications on various tribal communities of Orissa.

Bhubaneswar  
23rd Dec., 1988

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## ***Preface***

During the past few years, particularly ever since the approach of Tribal Sub-Plan was put into action, the tribal development has been a matter of great concern to us. The matters concerning the tribal life and culture, their welfare and future are much more talked over now than ever before. The layman who is otherwise intelligent and receptive hears or comes across news and views about tribal communities now-a-days almost every day and therefore he is inquisitive to know more about them.

Among those who have little contact with tribal communities and are not sufficiently acquainted with literatures on tribal life and culture, it is the general belief that the tribals are a single entity in respect of their language and culture; religion and society; occupation and mode of life. In fact, as is well known, it is not so. The tribes of India possess a variety of culture. Every tribal group has a specific pattern of culture, artistic tradition and habits and customs.

The people of a particular tribal group follow such occupations which their geographic surroundings and cultural background and their degree of progress give them the utmost satisfaction and greatest chance of survival. Thus different tribal groups have their own special ways both of working and living and hundred and one such factors distinguish them in many different ways from one another.

The most important implications of this cultural relativism is that different tribal communities follow different

way of living as dictated by their cultural background and geographical conditions and the conclusion which flows from this premise is that the strategies and the plans need to be community-specific as well as location-specific so that the target group can make full use of the developmental programmes with greatest ability and efficiency.

At this point what Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said comes to our mind. In one of his speeches regarding tribal development he said "you may talk here day after day about development programmes in regard to schools and other matters, but you will fail completely if you do not touch the core of the problem. The problem is to understand the tribal people, their culture and ways of living and make them understand us and create a bond of affection and understanding between us."

The best way of achieving a better understanding of the tribal communities is to live with them and work with them. It may not be possible for all people. In that case the other way is to study standard literatures about tribal life and culture. But such reference materials on many of major and minor tribal communities are lacking. Some years back, Government of India in the Ministry of Home Affairs has decided in a meeting of the Directors of Tribal Research Institutes that separate tribe-wise popular write-ups should be prepared for those who are not too well-informed about the Scheduled Tribes of the country, but are otherwise interested and inquisitive to have information about them. The Ministry has entrusted the Tribal Research Institutes wherever they exist in the country with the task of preparing popular monographs on both advanced and primitive and large and small tribal groups. The publications of popular series on the Bondo, the Juang, the Kondh and

the Saora which are brought out by the Tribal & Harijan Research-cum-Training Institute are in response to this task.

The ethnographic materials which have gone into these popular write-ups were collected both from the tribal people by the senior research staff of the Institute during their field work and also from many secondary sources. On the whole, all these for publications are the product of joint efforts of a team of officers and staff of the Institute.

Dr. Ch. P. K. Mohapatra and Shri B. Choudhury, Deputy Directors have respectively revised and re-written the first drafts which were prepared by Shri P. S. Das Patnaik, Research Officer on the Kondh and the Bondo. Smt. Kiran Bala Debi Deputy Director and Shri B. B. Mohanty, Research Officer have prepared the popular series on the Juang and the Saora respectively. These write-ups were finally edited by the Director of the Institute. The photographs which are included in the publications were prepared by Shri S. K. Roy, Photographer of the Institute. One word more, Shri B. B. Mohanty Research Officer has done the laborious task of proof reading and Shri Karunakar Mishra, Superintendent, was at it at every stage and saw through the release of these works in time.

T. H. R. T. I.  
January, 1989

N. Patnaik  
DIRECTOR

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## ETHNO HISTORY

The Saoras are one of the oldest known tribes of India. They are called by various names such as Savara, Sabara, Saur, Sora, etc. and show their racial affinity to the Proto-Australoid group. Their language which is called *Sora* belongs to south Munda branch of Austric language family. G. V. Ramamurti, an authority on *Sora* language says "it varies considerably not only between villages but also between individuals". In fact the language spoken by the Saoras in Gumma area varies from the language in Rayagada and Pottasingi areas. There are no doubt poetic themes in the language. Verrier Elwin says, "The Saoras who give the impression of being rather matter of fact and prosaic are surprisingly picturesque and metaphorical in their speech."

The term Saora appears to have two connotations- one derived from *Sagories*, the Scythian word for axe and the other from *Saba Roye*, the Sanskrit term for carrying a dead body. Both of them fit well with their habit of carrying an axe always on their shoulders with their primitive occupation of hunting and living on spoils of chase.

Being an ancient community of India, the Saoras find mention of their tribe in Sanskrit literature, the epics, the puranas and other religious texts. For example, there is a reference in Mahabharata to Jara Savara who mistook Lord Krishna for a deer and killed him with an arrow. A verse in Amarkosh written in 7th century A. D. records that like Nishada, Shwapacha, Kirata, Pulinda and other primitive people, Saoras were Antebasi, that is, the inhabitants of the peripheral regions who lived by hunting and food gathering.

The epics and puranas refer to their devotion to the Hindu religious heroes like Rama and the Jagannath cult. The legend of Viswabasu, a Saora king who worshipped the image of Vishnu in the form of Lord Jagannath, indicates the impact of Vaishnavism on the Saoras. The history also bears witness to the supremacy of the Saoras in some regions. Many legends relate to the aristocratic representatives of some Saora families. It is said that Dhenka Saora founded the erstwhile feudatory state of Dhenkanal and the legend relating to the origin of the Borasambar estate in Sambalpur states that the progenitor of this zamindari family was a cross-breed between the four heroic youths of Rajput origin and a Lohara Saora girl.

A close observation of the village life in rural Orissa reveals absorption of certain Saora cultural traits in Hindu social system. Gramdevi(village goddess) worshipped in each

village in Orissa is a non-Aryan element and exists as a survival of the Saora tradition of Thakurani worship. There is also Saora cultural influence in the magical lore which is popular in rural Orissa. In the incantations, conjurers repeat two names-the Nitai's mother (a washer woman) and the Kitai's mother (a primitive Saora woman) to rid the patient of the evil eye. It is the popular belief among the villagers that the Saoras are the best charmers and sorcerers and their medicines and incantations are effective curatives of all kinds of illness. In the village drama, the dance of Patar Saora (Saoras who wear leaves) is one of the most important items of entertainment.

It is well known that, like other tribal communities, the Saoras are the indigenous inhabitants of India in the sense that they had been long settled in different parts of the country particularly in the plains and river valleys and other fertile areas. Many of the Saoras were in a food gathering economy and a few were perhaps on the threshold of a real food producing economy. On the whole, they were in all respects primitive, wild and under developed.

With the Indo-Aryan speaking people coming to India, they had several encounters with the Saoras and other tribal communities, overpowered them by means of their superior social organization and technology and succeeded in pushing them out of the plains and the fertile belts of the land. The tribals could not resist the Indo-Aryans and in the process had to move bit by bit to farther and farther areas until they come to find their refuge in relatively more inaccessible regions of forests and hills. In the records, the frontier regions are called Pratyanta Desh and those who live in these regions are known as Antebasis. Most of the Saoras in question are Antebasis living in Pratyanta Desh of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.

The Saoras are one of the major tribes of Orissa. Their districtwise population according to 1981 Census is given below. They are found in all the 13 districts of the State. However they are in great compactness in Ganjam and Koraput districts.

Sl. No.	Name of the district	Population		Total
		Male	Female	
1.	Sambalpur	53105	54592	107697
2.	Sundargarh	683	705	1388
3.	Keonjhar	3989	3940	7929
4.	Mayurbhanj	1440	1463	2903
5.	Balasore	818	804	1622
6.	Cuttack	11029	10990	22019
7.	Dhenkanal	10112	10186	20298
8.	Boudh-Kandhamal	1664	1698	3362
9.	Bolangir	22929	23657	46586
10.	Kalahandi	2876	2820	5696
11.	Koraput	22584	23356	45940
12.	Ganjam	33632	35569	69201
13.	Puri	17483	17936	35419
Total		182344	187716	370060

The Saoras are educationally very backward. According to the 1981 census the level of literacy among them was 14.47 per cent as compared with 34.23 per cent for the entire population of the State.



A Saora youth



## HABITAT

The areas where the Saoras are found in great compactness are the Parlakhemundi sub-division of Ganjam district and the Gunupur sub-division of Koraput district. The primitive section of the tribe which is known as Lanjia Saora is found in these contiguous areas. The Saoras of other districts are very much influenced by the caste Hindus among whom they live and have become hinduized in their way of life. This book gives an account of the Lanjia Saoras who are mentioned in this popular series simply as Saoras.

- The Saora habitat is full of mountain ranges flanked by fertile valleys and plains which are dotted with Saora villages. The eastern ghats which traverse in north-south

direction keeps the compact Saora belt on its western side and the coastal plains in the eastern side of Ganjam district. The hill tracts on the western side of the Great Line of the eastern ghats was known as Maliah (hill country) and formed part of the Agency administration in the earlier dispensation.

The Gunupur sub-division of Koraput district which lies to the west of Parlakhemundi sub-division forms part of the same eastern ghats and its eastern side which is contiguous with the Maliah of Ganjam district is hilly and rugged while its western part is characterized by fertile plain lands. It is in this hilly sections of Gunupur sub-division that the Lanjia Saoras live. Thus the Maliah of Ganjam district and the hilly tract of Gunupur sub-division form a compact habitat of the Lanjia Saoras in the State.

In particular villages around Gumma of Paralakhemundi sub-division and around Pottasingi of Gunupur sub-division are inhabited by Lanjia Saoras. In these areas the hills rise from two to three thousand feet and valleys radiate out in all directions. In Pottasingi a wide valley stretches towards Sagada in the east and touches the hills around Tarabaul. These valleys extend towards south to Gunduruba through Rajingtal and Pattili to the market centre at Jaltar. In the valleys lie the terraced paddy fields and in the hill-slopes patches of swiddens or plots under shifting cultivation.

Similarly the tract stretching from Parlakhemundi town to Gumma and beyond upto Serango and the country lying within a radius of 20 kms. from both these central places has many Saora villages which are located in fertile valleys surrounded by lofty hills like Mahendragiri. The landmark of the Saora habitat is the vast stretches of terraced fields with stone packed contour bunding which run

from foot hills to hilltops. The ingenuity and perseverance shown by the Saoras in this work is unique and unparalleled in the country.

Both the Ganjam maliah and Pottasing hills are chiefly composed of rocks of ancient age. These rocks have completely been altered and crystallised by metamorphosis that all traces of their original nature are lost. These metamorphosed sediments have been intruded by granites and green stones, charnockites and dolerites. These series of rocks belong to the great Trachean system of the Indian peninsula.

Gunupur has a hot and humid climate. But its hill section is cooler due to elevation. The year may be divided into three seasons, the hot season from March to June, the monsoon season from July to October and the cold season from November to February.

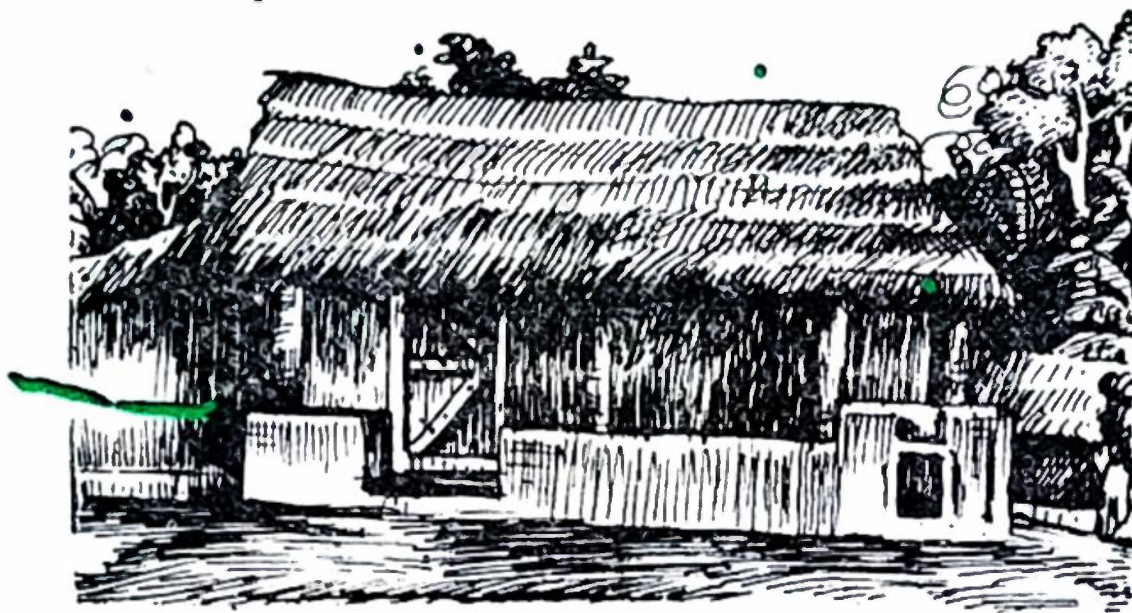
The average annual rainfall over the district as a whole is 15.22 mm (59.92") whereas it is 67.05" over the ghats. The spatial distribution of rain fall is largely influenced by the eastern ghats. The areas to the eastern side of the ghats get less rain than those on the ghats and to their west the latter being on the windward side during the monsoon season. During other seasons there is no such difference in the rainfall over the areas.

The Saora habitat is covered with thick vegetation. Sal forest is dominant in the valleys and hill ranges. The commonest trees available in this area are Sal, *Asana Dharua*, *Mohuwa*, *Chakunda*, and *Nimbu*. Among the underwood species *Bhuin khajuri*, *Dahiphula*, *Odasamari* are important. Bamboos are also found here and there. The creepers include *Sialilata* and *Atundi*. The common grasses found in the forests are groom grass, *Sabai* and *Bagali*.



The wild animals found in the Saora territory are tiger, leopard, common jungle cat and wolf. The hyaena and jackal are everywhere common. The black sloth bear is responsible for many casualties. Elephants make their appearance in the vicinity of Chandrapur area of Bissam-cuttack tahsil. Spotted deer, *samber* and barking deer are common in the area. Common langor and bandor and bonnet monkey represent the primates in good number.

On the whole, the Saora habitat is a lovely country with rolling mountains, undulating meadows, roaring rapids and enchanting water falls, terraced fields, varied flora and fauna. Likewise the Saoras with their colorful costumes and adornments, enchanting music accompanied by dancing in which both men and women participate and which speak of their spontaneous display of joyous life, provide an example of a tribe living in comparative freedom and in close relationship with nature.



## LIVELIHOOD

In consideration of their technology and methods of getting food the Saoras have been identified as one of the primitive tribal groups of Orissa. Their economic life hinges mostly on slash and burn type of cultivation, and terraced cultivation with occasional hunting and food gathering pursuits.

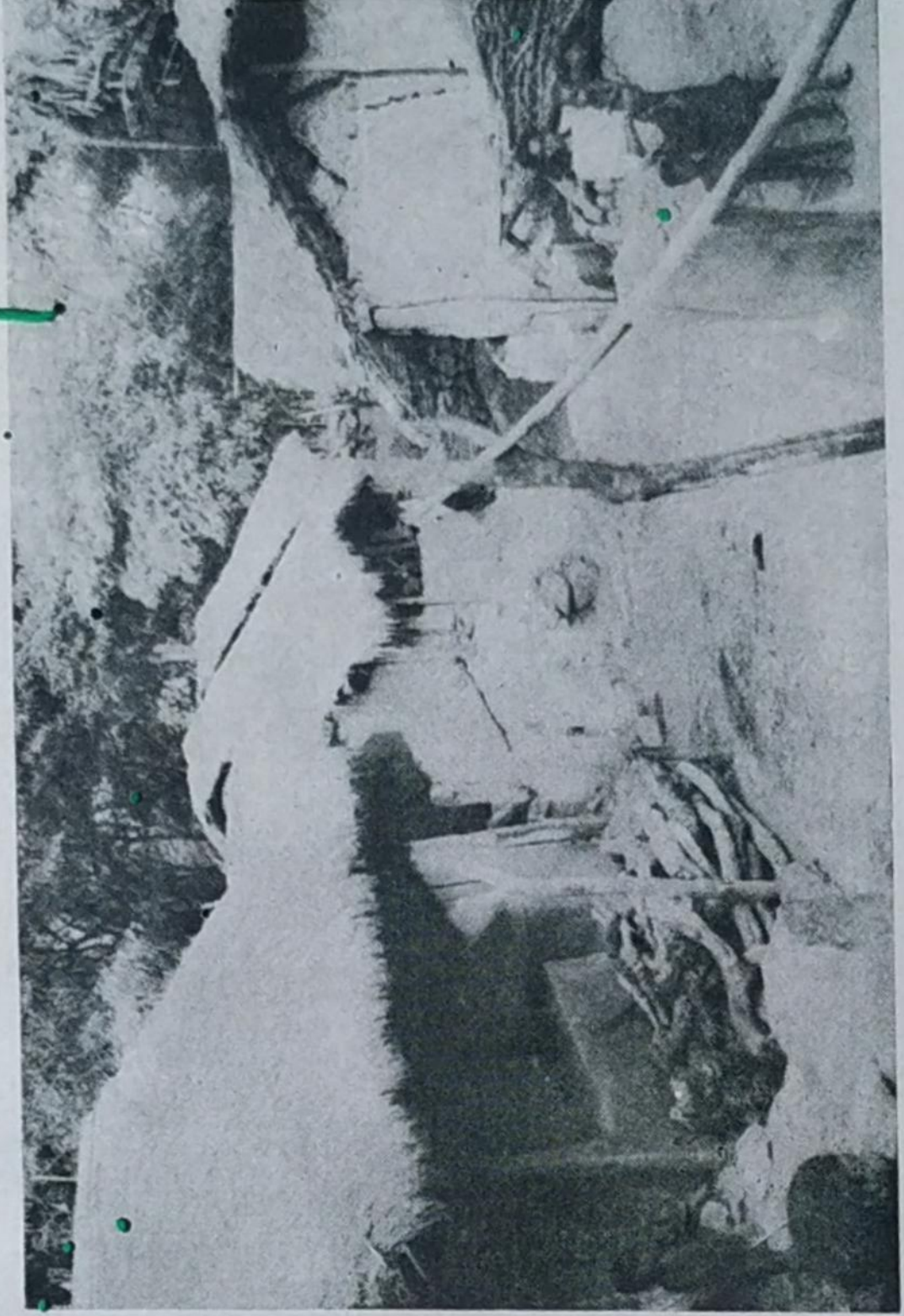
The Saora villages are situated in the most inaccessible areas and in many cases lie hidden in forest clad hills making it difficult to reach them except through zig-zag hill paths. They build their houses on the slope or foot of the hills. They generally live in small villages, the average size varying from a few households to around 200 households. In case of big villages, they live in several hamlets. Whether small or big, the Saora villages are long established in their present sites. Unlike their podu cultivation

which is shifting there is nothing of nomadic nature in their settlement pattern. The terraced fields exhibiting their skill in contour bunding, revetment and water management are located close to the settlements. At the time of founding a new settlement they select high lands and hill slopes which are free from water logging and close to natural water sources like hill streams. Some Saoras build field huts in the swiddens and spend time watching the crops grown there.

By the side of the path leading a Saora village at some distance from it two deities one male and one female which go by the name of *Gusadasum* or *Kitungsum* represented by two carved wooden pillars are installed to protect the village from epidemics and machinations of evil spirits. At the entrance of the village another deity which is called *Tangarsum* is installed on an earthen platform in the form of a wooden pole under a thatched shed. His duty is also to check the onslaught of evil spirits on the village.

The Saora villages do not conform to any particular type of settlement pattern. Houses are often built in rows leaving a street in between. In some villages there are several rows of houses with streets crossing each other at right angles. Sometimes the houses facing the same direction are arranged in rows on terraces. In many cases the houses conform to a shapeless cluster.

The Saora houses are single roomed and rectangular in shape and are fairly high. Though the plinth is sufficiently raised from the ground the roof is proportionately kept low. There may be a single door or in some houses there is a back door just in line with the front door. There is a high front varendah. The walls of the houses are made of stone pieces set in mud. In some



A Saora village

areas walls are made of bamboo lattice work or wooden planks plastered with mud. The walls look reddish because red earth which is locally available is used for plastering. Inside the house lies a big loft sidewise resting on wooden beams set on the sidewalls. This loft covering about three-fourth of the house is used for storing most of the household articles, food grains and clothes. The remaining portion of the house is used as a living room where the family members sleep, live and entertain guest. On the floor in this portion a mortar is fixed and with the help of a pestle grains are husked. The hearth is located under this loft at one end adjoining to the side wall. The household utensils are kept near the hearth. In Winter and Rainy season all the family members sleep under the loft. In Summer some may sleep on the varendah. From the roof hang a number of objects like baskets, gourd vessels, clothes and umbrella. Things like spears, bows and arrows are fixed in the roof. Agricultural implements are kept in one corner of the house. The sacred pots, gourds and baskets containing sacred objects like special cloths of the ancestors and tutelaries are hung against the wall which are painted with ikons. The fowls are usually kept in a corner of the living room. Some times a fowl pen and a pigsty are provided in convenient place in the front varendah. On the side of the house a cowshed is constructed.

The well-to-do Saoras build bigger houses with spacious varendah and fitted with carved doors. A Saora having more than one wife has to construct separate houses for them. At the time of constructing a new house rice and wine are ceremonially offered to the earth goddess and a pit is dug in which the first pillar is fixed.

Generally the Saoras use earthenware vessels for cooking and for storing water. But these are being replaced

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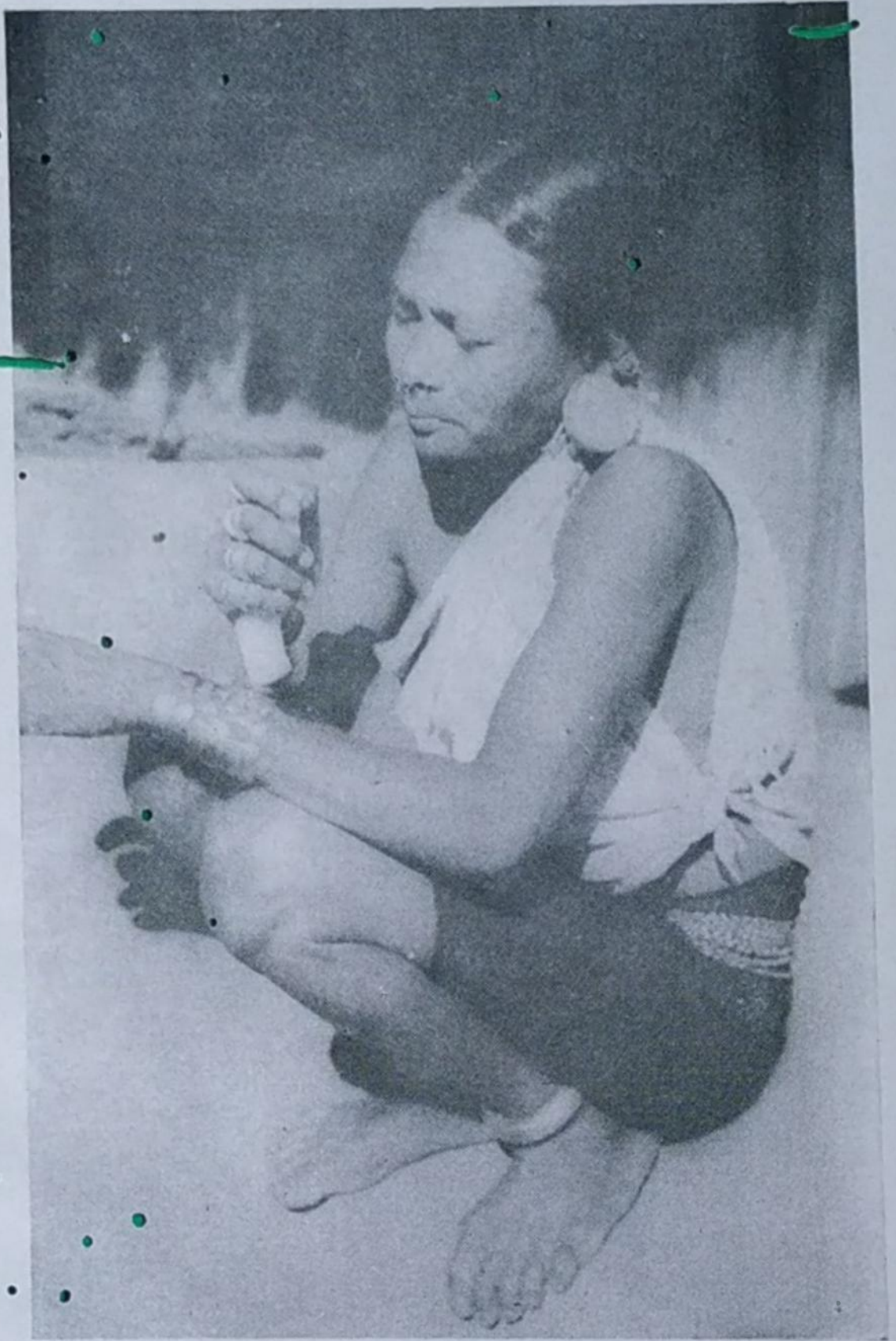
Generally the Saoras use earthenware vessels for cooking and for storing water. But these are being replaced

by brass and aluminium vessels in many families particularly in well-to-do families. The Saoras sleep on mats made of palm leaves. Baskets made of bamboo splits are used for storing food grains and carrying things to markets.

The traditional dress of a Saora woman is a waist cloth with gray borders which hardly reaches the knees. The skirt is about three feet in length and about two feet in breadth. In chilly weather they cover the upper part of the body with another piece of cloth. The dress of a male consists of loin-cloth about six feet long and ten inches in breadth. This may be plain or may be decorated with red tassels at the ends. This is tied around the waist passing between the thighs to cover the private parts. The ends hang in the front and at the back, the latter being longer for which they are called *Lamba Lanjia*. These clothes are woven by the Dombs from the yarn hand-spun by the Saoras themselves. At present in some places they have taken to mill-made clothes and readymade dresses. The converted and accultured Saora women cover the upper parts of their body with a blouse or a saree. The males put on shirts and shorts when they visit market or relatives in other villages.

The ornaments which the Saora women wear include a few necklaces of beads, round wooden plugs, spiral rings of metal used in the ear-lobes, hair pins of bellmetal, rings made of brass, bell-metal or aluminium used in the fingers and toes, little rings in the alae of nose, metal bangles and metal anklets. Most of these ornaments are purchased from local market.

The Saora musical instruments consist of drums of different types namely the hemispherical *Dollun*, the



A woman with traditional costume





A woman with traditional costume

*Tuduman* ( a simple tom-tom ), Kettle drum called *Dagadan* and *Kadingen* ( hide-gong ) and brass horns, brass gongs, brass cymbals and stridulators. A bundle of reeds is used to produce typical sound by beating with a clattering din. They have also string instruments, namely *Gogerajan* and *Memerajan* and *Kuranrajan* played at leisure time to the accompaniment of songs and sometimes during religious ceremonies. While dancing males put on turban decked with feathers and tie coloured cloths around the chest passing over the shoulders.

In hunting they use guns which are locally manufactured, bows and arrows, and axes and knives. They have bullock driven ploughs, leveller and spade used in wet cultivation and digging stick and hoe used in shifting cultivation.

The economic life of the Saoras resolve round both shifting and settled cultivation. The 1981 census revealed that among the Saoras as a whole the workers comprised 41.2 per cent and among the working population the cultivators comprised 41.2 per cent, agricultural labourer 49.5 per cent. The remaining 9.3 per cent were engaged in livestock rearing, forestry, fishing and hunting.

The Saoras carry on cultivation in four types of land. These are homestead land around their houses, undulated dry land along the foot of the hills, terraced land and the swiddens in the hill slopes and hill tops. The techniques of cultivation and the types of crops grown in different types of land show variation.

- In the little garden around the residential houses they grow maize, tobacco, chilly and vegetables like pumpkin, gourd, bean, brinjal, etc, during rainy season.
- Papaya, banana, lemon and orange plants are also grown

in the kitchen garden. Coconut plants which are also found in the area are recently introduced. In and around the village settlements jack-fruit, mango, tamarind, mohua, date-palm and sago-palm trees which are individually owned are seen.

✓ The Saoras denote the months not by lunar phases and climatic conditions as are usually done but by the types of agricultural operations. For example, the month in which hoeing of the swiddens is done, that is May, is called *Lalagae* (*Lala* meaning hoe and *Gae* meaning month). The terms used for different months are given in the following list,

Saora month	English equivalent	Explanations of terms	Agricultural operations after which the month denoted
1. Galan-bur Gae	January	Galan (Kandula) Bur (Harvesting) Gae (Month)	Harvesting of red gram and <i>Jana</i> .
2. Niva Gae	February	Niva (Fire wood)	Carrying fire wood home from swiddens.
3. Ariamdur Gae	March	Ariamdur (Firing)	Forest clearing and firing combustible.
4. Gusang Gae	April	Gusang (Dibbling)	Dibbling of red gram.
5. Lala Gae	May	Lala (Hoeing)	Hoeing swiddens.
6. Pujing Gae	June	Pujing (Weeding.)	Weeding in swiddens.

- |                |           |  |                             |
|----------------|-----------|--|-----------------------------|
| 7. Gusai Gae   | July      | Gusai (Transplanting)                        | Transplantation of Ragi.    |
| 8. Gusar Gae   | August    | Gusar (Transplanting paddy)                  | Transplantation of paddy.   |
| 9. Tisar Gae   | September | Tisar (Weeding)                              | Weeding in terraced field.  |
| 10. Gapal Gae  | October   | Gapal (Weeding)                              | Weeding and watching crops. |
| 11. Gajing Gae | November  | Gajing (Cutting grasses and forest clearing) | Forest clearing.            |
| 12. Timbir Gae | December  | Timbir (Forest clearing)                     | Forest clearing.            |

In addition to wet or terraced cultivation the Saoras practise shifting cultivation quite extensively. The shifting cultivation is known by the term *Bagada Chasa* among the Saoras and each and every family has a few patches of swiddens either in the hill slopes or at the hill tops yielding mainly minor millets and pulses.

Every Saora village has a well defined boundary and its inhabitants carry on shifting cultivation in the hills located within the village boundary. Some hills are close to the village and others at a distance. Traditionally the hills were distributed on the basis of *Birinda* or extended families. Members of a particular *Birinda* used to have swiddens exclusively in a hill and no outsider was allowed to share the hill for shifting cultivation. An individual who has been cultivating a particular plot continues to own it as long as he is capable of cultivating it. Thus individual ownership of swiddens on hereditary basis is in vogue

among the Saoras. With the increase in population and outmigration there has been some change noticed in the distribution of swiddens in a particular hill. Today cases of outsiders cultivating hills belonging to a *Birinda* other than their own are not unknown.

Shifting cultivation starts with the work of forest clearing which begins in November and continues till the end of December. In this work women cut down the undergrowths and low thickets with the help of sickles and men cut down the trees and creepers by axes. After the trees are felled the women chop them into small pieces and pile them with combustible matter in several heaps in the swiddens. The Saoras do not cut the trees flush with the ground. Their practice is to cut the trees high above the ground. It is done so because the coppice growth from the stools give them tender leaves which they eat by mixing with ragi or rice gruel, their staple food. During forest clearing they spare the trees called *Barada*, *Aranadh* and *Karki* which also provide edible leaves. They also cause no damage to the creeper plants called *Samatila* which also gives them edible leaves.

The felled trees and creepers are left for three months to dry and in the month of March they are set on fire. Firing is done by men. No sacred fire is used for this purpose. Either a match stick or a lighted branch of twig serves the purpose.

The Saoras start sowing in the month of April by dibbling *kandula* (cajanus cajan-red gram) in the holes made in rows by means of a dibble. After the red grams have sprouted a mixture of seeds such as *Kagnu* (*Barai*-minor millet), *Jana* (*Kambur*-sorghum vulgare), *Ganga* (*Ganga*-minor millet), *Ghantia* (*Kurei*-minor millet), *Jhudunga* (*Kandran* - a kind of bean) and *Burubudi* (*Soraimai*-

a kind of bean) is sown and the swidden is hoed to cover the seeds under and to get the ashes mixed up with the soil. The hoeing is done by means of a hoe by both men and women. Hoe is a forked piece of wood tipped with a pointed iron. Weeding begins in June and is done by women with the help of knife (*Kadati*) made of iron. From the month of August to January both men and women guard the crops grown in the swiddens against the inroads of wild animals such as wild bear, Percupine and jungle fowl. For this purpose they erect temporary field huts in some convenient position on the swiddens and spend most of their time in these places watching the crops and scaring away the animals and birds by the beat of drums. At night one can see the hill-side dotted with fires and hear the sweet music of the flutes and the thrum of the drums.

One after another crops become ready for harvesting. In August crops like *Kangu*, small *Ganga* are ready for harvesting. The Saoras harvest *Kangu* by removing the ears of the crop with a knife and carry them home where they thresh them with their feet. But they cut the *Ganga* plants from above the ground and thresh them with the help of bullocks.

In November crops like *Ganga*, *Ghantia*, *Burubudi* and *Jhudanga* are ready for harvesting. They remove the ears of *Ghantia* with the help of a knife and thresh them by beating the ears with a stick. *Burubudi* and *Jhudunga* are plucked by hand and then dried to take out the seeds by beating them with a stick. *Jana* and *Kandula* pants serve as stalks for the creeper plants of *Burubudi* and *Jhudunga*. *Jana* is harvested in the month of December. The Saoras dry them in the threshing floor and thresh them by beating with a stick. In January *kandula* is harvested by pulling the pods off the shrubs into baskets and threshed with sticks.

One of the important cash crops of the Saoras is turmeric and ginger which is grown in swiddens. It takes two years to be harvested and does not interfere with the growth of other crops. It grows well in the soil which is sufficiently loosened by hoeing. A swidden is cultivated for two or three years after which it is left fallow for a period of 6 to 8 years. The Saoras do not grow all kind of crops in all these years. For example, they choose to grow *burubudi* and *Jhudunga* in preference to *ghantia* in the first year. Similarly they do not grow all crops in equal quantity in all the years. For instance *Jana* and *Kandula* are not grown in the same extent. It is the experience of the Saoras that both of them hinder each other's growth. That is why one is grown more extensively than the other in a year and the extent of cultivation of these crops is reversed next year.

The Saoras follow different methods for storing different types of seeds. They store the seeds of *burubudi* and *jhudunga* in a new earthen vessel, whose mouth is tied with a piece of cloth tightly so that no insect does any harm to the seeds. But they store the seeds of *kangu*, *ganga*, *jana* and *Kandula* in bamboo baskets which are sealed with straw plastered with mud.

Several ceremonies are performed in connection with shifting cultivation. A ceremony is performed on the day of sowing. Before the seeds are mixed and sown broadcast the village priests known as *buyya* and *kudan* worship the hill-gods by offering them liquor and by sacrificing fowl and goat. They worship the goddess Laxmi by offering liquor and by sacrificing fowl. A small ritual which involves the offering of either a fowl or a goat to the hill-god called *Barusim* is observed towards the end of August after the *kangu* is harvested. The next ceremony follows before the *Jana* is threshed and *kandula* is

harvested. On this occasion fowls are offered to the hill-gods. The Saoras believe that if these ceremonies are performed they will get good crop from the swiddens.

Saoras of Parlakhemundi sub-division in particular, are the best terraced cultivators. The terraced fields in which water flows throughout the year are locally called as *Sarroba* and are exclusively meant for paddy cultivation. The upper terraces which are dry are locally called as *Jyanum* and used for cultivating Ragi (elusine corocana) *Biri* (*Phaseolus mungo*) and Kulthi (*dolichos biflorus*).

The terraces are built right up to the beds of the hill-streams and extend many hundreds of feet from the depth of the valleys to the hill slopes and in some places rising upto the hill tops. The terraces are works of great engineering skill. The platform of each terrace is flat throughout and the fall of each terrace is stone packed. The construction of the terraces is so ingeniously and skillfully done that no soil is carried down with the water that flows from the higher terraces to the lower.

The water management is equally skillful. The flow of water from one terrace to the other is controlled by channels and water ways which are provided in the ridges of the terraces. There is another way of facilitating flow of water from higher terraces to the lower ones. Two or three pits are dug at the lower side of the upper terrace and these pits are packed with boulders. The water flows into these pits and from there through the boulders trickles to the terraces down below. The water management is so skillful that it avoids flooding of the terraced fields. In many places water trickles level to level through stone fencing and ultimately flows down into the lands in the plains. But in no case either the soil is carried over with water from the terraced fields or any damage is caused to the stone walls.



All Saora families do not possess terraced land. Such terraced fields are privately owned and handed down from father to sons. They are valuable assets to the Saora and sometimes mortgaged to local moneylenders.

As water is available throughout the year paddy is the only crop grown in terraced fields. Two crops are harvested in a year. Two varieties of paddy are grown in the terraced fields, the short duration variety called *Amba-dhan* during summer season and long duration variety called *Badadhan* during Kharif. The different varieties of paddy grown in the terraced fields are *Ranga dhan*, *Jaipa dhan*, *Kunda dhan*, *Sanagadh dhan*, *Katanoda dhan*, *Kandula dhan* and *Amba dhan*. Some progressive farmers among the Saoras have taken to cultivation of high yielding varieties of paddy such as *Jaya* and *Ratna* and also apply chemical fertilizers and pesticides which are supplied to them by the developmental agencies. As all people do not have terraced fields, large scale adoption of improved agricultural practices is not possible at present.

Paddy is grown by transplanting method. The agricultural operations connected with terraced fields start with the preparation of seed bed in June which is followed by preparation of the fields with the help of bullock-driven plough and leveller for transplantation in July, weeding in September and harvesting in November-December in case of long duration variety in kharif season.

Again they start ploughing after the harvesting is over in November-December. Thereafter they apply cow-dung manure and plough it and puddle the soil thoroughly and transplant the seedlings in February and after sometime take up weeding and regulate flow of water through irrigated channels. Harvesting is the last activity of the series of agricultural operations carried out in the terraced



Terrace field

fields. Threshing of paddy is done in the courtyard in front of one's own house.

Ragi is cultivated in dry fields. No manure is applied in these fields. The transplantation of ragi starts after the first shower of rains and harvesting in the months of July and October respectively.

The Saoras observe certain rituals in connection with terraced cultivation. The principal one is connected with transplantation. Before the seedlings are pulled up for transplantation, a ritual is performed in the seed bed. On this occasion dried fish and fowl are offered to a deity called *Jatra*. The belief is that the deity when appeased will protect the plants from pests and ensure a good harvest.

As observed in the agricultural activities there is a division of labour based on sex. Among them women who seem to be more hard working are found busy continuously throughout the whole day. Apart from vital task of child rearing, women have to do all the household chores such as fetching water, cleaning the house and utensils, cooking and carrying the food for the male members working in the field. In addition to these works collection of minor forest produce is the main job of the women. In shifting cultivation, women do several items of work like debushing, dibbling, hoeing, weeding, watching the crops, harvesting, winnowing and storing while the men cut the big trees, fire the felled trees and watch the crops and occasionally assist women in other items of work.

In wet cultivation both men and women drive plough. In addition to this, women carry on the important task of transplanting, weeding, reaping, harvesting and storing the produce from the terraced cultivation. In the

disposal of agricultural and forest produce women play important role by carrying the products to the weekly markets for sale.

The Saoras domesticate cattle, buffalo, pig, poultry and duck. The cows, bullocks and buffaloes are used as draught-animal and in payment of bride price. On ritual occasions they serve as sacrificial animals. The Saoras of advanced section take milk and on festive occasions pigs, fowls and ducks are killed for meat.

The Saoras mostly perform agricultural activities on a cooperative basis. According to this system which is called *Ansir* the villagers work on one another's land on the basis of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation. No payment of wage is involved to the workers by the person on whose land they work. This is being replaced gradually by payment of wage in cash under the impact of monetized economy. A sense of possessiveness and acquisitiveness has developed in some farmers and in their hands wealth in the forms of land and money has accumulated. These affluent Saoras manage their agriculture by employing hired labour.

In areas covered with forest the Saoras collect minor forest produce for food, fodder and for subsidiary income. They collect different varieties of green leaves, roots, tubers, fruits and flowers for consumption, *karanja* and other seeds for extracting oil, fuel wood, small timbers and fibres for construction and repairing of houses and woods for fashioning agricultural implements and household articles. They carry on hunting and collect medicinal herbs during their leisure hours. But with the shrinkage and dessication of forest, hunting and food gathering pursuits are not of as much importance as they were before.

Although the Saoras wear scanty dress and eat simple food their ritual practices are very expensive. The sacrificial animals such as buffaloes, cows and goats, which they get from the Doms who live with them in their locality cost them a very high price. They sell different varieties of agricultural and forest produces for cash in the local weekly markets and purchase daily necessities like salt, chilly, tobacco, dried fish, etc. from the visiting pedlars mainly through barter. In these transactions the Saoras are always loser. The local traders and merchants take advantage of the illiteracy and ignorance of the Saoras and exploit them in such economic transaction by using fake weights and measures and paying them a low price for their goods. With the establishment of LAMPS in many areas which procures the produce from the Saoras on payment of a reasonable price and supply them with their daily necessities at a fair price the Saoras have got some relief. But the unfair practices of the itinerant traders and pedlars are still continuing in the tribal areas.



## FOOD, DRINK AND WELL-BEING

The principal food of the Saoras is gruel (*Pej* or *Jau*) prepared out of rice (*Oryza Sativa*) or ragi (*Elucine Coracana*) or Jana (*Sorghum Vulgare*) or some other minor millets. Besides, they take vegetables grown in kitchen gardens and fruits, roots, leaves, tubers and honey collected from forests. Rice, no doubt, is considered ideal food but paddy harvested by an average Saora family hardly lasts for 3 to 4 months. In other months they depend more on millets. Roots, tubers and mushrooms collected from jungle are eaten during rainy season. Kernal of mango and seeds of tamarind are also taken by some persons during summer. Pulses are mostly eaten in winter and spring when these are harvested from swiddens. The quality as well as the quantity of the food taken varies from season



An old lady smoking tobacco

to season depending upon their availability. Among the various items of food, gruel is taken throughout the year whereas the other items are seasonal and occasional.

An ordinary meal of the Saoras consists of gruel prepared out of either *ragi*, *jana*, *ghantia* or rice with salt and chilli. Usually the adults take food thrice a day which exceeds in case of children. Due to less production the food quantity is always limited despite the frequency. The first meal is served at about 6 a.m. before going to the field. Then in the noon at about 2 p.m. after returning from the field again they take gruel. Those who do not return home in the noon carry gruel with them to the field where it is consumed. In the evening at about 7 p.m. they take their dinner before going to bed.

Food is first served to the children and other male members of the family. Then the females take their respective shares. There is no special food prepared for the children.

The non-vegetarian food is much more relished than the vegetarian food and no festival is observed and no guest is entertained without non-vegetarian food.

Of all the alcoholic drinks salap liquor is most favourite. Mohua liquor and rice beer come next in importance. Both men and women irrespective of age drink liquor and no ceremony, social or ritual is observed without liquor.

The Saoras are inveterate smokers. They roll some tobacco in a piece of dried sal leaf and smoke it.

#### • VILLAGE SANITATION :

• The Saoras who have very little knowledge about environmental sanitation do not keep their villages



clean. Cow-dung and other refuses like household dirt and animal excreta, etc. are thrown in the street here and there. These heaps of house refuse and garbages are allowed to decompose inside the village habitation and these provide an excellent breeding ground for mosquitoes and flies. Besides, during the rainy season the streets of the village become muddy in the absence of proper drainage system.

Housing is an important factor intimately connected with the problems of health and disease. The Saora houses are not only very poor in quality but also most unhygienic. The house is only one roomed and is used for cooking, sleeping and storing. Though air and light are available in abundance yet the Saoras do not take advantage of these gifts of nature. The house lacks proper ventilation as there is no window. The room, therefore, remains smoky, damp and generally dark throughout the day. These factors are responsible for respiratory diseases, eye troubles and low resistance of the body. The reasons for darkness and congested atmosphere in the house are probably due to their ignorance, poverty, a sense of insecurity and age old habits. The Saoras prefer dark interiors for fear of the ghosts and spirits. They believe that the ghosts and the spirits remain out of sight and the darkness can safeguard evil eye.

If environmental factors considerably affects the health of a community, personal hygiene, on the other hand, affects primarily the health of the individual. As regards the personal cleanliness the Saoras are not so unclean as compared to some of the other primitive tribes of the State like Kutia Kondh, etc. The Saoras do not take bath daily in the winter (twice a week or so), however, in the summer they bath daily. They rarely use soap to clean their body, instead use a type of earth/mud or a piece of



An old woman drinking liquor

bark of some plants. They brush their teeth with twigs of sal (*Shorea Robusta*) or *Karanja*. For children there is no regular routine for their bath or any other health practice. The adult persons use to wash their hands with earth after defecation and with water before and after taking their meals, but children are seldom seen washing their hands before eating.

#### DISEASE & TREATMENT :

The traditional belief system of the Saoras has its own concepts about the causation of diseases. They believe that the sufferings are mainly due to, the wrath of the gods and goddesses, evil spirits, black magic, witch craft, sorcery, evil eye and breach of taboo, etc.

The common diseases found among the Saoras are malaria, gastro-intestinal disorder, diarrhoea, dysentery, respiratory troubles (Bronchitis), hook worm and round worm infections, skin diseases, etc. Venereal diseases such as yaws, leprosy, tuberculosis and filaria are not found among them. Besides, they suffer from mal-nutrition which is very commonly marked among the children. For treatment of these diseases they mostly resort to magical method by taking the help of the traditional medicineman (Shaman) of the village. In magical treatment the shaman establishes a direct link with the spirit who is responsible for causing illness and for its satiation offerings are made and animals are sacrificed. Besides magical therapy, the Saoras also make use of some herbal preparations according to the advice of the medicine man for treatment of certain diseases.



## FAMILY AND SOCIAL LIFE

The Saora community is divided into several subdivisions based on various factors such as social status, occupation and locality where they live. According to Thurston's classification the community has broadly two divisions, the hill Saoras and the low country Saoras. The hill Saoras include six sub-groups namely (1) Savara, Jati Savara, (2) Arsi, Arisi or Lambo Lanjia, (3) Luara or Muli, (4) Kindal, (5) Jadu and (6) Kumbi. The low country or plain Saoras are divided into two sections called Kampu and Sudha.

Sitapati, another noted scholar who had worked among the Saoras found as many as 25 subdivisions among them. However, some of the important sections of the community are :

Jat : They consider themselves superior to other sections because unlike others they do not eat beef. They are cultivators.

Arsi : The weaver section of the community is known as Arsi Saora.

Jadu : They live on high lands.

Kindal : They are basket makers.

Kumbi : They have adopted pot making.

Luara : This section serves as black smith.

Malla : They are agriculturists and basket makers.

Sudha : As a result of cultural contact they have become 'Sudha' meaning clean.

Kampu : They speak telugu language.

Kurumbas : This section practise shifting cultivation.

Lambo Lanjia ( Long tailed ) : They are really the primitive section of the community. They are called so because of their manner of putting the loin cloth in which a long tail hangs behind just like the tail of the monkey.

The Saoras are unique due to the absence of clan or sib organization common to most of the tribal communities in the country. Their main exogamous unit is the extended family descended from a common ancestor. This unit is called *birinda* which is based on patrilineage. Marriage is prohibited within a *birinda* as the members of *birinda* stand to each other as brothers. All the *birinda* members participate in *Guar* (second death ceremony) and *Kariya* (final death ceremony). When one dies the *birinda* performs the funeral rites and participate in *Guar* ceremony which is held to admit the dead to the under world. The *birinda* also inherits the property of a heirless member. A remarkable feature among the Saoras is that a woman

belongs to her father's *birinda* even after her marriage. After her death the members of her father's *birinda* claim to perform her funeral rites and *Guar*. Such claims are accepted by her husband's family ungrudgingly. Nevertheless, *birinda* is not synonymous with clan or *gotra* where members living in far off places observe common rules of exogamy. *Birinda* members live in one village and its membership is limited to 4 to 5 generations, or even less. It resembles the Hindu *Sapinda* or *Kutumba*. On rare occasions some one may migrate to another village but he retains the *birinda* of his own and after death his bones etc. are required to be brought to his original village.

Among the Saoras family is the smallest social unit. It is mostly of nuclear type comprising of married couple and their unmarried offsprings. The compound families having more than one wife and their children are most common among the well-to-do Saoras. The extended families having parents and their married sons and grand children living together are comparatively less. Joint families with several married brothers staying together are rarely found among them.

The size of family is usually small consisting of 4 to 6 members. The residence is patrilocal and descent is patrilineal. Membership in the family is acquired by birth but girls after their marriage leave parents family and stay with their husbands. Economic co-operation, common residence and common cooking are common features of the Saora family.

Among the Saoras the women have their distinct position. It has been told earlier that they do not change their *birinda* after marriage. This is a remarkable trait. In Saora marriages without the consent of the girls no marriage is fixed. The girl enjoys freedom to refuse to marry a particular boy or she may show preference for some body.



A Saora woman

Moreover, the women being an economic asset are not treated as chattels. In hoe cultivation women folk work more than men. They also do all household work, rear children, prepare food. Therefore, men are mostly dependant on the women for their livelihood. As a result women get equal status in festivals and ceremonies. They even get sometimes a higher position than men. The existence of female spirit called *kudanboi* shows that even gods and ancestors pay due regard to the women. After death the women like men get their status in the under world. *Guar* ceremony is performed for both the sexes as spirits of both sexes can cause fever. Thus, the women have still maintained their status in Saora society although their society is patriarchal and marriage is polygynous.

“Without children life is not worth living”, say the Saoras. They donot believe in birth control and family planning. Parent’s fondle their children wherever they may be. In ceremonial gatherings and festivals, children get the same share of rice and meat as the elders. Leaf cups containing equal amount of meat and rice are distributed among all present there irrespective of age, sex and status. Children smoke and drink from an age of eight to nine. Simultaneously, they also assist the parents in all the occupations and attain skill and proficiency in tribal vocations and crafts. Small boys can skin a buffalo, climb high hills, bring water, tend cattle and even plough. Small girls take care of children, help their mother in cooking, plastering houses, preparing beads, necklaces and spinning. There is no dormitory institution among the Saoras as is seen among the Kolarian and Dravidian tribes. Hence most of the training the children get is through the socialization process by the parents and elders. From elders a Saora child learns the method of cultivation and other economic pursuits and also the norms and social values of society.





## FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE

The Saoras are very fond of children. When a woman proves to be barren, remarriage or adoption often takes place among them. A pregnant woman does work as usual till the time of delivery. To ensure a trouble free delivery, various gods and spirits who are believed to cause troubles at the time of delivery are worshipped by drawing ikons and offering sacrifices. When the labour pain starts, the woman is confined in a room particularly at the corner of the house. An experienced elderly woman is called to attend her as midwife at the time of delivery. The officiating midwife rubs the abdomen of the expectant mother with castor oil in order to facilitate an easy delivery. After child birth the umbilical cord is cut by means of a sharp edged arrow.

The placenta is then buried in one corner of the courtyard of the house. Then the mother and the newly born baby are given bath in tapid water. From the day of delivery the baby is given bath twice daily, once in the morning and again in the evening. The mother remains polluted for seven days. On the 7th day, she takes a purificatory bath and cooks rice which is shared by the other family members of the house. Thereafter, the mother becomes purified and fit to resume her daily routine of activities. A name is given to the child on the seventh day following birth. The Saoras prefer the name of one of the ancestors for naming the child.

The Saora marriage is not an elaborate affair. It is rather queer that the people who spend most of their resources in observing a chain of festivals and ceremonies celebrate their marriage in a very simple way. There are various forms of marriages for acquiring mates. To mention a few of them are, marriage by arrangement, marriage by capture and marriage by service. Of all these types, marriage by arrangement is most common and held prestigious in the society. The arrangements are made by parents and relations of the groom who take initiative in the matter. In a stratified society as the Saoras have, negotiation is made between two parties having equal economic and social status. For a son of *Gomang* (secular headman) another *Gomang's* daughter may be arranged and a *royat* (commoner) may not venture to propose for a *Gomang's* daughter.

The Saoras do not observe village exogamy except where the village is inhabited by the members of one *birinda*. In big villages having more than one *birinda* marriages are often arranged within the village.

Since a woman does not change her *birinda* after marriage as it happens in other tribal societies where the woman adopts the clan or gotra of her husband's family, marriages are possible between a man and woman of his maternal side. But the Saoras are not quite fond of arranging marriages with maternal uncle's daughter. Only those who fail to arrange girls for their sons elsewhere select one of maternal cross-cousins for marriage (mother's brother's daughter). The father's sister being a member of the same *birinda* there is little scope for marriage with her children.

A Saora can marry a step-mother after his father's death. This is called *Yayangkoi*. In a polygynous society as that of the Saoras there may be a very young wife of a man while there are fairly grown up children from the former wife of his deceased father. If this happens the deceased father then admonishes the erring son in dreams and threatens him with serious consequences. The son then buys a buffalo, two bangles and a new cloth. The buffalo is ceremonially sacrificed and offered to the deceased. In this ceremony one of the older relations acts as the deceased father. The shaman puts one of the bangles in the son's hand and the other into the hand of the woman. This ceremony is followed by a feast. The *birinda* members and villagers share the meat and wine. After these formalities social approval is accorded. The step-mother and the step-son, thereafter, live as husband and wife.

Among the Saoras both child and adult marriages are allowed although the practice of latter is more than the former. Pre-marital relation is not a serious offence in the society. If a girl prior to her marriage becomes pregnant or had some abortions, nobody takes serious notice of it. In fact no slur is attached and it is not at all difficult for arranging marriage for such a girl. However, the person

who is responsible for the pregnancy normally marries the girl. Although polygamy is allowed polyandry is not socially approved. There is of course no objection for the remarriage of widows or divorcees.

When a widow wants to remarry she can first try her ~~younger~~ brother-in-law. If he does not agree she can try for an outsider. She should not however carry any article or property from her deceased husband's house. Not only that but the person who intends to marry her (widow) should offer a buffalo or a pig to her brother-in-law for her release. This animal is killed and offered as a sacrifice to her deceased husband's spirit by the shaman who prays "I am offering this meat and drink to you and with this the previous relationship between you and the woman ceases and she is not taking any article or property with her". Further, he would say "the woman should not be troubled by you either in the house or on the hill or forest or when asleep or when awake. The person who is now marrying her did not cause any harm to you. She liked him and desired the marriage, thereupon, only he agreed to marry her. Please take these and be satisfied. All your ancestors are witnesses of this solemn prayer and you should abide by it".

When a Saora woman wants to break the present wedlock without any intention of remarriage, she may go back to her parent's house. Thereafter, if she decides to remarry, then the former husband brings her to the new husband, who gives him a buffalo and a pig as compensation. The meat of these animals are shared by his relations. As this includes the offerings to the spirits the shaman is called who invokes the spirit and requests that since compensation is paid no trouble should be given to the second husband any more.

If a husband is not able to give his wife sexual pleasure on account of impotency or when he refuses to set up independent house, however much she tries, and particularly when her wife is not able to see eye to eye with her sisters-in-law and parents-in-law, it is quite permissible for the woman to leave her husband. When a wife is unfaithful or known to be having clandestine relations with others, or illtreating children, the husband can desert her. In that case if his wife remarries he collects the offerings (compensation) from her second husband. But when such desertion is on account of no fault of her, the wife can complain to *Gamang* (village head man), whereupon the compensation payable at the time of remarriage in her case would be reduced.

Arranged marriage begins with the gossip in the sense that the parents of the boy while chit chatting with their friends may hear of the beauty and suitability of a particular girl living in the same village or in another village. The father of the boy then proceeds accompanying with few relatives to the house of the girl's parents and takes a pot of wine with him. He offers that pot to the parents of the girl and indirectly demands by saying "Can you offer the sweetest flower in your garden, the scent of which we have smell from such a long distance? The parents of the girl then discuss about the proposal with their kinsmen. The opinion of the girl is very often sought. If the match is approved, the pot of wine brought by the boy's parents or guardians is accepted. It is then drunk by the parents and *birinda* members of the village. It is the first step in marriage negotiation.

Visiting the girl's house continues for several times and every time one or more pots of wine are carried. On one of such visit an arrow is given and the engagement

is fixed. In another visit the villagers sit together and finalize the payment of bride price.

Bride-price in form of cash, grains, liquor and clothing are demanded in certain areas whereas in other areas no cash is demanded. Generally the bride-price includes Rs. 60/-, 20 pots of wine, 15 kg. of rice, 20 kg. of paddy, 9 bangles and a saree for the mother of the bride. On the appointed day the groom's party visit the girl's house for betrothal and take nine pots of wine. On that day the members of the *birinda* congregate at the bride's house. They dance, eat cooked rice and drink wine. After one year or so similar congregation is held at the groom's house amidst dance, drinking and eating. On that day the bride is brought to the boy's house. Some well-to-do Saoras kill a goat or a pig on this occasion. In marriage ceremony services of a priest or shaman is not required. Only the wine before being drunk is offered to the ancestors by two to three relations of the groom.

Marriage by service is also practised in the Saora society. When boy's parents are not capable of paying bride price the boy serves in the bride's house for a period of 2 to 4 years. Before the stipulated period of service if the boy leaves the service and has developed courtship with the proposed bride, he may pay proportionate bride-price and get the girl. He then sets up a separate home.

Marriage by capture which is mostly prevalent among other kolarian tribes is not common among the Saoras. This form of marriage is widely decried. Such marriages are said to be not appreciated in the underworld where the dead ancestors live. However, some

times marriage by capture occurs among them. A case study is given below.

At village Sukui one such case was happened and it was referred to the village council. One Saora girl named Silia who had lost her parents early in life was living with her brother. She was engaged to one Regedo Saora of village Ukra. The brother of the girl and others in her village had accepted wine from Regedo thereby settled the engagement. The bride-price was fixed. They were just awaiting payment of bride-price and consummation of marriage. One day a young lad of another village while working in a field saw the girl. He caught hold the girl and forced her to go to his house. He also tied down her hand. But Silia escaped and informed her brother. The latter went to the boy's house and demanded a satisfactory explanation. The brother of Silia alleged that the offender threatened him with bows and arrows. The boy and his parents denied the allegation but said that they are prepared to pay the bride-price and take the girl home. The council comprising of the elders of both the villages and a few leading persons from other villages decided the case. The decision went like this. "Marriage by capture goes against the Saora norm. To attempt to capture a girl formally engaged to another is an offence. There is the double offence when the offender threatened the brother of the girl after committing this wrongful act. "The defence was put forward by the mother of the boy as follows." If the girl would have gone with the boy then bride-price would have been paid to the person with whom girl had been engaged. But since the girl ran away there is no offence. Secondly, no force was ever applied. Rather the boy merely asked the girl. Moreover, no threat was given to her brother. Hence the defendant was not bound to pay the fine." The council, however, did not convinced

with the explanations given by the boy's mother and a fine of Rs. 30/- was imposed for this misdeed. Latter on the girl refused to marry Regedo who is of middle aged and preferred to go with that young man who agreed to pay the bride-price in addition to the fine. In such marriages the bride-price to be paid is always double that of the normal marriages.

Many well-to-do Saoras have got more than one wife. Sometimes the number has gone up to nine but three to four wives are common. It is a sign of prestige and prosperity on the part of a Saora to have more than one wife. It also implies expansion of hill cultivation and greater accumulation of food grains. Very often a well-to-do Saora may build separate houses for each of the wives. He may prefer one, generally the youngest, but he visits the different wives in turn. Where separate houses are not built quarrels and competition among the wives to gain favour of the husband is common.

The Saoras, being terrible god fearing do not indulge in sexual excesses. Once someone is engaged to a girl, he should not even touch her before the marriage is consummated. If they meet at a lonely place they do not talk and as far as practicable avoid each other. They avoid sexual intercourse for 2 to 3 years after child birth. During menstruation period women keep themselves off for a week. They eat and sleep outside.

Like other tribal communities the Saoras do not enjoy sex secretly on the hills or in lonely places because innumerable gods who live there may be offended and bring misery and disaster. There being no dormitory in their society, pre-marital relationships are not common. Sometimes after marriage both the husband and wife who are ignorant of the sexual acts sleep separately.



The parents then scold the boy and force him to sleep with the wife. The couple discuss this problem when they go to the hill or forest. If necessary they enquire from their friends separately and then they sleep together and enjoy sex. Sexual perversion is very rare among them in comparison to other tribal communities. Polygyny also helps in checking sexual maladies.

#### DEATH :

The Saoras cremate their deads but persons dying of cholera and small pox and snake bite are buried. As cremation is a family function *birinda* members participate in it. Some members collect wood for the pyre and the girls who are trained to act as assistants in funeral rites fetch water and prepare turmeric paste. Then, the corpse is carried to the cremation ground in a procession accompanied by a musical band. The next day they visit the cremation ground to examine the ashes with a view to find the sign of the cause of death. In the same day evening a fowl is killed in the cremation ground and cooked with rice which is shared by the members of the village. Then after a year or two the *Guar* ceremony is performed. On this occasion, Menhirs are planted and large number of buffaloes are sacrificed. This is generally followed by three successive *karya* ceremonies in every second or third year to commemorate and to honour the deads of that particular period.



## • SORCERY AND SUPERNATURALISM

Perhaps, the religion of no other tribe is so elaborate and complicated as that of the Saoras. It is true that without understanding their religion one cannot get a clear idea about any other aspects of their life.

The Saoras, who live in a world of deities and spirits are obsessed with their spiritual-imaginative life. All the varied aspects of their environment are associated with some god or other. As a result, a considerable amount of their time, labour and money is spent in different religious activities. Their gods are legion- the god of the hearth, the god of the pathway, the god of the grain-basket-there is no end to them. Moreover, there can be no standard catalogue for these gods, for its composition continually changes as old ones are forgotten and new ones are introduced.

It is not possible to distinguish the religious and magical character of the beliefs and practices of the Saoras, because when they worship a spirit for any purpose they combine both religious and magical methods in such a manner that they cannot be easily distinguished.

#### DEITIES AND SPIRITS :

According to Verrior Elwin, "the Saora eschatology is confused and its doctrines vary from place to place, but it is possible to define certain broad principles that are generally accepted."

The concept of a supreme god is almost non-existent among the Saoras. It is true that in different parts different gods are considered supreme. Even the Earth worm, *Labosum* is considered the highest in certain areas. The Saora gods differ from one another in composition, function, character and nature. Some are benevolent, some are neutral and some others malevolent. All these gods and spirits have constant demand on the living beings. If their demands are not met they can cause havoc. The malevolent spirits and gods are cared more than their benevolent counterparts as they can bring misery. When their depredations become unbearable the benevolent gods are approached. They are not so narrow minded and bestow their blessings irrespective of how they are treated lavishly or austerly.

*Sonnum* or *Sunnam* is the general name for the Saora deities and spirits. The deities are called in different names such as *Labosum*, *Rudesum* and *Karunium*, etc. The word *Sonnum* is used in general sense when applied to a particular order of deities and spirits. Sitapati has recorded the following order of deities.

1. *Sonnumanji* : (This is an important order which contains maximum number of deities)

2. *Bonadanji* : (This order includes deities like *Sonnum Bonad*, *Regan Bonad*, *Jhonad Bonad* and many others)

3. *Jnodanji* : (This is a order of spirits which includes *Gusta Jnod*, *Kusath Jnod* and *Panosi Jnod*, etc.)

4. *Manninji* and *Sunninji* : (This order includes a large number of deities and spirits who reside in the hills and these deities are very docile and benevolent)

5. *Badonganji* : (Deities of this order also reside on the high hills)

6. *Kittunganji* : (This order include a number of demi-gods in human forms)

Besides, there are some other orders of the deities such as *Deijenji* (Super human beings), *Rajanji* (Kings and Dharam Rajas), *Patranji*, *Kuaranji*, *Adanganji*, *Mallanji*, *Bullenji*, *Jalbanji*, *Bulkenji*, *Radobanji*, *Raganji*, *Joienji* and *Kulbanji* which include a large number of deities and spirits.

Some of the evil spirits and malevolent deities as recorded further by Sitapati are :

1) *Kanni Chodana* : This is a terrific devil. Even relations are affraid of going near those attacked by this devil. For pleasing this devil, pigs are sacrificed since goat is not useful for this purpose. Since these devils are supposed to stay around big trees, the offerings are made outside the village.

2) to 4) *Sodang*, *Goshad*, *Eddana* These deities are supposed to be responsible for fevers, carbuncles, For these spirits, goats, toddy and cloths are the offerings.

5) to 7) *Gadejung, Sandra and Bhulku* : These are sky devils connected with the man and the sun. Due to their influence, headache and pains occur. Goats, hen, toddy and cloths are the prescribed offerings.

8) to 9) *Ratuna, Sonum, Pull bhutham* : These devils are supposedly responsible for neck pains and other ailments. He buffalo is the sacrifice to be offered alongwith toddy.

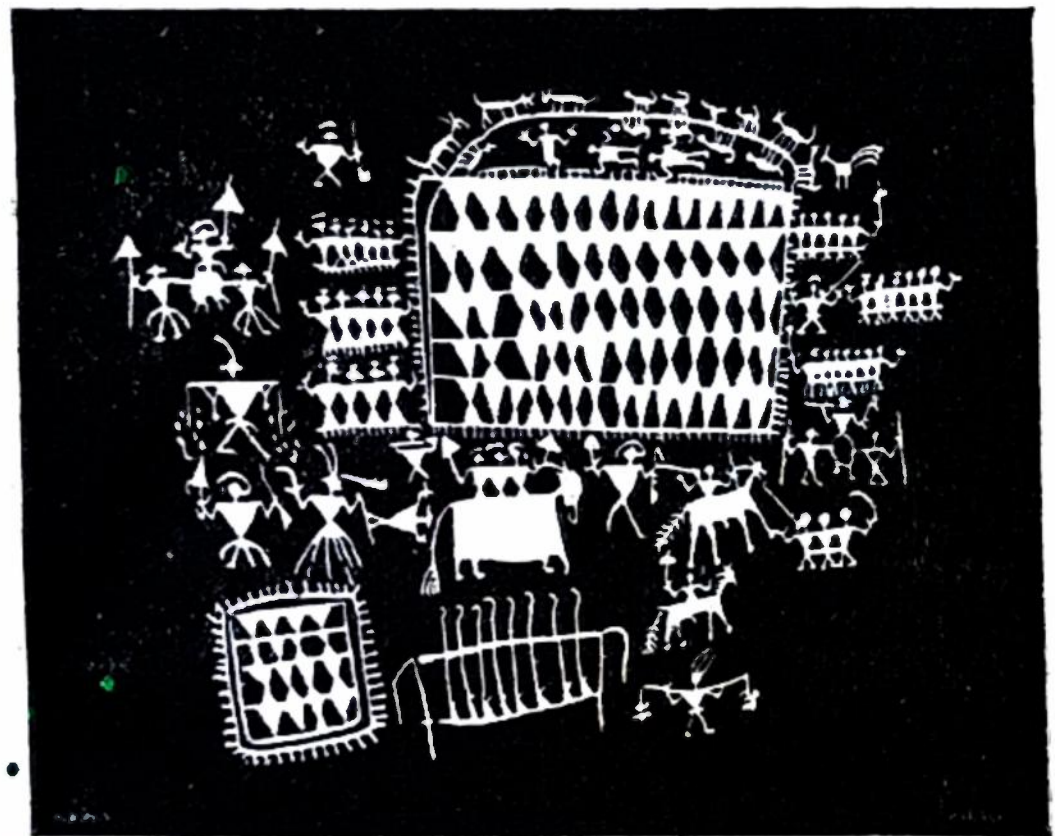
10) *Gagir-a-bullu* : This devil is responsible for creating ailments at the time of delivery in the case of women. Hen, goats, pigs and cloths are the offerings.

11) *Illasoman* : Due to the effect of this devil women face abortions. Those pregnant women who desire to avoid abortions should make offerings to this evil spirit.

12) *Rogabhojan* : This is responsible for small pox and other dreadful diseases. The people are terribly affraid of this devil.

Apart from these devils, those who died in the house appear in the dreams and direct that they should be given the offerings. Sometimes these devils with a view to make known their anger would enter the cattle sheds and kill cows and oxen.

The devils for which offerings are being made by the Saoras are only imaginary in the sense that they do not have any particular shape and not visible to the naked eye. Inside the house on the walls one often finds a group of sketches elaborately drawn, which are of religious significance and therefore called *italon* or *ikon*. The exact symbolic meaning of the ikons which consist of various sketches of human being, horse, elephant Gun man, aeroplane, cycle, sun, moon, etc. are very difficult to understand. An ikon is meant for the edifi-



Saora ikon

cation of gods and ancestors. The general idea is that an ikon is done to flatter and please the gods and ancestors so that they may spare the members of the household from their invidious attention. It is done to pander to the egotism of a particular god or ancestor and to remind him of the magnificence of his life in the unseen world as conceived of by the Saoras, his many wives, his *peta* and so on. The inspiration for the composition of an ikon may arise from a desire to honour the recently deceased or to commemorate the celebration of a certain festival or an important religious ceremony, or from a need for a prophylactic. At frequent intervals, an ikon may be replaced by another depending on the exigencies of the circumstances and on the god or ancestor who may be pestering a household at that time.

One can see a bamboo suspended from the rafters across the ikon in its upper portion. Depending from the bamboo, are baskets of grain and pots or gourds containing palm-wine for the gods and ancestors to partake of.

The saora society is full of shamans called *Kudan* (Male) and *Kudanboi* (female). They play a great role in curing all types of illness and diseases. The Saoras do not conceive of any cause of illness other than the machination of evil spirits. When illness happens, it is the shaman's chief function to determine which god or ancestor is dissatisfied and the kind of animals required to be sacrificed in order that they might be conciliated.

Every shaman has a female tutelary and every shamanin has a male tutelary. The relationship between these two sets of pairs is same as that of husband and wife. A shamanin is supposed to have sexual relationship with the male tutelary and have children born to her out of the union. She is supposed to feed her breast to these children who live in other world.

In an attempt to go on a mission into the unseen world, the shaman, in a trance, with his eyes half closed and fists clenched, tries to establish a direct link with the god or spirit who is responsible for causing the misery. In this mission the assistance of the spirit wife is also taken to find out the right deity. When finally the shaman is shaken with convulsions, it means that the god responsible for causing the illness has revealed himself. The god then makes his wishes known using the shaman as his medium. The animals demanded are then brought and sacrificed and other offerings made.

During the treatment of illness, in most cases a single pair of sacrifices is not enough to satisfy the ravenous appetites of the gods and ancestors. As the illness takes its natural course and fever intensifies, the shaman is called in again and there are further sacrifices of animals which are costlier than those sacrificed in the first instance.

#### CEREMONIES AND FESTIVALS :

The ceremonies, rites and festivals of the Saoras can be classified into two groups, that is, those that relate to the individual families and those that relate to the village as a whole.

The ceremonies and rites relating to the birth of a child, marriage and death are observed individual familywise whereas those relating to various agricultural operations, harvest of crops, the biennial or triennial *Guar* (literally meaning the filling up of the stone slabs in memory of the deceased) are observed by the village community.



Some of the important festivals observed by the village community are as follows :

1. *Buroy-n-a-Adur* : (relate to kind of millet)
2. *Ganugey-n-a-Adur* : (relate to sweet potato)
3. *Kondem-n-a-Adur* : (relate to a coarse variety of corn grown on the hills)
4. *Kuroj-n-a-Adur* : (relate to a kind of gram)
5. *Osa-n-a-Adur* : (relate to a minor millet)
6. *Rogo-n-a-Adur* : (relate to redgram)
7. *Taaku-n-a-Adur* : (relate to the storing of mango fruit)
8. *Uda-n-a-Adur* : (relate to ripe mango fruit)

Besides, these festivals which are connected mostly with crops, a ceremony called *Guar* is observed by the Saoras in every year in honour of the departed relations. This festival of *Guar* is very expensive in comparison to other festivals.

#### GUAR CEREMONY :

It is believed that a corpse after cremation loses all importance, for there after it is the spirit of the dead person with which the living are connected. The spirit hovers about the environ of the village, since its admission to the unseen world is barred until the *Guar* ceremony is performed for it by its relatives.

Although the festival of *Guar* is to be celebrated yearly, yet most of the Saora families excepting rich ones, could not afford to do so due to their poor economic condition as this ceremony entails among other features, the sacrifice of a buffalo which is very expensive. Therefore, the spirit has to wait for several years for its admission to the heaven till the family would have means to perform it.

To secure an early liberation from the new un congenial environment of the village, the spirit haunts and harasses its relatives continually reminding them that it is cold and hungry. The relatives by their best to alleviate the spirit's distress, before partaking of a meal, some food is always set aside for it, before drinking palm wine, libations are made to it. They remain half-clothed so that the spirit may wear any spare clothes they possess. Yet, the spirit is never satisfied with these compromises. The relatives, knowing this attribute their misfortune to the mischief of the spirit that inflicts on them. It is in this dark and fearful atmosphere the relatives live until they can afford to have the *Guar* ceremony done.

When finally the *Guar* ceremony is performed the spirit is able to enter the unseen world and join the rank of elders, thus achieving the status of ancestors. At the time of performing this festival all the villagers, their friends and relations in the neighbouring villages join together. In this festival, the animals which are sacrificed include buffalo, goat, hen, etc. Rich families would offer one buffalo, while the poor may give one goat or a hen, according to their capacity. The meat of all the animals offered as sacrifice is usually divided equally but those who carried the corpse to the funeral ground get a bigger share. Like other festivals they also drink a lot of wine on this occasion.

The great send-off of the spirit of a relative in to the unseen world is the cherished wish of a Saora. Very often it is not possible for him to make provision for it during his life time. It, therefore, remains an obligation for his heirs to discharge this sacred duty.

The cost of a *Guar* ceremony in relation to the limited means of a Saora family is enormous. Besides

the price of the buffalo, there are other considerations, such as the shaman's fees, and the food and drink for many guests and relatives who come from near and far to attend the ceremony. The expenses incurred in the *Guar* ceremony, and the frequent sacrifices that are required to effect a recovery from illness, are indeniably a great strain on a family's resources. To meet these heavy financial burdens, a man has no other alternative but to mortgage his land or sell his crops even before they are harvested. The complete faith of the Saoras in therapeutic value of animal sacrifice as prescribed by their shamans intensifies their poverty year after year and is the route cause of their indebtedness.

#### RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES :

The hierarchy of priests, who cater to the spiritual needs of the Saoras, may be divided into three categories. The *Buyya* is a priest who presides over agricultural festivals and offers the sacrifices that are required on these occasions. The *Kudan* is the shaman who combines the functions of priest, prophet and medicineman. His female counter part is the *Kudanboi*.

Where the position of *Buyya* is hereditary, that of the *Kudan* is not. The process of becoming a fullfledged *Kudan* is arduous.

An adolescent boy, who becomes a *Kudan* in future, is often troubled in dreams by a female spirit who is in constant demand to him. As a result, he puts himself in great panic troubled with headaches and other types of illness. The change in him is finally noticed by his parents who are aware that he has spiritual problems. After the same has been confessed by the boy arrangements are made for his marriage to the spirit visitor of his dreams. Since this marriage is very important occasion, it

is attended by various religious dignitaries and guests from all around. After the spiritual marriage he becomes a fullfledged *Kudan*. The spiritual marriage of a *Kudan* however does not deter him from taking an earthly wife.





## LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL

The Saoras have from centuries back been living in the hills and forests and did not like to mix with the people in the plains and still recently tried to maintain their individual identity. During the British rule, Bissoyis were employed as Government Officers and stationed by one of the Parlakhemundi Kings at different places for keeping Saoras under strict administration and control. As such during the British time, the Saoras have lost the political influence and independence.

Prior to British rule, the Saora villages were governed by the local self government. Every village was an independent unit with no connecting link with other villages. There was no links of bondage, for these villages, to live together. Rather, the nearby 5 to 6 villages at the most tried to have some sort of mutual assistance and cooperation with one another. Thus, it can be said that every village was a separate kingdom by itself. The people in a particular village owed their allegiance and loyalty to the village leaders, but did not claim individual rights or independence.

Among Saoras, no one would act independently on his own, but would always prefer to act in a common way with others in the village. All the persons in the village together can follow a new course of action or adopt a new usage or custom but no one would like to break away from others to follow his own course or what he likes. This shows collectivity in preference to the individual urges.

In every village the people are under the influence and control of two elders. One of them is called *Gomang* which means a great person. His powers are similar to that of a Magistrate. The second officer is called *Buyya* who along with *Gomang* also performs some duties of a Magistrate. Apart from this he has complete freedom in religious matters. The village administration rests with these two officers.

The offices of *Buyya* and *Gomang* are on hereditary basis and occupied by the members of one and the same family. Though the eldest son has the right to succeed to this office yet in case he does not have the necessary ability to perform these functions, he can be disintitled from occupying this post and the same may be offered to his younger brother. For the office of *Buyya* it is not sufficient to have a mere hereditary right, but he should

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also have a sound knowledge of the religious customs and practices. In addition to these offices which are indigeneous, there is in some villages an astrologer called *Disari* and this post is achieved but not ascribed. The man who acquires requisite knowledge about stars becomes an astrologer. In most villages there is a post called *Barik* who acts as the village messenger.

The *Gomang* and the *Buyya* remain present on every occasion of marriage, funeral and comon festivals of the village. Matters relating to purchase, sale and mortgage of land and trees are decided in the village meeting presided over by these two officers and attended by other elders.

Whenever the village assembly has to decide on any of these issues there are certain religious practices observed. Till about hundred years back, this village body was even deciding murder cases presided over by these two officers.

Though these two officers have such wide powers, they donot have any advantage in the form of money or land for themselves. Like others they too work hard to make their living. After the advent of the British rule in some matters their prestige got enhanced, when the Governor's agent toured these parts or when Saoras called them for important functions, these two officers *Buyya* and *Gomang* were honoured by presentation of new clothes, etc.

Ordinarily for any usual offences, the accused has to pay by way of fine, two pots of liquor and one goat, etc. and to feed the villagers with these. The exact quantity, however, depend on the gravity of the offence.

The growth of the family largely depends more on the women than on menfolk. Therefore, the Saoras believe that



greater sin is committed when a woman is killed than when a man is killed. A person killing a woman should offer 8 buffaloes while 7 buffaloes are prescribed in case a man is killed. At any time, if a thief is caught red handed, he could even be killed then and there. Whatever be the offence the practice of having village feast as a fine shows that the entire population of the village live as a single family and this concept which had been in vogue from the ancient times are still surviving. Payment of compensation, offerings to gods, etc. are some of the things which every offender has to do. Therefore, the person wronged, his relations and friends would pacify when these offerings are made and latter distributed and eaten by all the villagers. As a result of this peace and tranquility once again prevail in the village.

After Independence the Panchayati Raj system was introduced in the country with the emergence of various political parties. Under its influence the traditional political system underwent several transformations and its dominance on the village community gradually diminished. Due to spread of education and exposure to outside world a kind of new leadership has now emerged in Saora villages. The traditional Panchayat has now lost its importance. In every village new leaders such as ward members, Sarapanch with their affiliation to certain political parties are actively at work and tackling the problems of the village quite effectively.



The village chief 'Gomang'



## AESTHETIC DRIVE

The Saoras, irrespective of males or females cultivate the art of dancing and singing as a natural habit. Though, when asked to sing individually they may not be able to do so, but when they are in group and happily inspired they would not hesitate to do this in a very pleasant way. Any Saora in that group even if not able to sing would do other merriments without any flaw. Among them there is no difference between a poem and a song. Every Saora, be a male or female can coin a song then and there and sing it.

While doing these agricultural chores or cutting firewood from the forests, when an unmarried young man and woman meet they look at each other lovingly and engage in a fræe talk. If this evokes favourable response from both sides they make love with each other and sing songs. While doing so their movements appear like dance. In these songs one finds a great deal of humour, romance and melody in combination of the words. During the marriages and festivals all of them join together for singing and dancing.

They usually play the games of tiger, leopard monkey, etc. While pounding the rice they sing songs which produce suitable matching musical sounds. In this song there is the exhortation of the sister to his brother-in-law not to entrust hard work to his wife but to treat her kindly. In the songs of the Saoras, one notices, that they are composed on the basis of the sounds produced by various birds and animals, as their movements and activities are observed by them. This shows that the Saoras are not unaware of their surroundings and nature.

Like any others, Saoras meet pleasantly when they see things of beauty. They exhibit this pleasure and happiness in the composition of their songs. One finds in these songs, humours, jokes, romance, satires, criticisms, acquisitions and anger. One also notices reunion forgetting differences reflected in the songs. Though there is no modernity and fineness, their ideas being natural, the compositions are good, inspiring and melodious.

On the occasions of performing pujas and observance of festivals, the songs sung are different. Such songs are adopted from the past so many years. These songs describe the history of gods, the process of creation and some epic stories. They also believe that these festival songs when sung melodiously with meticulous care and attention, the gods get pleased by this invocation and give them the blessings and even grant their prayers. Almost all the songs of the Saoras are of four lines or so but not more and there will be five steps of musical sounds in the songs.

## DANCE

If one has seen the whorls of dancing men and women among the Santals, the rythm of the Hos, the

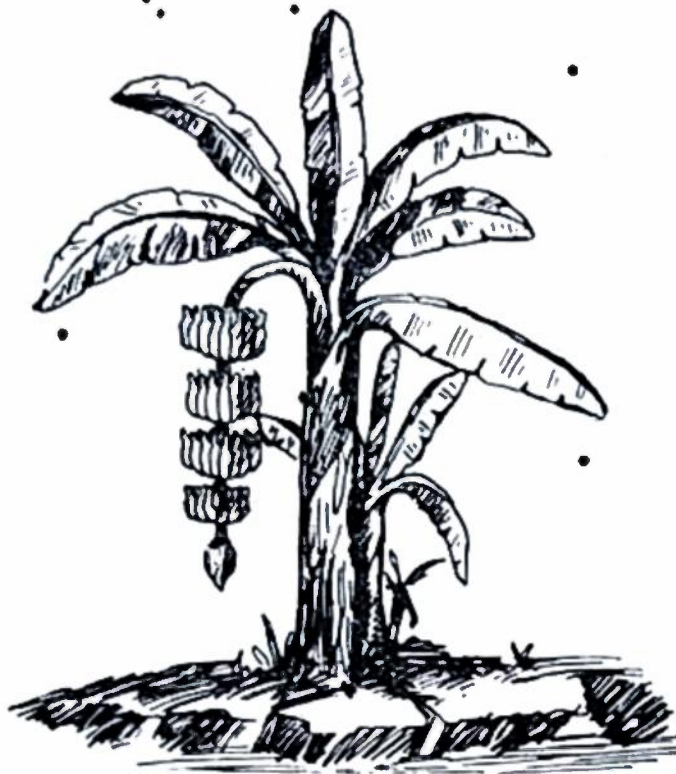


A Saora musician

precision of the Bison Horn Marias, and decoration of the Koyas, he will be disappointed to find those exuberances in the Saora dances. The Saora dance lack all these artistic value. In Saora dance, group of men and women jumble up together and while dancing the drummers and the dancers advance towards each other alternatively with the rythm of the music. Colourful costumes are worn during the dance. Other decorations include feathers of white fowl and peacock plumes.

Besides, old coloured clothes of cotton and silk are tied as turbans by the men and wrapped around their chest by women. While dancing they carry swords, sticks umbrellas and other implements and blow whistles and make peculiar sounds.

The Saoras do not dance very frequently like the Oraons or Santals. But they do not also forget this merriment during ceremonies and festivals, marriages, *adurs* and when some important person visits their village.



## PROBLEMS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Saoras have many problems alike to any other tribal communities of the State but what is unique to them is that the large scale exploitation which they have been undergoing over the years by one of their neighbouring community, the Dombs. It will not be an exaggeration to say that one cannot think of any developmental measures among the Saoras without understanding these Dombs, an untouchable caste of the plains. In caste constillation, the Dombs are at the bottom and are treated equal to Haddis and Mehentras who mostly work on the hides and skins. Although the history of migration of the Dombs to the Saora country is not

very much known yet there is little doubt that they were the first non-tribal group who came to stay in Saora villages.

At first their relationship with the Saoras was symbiotic rather than parasitic. They wove clothes from yarn spun by the Saoras and sold these to them. Besides, they supplied brass and earth-ware pots, and served them as agents of liaison with the government authorities. Impressed by the worldliness, the Saoras sought their advice on various matters and gradually reposed their confidence on them. In course of time the Dombs became a powerful community among the Saoras who controlled the socio-economic life of the tribe.

At present the principal occupation of the Dombs is trade. Domb traders do not spare even the most remote Saora villages. They move about singly or in groups from dawn to dusk. They carry with them tobacco, salt, chillies, dry fish and clothes and return with grains and other products. The Saoras are mostly cheated in transactions with them. Their agricultural produce like rice, millet, etc. and particularly minor forest produce like tamarind, mohua seeds and flowers, karanja seeds, and turmeric, etc. are removed by the Dombs at cheap rates and sold in the market by them at very high rates. Buffaloes used by the Saoras for sacrifice in religious ceremonies are sold to them by the Dombs at high prices and so is the case with other articles. Thus, the exploitation goes on.

What is the secret of the dominance of the Dombs over the Saoras in spite of their exploitation and derogatory status according to Saora estimation? An appropriate answer to this question would be that the Saoras are a tribe who have not changed much. They are very sigh



and timid and their knowledge about the outside world is very limited. Therefore, the Saoras are not very keen to go with their produce to different places to fetch a profit.

The most important point is that according to their traditions trading is considered a low profession. As such, they prefer to dispose off their produce and also buy their requirements at the doorsteps. On the other hand, the Dombs, who are very hard working, climb stiff hills and move miles together to reach different corners of Saora land with their trade. Besides, during the days of acute scarcity a Saora can get a little loan and few articles on credit from the Dombs. Besides, when animals are needed for sacrificial purposes, the Dombs bring them on credit.

What is the solution to this problem of age old exploitation? For solving this problem, there are two sets of views. One view gives stress on the expulsion of the Dombs from the Saora land. But that may require building of settlements for them. Besides, they will have to be provided with agricultural land, inputs and subsidiary employment and their economic condition has to be improved. Without these facilities, there is no possibility of their removal from among the Saoras. The other way would be to discourage their present profession by diverting their energies to cultivation. This will keep them busy for many months of the year and create between them a community of interest as agriculturists. A second step that may help would be to help the Dombs to qualify themselves to take up such professions as tailoring, shoe making, etc.

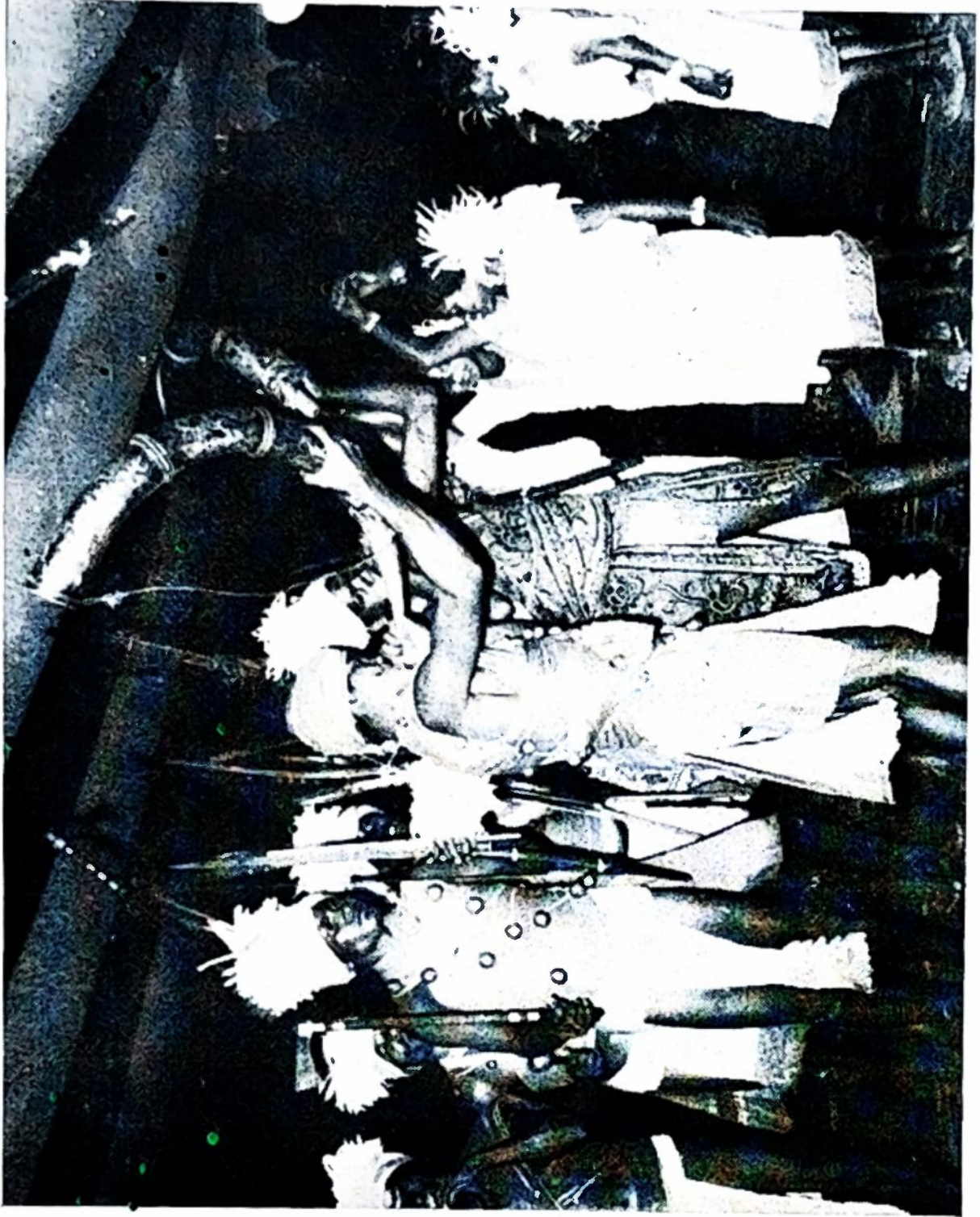
The Saoras are one among the few tribes of Orissa who practise shifting cultivation extensively. Being the chief source of their income it has become a way of

life for these people. The government has imposed restriction on shifting cultivation, since it is considered to be devastative, harmful and disadvantageous. It is a fact that due to repeated cutting and burning of forests, not only the forest is affected, but also the productivity of the land has considerably been reduced adversely affecting the economy of the Saoras. Even under such circumstances the Saoras show a considerable doggedness in sticking to this type of cultivation. What is, therefore, necessary that before restricting shifting cultivation, sufficient care should be taken to provide them with good land, rehabilitate them in their own villages or colonies established in suitable places near about their present habitat. Moreover, a study on food habits and nutritional status of the Saoras shows that from the crops grown in shifting cultivation they used to get their required amount of vegetable protein. If the practice of shifting cultivation is kept under ban without providing them any alternative source from which to get the protein supply, these measure will do more harm than good to them by causing dietary imbalance. Keeping in view the failure of the earlier colonization programmes and that the land in tribal areas is in short supply the other solution to this problem would be to bring about reform in the productive organization through scientific shifting cultivation. The Saoras may be allowed to carry on shifting cultivation only in the slope extending from 20 per cent to 40 per cent. The land in valley bottom up to 3 per cent slope should be reclaimed for permanent paddy cultivation.

Education has a vital role to play in the process of human resource development. But the Saoras lay very little emphasis on education of their children. However, this may not be true among the converted Saoras. In converted areas the attendance in the schools

is comparatively much high than the non-converted areas. Although there are many schools established in the Saora villages yet these are not adequate. Moreover, in comparison to schools established by Education department, the residential types are very few. But the residential schools, which provide various facilities to the children are favoured more by the Saoras than the non-residential schools. Many non-residential schools lack certain basic facilities, like permanent building, required number of class rooms, furnitures for the students and teachers, full sanctioned strength of teachers and adequate reading and writing materials. It is, therefore, suggested that more number of schools of residential types should be established in different remote villages. Establishment of schools alone would not serve the purpose. In Saora area the educational institutions are mostly manned by the Dombs, who are looked down by the Saoras. It is often seen that the teachers mostly close the schools and spend their time at home. This problem has to be tackled effectively by strengthening the inspection by the higher authorities. The problem of language is an important factor which is very much responsible for large scale dropout and stagnation in the schools. In the beginning learning oriya is definitely a difficult proposition for the small children. Both the teachers and the students experience a lot of difficulty in communicating their feelings to each other due to language problems. If the teachers would have knowledge in Saora language they could easily make the students understand the courses. Therefore, in the existing institutions and the institutions which will be established in future, there is a necessity for appointing teachers with good knowledge of Saora language.

There is acute shortage of water in Saora area. The problem is more acute in the villages located in the hill-slopes and hill-tops than in the villages located in the plains.



Saora dance

The innumerable small and big hill streams dry up mostly in February. In the absence of adequate number of drinking water wells the people have to depend upon tiny springs for their requirement. Water in those places get dirty and contaminated by various germs. The Saoras have to drink that water and as such they suffer from various diseases. Therefore, priority should be given for providing safe drinking water to each and every hamlet and village. If necessary, a ground water survey may be conducted in the whole belt to locate the water level.

Although the general health of the tribe is fair yet they suffer from various diseases which are mainly due to insanitary conditions and lack of health education. It is, therefore, necessary that proper health education should be imparted through popular talks, group discussions, demonstrations and audio-visual aids to the people so that they understand the problems in scientific perspective and adopt remedial measures to improve their health and nutritional status. Besides, steps should also be taken for improving the environmental condition with reference to water supply, drainage, disposal of waste products. For treatment of different ailments, the Saoras not only resort to magical therapy, but also use various herbal medicines available locally. It is, therefore, necessary to identify these medicinal plants and ascertain their medicinal value and protect the rare species. The Saora country is very much susceptible to malaria. This should be effectively checked by taking various preventive measures. It is very important in the Saora context as fever means some sacrifices to be offered to ancestors which ultimately leads to debt.

#### DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES :

Since Independence Government have been keen to improve the lot of tribals. In the mid fifties, special

Multi-purpose Tribal Blocks (SMPT) were set up in some parts of the State followed in the sixties by Tribal Development Blocks (TD) which had more than 66 per cent of tribal population. The idea was to ensure that funds meant for tribal development should not be used elsewhere, but applied for tribal uplift. Even the T. D. blocks were found inadequate and in the early seventies, four Tribal Development Agencies (TDA) were set up in the State. Out of these, one was located in the district of Ganjam, namely Parlakhemundi TDA and the other in the Koraput district, namely Gunupur TDA. The former covered entirely Saora population and the latter not only the Saoras but also the Kondhs. Funds allotted to the T.D. As were used for the core socio-economic programmes of the tribals exclusively and were not diverted for other purposes. These T.D.As are still continuing and have done some good work in the field of agriculture, communications, horticulture and minor irrigation.

Since the beginning of the Fifth Plan, a sub plan for tribal region of Orissa has been in operation. Its broad aim is to improve the quality of tribal life and raise the economic level of tribals to that of the other communities. Those community development Blocks in the State having more than 50 per cent of the tribal population were identified and brought within the ambit of the sub plan. The blocks were aggregated in to projects called Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP). 19 such I.T D.Ps have been set up and special administrative structure created to ensure vigorous implementation of programmes.

Subsequent to the establishment of I. T. D. Ps. there was a need for identification of primitive tribes who needed special attention. The Lanjia Section of the Saora tribe come under this category and for their development

Micro Projects were set up at four different places in Ganjam and Koraput districts where there is large concentration of this tribe. In Ganjam district Micro Projects are functioning at Serango, Tumba and Chandragiri and in Koraput district at Pottasingi.

The accent of both I. T. D. P. and Micro Project has been on integrated approach and the programmes receiving priority attention are horticulture in the Podu areas, irrigation, marketing, besides programmes like agriculture, communication, forestry, health, education and animal husbandry, etc. Until to-day, a lot has been done by these agencies. It is further hoped that these concerted efforts will bear fruits, if carried forward with dedication, good will and sincerity.

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