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SAPUA KELA

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PREFACE

The study of the Snake Charmers (A section of the Kela community known as Sapua Kela) was considered necessary in order to formulate suitable developmental programmes for their upliftment. In a short visit to the Kela settlement at Padmakesharipur which is situated at a distance of about 12 kms. from the State Capital. Bhubaneswar we found it inhabited by a large population of about 916 persons all belonging to the Sapua Kela community. This is the single most populous settlement in Orissa where 265 Sapua Kela households live off from a big heterogeneous village called Patia. The Sapua Kelas identify themselves not by the name of their own settlement but by the name of thier revenue village Patia and therefore in the public they are known as Patia Kelas.

The Sapua Kelas eke out their living primarily by snakes charming, jugglery and begging. They are known for their skill in the risky job of snake catching and snake charming and for certain peculiar customs like, inbreeding or intra kin-marriage, frequent change of spouses and dominance of women in domestic and village affairs. Their religion is primarily concerned with the worship of Goddess Durga in her various incarnations and the ancestor-spirits. Their caste council

which is very democratic in formation as well as in function is still very powerful in maintaining identity and group cohesiveness and at the same time in bringing reforms and changes for better living. They seem to be inclined to shift from wandering life to settled life and are struggling hard to acquire assets in the form of houses, land and cattle and also to get themselves absorbed in stationery governmental and non-governmental jobs.

The materials presented in this book were collected during several visits in the year 1983. Our aim in this book has been to give an overall picture of various aspects of their life which may change very fast because of their inclination towards settled life. As this book is likely to be used by the general intelligent public we have tried to keep our presentation fairly in a popular style. This small monograph is expected to remove a long-felt need for a first hand ethnography of this wandering group. The present monograph also gives an insight into various changes occurring in different aspects of their life and their adjustment with the new environment.

We are thankful to Shri Pagal Das and Smt. Maguni Dei in particular and other Kela informants who have ungrudgingly provided data for this book. We must record our appreciation for the help rendered by Shri Sailendra Das, Primary Investigator of our Institute during our

field work in the village. He is a Sapua Kela by himself and belongs to the same village.

We are thankful to Shri J. P. Rout, Research Officer for preparing the maps and charts and to Shri S K Ray, Photographer for developing the photographs which are printed in this book. Shri B. B. Mohanty, Research Officer deserves special mention for undertaking the laborious task of proof correction in association with Miss K. Patnaik, Research Assistant. Lastly, we also thank Shri I C. Nayak, Junior Typist for typing the manuscript.

Bhubaneswar
Jan., 1989

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INTRODUCTION

The Kela is one of the Scheduled Castes of Orissa. It is a small semi-nomadic caste identified as one of the vulnerable groups among the Scheduled Castes needing special care for their development. The word 'Kela' is derived from the Sanskrit verb 'Kel' which means 'to play', 'to sport', 'to charm snake', 'to tremble' or 'to move'. E. Thurston and Rangachari (1909) hold the view that the term 'Kela' has been derived from the word 'Keli' which means 'dancing' or from 'Khel' which means 'play'. But in common vocabulary it implies those people who along with their family members leave their house and hearth and continuously move from place to place showing snakes and their skills in snake-charming, jugglery and acrobatic fits. Like other Scheduled Castes they suffer from the stigma of untouchability.

The term 'Kela' is not only applicable to *Sapua Kela* but also to such communities as *Bajikar*, *Sabakhia*, *Mundapota* and *Ghusuria* who are small semi-nomadic castes included in the list of vulnerable groups of Scheduled Castes shown in Appendix 1. All these castes including the *Sapua Kela* live in large concentration mainly in the coastal districts of Cuttack, Balasore, Puri

and Ganjam. The Kela with a population of 14,611 as per 1971 census constitutes the biggest group among the nomadic and semi-nomadic Scheduled Castes in the State.

The Kela caste is divided into several sub-castes based on different professions and also on matrimonial alliance with other castes. The sub-castes are :

- a) *Sapua Kela*- They are also known as *Goudia Kela* and *Ahir Kela*. Their traditional profession is snake-charming. They call themselves 'Mangata' meaning those who depend no others for their livelihood.
- b) *Nageswaria Kela*- They are sanke-charmers. They catch Cobra (*Naga*) only and not any other species of snakes.
- c) *Nalua Kela*- They show acrobatic fits with the help of poles.

Apart from these sub-castes, several other sub-castes have emerged out of matrimonial alliances with other castes. Thus a sub-section called *Pathania Kela* has come into existence as a result of marital union between Kela and Muslim. Similarly out of the marriage between persons belonging to Kela and Kandara has emerged another

sub-caste called *Kandara Kela*. The sub-caste *Matia Kela* has come from Andhra Pradesh to Orissa. In most cases Kela girls have married boys of other castes. These sub-groups are strictly endogamous and among them the *Sapua Kela* claim the highest status. The present monograph relates to the *Sapua Kela*.

The *Sapua Kela*s are found only in one village, viz. Padmakesharipur which is treated as a hamlet of Enjana revenue village for all official purposes, but acts as a fullfledged village in social, religious and political purposes. Each Kela household has its own house in the village including other assets like agricultural land and fruit trees.

Origin of the Kela has remained obscured. However, some old persons have narrated a story of origin of the caste as follows.

“There was no caste called ‘Kela’ in the beginning. A man named Dhatudagdha Kela alias Bhadari Naik, who was specialized in aluminium & bellmetal works had six daughters and no son. He was in search of bridegrooms for their marriage. In the same locality six youngmen, Nunchala, Santoshguru, Dwari, Jogi, Baguti and Patra by name volunteered to marry these six daughters, but the parents of the girls did not agree with their proposal. These young men after obtaining the consent of the girls for the marriage

approached the king for a verdict in their favour. The king asked the girls in the presence of their parents to express their willingness for their marriage with these young men. When the girls gave their consent, the king ordered to celebrate the marriage then and there. While Nunchala, Santoshguru and Dwari became the progenitors of the castes of *Tamli*, *Khuruda* and *Kalandi* respectively *Jogi*, *Baguti*, *Patra* and *Dhatudagdha* constituted a separate caste called *Kela* and later on formed four *Bandhu* groups known as *Nadaguru*, *Prasad*, *Parmanik* and *Naik* respectively."

Originally the *Kelas* were nomadic people and are generally referred to 'Indian gipsies'. Their early history of migration is not remembered by the present generation. However, older persons give some idea that their ancestors were originally in village called *Thakurgaon* in *Midnapur* district of *West Bengal* and when the famine broke out they left the village in 1860 and migrated to *Tigiria* area of *Cuttack* district of *Orissa*. But they could not stay there for a long time. After a few years they shifted to *Godipatna* village near *Choudwar* in *Cuttack* district. But finally they migrated 50 years back to *Chandrasekharpur* or *Padmakesharipur* near *Patia* village. They liked this place and made up their mind to settle down there permanently. Their leaders approached *Shri Dibyasingh Deb*, the then King of *Raj Kanika*, ex-state in *Cuttack* district for

allotment of the fallow land lying in between Enjana and Kalarahang villages for setting up their new settlement. They got the approval of the Ex-King and established their settlement, which has been named as Padmakesharipur after the name of one of the Ex-Kings of Raj Kanika. But a group of nine families who did not want to settle down there went back to Godipatna area under the leadership of one Shri Bhaskar Das. They continued to stay there for a few years, but came back again to join their caste members and settled down in the new village founded by them. They were given homestead land for their settlement. These families are still referred to as *nāgharia* (nine houses). Now this group has grown to 25 families and the ward which inhabited by them is known as Patuasahi.

POPULATION

Table-1 gives the district-wise breakup of the total Kela population in the State during the decade 1961-71. The overall growth rate of 18.19 per cent in the decade of 1961-71 compares very favourably with the growth rate of the Scheduled Caste population and of the general population which are 19.70 per cent and 25.05 per cent respectively.

It is also apparent from the table that the Kela caste as a whole is mainly concentrated in the adjoining coastal districts of Cuttack, Puri and Balasore accounting for about 90 per cent of their total population.

Table 1

District-wise distribution of Kela population as per Census 1961 & 1971.

Sl. No.	Name of the district	1961	1971
1	2	3	4
1.	Cuttack	2,205 (54.16)	9,192 (62.91)
2.	Balasore	1,361 (17.53)	2,583 (17.68)



Checking up the baskets before the start

1	2	3	4
3.	Puri	697 (8.98)	1,380 (9.45)
4.	Dhenkanal	262 (3.37)	710 (4.86)
5.	Ganjam	204 (2.63)	298 (2.04)
6.	Keonjhar	312 (4.02)	224 (1.53)
7.	Bolangir	—	85 (0.58)
8.	Mayurbhanj	201 (2.59)	44 (0.30)
9.	Phulbani	37 (0.47)	44 (0.30)
10.	Sambalpur	450 (5.80)	35 (0.24)
11.	Koraput	31 (0.40)	16 (0.11)
12.	Kalahandi	4 (0.05)	—
13	Sundargarh	—	—
Total		7,764 (100.00)	14,611 (100.00)

A comparison of literacy position of the Kela in the State during the Census of 1961 and 1971 clearly reflects the apparently low rate of literacy among them during the decade 1961-71

in comparison with the general population. They recorded 14.3 per cent in 1961 as against 11.6 per cent for the total Scheduled Caste population and 21.7 per cent for the general population of the State. But in 1971 their literacy status has deteriorated amazingly to 10.4 per cent as against the increased trend shown in the literacy position of the total Scheduled Caste population (15.6 per cent) and general population (26.28 per cent).

Table-II given in the next page shows the classification of *Sapua Kela* population of Padmakesharipur by age and sex during 1968 & 1983.

Table II
Classification of population by age and sex

Age-groups	1968			1983		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
I. 0-4years	108 (15.32)	41 (11.52)	67 (19.20)	99 (10.81)	44 (9.36)	55 (12.33)
II. 5-11years	58 (22.41)	88 (24.72)	70 (20.06)	190 (20.74)	96 (20.43)	94 (21.08)
III. 12-15years	66 (9.36)	39 (10.96)	27 (7.74)	109 (11.90)	64 (13.62)	45 (10.09)
IV. 16-20years	45 (6.38)	17 (4.78)	28 (8.02)	95 (10.37)	29 (6.17)	66 (14.80)
V. 21-30years	131 (18.56)	74 (19.78)	57 (16.34)	177 (19.55)	107 (22.76)	72 (16.15)
VI. 31-40years	41 (5.82)	17 (4.78)	24 (6.88)	77 (8.41)	38 (8.09)	39 (8.74)
VII. 41-59years	139 (19.72)	74 (20.78)	65 (18.62)	161 (17.58)	87 (18.51)	74 (16.89)
VIII. 60years and above	17 (2.40)	6 (1.68)	11 (3.14)	6 (0.64)	5 (1.06)	1 (0.22)
Total	705 (100.00)	356 (100.00)	349 (100.00)	916 (100.00)	470 (100.00)	446 (10.000)

One striking feature noticed in the distribution of population by age-groups is that there is a decrease in child population of 0-4 age-group from 108 in 1968 to 99 in 1983 and in the oldest population of 60 years or more of age from 17 in 1968 to 6 in 1983. In all other age-groups there is increase in population between these two years.

The annual rate of growth of population is only 1.98 per cent during the period 1968-1983 as against 1.97 per cent for the general population and 1.98 per cent for the Scheduled Caste population of the State per year during the decade 1971-81. In other words, the Kelas of Padmakesharipur correspond in growth rate with the general population and other Sch. Castes. Among them there are 470 males and 446 females in a population of 916 in 1983. This shows that the ratio of females per 1000 males is 949 in 1983 as against 988 in 1968.

The percentage of literacy among the Kela population of Padmakesharipur is 18.72 as per the survey in 1983. Male literacy was recorded at 26.97 and female literacy at 10.32 per cent. At present there are four matriculates out of which three are reading in colleges. The proportion of children in the school going age-groups of 4-11 and 11-14 years is shown in Table III.

Table III

Number of children in the School going age groups and number of children actually going to schools.

Age groups	Number of Children			Percentage of children actually going to school		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
4-11 years	190	96	94	27.89	36.46	19.15
11-14 years	109	64	45	27.52	32.81	40.00
Total	299	160	139	27.76	35.00	19.42

The proportion of children going to school is the same for both the age-groups. The Table III gives an idea that the majority of the children (more than two third) are not attending school although special school has been established close to their settlement by the Harijan and Tribal Welfare Department since 1955. At present 15 boys and 8 girls are reading in Middle English School and 12 boys and 2 girls in High School.

From the above analysis, it is seen that they still have remained educationally backward mainly due to their wandering habit and want of special provision in the shape of free residential school.

LIVING CONDITION

The Kela settlement of Padmakesharipur is situated on an elevated land composed of laterite close to the Patia Passenger Halt in between Mancheswar and Barang Railway Stations on Howrah-Waltair S.E. Railways. An uneven katcha road through fallow land links the settlement with the pucca road which connects Bhubaneswar and Nandankanan Wild Animal Sanctuary. To reach the settlement from Bhubaneswar one has to cover 10 Kms. of pucca road and about 2 Kms. of katcha road. Another rough road on the bank of Daya-West irrigation canal of the river Mahanadi connects the settlement with the National Highway No. 5 near the New Capital water works at village Palasuni. The distance between Bhubaneswar and Kela settlement through this route is about 12 Kms.

The Kela settlement is bounded by the village Kalarahanga in the north, Patia and Chandrasekharpur in the west, Daman in the south and the village Enjana in the east. Katcha uneven roads run on four sides of the Kela habitation proper. Close to these roads the Daya-West canal of the river Mahanadi is located in the east, agricultural field in the north and south and the railway track in the west. There is a main passage

connecting the katcha road along the railway tract in the west, with road on the canal bank in the east. This passage is cut by another main passage connecting the Katcha roads in the north and south. Thus the settlement is divided into four segments which may be termed as north-west, south-west, south-east and north-east. In the south-east segment four narrow uneven passages run towards the west direction. Although Kela households are found in every segment of the settlement, their maximum concentration is in the south east segment. The settlement is divided into two *sahis* (wards), the north-west and the south-west forming Patnasahi and the other segment named as Dakhinasahi.

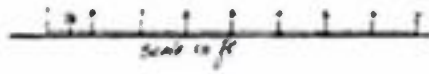
The upper primary school (upgraded seva-shram) of Harijan and Tribal Welfare Department and its hostel, the Panchayat Office, the Servicing Co-operative Society, the V. L. W. quarters, one Tea-Stall and two sanitary public wells are located in the south-west segment of the settlement. Four *Kandara* Kela and several *Sapura* Kela households inhabit in this segment. There are two private katcha wells in the settlement, one in the south-east segment and another in the north-east segment and one tube-well in the north east segment. These wells are the sources of drinking water. For bathing and washing purpose, they depend on the canal water for a specific period and also on a private tank located near the

east-north segment. The construction of the Yubak Sangha building located in the south-west segment on the main passage is now in progress. The partly constructed temple of the village deity is located in south-east segment and the burial ground on the other side of the railway tract. The settlement is electrified. There are street lights and some private houses have also taken electric connection.

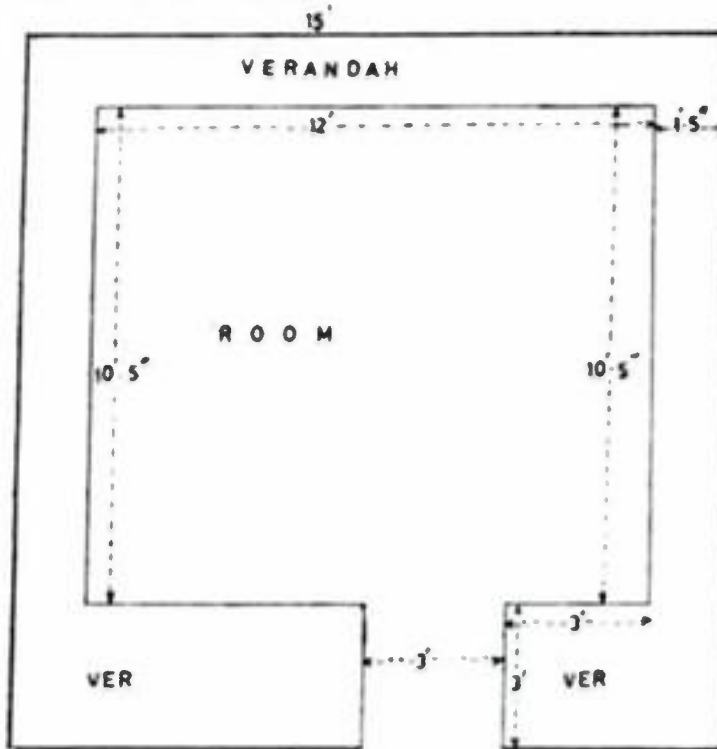
There are some fruit trees such as mango, cashewnut and jackfruit trees privately owned by the households. Among these there are also a few guava, lemon, tamarind and date-palm trees.

The settlement conforms to a linear pattern. It means that the houses have been built on either side of each of the main and minor streets. Some houses face the street while others opposite it. The houses in the settlement can be classified into three categories according to the size of the houses and the materials used for construction. In the first category comes the spacious traditional houses which have a rectangular ground plan of the size 21 feet in length and 15 feet in breadth with a three feet wide front verandah and one and half feet side verandah and single door opened to a front courtyard. Such a house has two-sloped roof thatched mostly with straw and a few houses with fire-proof roof supported by laterite pillars and mud walls of eight feet in

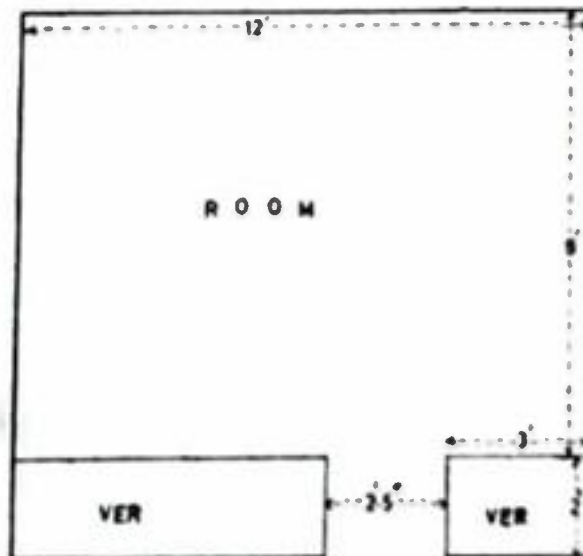
GROUND PLAN OF SAPUA KELA HOUSES.



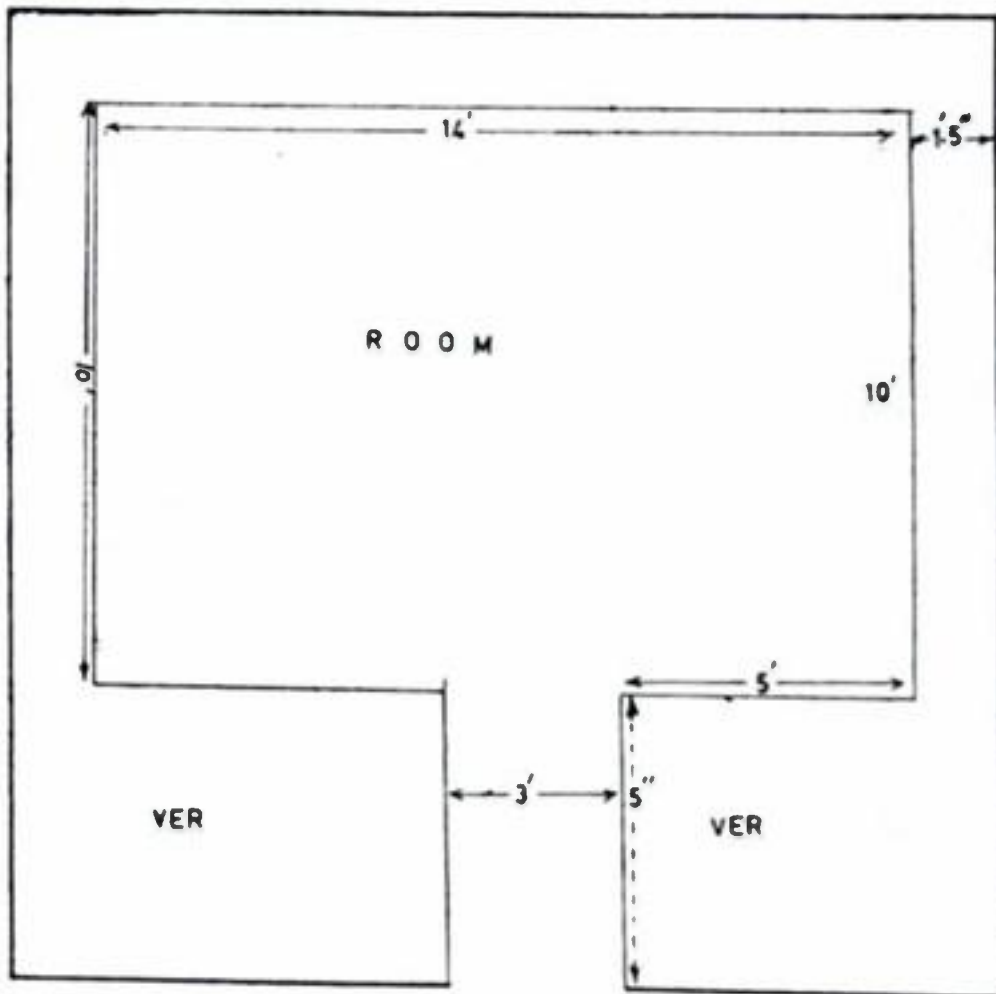
1. TRADITIONAL HOUSE.



2. TRADITIONAL SMALL HOUSE.



3. NEW HOUSE.



height. Wooden planks are fixed along the inner walls to serve as platform for keeping household articles. The hearth is located in the right corner of the entrance or on the verandah. A second hearth is also constructed in the courtyard. The interior is unpartitioned and serves as bed-room, dining-room, living-room and kitchen and also as a pen for the fowls. The snakes are also kept there in basket.

The second category of houses consists of small houses which may be termed as 'hut' of the size of 12 feet in length and 9 feet in breadth with one and half feet wide verandah. These houses have two-sloped straw-thatched low roof supported by wooden pillars and mud-walls of eight feet in height. The third category consists of houses constructed out of Government assistance. The size of this type of houses in general is 21 feet in length and 15 feet in breadth with 5 feet wide verandah in front. Most of these houses have pucca walls with fire proof roof of tiles or asbestos. Besides a three feet wide door, a window of 2' X 3' is also provided in the houses. As many as 42 households have received Government assistance ranging from Rs. 650/- to Rs. 4000/- for construction of houses. At present 42 households (15.76%) have pucca houses with pucca walls and fire-proof roof, eight families (3.00%) with semi-pucca houses (house with pucca walls and straw-thatched roof or katcha

walls with fire-proof roof) and 148 households (55.65%) won katcha houses. As many as 57 households (21.24%) have small huts or temporary sheds constructed over the house site owned by them. The remaining 11 families (4.14%) have neither housesite nor house of their own. They live either with their relatives or in temporary sheds raised on Government wasteland. They do not dare to construct house with reinforced concrete roof, because they believe that the owner of such a house will not survive soon after the construction is over. This is based on a situation which occurred about 18 years back. One Bhopali Das constructed such a house which now exists in the settlement, but he died soon after it was completed. Soon after the death of Bhopali the younger brother of the deceased named Satrughana also died. From that day onward construction of house with reinforced concrete roof is considered inauspicious.

The interior of a Kela house is not partitioned into compartments. The hearth is usually located in the right corner of the entrance. Sometimes it is located in the verandah outside. A wooden platform of waist height close to a side wall is constructed and in some houses wooden planks at head height are fixed against the walls. These platforms are used for keeping their valuable possession while the snake baskets are kept under the wooden platform.



A change from well to tube well

The Kelas themselves do not build their houses nor do they have knowledge of thatching or repairing it. They usually employ the members of other castes of the locality for these purposes. Before constructing a house, they consult an astrologer belonging to the *Nohak* Caste of the village Patia or Kalarahang to indicate the auspicious day for setting the first pillar in case of a katcha house or for laying the first stone in case of a pucca house. On the appointed day, the priest who belongs to a low-grade Brahmin, the astrologer and the carpenter belonging to *Badhei* caste, a mason belonging to *Khandayat* caste or *Tanti* caste will be present to do their respective jobs. The astrologer selects the spot where the pillar or the stone will be fixed. The priest performs the worship with the ritual materials brought by him on payment of cost in advance by the client. Thereafter the carpenter or the mason sets the pillar or lays the stone in the proper place. For their services each of them receives payment in cash varying from Rs. 15/- to Rs. 20/- each and a piece of new cloth. Thereafter the house is constructed with the help of the carpenter and the mason. The approximate cost of materials and construction at current prices of a pucca house, a semi-pucca house and a katcha house is shown below.

A) Cost of construction of a pucca house with a floor space of 315 square feet excluding verandah.

Items of expenditure	Amount
1. Dressed laterite slab 1000 (2' X1' X1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ')	Rs. 2500.00
2. Cement 8 bags	Rs. 520 00
3. Labour charges for cement work	Rs. 1200.00
4. Iron rod for chaja & window railing	Rs. 500.00
5. Wooden materials for the roof	Rs 800.00
6. The wooden materials for the door and the window	Rs. 500.00
7. Asbestos sheets with fittings	Rs. 2400.00
	Rs 250.00
8. White washing of walls and painting of door	Rs. 200.00
9. Labour charges for carpenter	Rs. 1000 00
	Rs. 10,000.00

B) Cost of construction of a semi-pucca house (pucca walls and straw thatched roof) with a floor space of 315 Sq. ft.

Items of expenditure	Amount
1. Dressed laterite slabs (2' X1' X1 $\frac{1}{2}$ ') 1000 pieces	Rs. 2500.00
2. Cement 8 bags	Rs. 520 00
3. Labour charges for cement work	Rs. 1200.00

4. Wooden and bamboo materials for the roof	Rs. 1000.00
5. Rope	Rs. 40.00
6. Wooden materials for the door and window	Rs. 500.00
7. Labour charges for the carpenter	Rs. 500.00
8. Fittings	Rs. 60.00
9. Straw for thatching	Rs. 500.00
10. Labour charges for thatching	Rs. 150.00
11. White washing of walls and painting, washing of the doors	Rs. 200.00
	<hr/>
	. 7170.00

C) Cost of construction of a katcha house with a floor space of 315 Sq. feet

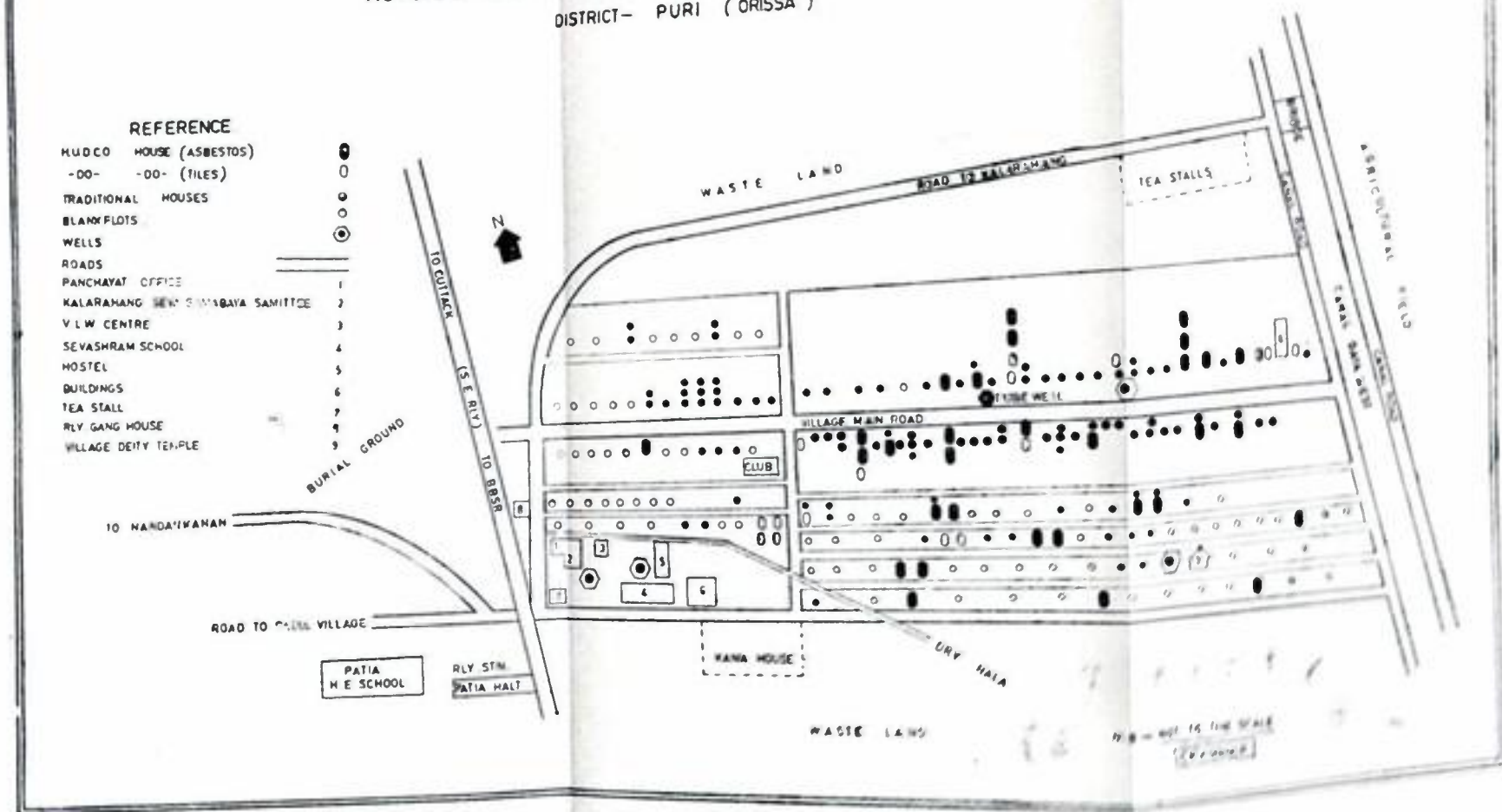
Items of Expenditure	Amount
1. Laterite pillar 6 nos	Rs. 200.00
2. Bamboo rafter 50 nos	200.00
3. Bamboo baten 4 bundle	Rs. 60.00
4. Rope 4 Kgs	Rs. 40.00
5. Labour charges for construction of mud walls	Rs. 400.00
6. Labour charges for the carpenter	Rs. 500.00
7. Straw for thatching	Rs. 500.00
8. Labour charges for thatching	Rs. 150.00
9. Cost of wood for the door	200.00
10. Iron fittings	Rs. 50.00
11. Cost of white washing and painting	Rs. 200.00
	<hr/>
	Rs. 2500.00

The household articles in a Kela house includes both traditional and several items of modern articles. Almost all items are purchased from outside. An inventory of such articles in four sample households belonging to different economic categories is given in the next page.

NOTIONAL MAP OF SAPUA KELA SETTLEMENT OF PADMAKESHARIPUR.
DISTRICT- PURI (ORISSA)

REFERENCE

- MUDCO HOUSE (ASBESTOS) ○
- OO- -OO- (TILES) ○
- TRADITIONAL HOUSES ○
- BLANK PLOTS ○
- WELLS ○
- ROADS ———
- PANCHAYAT OFFICE 1
- KALARAHANG MEN'S SABAYA SAMITTEE 2
- V L W CENTRE 3
- SEVASHRAM SCHOOL 4
- HOSTEL 5
- BUILDINGS 6
- TEA STALL 7
- RLY GANG HOUSE 8
- VILLAGE DEITY TEMPLE 9



1:10,000

Inventory of household articles of sample households belonging to different economic categories

Sl. No. of articles	Local name	English equivalent	Approximate cost per piece (Rs.)	Duration of use (Year)	Number possessed by household in the category of									
					Upper Rich	Middle	Lower Middle	Poor	8	9				
1.	Palanka	Framed bedstead	150	30 to 40	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
2.	Table	Wooden Table	40	20 to 25	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
3.	Chouki	Wooden Chair	30	20 to 25	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
4.	Trunk	Steel Trunk	25	20 to 25	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
5.	Katha bakas	Wooden Box	20	10 to 15	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
6.	Radio	Radio	300	10 to 15	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
7.	Tape recorder	Tape recorder	600	10 to 15	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
8.	Ghanta	Wrist Watch	300	15 to 20	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
9.	Cycle	Bicycle	700	20 to 25	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	22
10.	Torch	Torch	25	10 to 15	1	-	-	-	-
11.	Chhata	Umbrella	20	4 to 5	1	1	-	-	-
12.	Stove	Kerosine Stove	45	4 to 5	1	1	-	-	-
13.	Gara	Brass Jar	80	30 to 40	1	1	-	-	-
14.	Balti	Bucket	20	10 to 12	1	1	1	1	1
15.	Dekchi	Aluminium cooking pot	15	10 to 12	3	4	3	2	2
16.	Kadei	Cast-iron pot for preparing curry.	12	6 to 7	1	1	1	1	1
17.	Kansa dhal	Bell-metal jug	20	20 to 25	1	-	-	-	-
18.	Rasa dhal	Aluminium jug	8	8 to 10	1	1	1	1	1
19.	Rasa gilas	Aluminium timber	4	8 to 10	2	1	1	1	1
20.	Rasa bela	Aluminium pot	8	8 to 10	2	4	3	3	3
21.	Danki	Ladle	2	8 to 10	2	1	1	1	1
22.	Pitha	Frying flat rod	1	8 to 10	1	1	1	1	1
		Khadika							
23.	Tawa	Baking pan	5	8 to 10	1	-	-	-	-

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
24	Lanthan	Lantern	15	10 to 12	1	1	-	-
25	Dibri	Lamp	1	3 to 4	1	1	1	1
26.	Sabal	Crowbar	5	15 to 20	1	1	1	1
27	Katuri	Bill hock	8	8 to 10	1	1	1	1
28.	Kuradhi	Axe	8	8 to 10	1	1	1	1
29	Mana	Grain measuring	5	8 to 10	1	1	1	1
30.	Sika	Carrying net	4	3 to 4	4	4	5	5
31.	Bahungi	Carrying pole	5	3 to 4	2	1	1	1
32.	Jota	Rope used for carrying fuel wood	5	3 to 4	2	2	2	2
33.	Tokei	Baskets	3	2 to 3	2	2	2	2
34.	Kula	Winnowing fan	3	2 to 3	1	1	1	1
35.	Badasapa pedi bigger size	Snake basket of	30	15 to 20	1	1	1	1
36.	Dambaru	Dumb-bell	-	-	1	1	1	1
37.	Sanasapa pedi smaller size	Snake basket of	6	10 to 15	3	5	6	6

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
38.	Akha	Gunny bag	4	2 to 3	2	2	2	2
39.	Churi	Knife	2	10 to 12	2	2	2	2
40.	Batua		4	8 to 10	1	1	1	1
41.	Razor	Shaving razor	5	10 to 15	1	1	-	-
42.	Guakati		2	10 to 15	1	1	1	1
43.	Pania	Comb	2	3 to 4	2	2	2	2
44.	Sisi	Bottle	1	2 to 3	3	3	3	3
45.	Khajuripati	Mat of wild date plam leaf	10	8 to 10	2	2	3	3
46.	Saupa	Mat of grass	15	6 to 8	1	1	-	-

A few well-to-do households have wooden chair, table and cot. They have mats for sleeping purposes. Aluminium utensils both for cooking and eating, earthen vessels for cooking and storing water are commonly seen. Some well-to-do households have brass water jars, bell-metal utensils for taking food. Baking pan and spoon are commonly seen. Some households have lantern, almost all households have kerosine lamp and well-to-do households possess bicycle, radio, tape-recorder, umbrella, kerosine stove, suitcase, steel trunk and brief case. Besides all these articles they have snake-baskets and equipments used in carrying out their traditional profession. A list of equipments used in snake-catching, fishing and bird-catching are given in the next page.

(A) List of equipments used in snake-catching

Sl. No.	Local name of the equipment	English equivalent	Purpose
1	2	3	4
1.	Sapapedi	Flat circular bamboo basket with lid.	For keeping snake
2.	Badi	Wooden stick about three feet length & one inch in girth.	Used in pressing the head of the snake against the land surface when caught afresh
3.	Akha	Gunny bag	Carrying big snake
4.	Sabal	Crowbar	For digging out the hole in which snake is hidden
5.	Chaku	Knife	For removing the poisonous teeth of the snake
6.	Guakati	Betel-nut cutter	For chopping finger tip when beaten by snake
7.	Sika-bahungi	Carrying pole with nets	For carrying the equipment and the snake
8.	Carbolic Acid	Carbolic Acid	For the treatment of snake bite

(B) List of equipments used in bird-catching and fishing

Sl. No.	Local name of the equipment.	English equivalent	Purpose
1	2	3	4
1.	Fasa	Rope trap	For entrapping birds
2.	Bag	Cotton hand bag	For carrying birds caught
3.	Gamcha	Napkin	For carrying
4.	Banisi	Angle	For catching fish with a hook and bait
5.	Sabal	Crowbar	For digging
6.	Khalei	Bamboo container	For carrying fishes
7.	Chaku	Knife	For removing thorn from limbs

There is no peculiarity in their dress and ornaments. They use modern dresses and ornaments like their Hindu neighbours. The male members are found using bead or metal necklaces and ear-rings like women. Possession of gold and use of gold ornaments are taboo for them because they believe that the owner and the user will meet unnatural death. Use of shoes and chapals is no more a taboo as in the past. Foot wear has become very common among the people of younger generation. Silver ornaments and coins containing silver, pucca house, modern articles and snake are considered their wealth.

As regards bodily cleanliness and sanitary habits, the women are cleaner than men. Use of washing soap and powder for cleaning clothes and use of bathing soap is common among them. Women, particularly maidens put on costly modern sarees and other dresses and different varieties of ornaments of different metals except gold and use modern cosmetics. They take particular care of their hair shaping it to a beautiful bun tied with coloured ribbons and ornamented with flower-designs of silver and other metals. Tattooing of their own name or those of gods and goddesses on the inner side of the arm is prevalent among both sexes.

Rice is their staple food and they take it at least two to three times a day. They also take

tea and tiffin which they get from outside. They are fond of fish and meat, dal, curry, dry fish or fried green leaves invariably constitute a side dish with the staple food. They take alcoholic drink of distilled country liquor only on festive occasions. Some male members are addicted to smoking or chewing of tobacco mixed with lime. Men and women take betel with tobacco. They carry with them all the ingredients of betel in a pouch called *batua* wherever they go.

The Kela commonly suffer from scabbies, fever, cough and cold and stomach trouble mainly due to change of place and water during their movements from place to place. They believe that such diseases are caused by unhygienic water and food, their exposure to climatic changes. But diseases like T. B., leprosy, cancer and filaria are believed to be caused by one's mis-deed and disrespect to superiors like parents and uncles. For common ailments they primarily depend on herbal medicines prepared by them. Some of them have knowledge about preparing some items of medicines from herbal plants and other materials and sell these to the needy persons during their visit. For the treatment of scabbies, they bring *nim* (*Azadirachta Indica*) leaves and *chua* (Oil distilled from *jhuna* or dried milk of *sal* trees used as incense). These are boiled with water. This is followed by anointing the affected portion with oil extracted from *Karanja* (*Pongamia glabra*) or

from Bolanga (*calophyllum ionophyllum*) or with ashes of *arakha* (*Calotropis gigantea*) plant. For cough and cold they take water boiled with *basanga* (*Adhatoda Vasica*) leaves. For dysentery they take water mixed with sugarcandy, *juani* (used as spices) and *ganja* leaf (Indian hemp).

ECONOMIC LIFE

The Kela are a semi-namadic group of people who move in batches from place to place round the year with occasional visit to their permanent settlement at Padmakesharipur on certain festive occasions. They mainly depend on their traditional occupations of snake-catching, snake-charming and sanke-selling. These are supplemented by several other economic activities such as mouse-play, magical performance, bird-catching, jugglery, sale of folk and herbal medicines, amulets, tattooing, sale of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metals. Some of them also possess land which they cultivate, some work for wages and some of them have joined in regular services. Table IV gives the occupational distribution of workers.

Table IV

Occupational distribution of workers among Kela as per Survey (Primary occupation) in 1983.

Sl. No.	Occupation	Total workers	Male workers	Female workers
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Snake-charming	252 (49.02)	252 (89.67)	—

1	2	3	4	5
2	Sale of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metals	62 (12.06)	-	62 (26.61)
2.	Tattooing	32 (6.23)	-	32 (13.73)
4.	Magic performance	6 (1.17)	6 (2.13)	-
5.	Cultivation	2 (0.39)	1 (0.36)	1 (0.43)
6.	Forestry	34 (6.61)	6 (2.13)	28 (12.02)
7.	Wage-earning	117 (22.77)	8 (2.85)	109 (46.78)
8.	Regular service	9 (1.75)	8 (2.85)	1 (0.43)
Total		514 (100.00)	281 (100.00)	233 (100.00)

The workers numbering 514 constitute 56.22 per cent of the total population of 916. Out of these workers 49.02 per cent depend on snake-charming, 22.77 per cent on wage-earning, 12.06 per cent on sale of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metal, 6.61 per cent on forestry and 6.23 per cent on tattooing. Only 9 persons have joined regular service, 6 persons conduct magical performances and 2 persons do cultivation.



Showing their skill in snake charming

In other words, about 69.08 per cent still depend on their traditional occupations such as snake-charming, sale of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metal, tattooing and magical performance and the rest 29.02 per cent have taken up wage-earning, service and cultivation as their primary sources of livelihood.

Among the male, the workers constitute 59.79 per cent of the total population of 470. Snake-charming and magical performances and sale of charms and herbal medicines are exclusively done by male workers. Similarly sale of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metals and tattooing are done only by female workers. The Kela women are engaged in wage-earning and collection of forest produce in a higher proportion than their male counterparts. Among the females the workers constitute 52.24 per cent of its total population of 446. Various economic activities undertaken by the persons of different sexes and age-groups are given below.

Age & sex group	Economic Activities
Adult-male	Snake-catching, Snake-charming, bird catching, sale of charms and herbal medicines, magical performances,

collecting minor forest produces like firewood, fruits and green leaves and wage-earning.

Adult-female : Tattooing (*ulki*), selling of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metals, wage-earning, collection and sale of minor forest produces like firewood, fruit and green leaves.

Boys : Bird-catching, assisting father or elder brother in snake-charming and in showing magical performances, watching camp and occasionally begging, collection of firewood.

Girls : Selling of toys, cosmetics and ornaments of cheap metals, collection of firewood and other minor forest produces, watching the camp, giving company to mother when going out.

The division of economic pursuit undertaken by different sexes according to age-groups mentioned above is not a water-tight compartment since there is no bar for a woman to engage herself in snake-charming or magical performances which are mostly done by males and there is also no bar for a man to do tattooing or to sell toys, cosmetics or ornaments which are generally

done by woman. There is no bar for a man or woman to do any of the economic pursuits whether traditional or modern followed by them. In spite of adoption of several new economic activities the majority of the Kela population still depend on their traditional occupations which are discussed below.

Snake-charming

The main occupation of the Kelas is snake-charming. They also catch snakes for sale either among themselves or to outsiders.

They have knowledge about the places where different species of snakes are generally found. They visit these places in batches during different seasons to catch them. The names of places which they visit and the snakes they catch are given in Table V.

Table V

Places visited for catching snakes

Species	Season in which caught	Locality in which found
1. Ahiraj (King Cobra) (Naja Hannah)	November- December- January	Raj-Kanika and Kujanga areas of Cuttack district, Chandaka area of Puri district
2. Tampa, Gokhara (Naga) (Naja Naja)	February- March	Satyabadi area of Puri district
3. Ajar (Python Molurus)	November- December	Raj Kanika & Kujanga areas of Cuttack district, Sundarban area of West Bengal, Deogarh of Sambalpur district
4. Katkatiatampa (Trimeresurus Gramineus)	February- March	Satyabadi area of Puri district

Species	Season in which caught	Locality in which found
5. Chiti (Bungarus caeruleus)	February- March	Any place whenever they locate
6. Boda (Vipera Russellii)	November- December	Chandaka area of Puri district
7. Dhulia Naga (Echis Carinatus)	February- March	Satyabadi area of Puri district

The *Ahiraj* species generally live in hillocks covered with dense forests and *Gokhar* in ant-hills or under straw thatched roofs of old houses. Both the species usually come out in the early morning before sun rise or in the evening to take fresh air. This is the time when these are caught. The species of *Ajagar* and *Boda* take shelter in swampy lands covered with bushes and shrubs. Both these varieties enjoy cool sleep of longer duration during winter season when these are caught. They also catch different species of non-poisonous snakes such as *Dhanda* (*Natrix piscator*) and *Mati Biradi* (*Natrix stolata*) to use as food for the poisonous snakes. They also catch frog, mouse and different varieties of birds for use as food for the snakes.

Only male members go out in batches to catch snakes. Before proceeding on their snake catching trips they pray and worship Lord Siva, Goddess Mangala and forest deities for success in the pursuit and safety. During the days when engaged in snake-charming they themselves cook their own food in earthen pots and also take their food in leaf plates or earthen pots. They neither eat the left-over food of other persons nor partake food with any body during the period when engaged in snake-catching. The equipments used in catching snakes consist of a wooden stick of 3 feet in length and one inch in girth, a gunny bag, a knife and bamboo-baskets with carrying nets.

Before going to catch snakes, they clean and wash these equipments, if they are not new. They also carry carbolic acid with them for the treatment of snake-bite.

In the forest they look for the snakes in the bushes and big trees near the sources of water. When a snake is located, the person should move very stealthily without making slightest noise and should try to hold it by its tail and raise it swiftly in such a manner that its head will be touching the surface of the land, so that the snake gets no time to turn and bite him. In such a position the snake will not be able to move, rather it will start biting the surface. The person will press the head of the snake with the stick with his left hand. When the snake is under control, he moves his right hand to hold the head of the snake. Then there follows the removal of the poisonous teeth with the help of a knife before putting the snake into the basket. A bigger snake if found in deep sleep is caught by hand without using the stick. He catches this type of snake by head and tail simultaneously and puts it into the sack.

Although the snake catching is an individual pursuit they move in batches and help each other at the time of need. If any occasion arises for a joint endeavour for catching bigger snakes, they share the cost which varies from Rs. 500/-

to Rs. 1000/- equally among themselves. The persons who will keep the snake will pay the shares to other partners. At present permission of the officers of local Forest Offices is to be obtained before going to catch snakes in the forests in accordance with the Forest Rules.

Table VI

Local names of different varieties of snakes handled by the Kela

Zoological name of species	Local names	Approximate cost
1. Naja Naja	1. Gokhara or Naga (with sandle mark on head)	Rs. 30.00
	a) Italia Naga	Rs. 20.00
	b) Kanthua Naga	Rs. 20.00
	c) Dhulia Naga	Rs. 20.00
	d) Gendalia Naga	Rs. 20.00
	2 Tampa (with lotus mark on head)	Rs. 20 00
	a) Panibuda tampa	Rs. 15.00
	b) Patraja tampa	Rs. 15 00
	c) Kolthia tampa	Rs. 15.00
	d) Karkatia tampa	Rs. 15.00
2. Naja Hannah (King cobra)	1 Ahiraj	Rs. 500-1000
	2. Sankha-chuda	Rs. 500-1000
	3 Manichuda	Rs. 500-1000

1	2	3
3. Python Molurus	1. Ajagar	Rs. 200.00
4. Bungarus (Fasciatus)	1. Rana	Rs. 15.00
5. Viper Russelli	1. Boda	Rs. 25.00
6. Bungarus Caeruleus	1. Chiti	Rs. 10.00

Now-a-days some of them are not going to catch snakes. They purchase the snakes from other members of their own group or from other sections of their caste, such as *Pathania Kela*, *Bajikaria* and *Matia Kelas* coming from Andhra Pradesh who catch snakes primarily for sale. If an individual has snakes more than what he requires he sells them either to his fellow members or in Clacutta. The approximate cost of each variety of snakes is also given in Table VI.

The longevity of a snake in natural surrounding is generally 30 years, but it can survive only for 8 to 10 years under human care and nourishment. The cobra or *Ahiraj* snakes are given to eat live frog, small bird, lizard, mouse and non-poisonous snakes. In the absence of these small pieces of mutton are given. Clear water is supplied to drink. Both food and water are given to these snakes kept in the bamboo baskets atleast once in a week. A snake when required to drink is brought outside and its head is dipped in water and kept in watch. It brings out its head from the water pot after it has drunk

sufficiently. Thereafter it is put inside the bamboo basket.

The Kelas generally move in groups consisting of six to fifteen families in a group and visit various parts of Orissa and outside Orissa to earn their livelihood through their traditional profession throughout the whole year excepting their brief stay extending for a fortnight or so in their native village during Dola Purnima in the month of March, Raja Sankranti in June or Dasarha in October and Pimpei in November. In the past all families excluding the old persons and pregnant women used to leave the village in several groups. In such cases they had to engage *Dakua* or some local people to watch their houses on payment. But at present most of the families are not taking their women and children with them.

Married brothers with their parents and with families of paternal or maternal uncles, generally form a group. Before starting their seasonal migration they informally discuss about the areas which they intend to visit and form groups. In this respect, they gather information about the area affected by natural calamities like flood, drought and epidemics for exclusion from the list of areas for their visit. They visit those areas where the people can understand the language spoken by them. The formation of a group is called *Sea-bandha*. Each group selects a *Dalpati*



With a hope to get a good income this time

(Leader) who will preferably be the seniormost and most experienced male member of the group. The main duties of the *Dalpati* is to lead the group and take care of its members. Sometimes a group may be sub-divided into several smaller groups for their movement with the permission of the *Dalpati*.

They carry with them all the things required in a camp life such as mats, mosquito-net, utensils for cooking and taking food. These articles are carried by both husband and wife assisted by other family members accompanying them. The male member carries his share which generally includes snake-baskets, medicines, stationery articles for sale and utensils and food stuff with the help of a carrying pole and the female carries in head-load of all other necessities such as mats and clothes.

At the time of movement, they generally camp in urban, semi-urban areas and bigger villages. In such places, they take shelter under a big tree, open sheds of the weekly market or in some deserted big buildings close to the source of drinking water. In the camp everybody gets up very early. The male member lits the hearth and the female member goes out to the water source to wash the utensils and to fetch water after finishing daily ablutions. When she returns and cooks the food, the male member goes out for

the daily ablutions. Thereafter all of them take their morning meal simultaneously about 9 a. m. Women wash the utensils and men check up their equipments. After taking rest for half an hour or so, he goes out to visit different parts of the town or to a neighbouring village to show snake-play. She carries the stationery articles, ornaments, toys and the instruments and materials for tattooing in a bamboo basket on her head and visits different parts of the town or the neighbouring village. The children watch the camp. Sometimes they go out to beg or to fetch firewood. She returns early at about 3 p. m. to the camp. Once again she goes to fetch water for the evening meal. Men return at about 4 p. m.. While cooking will be going on, the family members discuss about the days experience. They take their meal in the evening. All members of the camp spend sometime in chitchating before going to bed.

The duration of stay in a camp during their movement extends for five to fifteen days occasionally upto one month depending upon the number of villages which they can visit for exhibiting snake-play. Under the leadership of Bichitra Das, a group of 15 households with a population of 38 (17 male adults, 5 female adults and 6 children) left the village after Dasarha, by train to Berhampur in Ganjam district. The itinerary of the group giving the names of the

places where they camped and duration of stay in different camps is given below.

Places of camp	Duration of stay	Month
1. Berhampur	One month	August-September
2. Kukudakhandi	7 days	September
3. Nimakhandi	5 days	September
4. Solagh	10 days	November
5. Handighar	8 days	November
6. Bhabandha	10 days	November
7. Bhatgumuda	10 days	December
8. Chhatrapur	15 days	December
9. Court Chhatrapur	15 days	January
10. Rambha	10 days	January
11. Hmua	10 days	January-February
12. Khalikote	10 days	February
13. Keshpur	8 days	February
14. Ganja	8 days	February
15. Balugaon	One month	March
16. Banpur	10 days	April
17. Soleri	7 days	April
18. Gangadharpur	7 days	April
19. Kuhudi	7 days	May

1	2	3
20. Bhusandapur	7 days	May
21. Kalupada	5 days	May
22. Nirakarpur	5 days	May
23. Golbai	6 days	May

Another group of 8 families with 21 persons (8 male adults, 9 female adults & 4 children) led by one Basanta Das left the village by train after Dasarha for Bhadrak in Balasore district and camped in the places.

Place of camp	Duration of stay	Month
1. Bhadrak	Two months	July-August
2. Soro	10 days	August
3. Bahanaga	7 days	September
4. Nilgiri	7 days	September
5. Kaptipada	15 days	September
6. Udala	10 days	October
7. Khunta	7 days	October
8. Jashipur	7 days	October
9. Rairangpur	One month	November
10. Gorumahisani	15 days	December
11. Baripada	Two months	December- January
12. Suliapada	10 days	January- February
13. Kostha	8 days	February

1	2	3
14. Amarda	8 days	February
15. Betnoti	5 days	February
16. Baisinga	7 days	March
17. Balasore	One month	March-April
18. Bhadrak	One month	April-May
19. Chandabali	15 days	May-June

Another group of only nine adult male members led by one Hemanta Das to Jamshedpur area of Bihar State. They left their village after Dasarha for Chianbasa in Bihar State. They travelled by train upto Jajpur-Keonjhar Road and then by bus upto Chainbasa. Various places where they camped one after another are as follows :

Places of camp	Duration	Month
1. Chainbasa	15 days	October
2. Kuju	7 days	November
3. Keshargadia	6 days	November
4. Ichagada	6 days	November
5. Rajnagar	10 days	November
6. Heta	7 day	December
7. Pataka	5 days	December
8. Jadugoda	10 days	December
9. Musabani	10 days	December
10. Rajghat	7 days	January
11. Rakha Mines	10 days	January

1	2	3
12. Tata	Two months	January-March
13. Gambharia	7 days	March
14. Kanda	7 days	March
15. Seni	5 days	April
16. Gadabambu	5 days	April
17. Mahalmorucha	7 days	April
18. Supeisahi	7 days	April
19. Kuruma	5 days	April
20. Gopinathpur	6 days	May
21. Itihasa	10 days	May
22. Kareikala	8 days	May
23. Latapahadi	10 days	May
24. Chakradharpur	10 days	June

Another group of 5 male adults under the leadership of one Nath Das, visited various parts of the State not at a stretch but at different months of the year. They went to a place from their village and camped there for a period not exceeding 30 days and returned home. After staying at home for three to four days they left for another place. During the year 1983-84 the group visited the following places.

Places of camp	Duration of stay	Month
1. Puri	One month	October- November
2. Balugaon	10 days	December



Taming the newly caught snake

Places where camped	Duration of stay	Month
3. Nayagarh	10 days	December
4. Banki	8 days	December
5. Talcher	10 days	January
6. Dhenkanal	15 days	January
7. Berhampur	10 days	February
8. Paradeep	15 days	February
9. Chandabali	10 days	March
10. Baripada	15 days	March
11. Rairangpur	15 days	April
12. Choudwar	10 days	April
13. Dandakaranya	One month	May
14. Balimela	One month	July
15. Kalahandi	10 days	August
16. Balliguda	10 days	August
17. Phulbani	15 days	August-September

While they are away from homes, they keep contact with their kinsmen and other members of their community staying in the village through postal correspondence. Whenever any necessity arises for them to be present in their home village, they come back. Sometimes the caste-council directs them to return to the village on or before a fixed date. On such occasions they have to come back to village otherwise they have to pay a fine to the council.

feet with dust particles, under the light provided by lightening in the sky. In the month of *Baisakh* (April-May), Lord (Jagannath) comes out for boating during a festival called *Chandan* (Sandal wood) Jatra providing an opportunity for the devotees outside the temple. In the month of *Asarh* (June-July) Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra again come out and go to the maternal aunts house in chariots during the famous car festival. In the month of *Sraavan* (July-August) when there is heavy rain lord use sandal made of gold. The *Bhadrab* (August-September) is the month when Lord (Srikrishna) is born to protect the mankind by killing Kansa. Thereafter lord killed Putana (in the incarnation of Ramchandra) which was not known to King Dasaratha. The month of *Aswinu* (September-October) Gopis and so also the unmarried girls spend the fullmoon day (called *Kumar Purnima*) by dancing and rejoicing. The festive calendar in honour of Lord Krishna ends in the month of *Kartika* (October-November).

During the snake-play and mouse-play, the Kela allures the audience with his talk, song and action and gets scope to sell the herbal medicines and amulets. Similarly Kela women can allure the womenfolk for selling cosmetics, toys and ornaments. While undertaking the painful operation of tattooing she sings romantic songs, some of which are reproduced below :

- (a) Chhi karide, mana maride, gandi paride,
 Chaul bhaja, manaku maja
 Kakadarpur niti maja,
 Naera bali, mote dekhi tama dhamak chali
 Ana sorisa, mote dekhi tume tahi karucha.

The theme of the above song is a request to the person undergoing the operation of tattooing to remain mentally strong to bear the pain which is not so severe.

- (b) Asa Asa tu brajabali bege chali
 Chitakutidebi nana bhaliki bhali,
 Mora chitakuta sansare sara
 Asundara na disiba dehaku tora,
 Belabudilani gruhe jibi chali
 Brajataruni, chita kutidebi bhaliki bhali
 Kapalare adha chandradebi kuti
 Duru dusuthiba phuti,
 Beni haste kuti debi suasari,
 Manaku ati jatanakari,
 Mayura mayuri karuthibe dalarebasi
 Kunjabinodia karuthiba bainsi dhuni go
 Dekhuthiba taku niti Kalakanhu mo
 netra sampati go,
 Nua kelunira nua katha ago suna
 Sakhi pachare pachare go
 Keun desha ate ghara tahara go
 Ke atanti janani piar
 Ago sodasi bayasi
 Purusa bayase dekhile jibe tarasi

In this song the Kela woman narrates the beauty of various designs of tattoo-marks for different parts of the body. English translation of this alluring song runs as follows.

Come, come quickly O' Brajabali
 (I) will tatto different designs
 My tattooing is top in the world.
 These (tattoo marks) will not look indescent
 to your body
 It is going to be sun-set
 (I) will return home. O' Brajatarani,
 (I) will tatto different designs.
 'Half-moon' on the fore head,
 will look dazzling from a distance.
 On your arms with utmost care (I) can tattoo
 a pair of parrot or a pair of peacock or a
 picture of Kalakana, Kunjabinodia Srikrushna)
 with a flute in hand which you can see every
 day and hear the music of the flute to
 Kunjabinodia (Srikrushna).
 O' Golden friend (Sakhi) I unknown kela
 woman asking "To which region (you) belong?
 Who is your dear mother?"
 O' sweet sixteen, young men will be amazed
 on seeing you.

(c) Asa chita kutibe Labangalata
 Disuthiba suasari pari
 Kumbhapadithiba dhad ki dhadi
 Asa chita kutidebi Labangalata

Asalo jhia kutiba chita
 Dekhaidebi bahu chita
 Hassi deba tuma manaku
 Asalo chita kutiba Labangalata.

In this song the Kela woman calls the girls by addressing them as Labangalata for undergoing the operation of tatoo-marks of different designs.

English translation of this song is as follows :

O' Labangalata, come for tattooing a pair of parrot, rows and rows of flower designs come, come O' Labangalata for tattooing, come, daughter for tattooing (I will) show you different designs (you) will be joyous come, come, O' Labangalata.

She sells the ornaments and cosmetics on both cash and food grains. Apart from this she also begs for foodstuff, old clothes, vegetables, etc. from the housewives. At present the average daily income of a male member varies from Rs.8/- to Rs. 15/- and in case of a female it is around Rs. 5/-. Previously women were earning quite appreciable amount from tatting operations. At present tattooing has become unpopular among many communities as a result of which the income of Kela women has gone down. Previously, both husband and wife were able to earn Rs. 20/- to Rs. 25/- daily.

About 25 to 30 years back the Kelas were solely dependant for their livelihood on their traditional occupations of snake-charming, tattooing and sale of cosmetics, cheap ornaments and toys, showing magical performances and begging were also additional sources of income. The economic life of the Kelas is in the present time undergoing change. Many Kelas no longer want to pursue their nomadic habits. In fact some Kelas have taken up regular services and some of them, mostly females have become wage earners. Among them there are some Kelas who are interested in educating their children. In such cases the father and other adult members of the household go out on seasonal migration leaving the children in the village with the mother to attend school. Besides wage-earning some of them go out to collect fuel-wood, green leaves and seasonal fruits from the neighbouring Chandaka forest primarily for own use and occasionally for sale.

Now some of them have purchased agricultural land and started cultivating the same in contravention of the taboo current among them since long. Possession of agricultural land and practice of cultivation was considered inauspicious in the past. It was the belief among them that any breach of this taboo would bring disease and death. But this has been changed since last two generations. For the first time the father of one Sailendra Das, who is now a government servant



Trading at the door step

purchased agricultural land about 36 years ago. Subsequently some others also purchased land. At present as many as 40 out of 266 households possess land, the size of holdings varying from Ac. 0.12 to Ac. 3.00. Except one household who cultivates land other land owners have their lands to non-Kela cultivators of the locality on sharecropping basis.

In the past they were not keeping any domestic animal except poultry. But some of them have started keeping of goats and sheep. A few years back two households purchased goats but finding it cumbersome to keep them they gave them to a tribal on condition that whatever income would accrue would be given to the owner. Two more households have now calves and 16 households sheep for which they have obtained loan from commercial bank.

Plantation of fruit trees is now gaining popularity. Several households own trees like jackfruits, mango, guava, lemon, cashewnut and plants like banana, papeya etc. by their own effort as shown in Table VIII. Most of them sell the surplus produce of these trees and plants for additional income. Most of the households grow vegetables like gourd, pumpkin, peas, lady's finger etc. during rainy season mostly for their own consumption.

Women have knowledge about making toys and mats of different sizes with multi-coloured designs from the date-palm leaves which they purchase from the people of *Khajuria* caste of the locality. Toys are sold while mats are primarily meant for their own use. Moreover they have knack for knitting and embroidery work. Now some of the Kela girls are undergoing training in tussar reeling in the Training Centre at Rasulgarh, sponsored by the Khadi and Village Industry Board.

Their income from snake-charming, tattooing and sale of herbal medicines and amulets is on the decrease. As tattooing has become out of fashion there is so to say no income from this source. Use of herbal medicines and amulets has also become very unpopular. Previously they used to earn sufficiently from different sources and therefore were able to save something. But now-a-days the situation has changed and they are in want and living even from hand to mouth has been very difficult.

Table VII

Classification of households by size of land holding.

Sl No.	Size-Class of land holding (in acre)	No. of household	Percentage to total household
1.	Within one acre	32	12.04



Making toys for the children

1	2	3	4
2.	Between 1.0 ac. to 2.5 ac.	6	2.25
3.	Between 2.5 ac. to 3 ac.	2	0.75
4.	Above 3 ac.	—	—
5.	No land	226	84.96
Total		266	100.00

Table VIII
Possession of fruit trees

S. No.	Type of trees	No. of house- hold owning	No. of trees
1.	Jackfruit	19	27
2.	Mango	38	52
3.	Guava	1	1
4.	Cashewnut	14	54
5.	Lemon	1	1
6.	Papeya	8	8
7.	Tamarind	7	7
8.	Date-palm	5	5
9.	Barakoli	2	2
10.	Banana	9	32
11.	Jamu	2	2
12.	Palmolin	1	1

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The Kela community is strictly endogamous and marriage in the same settlement is not approved. All the households in the settlement are closely related to one another by blood.

The family among the Kelas is the smallest social unit and primarily responsible for providing nourishment, food and protection to its members. The elders of the family transmit the knowledge, skill and secrets to its younger generation for carrying on their traditional occupations.

The form and size of the family have considerable influence on social interaction, socialisation and economic life of individuals. The types of family and its composition are given in Table-VIII. The simple nuclear family which is composed of husband, wife and their dependant unmarried children is found in large majority (64.66%). If this is taken together with the intermediate nuclear family having husband and wife only (27.44%), it becomes 92.10 per cent. Monogamy is considered ideal and also a reality in their society. Neolocality is the general rule and a boy soon after his marriage builds a separate house, preferably on the homestead land allotted by his parents. A widow or widower if not very old

enough, gets remarried since it is considered disgrace to remain without having a life partner. There are 21 broken households having widow or widower with or without children and dependant siblings.

The size of household varies from one member to ten members with an average of 3.44 members. From Table IX it is seen that there are 12 households having only one member each. As many as 63 per cent of the total households have 2 to 4 members each. Households having 5 to 7 members each constitute 40.60 per cent and those having 7 to 10 members claim a negligible percentage of 1.66 only. Nuclear families which are smaller in size are most numerous.

After marriage, each adult man is entitled to have his own house and hearth independently with the consent and cooperation of his parents-in-law. Since they are patrilineal the husband is the owner and head of the household. He represents his household in the community and inherits parental property alongwith other brothers.

Table IX

62

Form and size of household

Sl. No.	Form of family	No. of households having							Total no. of families
		One member	Two member	3-4 members	5-7 members	7-10 members	8		
1.	Households having husband, wife and unmarried children.	-	-	59	109	4	172	(64.66)	
2.	Households having husband & wife only	-	73	-	-	-	73	(27.44)	
3.	Households having widow or widower with/without unmarried children or dependants.	12	8	1	-	-	21	(7.90)	
Total		12	81	60	109	4	266	(100.00)	

The husband and wife with their dependants work together as a team for the maintenance of their family. Together they go out on seasonal migration, provided there is no such situation which may warrant the presence of the wife in the native village. The wife is the custodian of the family purse and all earning members of the family have to deposit the daily income with her for family expenses. Without her approval the husband will not venture to spend anything from it.

The husband-wife relationship among them is very informal and friendly with an accent of equality. Even at the time of informal or formal gathering of the village elders the women have freedom to participate in the deliberations. On many occasions more commonly when they are in camp the husband helps his wife in fetching water and cooking meals which are the primary duties of the wife. Both husband and wife are equally responsible for the selection of spouses for their children. Although the husband is the head of the family, he always consults his wife in almost all matters concerning the family.

Parents are primarily responsible for the training of their children in their traditional economic activities. They guide their son and daughter-in-law for a year or so following their marriage in earning their livelihood. The family is solely respo-

nsible for the celebration of most of the religious festivals.

In spite of mutual cooperation and companionship there are occurrences of quarrels and conflicts between husband and wife on the grounds of laziness, suspicious character and bad temper. In the past quarrels and conflicts between husband and wife generally ended with divorce. On such occasions, the aggrieved woman with all her personal belongings had to go to her parents till a compromise was reached or a divorce was effected. The aggrieved husband has to seek the approval of the Caste-Council for a divorce before marrying another woman. But the Caste-council took a big hand by imposing pecuniary punishment on the couple involved in quarrels, conflicts and divorce, which were considered very degrading socially by the neighbouring castes. Now one can find Kela families leading harmonious and conjugal life.

The next bigger unit is the lineage which is called Kurumba. The lineage is a patrilineal group membership of which rests on descent through males from a common ancestor. The members of a lineage group are bound together upto three generations only. Thus a lineage group is segmented into several lineage groups in course of time. The primary function of the lineage group is to observe death ritual of its deceased members.

Apart from this and occasional cooperation in family functions and in camp life, the lineage has no other role to play. Even marriage within the lineage which is commonly restricted among many castes and communities is allowed in their society.

The Kela recognize four patrilineal descent groups known as *Bandhu*. These are *Nandaguru*, *Prasad*, *Parmanik* and *Naik*. Each *Bandhu* group is believed to have descended from a common ancestor as mentioned in the story of their origin earlier. Like lineage, these groups are neither endogamous nor exogamous. There is no symbol or any other insignia attached to any *Bandhu* group. In a group there are several lineages. Status differentiation among these *Bandhu* groups is absent. Previously a person from the *Nandaguru* group was required to act as the priest in the marriage ceremony of the members. But this has been discontinued and now a male and female member from each of the *Bandhu* groups act jointly as priests and priestess in the marriage ceremony. The earlier practice of selection of a male person from the *Prasad Bandhu* group as *Mardar* to distribute wine among the village elders on behalf of the bridegroom's family at the time of marriage ceremony is still continuing.

Apart from this, the most significant role played by these *Bandhu* groups may be marked at the time of communal gatherings on the occasion

of the meetings of the Caste-Council and at the time of performing. Marriage ceremony and purificatory rites for readmitting an outcasted person into the castefold. Male members representing each of the *Bandhu* groups must be present on these occasions.

No meeting of the Caste-Council or the celebration of a marriage or purificatory rites can be held in the absence of representatives of the *Bandhu* groups. Each *Bandhu* group has to select a prestigious and influential male member to act as its leader on these occasions.

The pattern of kinship system among the *Kelas* excepting a few peculiar features is more or less similar to those found among the neighbouring Oriya Castes. There is joking relationship and familiarity between the grand children and grand parents of both maternal and paternal lines and between a man and his wife's younger sister. But the joking relationship of a man with his elder brother's wife and with wife's younger sister which is commonly observed among many Oriya Castes is absent among them.

Avoidance between a woman and her husband's elder brother and husband's maternal uncle common to Oriya castes is not in vogue among the *Kelas*. Avoidance relationship between mother-in-law and son-in-law, between a man

and his wife's elder or younger sister, between a man and his elder or younger brother's wife is observed.

The pattern of reciprocal avoidance between these relatives includes non-utterance of each other's name and non-acceptance of food from hand to hand.

As marriage within the same group living in the same settlement is permitted, individuals are bound one to the other by multiple interlooking ties and all of them have face-to-face relationship. Besides the network of relationships in kinship and affinity, some of them enter the bond friendship with one another within their own group.

Kinship terminology

The kinship terminology used by the Kelas is more or less like that of their Oriya neighbours and is characterised by preponderance of classificatory terms. The terminologies used for the paternal and maternal kins are given here.

Terms of relationship	Terms of reference
Father	Baba, Bapa
Father's father	Dada
Father's mother	Ae
Father's elder brother	Jetha

1	2
Father's younger brother	Kaka
Father's elder sister	Pisi
Father's younger sister	Pisi
Mother	Ma
Mother's father	Dada
Mother's mother	Ae
Mother's brother	Mamu
Mother's sister (elder, younger)	Bada Mansi, Sana Mansi
Father's brother's son (Older than age)	Bhai
Father's brother's son (younger than age)	Bhai
Father's brother's daughter	Didi
Father's sister's son	Bhai
Father's sister's daughter	Didi
Mother's brother's son	Bhai
Mother's brother's daughter	Didi
Mother's sister's son	Bhai
Mother's sister's daughter	Didi
Brother (elder)	Bada bhai
Brother (younger)	Chota bhai
Brother's son (elder brother's)	Putura
Brother's son (younger brother's)	Putura
Sister (elder)	Bada didi
Sister (younger)	Sana didi
Elder sister's son	Bhanaja
Younger sister's son	Bhanaja

1	2
Elder sister's daughter	Bhaniji
Younger sister's daughter	Bhaniji
Son	Po
Son's daughter	Natuni
Son's son	Nati
Daughter	Jhi
Daughter's son	Nati
Daughter's daughter	Natuni
Husband	Marad
Husband's father	Sasur
Husband's mother	Saudi
Husband's elder brother	Bhasur
Husband's younger brother	Diar
Husband's elder sister	Nanand
Husband's younger sister	Chota Nananda
Wife	Me
Wife's father	Sasur
Wife's mother	Saudi
Wife's elder brother	Bada Sala
Wife's elder sister	Bhuasuni
Wife's younger brother	Chota Sala
Wife's younger sister	Sali
Father's sister's husband	Pisa
Father's elder brother's wife	Jethi

1	2
Father's younger brother's wife	Kakima
Mother's brother's wife	Mami
Mother's elder sister's husband	Mousa
Mother's younger sister's husband	Mousa
Elder brother's wife	Bada bhauja
Younger brother's wife	Chota bhauja
Sister's husband elder sister's	Bahatoe
Sister's (younger) husband	Bahatoe
Husband's (elder's brother's) wife	Ja
Husband's younger brother's wife	Ja
Husband's sister's husband	Nanadei
Wife's brother's wife	Salabhauja
Wife's sister's husband	Sadu
Son's wife	Bohu
Son's wife's father	Samadi
Son's wife's mother	Samaduni
Daughter's husband	Jamei
Daughter's husband's father	Samadi
Daughter's husband's mother	Samaduni

1	2
Husband's brother' son	Putura
Husband's brother's daughter	Jhiari
Husband's sister's son	Putura
Husband's sister's daughter	Jhiari
Wife's brother's son	Putura
Wife's brother's daughter	Jhiari
Wife's sister's son	Putura
Wife's sister's daughter	Jhiari
Husband's father's father	Dada
Husband's father's mother	Ae
Step mother	Ma

LIFE CYCLE

Birth :

The life cycle from birth to death among the Kelas shows several special features which distinguish them from the neighbouring castes. The normal attitude towards pregnancy is a matter of pride and rejoicing. When a woman misses her monthly menstrual flow and some other minor signs indicate conception she has to take care about certain things for the safety of own self she should neither see any corpse nor attend funeral. She should not go to temple and cremation ground. She is expected to do her normal work till the seventh month after which she must abstain from heavy work. If it is the first pregnancy, she should not take fish or meat of any kind.

The parents-in-law are expected to be present at home at the time of delivery of their first grand child. The parents of the pregnant woman prefer a female issue to a male one. The delivery is conducted by a village midwife belonging to their own caste in the living house of the family. One or two experienced women remain present to assist the midwife. If any complication arises, the pregnant woman is shifted to the

nearest hospital. A knife is used for cutting the umbilical cord by the midwife or the paternal grand-mother of the baby. The placenta with the umbilical cord is put in an earthen pot and is buried in their kitchen garden or outside. The baby is annointed with turmeric paste mixed with mustard oil and washed. There-after the laying-in room is cleaned by the midwife and the other women present.

The birth pollution lasts for 12 days in case of a male child and for 21 days in case of a female child. During this period, the family members are not allowed to take part in any religious rites. The father of the baby should not cut his hair and nails. The mother should not leave the baby and go out. She should not cook or go to other parts of the house

On the fifth day called *Enturi utha* the house is cleaned with cowdung water and clothes are washed. The goddess *Sathi* is worshipped by the midwife. Fried rice and boiled rice are collected from five other families for offering to the Goddess. On this day an experienced woman puts the marks of burns made by a heated iron nail at four points around the umbilical cord prepared for the purpose so that the baby will not suffer from indigestion and dysentery. Sometimes the baby is given a name on this day.

On the twelveth day called *Bara-jatra* in case of a male baby or on the twentyfirst day (*Ekusia*) in case of a female baby the final purificatory rites are performed. On this day the mother takes her bath and washes her clothes. The father cuts his hair and pares his nails by himself. Food is prepared by the midwife and the women who attended the delivery and some elderly members of the village are fed sumptuously. On this day the name of the baby is given if it is not done earlier.

Child care and Training

When the child is less than six months old, the mother generally does not accompany her husband in seasonal migration but stays back in the village. When the baby becomes eight to nine months old, cereal food in addition to mother's milk is given for the first time. Breast feeding also continues till the baby is 2 years old if the mother does not have another baby within this period. The baby is not given any special food, but takes common food prepared for other members of the family. A child is not carried habitually. When the mother goes out the child is left at home/camp in the care of older children or any reliable person. The baby sleeps with the mother upto the age of 3 years, if the latter does not have another child by then. Generally brothers and sisters sleep together till they are 9 to 10 years old. Not much

care of the children is taken by the parents for their cleanliness.

After the age of 10 years male children of different families sleep in night together in some place lying vacant in the village. Similarly the female children do the same thing in a different place. A widower's house is generally used by the boys and a widow's house by girls as places for sleeping in the night. Here they acquire some knowledge about their traditional economic pursuits and caste-rules by mutual discussion. Older boys and girls narrate their experiences in camps before the young ones.

The boys who do not attend school remain with their father constantly to learn the techniques of the risky craftsmanship of snake-charming. It is the duty of the father or in his absence elder brother or paternal or maternal uncle to train up the boys to earn their livelihood in future. Similarly the mother or in her absence elder sister or paternal or maternal aunt has to train up the girls through formal and informal instruction from time to time. While they go out in seasonal migration, the boys and girls accompany the group in which their parents or in their absence maternal or paternal uncle's family or elder brother's family have joined. The boys observe and assist the adult males in showing their performances. Similarly the girls observe the activities of the adult females for

acquiring knowledge of traditional economic activities.

Besides this informal training at home, the Kelas have recently developed interest in giving education to their children. They now prefer employment in service and business for their children to traditional economic pursuits. Women are now not going out on seasonal migration in large number as in the past, but staying back in the village to look after the children who attend school. At present about 35 per cent of children of the school-going age group of 4-14 years are attending schools.

Marriage :

Among the Kelas, marriage is not merely a matter which concerns the boy and girl who are married, but it is equally a matter of great concern of the family and of the caste. The caste strictly forbids and severely punishes marriage with any outsiders whether belonging to higher castes or lower castes or with relatives in a prohibitive degree. Those who marry outside their caste are outcasted. In case of a male member marrying outside the caste, there is some relaxation for their readmission to the castefold. His readmission is possible only after the death or desertation of his non-Kela wife and by undergoing necessary purificatory ceremonies. But in case of a female

marrying outside the caste, she is outcasted for good and readmission is never allowed. Similarly any person marrying a relative of a prohibitive degree is excommunicated but readmitted after performing the purificatory rites.

Monogamy is ideal and also reality in the Kela society. Out of 243 married males none has more than one wife. This is because a Kela woman does not tolerate co-wife. Neolocality is the general rule, for it is considered proper that a newly married couple set up a new residence apart from their parental home, preferably in a homestead land allotted by the boy's family. But there are some exceptional cases where boys after marriage have moved to take up residence near wife's family. This happens occasionally in case of boys who have no parents. During the first year of their marriage, the newly married couple are guided by their parents. If the couple will go out in their seasonal migration, parents of the boys and the girls join the same group.

As mentioned about the Sapua Kela community is endogamous. Any sexual union between uterine brothers and sisters, and with one's wife's elder sister and with one's younger brother's wife is considered undesirable and incestuous and the offenders are always excommunicated. Marriage between persons of unequal age groups i.e. bet-

ween younger and older persons is considered indecent and not appropriate. In the third place, the preferential marriages such as cross-cousin, parallel-cousin on both father's and mother's lines, levirate and sororate are not in vogue. Lastly, the selection of mate is made from among the familiar faces within the settlement but not outside it.

In the selection of mates, the consent of both the boy and the girl is primary and the role of the parents and neighbours in their selection is secondary. However, the boy and the girl generally take the approval from their parents more particularly from the mother before the final selection of mates is made.

The marriage takes place after the girl attends her puberty and the age at first marriage varies from 18 to 22 years in case of the boys and 15 to 20 years in case of the girls. Child marriage is never practised although parents sometimes select mates for sons and daughters even before they are matured. In such cases, the prospective bride before attending puberty is expected to attend to the domestic duties in the day time in the boy's family. She gets her food and dress like a member of the prospective bridegroom's family and works under the guidance of the would be mother-in-law. After the evening meals she goes back to her parental house to

spend the night there. Families of the prospective bride and bridegroom join together and go out on seasonal migration. This continues till her marriage which generally takes place after one year from the day she attains puberty. While selecting spouses factors like age, efficiency and skill in earning livelihood and physique are taken into consideration by both the boys and girls and also by their parents. As a general rule, the bridegroom is older in age than the bride at their first marriage. But in cases of second or subsequent marriages after widowhood or divorce sometimes the husband may be younger than his wife.

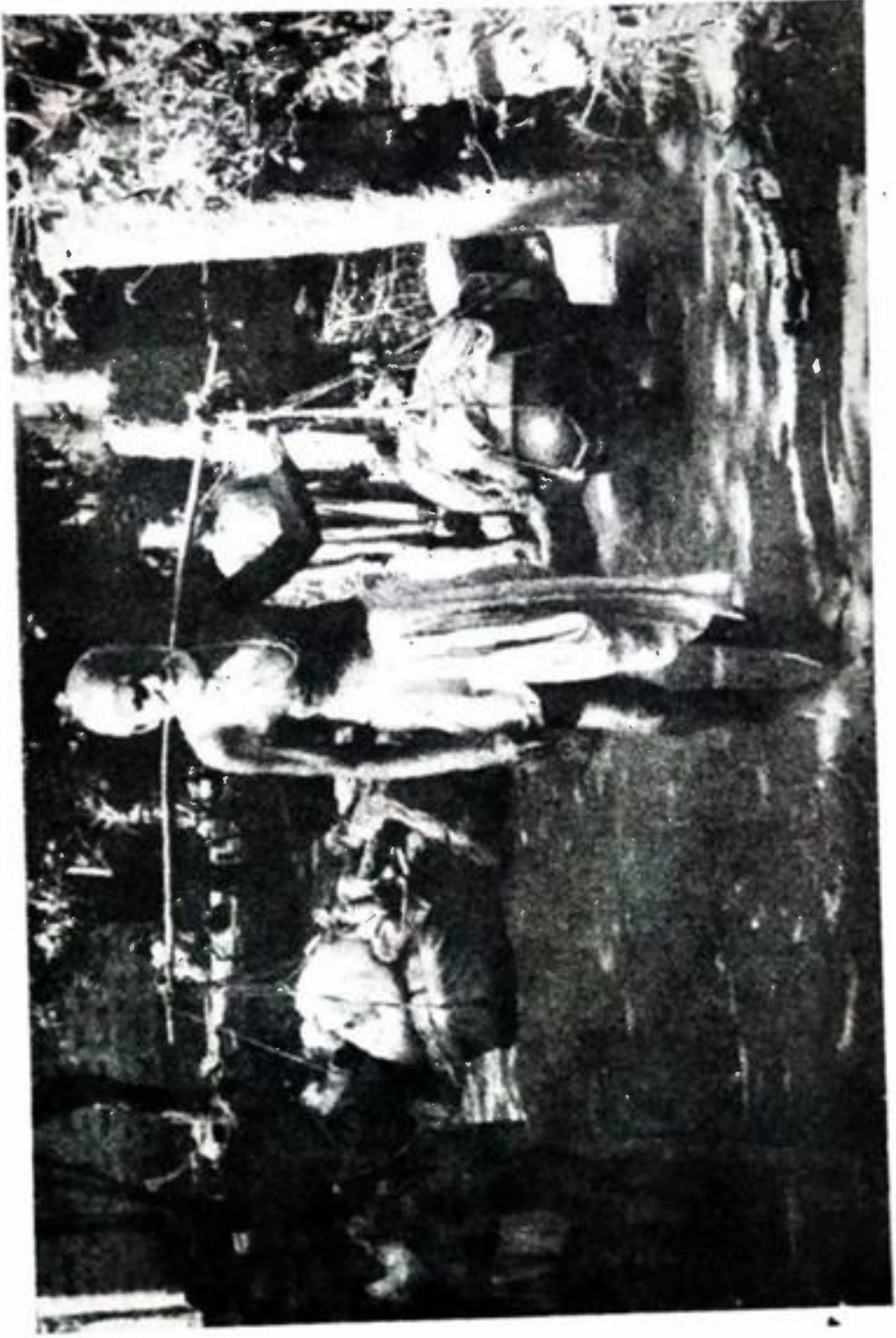
Divorced men and women and widows and widowers can remarry. Soon after the death of the husband or separation by divorce, an able bodied woman gets herself married as it is considered disgrace to her not having husband. In such types of marriages, no regular marriage procedure is followed. Presentation of a saree, bangles and vermilion mark given by the man on the forehead of woman are enough for them to live as husband and wife.

After selecting a spouse, the boy generally informs his parents or in their absence to his paternal and/or maternal uncle about it. If it is approved, the proposal is communicated to the girl's family formally by the boy's parents in a visit accompanied by two village elders. If the

girl's parents give their consent for the marriage, the boy's parents inform the Caste-Council about it. All marriages, now-a-days are celebrated in the village but never in the camp as was occasionally done in the past.

Parents of both the boy and the girl consult the village astrologer belonging to the *Nahak* caste in the locality and fix the auspicious date for the marriage. In the past marriages were performed on any day of the year as was suitable for it. When the date for the marriage is fixed, both the parties formally inform the Caste-council for approval. The boy's parents have to deposit Rs. 16/- and the girl's parents Rs. 13/- with the caste-council which selects a boy married or unmarried and an unmarried girl from each of the *Bandhu*-groups excluding those to which the bridegroom and the bride belong to act as the priest and priestess. If the marriage takes place between persons of one *Bandhu*-group, a boy and a girl are selected from each of the remaining three *Bandhu* groups. If the marriage is taking place between two *Bandhu*-groups priests and priestess are selected from other two *Bandhu*-groups

In the morning of the marriage day, the bride accompanied by the priestess goes to the village shrine to offer flower to the deity and to pray for her blessing on the occasion of her



No rest even at this age

marriage. Both the bride and the bridegroom observe fasting till the last rite of the marriage is performed. All village elders both male and female present in the village should suspend their normal works to participate in the marriage ceremony. If any body does not do so without justified ground, he or she is to pay Rs. 1/- as fine to the caste council. All the village elders, assemble at the marriage platform which is constructed in the village street close to the bridegroom's house. A person called *Marder* is selected from the *Prasad Bandhu*-group to distribute wine and betel to each of the village elders on behalf of the bridegroom's family. In the meantime the priestess should have arranged two garlands, a little quantity of turmeric powder and vermilion for use in the marriage rites. When all persons are served with liquor and betel, the priest and priestess handover a garland, turmeric paste and vermilion to the bridegroom. In an winnowing fan they also handover 4 pieces of betel, sandal wood paste and flowers to the caste council. Thereafter they go with flower and sandal wood paste for distribution among the family members of the bride. Thereafter they return to the bridegroom's house.

The bridegroom dressed with new dhoti and shirt of white colour and occasionally with a ceremonial cap is taken in a procession by the priests and priestesses accompanied by villagers

to the house of the bride. The procession is led by a band of musicians belonging to their own caste. The priestess and other girls present on the occasion sing marriage songs. They return with the bride and bridegroom to the latter's house. On reaching the bridegroom's place the bride and bridegroom are conducted to the marriage platform for undergoing necessary rituals of the ceremony. First of all bridegroom with his left hand is required to anoint turmeric paste on the left hand of the bride & the latter with her right hand on the left hand of the former. Thereafter they exchange garlands. The newly wedded couple pay respect first to the bridegroom's parents, then to the bride's parents and finally to the village elders. Then they sit on the marriage platform for receiving gifts from the relatives and invitees. At the time of giving gifts the guests have to declare which items are given to the bridegroom and which to the bride. Now-a-days gifts include bicycle, radio, watch and electric fan, etc. The guests and relatives present on the occasion are entertained with festive meals by the bridegroom's family.

In the past divorce was very common among them since marriage was considered as a mere contract but not a sacrament. Divorce was possible without or with any of the following reasons subject to the approval of the caste-council.

a) Temperamental differences

- (b) Idleness
- (c) Sexual misconduct
- (d) Disrespect to parents-in-law on either side
- (e) Infection of incurable diseases
- (f) Barrenness
- (g) Marital tension and unhappiness

Although these were the most common grounds on which divorce was sought and caste-council was approached for approval, there were a number of other factors which effected divorce. There might be a pressure from the wife's mother and her kinsmen and influence of the new lover who live in the same village. Moreover legal procedure was easy and legal charges were minimal to obtain a divorce easily with as little stigma or scandal as possible.

The final decision regarding divorce is taken by the caste-council in a meeting attended by village elders belonging to all Bandhu groups. The matter is referred to the caste council by paying a legal fee of Rs. 2/- either by the husband or the wife who seeks divorce. A very simple procedure is adopted in executing a divorce. At the first instance, the council members try to reconcile the differences and if they do not succeed the husband, the wife and their parents, if present are asked to express their opinion. If the party which has sought for the approval of the council does not agree to reconcile, the

council calls both the husband and the wife and gives a piece of straw to each of them for performing the symbolical action of dissolution of marriage tie. At first the husband severs the straw into two pieces. While doing so he utters, "from today onwards I will have no relationship with so and so as my wife". The wife also does the same thing uttering the same thing as was done by her husband. Then comes the turn of one member from each of the Bandhu groups for severing the piece of straw as an expression of approval of the council to dissolve the matrimonial alliance.

Out of the amount of Rs. 2/- deposited by the mover the council retains a rupee and the non-mover is paid a rupee. The wife is required to return all the ornaments & other valuables presented to her by the husband and her parents-in-law and thereafter goes back to her parental house. A woman who has been divorced has no claim over her children who belong to the father. But where there is an infant, the woman is required to keep the baby with her for nourishing till it attains one year of age. The worst sufferers are the children. The father has to take the help of his sister or mother and in their absence aunts to bring up his children till his next marriage. If he does not remarry at all, he takes care of his male children by himself and his sister, mother or aunts the female children. The council never approves divorce of a pregnant wife before delivery.

When such was the state of affairs the Kela leaders became aware of the impact of frequent divorce on the children. The neighbouring non-Kela population looked down upon them for such a disgracing practice. They passed a resolution in their caste council in 1962 to allow divorce on only genuine grounds. Even though the rate of divorce came down, it could not be stopped totally. However, divorce has been strictly banned since 1974. The rate of divorce in 1968 was as high as 30 per cent. At that time there were 163 married male persons with their wives. Among them 42 persons have faced divorce once in their life time, 9 persons twice and 4 persons thrice. Out of 72 cases of divorce, in 39 cases males demanded divorce and in the rest the females. At present there are 245 married couples. Among them only 32 males and 37 females faced divorce before 1973. In addition to the public condemnation and disfavour there are also other factors responsible for the fall in the rate of divorce. The Kela women at present do not get much scope to earn substantially from tattooing as they used to do in the past. As a result they are fast becoming economically dependent on men. Many of them now do not accompany the males in their seasonal migration because the sources from which they used to earn something have dried up and therefore they stay at home and depend exclusively on the earnings of their husbands. In such a situation their inde-

pendent outlook have gone and they now do not think of divorce. Lastly, the infunctions of the caste council have worked effectively to keep the cases of divorce in check.

Death rites

When a person dies, the news spreads immediately in the whole village come to the house of the deceased and make arrangements for the cremation. The members of all the four Bandhu-groups must be present during the cremation. If the members or any Bandhu-group are not available at that time, somebody from any other group should be selected to represent it. If any adult male though present in the village is found avoiding to participate on this occasion without satisfactory reasons, he is fined Rs. 1/- by the caste council. The corpse is covered with a piece of cloth and carried to the cremation ground by the male members. Such articles as tobacco-container, umbrella, utensils and dresses used by the deceased are also carried with the corpse. Women & children are also allowed to participate in the cremation. On reaching the cremation ground, a pit of 6' in length, 2' in breadth & 2½' deep in east-west direction is dug by the male members. In the meantime women will bath the corpse and dress it with a new piece of cloth and apply sandal paste on the forehead. The bed is spread inside the pit and the corpse is put into it

with face upward and head towards the east. They put coins near the corpse in all directions so that the spirit of the deceased will not bring trouble to the villagers. All the belongings taken with the corpse are put by the side of corpse in the pit. The eldest son of the deceased or in his absence any male member of the family or the lineage throws a handful of soil first and other persons present follow him to fill up the pit.

On the way back to the village all persons who went to the burial ground, take bath and come back to the deceased house. Here every body purifies his/her body by sprinkling sanctified water over and taking a few drops of it. They also inhale the smoke coming out of burning neem leaf to avoid the wrath of the spirit of the deceased. The deceased's family feed them with fried-rice if available. The mourning is observed for nine days during which all members of the deceased's lineage (kutumba) abstain from using oil or ghee in food and from eating non-vegetarian diet. During this period they also do not perform any rituals. On the ninth day the houses are cleaned with water mixed with cowdung and clothes are washed. On the tenth day all the old earthen pots are thrown away. All members of the lineage go to the nearby tank and there the male members cut their hair, pare their nails and take bath. Similarly the females and children also take bath. While bathing one of them catches a

fish and keep it in a pot containing water. In a second pot ghee mixed with honey is kept. After taking bath each member drinks a little water from the first pot and takes a little quantity of ghee mixed with honey as a purificatory measure. On returning home they cook their food and now there is no restriction for using in food.

On the eleventh day, the deceased's family has to arrange a feast for all members of the lineage and also for those who accompanied the corpse to the burial ground. If the deceased's family cannot afford, in that case the lineage members contribute in the shape of cash or kind. Either meat or fish is served along with other items of food cooked on this occasion to entertain the agnates. First the members of other three Bandhu-groups are fed and then all others present take their food. The chief mourner offers food, betel and drink to the spirit of the deceased at the burial ground on this day.



Making rope for self use

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The religious beliefs and practices of the Kelas are more or less the same as that of the low caste Hindus. They pray and worship a number of deities starting from high Gods and Goddesses to local ones and minor deities of Hindu pantheon and observe a number of Hindu festivals round the year.

They worship Lord Krishna and Lord Siva for safety and protection from deadly serpents which they deal with constantly. They worship Goddess *Durga* in her various manifestations and incarnations such as Goddess *Bhagavati* of Banpur and *Mangala* of Kakatpur in Puri district and *Chandi* of Cuttack town for safety and security and also for success in their traditional craftsmanship of snake-play. They worship Goddess *Laxmi* on every Tuesday in the month of *Margasira* (November-December). Their village deity named *Nahakani* is equated with Goddess *Durga*. She is represented in a statue of clay and is installed in a shrine. They also visit local shrines of Goddess *Mangala* in the neighbouring villages and perform worship for recovery from illness and also for success in their snake catching expeditions. Besides these deities of their native place they also pray and worship the

presiding deities of different areas which they visit for catching snakes. They also worship *Yama* for the safety and welfare of their children. It is very common practice among them to pray and make vows before the Goddess with promise to sacrifice fowls for the success in snake-charming expeditions or for recovery from illness.

They worship their ancestor-spirits who are believed to have considerable influence over the living members. It is the belief that these spirits help in bringing success in their economic pursuits, enjoying a healthy life provided they are worshipped regularly on festive occasions. These spirits are believed to have their abode in the auspicious pillar that was erected or the first slab of stone laid ceremonially at the time of the construction of the house. Like the living being, they are believed to move about and watch the activities of the people. The oldest male member of the family worships the ancestor spirits on every festive occasion at home and offer food and drink to please them. The annual cycle of religious festivals observed by the Kelas is given below.

Annual cycle of religious festivals

Sl. No.	Festival	Month in which celebrated	Deities worshipped	Purpose of worship	Who performs the worship
1	Pana Sankranti (Mahavisuva Sankranti)	3	4	5	6
1.	Pana Sankranti (Mahavisuva Sankranti)	Baisakh (May)	Ancestral spirits	To seek blessings of the ancestors	Eldest male member of the household in the kitchen
2.	Rajaparab	Jestha (June)	Ancestral spirits	To seek blessings of the ancestral spirits and for rejoicement	Eldest male member of the household in the kitchen

1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	Khudurikuni Osa.	Bhadrab (August- September)	Goddess Mangala (Incarnation of Goddess Durga)	For the welbeing of brothers	Group of unmarried girls celebrate it in a vacant house
4.	Dasarha	Aswina (September- October)	Goddess Nahakani (Incarnation of Goddess Durga)	For the safety and security against any calamity to the villagers	Kela priest called Kalasi in the shrine for the whole community
5.	Pimpae Amavasya (Dipavali- Amavasya)	Kartika (October- November)	Ancestral spirits	To seek blessings of ancestral spirits	Eldest male mem- ber of the house- hold in the cou- rtyard.
6.	Laxmipuja	Margasira (November- December)	Goddess Laxmi	For mate- rial gain in their eco- nomic pursuits	Eldest female mem- ber of the house- hold in the cour- tyard

1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	Panthei Osa (Bata Osa)	Pusa (December- January)	Yama	For the welfare of the children	Several women collectively on every Sunday
8.	Mangala Puja	Chaita (March- April)	Goddess' Mangala (Incarnation of Goddess Durga)	For the welfare of the family	Family members visit shrines of Mangala

On the *Mahavisuva Sankranti* which falls in mid-April coincides with the new year's day of Oriya Calender, the Kelas like their Hindu neighbours worship their ancestor spirits. Foods liked by them are offered to them with drinks and tobacco to keep them in cheerful disposition. On this occasion the box containing amulets and herbal medicines is washed and worshipped and a fresh piece of root of *Bajramuli* (*Clerodendron infortunatum*) plant kept in the box to make the medicines more effective.

The *Raja parab* which is commonly observed by almost all Hindu castes of Orissa for three consecutive days in mid-June is also celebrated by the Kelas. All persons should return from their camps to the village atleast eight days prior to this festival, least the caste-council imposes a cash fine of Rs. 20/- to each of the defaulting head of the households. This is a festival of rejoicing and merry making. All persons suspend all their economic activities. Prior to this festival houses are repaired and cleaned. Most of them particularly children and women put on new dresses. Festive meals with fish or meat preparations are taken. Children, young boys and girls spend their time in playing, swinging and singing. It is at this time that the caste-council is held to adjudicate cases of breach of caste rules, make new rules, finalize accounts of the council and discuss matters concerning the village including measures to be taken

for the solution of various problems which the people face in the village. The people also spend the time leisurely and in gossiping their experiences in the camp life.

The Khudurikuni Osa is observed by the unmarried girls in the month of *Bhadra* (August-September). It is a local festival of the State, observed in honour of Goddess *Mangala*. In memory of the sailor traders popularly known as *Sadhabas* who used to visit different countries overseas for trading this festival is observed. The unmarried girls of the village form several groups observe the festival in some vacant houses of the village separately. An image of Goddess *Mangala* is purchased from the local market along with the offering materials like coconut, cucumber, flat rice, mollasses, etc. All participants have to contribute equally towards the expenses of the worship. The festival is observed in the evening of each Sunday of the month. On these days the participants remain fasting in the day time and break their fast after the worship is over at night. They decorate the image with flowers. One of the girl acts as the priestess, offers the initial worship, while others sing the *Khudurikuni* songs jointly. This is followed by the concluding worship. All participants and also the married women and children if present, are given *Prasad* to eat. The unmarried girls break their fasting by eating *Prasad*. Thereafter they may spend some time in singing

other songs and merry making. The same image of Goddess *Mangala* is retained for similar worship on the subsequent three Sundays of the month. Finally, the image is taken in a procession after the worship on the last Sunday for immersion in the pond. The purpose of this festival is to invoke the blessings of Goddess *Mangala* for the welfare of the brothers of the participants.

Dasarha is another festival which is also observed with great pomp solemnity in the month of *Aswin* (September-October). Those who are out on snake catching expedition have to come back to the village eight days prior to the *Dasarha*. Otherwise they have to pay a fine of Rs. 20/- to the Caste-Council. During this time the communal worship of their village deity named *Nahakani* is held by the village priest (*Kalisi*) who belongs to their own group. Each household contributes in cash towards the expenses of the worship. The deity is worshipped daily from the seventh day to *Vijaya Dasami* Day. Individual households offer coconuts and fruits to the deity and participate in the worship. Those who have been cured from diseases, those who have achieved success in catching snakes and those who have escaped accidents during the last year make special offerings according to the vows made. Cocks are generally sacrificed on behalf of individual households.

During this occasion meeting of the Caste Council is held to discuss caste matters and the

problems of the village. They hold informal discussions among themselves about their experience in different places they visited for catching snakes.

On this special occasion of *Dasarha*, they renovate their tools and equipments and make new ones. The snake baskets are given 'U' mark with vermillion and are sanctified by waving incense around them.

The festival of *Pimpae Annavasya* which is the same as the *Dipavali Amavasya* of the Caste Hindus is celebrated at the household level. This is the time when the ancestral spirits are worshipped by offering specially prepared foods. On this occasion the Kelas clean their houses and at night the eldest male member of each household lights *kaunria* (stem of Jute plant) sticks and offers food, drink and narcotics to the ancestral spirits. At the end of the puja he proceeds to the source of water where the ancestral spirits are left to rest. Those who are in the camp may also perform this festival in the same manner.

They have started worshipping Goddess Laxmi, the Goddess of wealth like their hindu neighbours on every Thursday in the month of *Margasira* (November-December). For this purpose, a small portion of the courtyard is smeared with cowdung. After bath in the morning and putting on clean cloth the eldest female member of the household conducts the worship at the place which is cleaned

for this purpose by offering flower, coconut, vermilion and incense. They repeat this on every Thursday of the month and pray for wealth and prosperity.

Several married women form a group to observe *Bata Osa* in the month of *Pusa* (December-January). On every Sunday they themselves collectively perform the worship in the village-street by offering fried rice, molasses and coconut to *Yama* for the protection of their children. This is not observed by all households.

Most of the households visit the shrines of Goddess *Mangala* located in their own village or in the neighbouring villages on every Tuesday of the month of *Chaitra* (March-April) and offer prayers and fruits and flowers. Those who have recovered from illness or have achieved success in some work for which they had earlier wished to offer something to the deity visit the shrine for offering the materials promised to do so. On these occasions they also pray for the welfare of their family members.

They worship Lord *Siva* like their Hindu neighbours in the morning of every Monday in the month of *Kartika* (October-November). For this purpose they go to the temples of Lord *Siva* located in the neighbouring *Padasahi* and *Kalrahanga* village.

SOCIAL STATUS

The Kela form one of the vulnerable groups of the Scheduled Castes of the State. Since they are a wandering group of people habituated to cook their meals at different places under polluting conditions they are treated by the clean castes as untouchable. As pointed out earlier they were a non-producing community wandering from place to place to earn their livelihood primarily by snake-charming and begging. Because of their economic dependency on others they are considered parasites. But in course of time they have changed their nomadic habit and have become permanent residents of the present habitat. Now they have permanent immovable assets like houses and lands and have made systematic attempts through their Caste Council headed by enlightened leaders to bring about various reforms in their society. They have given up some of their cultural traits which are considered degrading by themselves and by their neighbours. They are now adopting new economic pursuits like agriculture, service and wage-earning.

Here they live in the midst of a number of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and other Castes. Among the Scheduled Castes there are the Keuta (Fishermen), the Pana (Weavers), the

Dhoba (Washermen), the Chamar (Toddy extractors), the Bauri and the Kandara and among the Sch. Tribes, the Savar and the Munda are found in the neighbouring villages. The Brahmin, the Khandayat, the Karan, the Gouda (Milkmen), the Barik (Barbers), the Gudia (Sweet-makers), the Teli (Oilmen), the Bania (Goldsmith), the Kumbhar (Potters), the Kamar (Black-smiths), the Kansari (Bell-metal workers) and the Kachara (Glass bangle sellers) comprise the non-scheduled communities of the area.

Being a nomadic group they had no well-defined position in the caste hierarchy of the Hindu society. An analysis of their present social status in the framework of Hindu social system may be of some significance since various changes in their traditional society have occurred. As they still suffer from the stigma of untouchability, question of getting the services of the Hindu Brahmin, the Barber and the washerman does not arise. Very rarely they invite the low grade Brahmins to officiate in the worship at the time of founding a new house or celebrating certain religious festivals like *Trinatha Mela*. On such occasions a brahmin priest is only called for to bring all the materials used in the *Puja* on payment by the client. The duties of the barber and the washerman are performed by themselves.

The wandering habit of the Kelas which forces them to camp in dirty places, their tradi-

tional occupation of snake-charming which is considered defiling and their habit of eating pork, drinking wine have all added to give them the status of untouchables. They do not provide any service unlike many other Scheduled Castes to other communities and therefore they are considered as parasites on others.

The neighbouring communities maintain a distance from the Kelas. It is evident from the fact that not a single non-Kela family is found inhabiting the Kela settlement of Padmakesharipur. Physical contact with the Kelas by all castes except the Hadi and the Chamar is considered defiling. In the past this was very rigorously observed and nobody from the clean castes was entering their settlement. At that time a Brahmin was not only to take bath and wash his clothes but was also required to change his sacred thread whenever he had physical contact by accident with a Kela. Even the shadow of a Kela falling on any person of clean caste is enough to defile him. Raw vegetables and fruits touched by a Kela are now accepted although it was not the practice in the past. No caste accepts water or any type of food from them. Only the Hadi, the Chamar and the Pana accept tobacco leaves and wine. Now members of all castes are purchasing vegetables and edible fruits like mango and Jackfruits from the Kelas.

The Kelas on the other hand accept cooked food of all types, dry food and water from all castes except from the Dhobas, the Panas, the Hadis, the Chamars, the Bauris and the Kandaras who are included in the list of Scheduled Castes. They accept tobacco leaves and wine from all castes except from the Hadis and the Kandaras. Toddy-drink sold by the Chamars is acceptable to the Kelas. Being a wandering caste they cannot strictly observe the caste regulations of while taking food and water.

The Kelas themselves feel that their status in the society is inferior to that of any clean caste. But they claim a status of equality with the Scheduled Castes living in the locality. They maintain distance by not accepting any food from them. Marital relationship with any other caste is not acceptable. A kela girl marrying a non-Kela boy is expelled from the community for the whole life. In case of a boy in similar situation, ex-communication from the caste is revokable by undergoing the purificatory rites after deserting the non-Kela wife and her children, if any. Similarly different Scheduled Castes have the same relationship with the Kelas.

However, the pollution-purity concept is now being weakened everywhere as a result of education, urban contact, politicization, changes in economic life, enactment of special legislation

and implementation of various welfare measures. Now the school teachers and students belonging to non-Kela communities are mixing with Kela students in the schools and the educated Kela serving in offices are not looked down upon. Their Caste Council guided by the educated persons is making serious attempts to reform their society by asking its members to give up the degrading practices. The politicians and the officials belonging to different castes are visiting their settlements to contact them for various purposes. Petty traders visit them to sell daily necessities and also to purchase edible fruits and vegetables grown by them.

CASTE COUNCIL

The pattern of leadership among the Kelas which has been changing from tradition to modernity is now elective, collective and functional type. They have a caste council called *Panch* which is democratic in its formation as well as in its functions. The *Panch* is primarily responsible for the management of caste matters and also for maintaining group cohesiveness by enforcing social control. It, not only tries breaches of caste-rules, arbitrates disputes between members and adjudicates cases of theft and physical assaults but also makes new caste-rules and looks after the improvement in the living condition of the caste members.

The *Panch* is headed collectively by two or more secular officials called *Behera*. From the beginning there were two *Beheras* till 1972 when one Dhruba Das and one Bhaskar Das were acting jointly as the headmen of the *Panch*. But a split took place when a Kela Bipra by name being instigated by Bhaskar Das violated caste rules by deserting his wife Damayanti (the daughter of Dhruba's son) and married one Dhira (the daughter of Bhaskar's wife's brother's daughter) secretly in the court. When it came to the notice of the caste council, a decision was taken to impose a

fine of Rs. 500/- on Bipra for deserting his first wife and marrying for the second time without informing the caste council. Being instigated by Bhaskar Das (who was acting as one of the *Beheras*), Bipra refused to pay the fine. The caste council wanted to impose social boycott on Bipra, but Bhaskar Das did not support it and deserted the caste council and formed a separate Caste organization under his leadership. In 1974 a compromise was made and both the councils merged under the joint leadership of Dhruba and Bhaskar. Again the caste council split in 1982 over a conflict in the management of the village Mahila Samiti. There was exchange of blows between members of the two groups one led by Bhaskar and the other by Dhruba. The police booked a case which is now pending in the court. At that time Dhruba, the most influential and commanding *Behera* was bedridden and since then there are two parallel caste councils functioning in the settlement. The council headed by Bhaskar Das, Anam Das and Jagu Das had only 40 families who live in the upper ward named as Patnasahi. The remaining 222 families (who belong to Dhruba's group) come under the other *Panch* headed by Pagal Das. Some negotiations are going on for a compromise between these rival groups and there appears to be a possibility of forming one *Panch*.

The post of *Behera* is never hereditary but selective. Only well-to-do adult male members

with wide knowledge of caste-matters and traditions and having intelligence, modern outlook and capacity to establish an efficient dialogue with the caste members are selected as *Behera* unanimously by the village elders. They continue to hold their offices till the castemen have confidence in them. They are expected not to go out to distant places but reside in the village. They may go out to the nearby villages and towns during the day time to earn by showing their traditional craftsmanship.

There are other functionaries like the *Kalisi* (Priest) and the *Dakua* (Attendant and Messenger). Both these posts are also selective. The *Kalisi* officiates in the worship of their caste deities on behalf of the castemen. The *Dakua* acts as an attendant and messenger to the *Panch* and is responsible for the publicity by word of mouth of the decisions of the *Panch* among the villagers. Previously he was watching the settlement at night and was getting monthly remuneration of Rs 50/- from the village fund. But this has been discontinued as many villagers are now staying in the village throughout the year. Now he gets only 25 paise from the Council for each sitting. The caste council takes the advice of the educated male members of their society at the time of making decisions.

The meeting of the caste-council is held during *Raja Sankranti* in the month of June and

Dasarah festival in the month of October when all persons return to the village from their seasonal migration. Those who do not return by the scheduled date have to pay a fine of Rs. 20/- to the caste council. There is no fixed place for the sitting of the *Panch*. In the meeting all adult male and female members of the group are expected to be present and are free to participate in the deliberations. All adult male members excluding the service holders and traders should come back from the camps on intimation to attend the meeting of the council at any time other than during *Raja Sankranti* and *Dasarah*. If anybody fails to do so he has to pay Rs. 5/- as fine. Those male members present in the village but do not attend the council meeting are also to pay fine.

If any offence is committed publicly or in such a manner as to leave no doubt and scope for trial, the culprit is awarded punishment as per decision. If a person is suspected of a guilt, the caste council conducts the trial by examining the witnesses for the prosecution or for the defence. The *Beheras* who act as judges and the village elders as jury try to bring about a confession by the culprit. If a person under suspicion cannot be brought to confess his/her guilt, he/she is taken to make a vow before *Jahonia Thakurani* which is believed to be the powerful Goddess of Jambu area in Jagatsinghpur subdivision of Cuttack district in protecting human being from unforeseen danger.

like snake-bite and attack from wild animals. During his/her journey in the company of a village-elder sent by the *Panch*, the suspect must not eat or drink anything, must not attend to the call of nature. If he/she does so, the person is considered guilty and punished. If the person under suspicion hesitates to do so he/she is also considered guilty. If the suspect goes to the seat of the Goddess and solemnly declares his/her innocence before the deity, he/she is declared innocent. The very idea of sending the suspected person to such a long distance (about 15 Kms) by observing the restrictions mentioned above, which is itself a difficulty ordeal, influences the suspect considerably to confess the guilt. It is believed that the Goddess would punish him/her more severely by bringing diseases and death to the accused or to the family member if he/she has made a false declaration to establish his/her innocence.

Whenever a person is dissatisfied with the decision of the caste-council, he seeks permission of the *Panch* to appeal before an informal higher Council in which Bajikaria Kelas of village Oldihi in Bhadrak area and of village Dhanipur in Jagat-singhpur area and also the Pathania Kelas of Balkati near Bhubaneswar are represented. In such cases, the caste-council sends intimation to these places indicating the date of holding the meeting to adjudicate the case. The petitioner

will meet the travelling and food expenses of the village elders coming from the above mentioned villages. An appeal made by one Sura Das against the decision of the village *Panch* to pay Rs. 2000/- as compensation to one Dharani Das, who lost his suitcase containing Rs. 2000/- at a time when the former was the custodian during a train journey will be adjudicated by the Higher Council during the next meeting of the higher council.

Except for cases of breaches of caste rules which are considered severe and serious, pecuniary punishment is awarded very commonly to the culprits. If the decision of the Council is not obeyed within the stipulated period, the culprit alongwith his household is socially boycotted and those who will violate the decision are also excommunicated, but they are readmitted only after obeying the decision at the same time undergoing the purificatory rites. During this social boycott any other member of the group will have no relationship of any sort with the person or the household boycotted. Besides pecuniary punishment, excommunication from the group is a major punishment very commonly followed in the case of serious breaches of caste rules relating to marriage and regulations of commensalities. Excommunication in case of a female offender is final and irrecoverable but in case of a male culprit it can be withdrawn on certain conditions after undergoing the purificatory rites. Whenever a

person is awarded with the punishment of excommunication his/her guardian, whether father or in his absence elder brother or any other male members with whom he she will be staying is also outcasted till all conditions are fulfilled and the purificatory rites for his readmission are performed.

During the period of excommunication or social boycott, no member of the group will have contact of any sort with him/her. If any one is found not following this instruction he or she is automatically outcasted. If outcasted offender continues to stay with his/her family, all members of the family will also be excommunicated.

On being approached by the outcasted offender, the caste-council fixes a date for performing the purificatory rites for his/her readmission into the caste. The outcaste has to deposit Rs 15/- with the caste-council. On the appointed day all the village elders both male and female must participate in the ceremony. A potful of arnaprasad (cooked rice offered to Lingaraj in Bhubaneswar temple) is obtained by the caste council for the ceremony. The village elders with best of their dresses assemble in the house of the most prestigious and highly respectable member of their own *Bandhu* group. All the four *Bandhu*-groups come out in procession separately to the place where the purificatory rites will be

performed. In the meantime the outcast will be waiting with a potful of water. When all the *Bandhu* groups reach the place, the outcaste washed the feet of an influential and highly respectable member of each of the four *Bandhu* groups. If persons belonging to all four *Bandhu* groups are not present, the rites cannot be performed. Thereafter these four highly respected members of the *Bandhu* groups will partake a little quantity of *arnaprasad* kept in a plate. Then the outcaste seats a little from the same plate. There after all other villagers present there take such a little bit of *prasad* and eat it. After this the outcaste is formally readmitted into the caste.

Besides the caste council, there is a Yubak Sangha which has been working for the improvement of the living condition of the villagers from the date of its registration in June, 1981. There are now 22 members in it. A person has to pay Rs 10/- as entree fee and Rs 20/- as annual membership fee for enrolment. There is an Executive Body which consists of a President at the top and Vice-President, Secretary, Asst. Secretary and Treasurer as other office-bearers. The main function of the Yubak Sangha is to look into the development of the village and its inhabitants. They also make contact with officials of different development departments and seek their help for implementation of developmental programmes in their village. They assist their co-villagers in

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contacting the Government officials for any work or help.

During the absence of the village elders the *Panch* does not work. The Yubak Sangha plays the role of the *Panch* in deciding minor cases like family quarrel, land dispute, etc. and also in maintaining peace and harmony in the village. Now the Sangha is making sincere attempt for the spread of education among them. They have succeeded in getting sanction of funds for the construction of the building of the School and Yubak Sangha, in their settlement. The Sevashram School has also been upgraded to upper primary school by their sincere effort.

The Kela settlement is represented by 3 ward members in the statutory Gram Panchayat. The ward members are elected as ward members. In the recent Panchayat election (February-1984), one male person and two women have been elected uncontested from the Kela settlement by mutual agreement. One Chittaranjan Das, who is also acting as one of the *Behera* of the *Panch* and the President of the Yubak Sangha, is the lone male ward member of the settlement.

In addition to judicial matters the *Panch* is solely responsible for making new caste rules and also for taking various reformative measures under the changed circumstances. It also plays an

important role in the developmental aspect of their settlement in cooperation with the Yubak Sangh and the ward members representing the village in the statutory, gram panchayat.

Important customary laws are modified and new caste rules adopted as reformative measures are listed below.

1. They are emphatically endogamous. Any body marrying outside their own group is punished with expulsion from the group which is irrecoverable in case of a female and can be withdrawn in case of a male, only after the desertation of his non-kela wife and children if any and by undergoing the purificatory ceremony for admission to the castefold. There are several instances of Kela boys marrying Kandra girls. Such outcasted Kela girls and boys have now formed a separate group known as Kandra Kela.
2. Marriage of a Kela must be celebrated in the home village only. The defaulting parents are imposed with a heavy fine in cash. Previously this restriction was not imposed.
3. Marriage must be celebrated on any auspicious day of the months of *Baisakh* (April-May), *Jestha* (May-June), *Asarha* (June-July) and *Faguna* (February-March) fixed by the

astrologer who belongs to other community and approved by the caste-council. If this is not done the defaulting parents have to pay a heavy fine as per the decision of the council.

4. All adult males and females must attend the marriage ceremony, atleast at the time of exchange of nuptual garlands between the bride and the groom. If anybody remains absent without having genuine grounds has to pay a fine of Rs.1/-each. Since 1972 the students, traders and the service-holders have been excluded from the purview of this rule.
5. Whenever the nuptual garland of the bride or the groom is severed or damaged before exchange or at the time of exchange, the bride-groom's side is imposed with a fine of Rs 2/-by the caste council.
6. Divorce either by wife or husband is not approved except on genuine grounds like adultery, theft, torture, etc. This decision was taken by the caste council in the year 1962.
7. In case of adultery within the own group the male culprit is compelled to keep the woman as his wife after paying compensation to the previous husband which is fixed by the caste council. Failure to do so will result in social boycott of the culprit.

8. Whenever a man is found having sexual relationship with an unmarried girl, the caste council asks him to marry the girl. If he refuses to marry, he is socially boycotted.
9. Whenever a female member whether married or unmarried is found having illicit sexual relationship with a man of any other caste whether high or low is outcasted for all times to come.
10. A male member found guilty of having illicit sexual relationship with a woman of any other caste is outcasted till the purificatory rites are performed for his readmission into caste-fold.
11. Adult females either single or in a group not accompanied by adult males of the group cannot stay at night outside the own village or camp. If anybody does so she is outcasted and driven from the village.
12. For beating one's wife, for quarreling with any relatives, for disrespect to one's superior publicly the caste council imposes fine which may range from Rs. 2/- to Rs. 50/- according to gravity. If anybody fails to pay the fine he or she along with his/her family will be socially boycotted as long as the fine is not deposited.

13. All families who go out on seasonal migration should return to their village atleast 8 days ahead of *Raj Sankranti and Dasarha* festivals. If any family does not come back timely, the head of the family has to pay a fine of Rs. 20/- to the caste council.
14. For breaches of regulation of commensalities, the culprit when detected is boycotted till the purificatory rites are observed in the same manner as followed in case of an out-casted person for readmission into the caste-fold.
15. Women were not allowed to do husking paddy. This restriction has been withdrawn since 1964.
16. A Kandra Kela putting on shoes was not allowed to pass through the Sapua Kela settlement in the past. But this has been withdrawn since 1967.
17. The restriction for a Kandra Kela to draw water at the same time from the same well from which a Sapua Kela would be drawing has been withdrawn since 1967.
18. Restriction for grown-up girls in attending school has been withdrawn since 1973.
19. The restriction for a grown-up girl to undertake tattooing operation on a male person of

other castes and tribes has been withdrawn since 1974.

20. Women and grown-up girls were not allowed to work as daily labourer in the past. This has been withdrawn since 1981.
21. All adult male members of the village are required to be present at the time of caste council meeting and on the occasion of communal gathering and at the time of the cremation of a deceased. Fine is imposed if any one is found absent. But this has been relaxed in case of those who do service and trading.

STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The Kela as a small semi nomadic Scheduled Caste is facing several problems which are peculiar to them. Except a few well-to-do families, most of them face economic hardship as their traditional occupation of snake-catching, tattooing and toy-making has become now less remunerative than before. They waste the costly venom since they do not have knowledge of collecting it through scientific methods for sale. Some of them have now purchased land and a few others are in small service and business. They seem to be now less interested in their nomadic life and are keen to settle down in a permanent basis. They also like to have permanent assets like good houses, agricultural land and livestock. They suffer from the stigma of untouchability and occupy a very low status in society and are educationally very backward. They seem to have evinced a great interest in giving education to their children. In fact whenever they go out on this snake-catching expedition they leave below their children enabling them to attend school.

Under the present circumstances the strategy for the development of the Kelas would largely be family-oriented approach supplemented by a few

items of infrastructural development for social service support.

Family oriented programmes

Family oriented programmes will include both income-generating schemes and also other schemes like housing and training to acquire new skills.

House and House-site

Most of the families have katcha house and some of them also live in such houses which may be termed as 'hut'. Among them as many as 42 families have already received government assistance for construction of houses. It is now proposed to provide house with house-site to those who are houseless and houses to those who live in unhygienic small houses. The deserving families should be given assistance to construct house with fire-proof roof.

Horticulture

Only 40 out of 266 Kela households now possess agricultural land. Possession and cultivation of land are no more considered inauspicious at present and most of them are anxious to have land. The land owning households have purchased land although the size of landholding is very small.

About 120 households are now making collective efforts for assignment of Government waste-land which is available in the locality. The land-owning households are not yet accustomed to cultivation and therefore give their land to non-kela cultivators of the neighbouring villages on share-cropping basis. Now majority of them are willing to lead a settled life by adopting agriculture, horticulture and other gainful employment in place of their wandering life. Since it may not be feasible to provide adequate quantity of agricultural land to all the needy people for their full-time engagement and adequate income sufficient enough for the maintenance of family. It is proposed to provide a compact area of 40 to 50 acres (which are now available by the side of the approach road connecting their settlement with Bhubaneswar and Nandankanan road) to a group of 50 to 60 families for undertaking intensive vegetable cultivation on co operative basis under the technical guidance of a V. A. W at the initial period. They will be provided with a package of assistance in the shape of seeds, grafts and suckers, fertilizer and pesticides, draught animal and implements, dug wells with pump sets or tube-wells for irrigational purposes, fencing materials, etc. on approved subsidised rate applicable to scheduled castes. They will be helped to get adequate return from the land by adopting modern techniques of cultivation round the year. Marketing of vegetables will not be a problem for them since they live very

close to the city of Bhubaneswar. Where there are great demands for agricultural, horticultural and dairy products.

Those who have land may be provided with incentives like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, bullocks, implements and demonstration on improved agricultural methods for adopting agriculture as their main-stay.

They are now accustomed to horticultural plantation from which they derive income. Those families who have adequate space in their homestead land, may be encouraged to take up horticultural plantation by providing seedling, suckers and grafts alongwith chemical fertilizers and pesticides on subsidised rate. Except cocoanut they may be supplied with plants/grafts/suckers like banana, guava, jackfruit, orange, lemon, mango and papeya.

Animal Husbandry :

Some of the Kela households are now interested to take up rearing of goat, sheep, pig and poultry birds. Under Animal Husbandry programme, the widows, widowers and other destitutes having no supporting hands should be given preference over others. Each selected beneficiary may be supplied with eight she-goats or ewes or white sows in addition to graded bucks, rams and boars for upgradation. Some families may be given assi-

stance to start poultry units under the technical guidance of a livestock Inspector. Above benefits may be given to them with approved subsidised rate.

Loan for small trade

Some of the households need loan for starting small trade. They may be given loan for working capital and also for purchasing bicycle.

Rural Industries

(a) Traditionally every Kela woman has knowledge of making toys and weaving mats of different kinds with multicoloured designs from the dyed date-palm leaves purchased from the people of *Khajuria* caste (toddy extractors). These things, toys and mats are sold by them. The willing women may be encouraged to produce these articles in a larger scale by providing incentive in the shape of working capital and marketing facilities.

b) The Kela women have knack for knitting and embroidery work. They may be provided with training with follow-up actions like supply of tools as well as raw materials such as wool, cloth and threads for their whole-time engagement. Some boys may be given training in tailoring.

c) Now some of the Kela girls are undergoing training in tussar reeling in the Training

Centre at Rasulgarh, sponsored by the Khadi and Village Industry Board. This facility may further be extended to train some other willing Kela girls so that some of them may get scope for full-time employment.

d) A number of Industries both small and medium under both private and public sectors are coming up in the vicinity. Opportunities for both skilled and unskilled jobs in large number will be available soon. Now a number of Kela women and a few men work as daily labourer in the construction works of these industries. Many of them are aware of the fact that these industries will provide employment to both unskilled and skilled workers in the lower rung. Some of them are interested to serve as Class-IV employee and some of them express their desire to work as driver, mechanic, fitter and machineman if proper training facilities are provided to them. So it is proposed to select some of them according to their eligibility for undergoing technical training at Government cost so that they may be absorbed in these industries. The management of different industries may be instructed to give preference to the Kela in the appointment as unskilled labourer and in Class-IV posts.

Collection of venom from poisonous snakes for sale

It is a regular habit with the Kela to remove the poisonous teeth of the snakes with a knife.

Immediately these are caught. Thereafter they regularly, remove these erupted poisonous teeth once in a fortnight for their safety. By this crude practice venom which is very useful and precious in medical science is wasted. The Kelas of this settlement now possess about thousand snakes and also sell the snakes to the visiting buyers or in Calcutta. It is therefore proposed to educate the Kelas about the utility of venom and to train them up in extracting the venom through scientific methods and preserving the same for sale. The Hopkin Institute of Bombay have come to the conclusion that the quantity of venom collected from different species of snakes every month varies from 0. 2 gram to 0. 0046 gram as has been shown below.

Species	Dry weight of lyophilised venom
1. Gokhara (<i>Naja naja</i>)	0. 2 gram
2. Chandra Boda (<i>Vipera russelli</i>)	0. 15 gram
3. Rana (<i>Bungarus Fasciatus</i>) and Chitti (<i>Bunagarus Caeruleus</i>)	0. 022 gram
4. Dhulianaga (<i>Echis Carinatus</i>)	0. 0046 gram

The venom is converted into polyvalent anti-snake venom serum for the treatment of snake-bites. After imparting the necessary training to the Kelas arrangement will have to be made for sale of venom to some reputed institute in the country so that the Kelas can earn a profitable income.

Marketing of snakes

Some of them also sell snakes at Calcutta or to the visiting buyers from Calcutta. Those who catch snakes more than their requirement, they try to dispose of these on sale. In their transaction they do not always get the actual price for these snakes. It is therefore proposed to help them to sell the snakes to organizations in the country dealing with snakes so that they can get the actual price.

Infrastructural Development and Social Service support

In addition to family-oriented economic programmes, a few items of infrastructural development and social service supports like school, yubak sangha, drinking water supply and electrification will have to be provided in their settlement.

Education

A Sevashram with provision of teaching upto Class-III was established in the Kela settlement in

1955. Middle English Schools and High Schools are existing in the nearby villages. Still then the percentage of literacy stood at 18.72 for the total Kela population. The corresponding figures for males and females stood at 26.97 per cent and 10.32 percent respectively as per survey in 1983. Further only 27.76 per cent of the total children in the school-going age-group of 4-14 years are now attending school. However the Kela parents are now showing much inclination for the education of their children in formal schools. They took initiative and got the Sevashram school upgraded to Upper Primary School from the sessions 1984-85 and the Government in Harijan and Tribal Welfare Department has already sanctioned funds for the construction of the School building and a hostel for boys. Now they have approached the Government to convert this school into a residential institution with provision for free boarding and lodging. In view of their poverty and semi-nomadic mode of living, it will be of immense help to them if the present school is converted to residential type. In such cases, the boys may be accommodated in the hostel and girls may attend school as day-scholars.

Drinking water supply

There is only one tube-well, two private sanitary wells and two private katcha wells on which they depend for drinking water supply as

well as for bathing and other purposes. They make use of water of irrigation canal of the river Mahanadi for certain parts of the year for bathing and washing purposes. Occasionally they use the water of a private tank located close to their village. They need atleast 2 more tube-wells which may be provided on priority basis.

Bathing ghat

They want a bathing ghat in the canal which may be provided by the Government.

Electrification

The needy Kela households may be given financial assistance to take electric connection to their houses for domestic use.

Yubak Sangha

The building of the Yubak Sangha is now under construction with the funds provided by the Government. This building will be utilized for various purposes. This will serve as the meeting place of the caste council and also as the place where vocational training classes can be conducted. So grants for the purchase of furnitures and a few items of equipments like *darri*, petromax, buckets, etc. may be provided. Grants for the purchase of books to start a library for the benefit of the members of the Yubak Sangha may also be provided.

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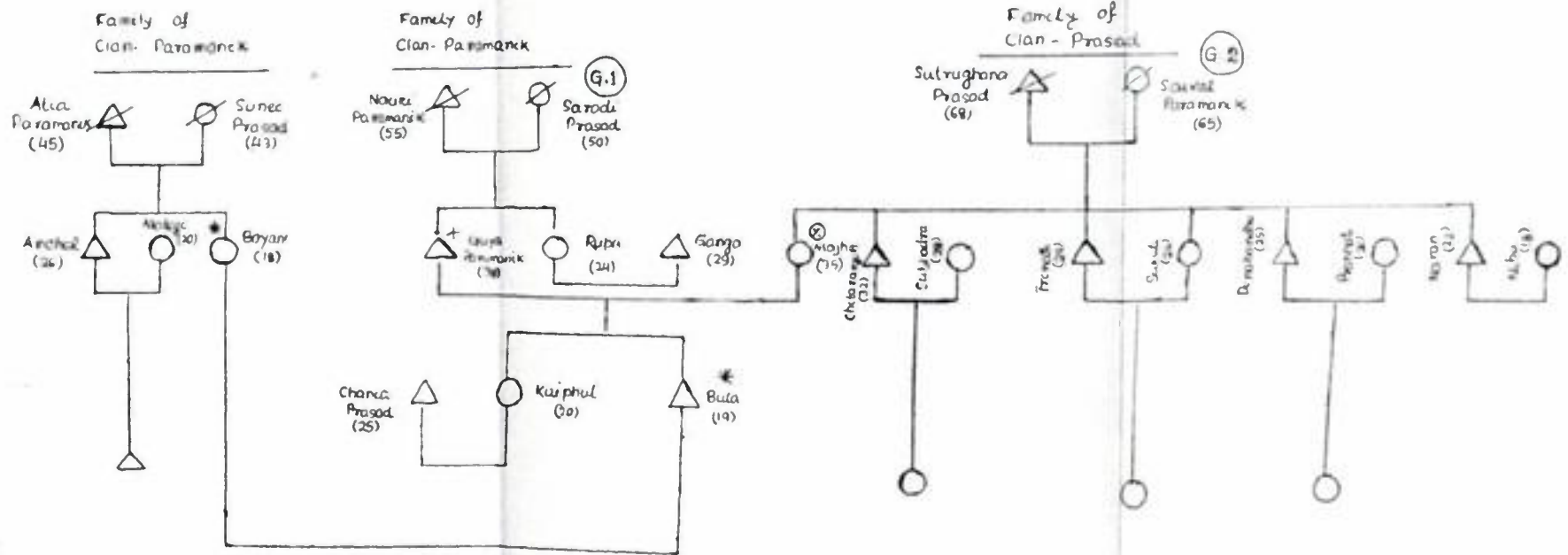
ANNEXURE-I

Specially vulnerable groups among the Scheduled Castes in Orissa

Name of the community		Popula- tion
A) Denotified communities	1. Aduria & Oriya Domb of Koraput district.	1,59,441
	2. Ganda of Sundargarh district.	12,596
	3. Ghasi of Koraput district.	5,361
	4. Dandasi of Ganjam district.	45,245
	5. Jayantara Pano	900
B) Nomadic and Semi-nomadic Communities	6. Kela	14,611
	7. Bajikar	195
	8. Ghantraghora or Ghantara	3,358
	9. Sabakhia	966
	10. Mundapota	527
	11. Ghusuria	4,590
	12. Madari	1,644
		2,49,434

Annexure - II - A

Cases of marriage within the same clan and outside the own clan.



* - Marriage within the same clan (Bula belonging to Paramanik clan)

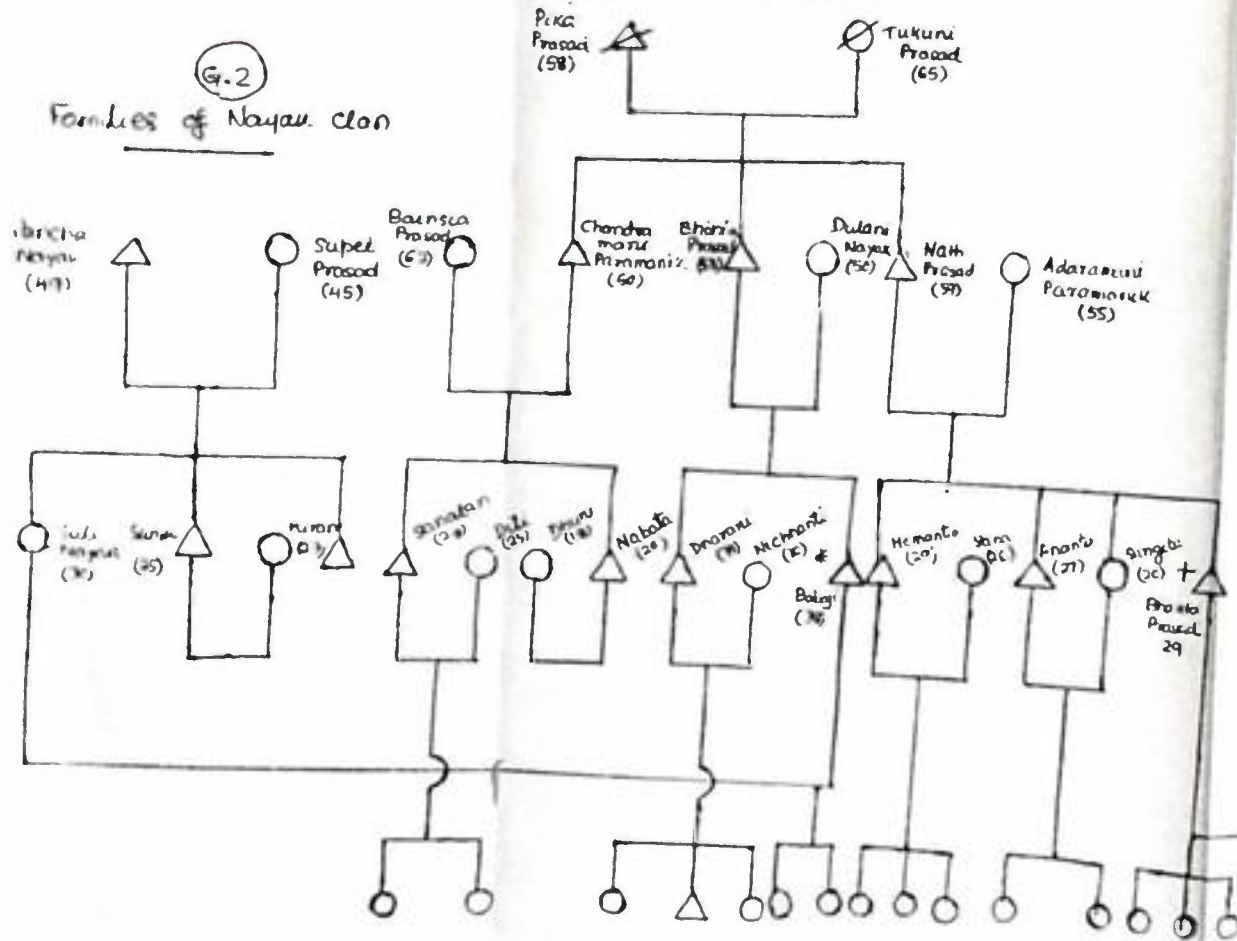
⊕ - Marriage outside the own clan. Mayhe of Prasad clan has married Ganga of Paramanik

ANNEXURE - II B

Affinal affinities among the families of Prasad, Nayak and Paramanik clan.

G.1

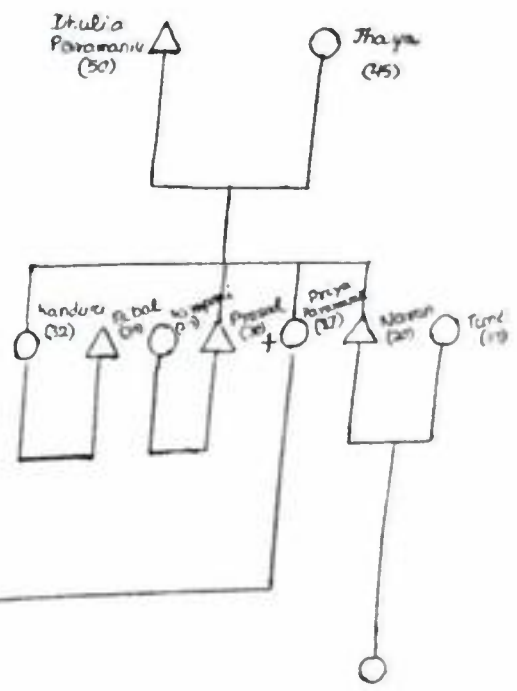
Families of Prasad clan



* - Sulekha (47) of Nayak clan married to Baunsua (67) of Prasad clan.
 + - Bhole (41) of Prasad clan married to Praga (43) of Paramanik clan.

G.3

Families of Paramanik clan



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