



KHARWAR

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

P R E F A C E

Kharwar is a small and little known Mundari tribe of Odisha numbering little over 2000 persons. They are also known as Lulkidihi. They are largely found scatteredly in Sundergarh and Jajpur districts of Odisha. They claim of a Kshatriya origin as the descendants of Suryabanshi dynasty of a Rajput king who being divinely cursed had been exiled and lived a life of chandala, the flesh eater. Etymologically the term Kharwar denotes catechu (khaira) maker or inhabitants Khairagarh, their original habitat in Chhatisgarh from where they have migrated to Odisha.

'Kherwari' a Mundari language is their mother tongue which they have forgotten at present. Now they speak the common local language 'Sadri' and Odisha's State language, Odia and use the Odia script for writing. Racially they belong to Proto-Australoid stock.

The community is endogamous and divided into six endogamous sub groups, i.e. Suryabansi, Daulatbandi, Kheri/Chero, Bhogati/Ganju and Manjhia, which is again divided into a number of totemistic exogamous clans (Kili).

There is nothing very spectacular about their pattern of dress and ornaments, settlement and housing. They live both in homogenous and heterogeneous settlements. In case of the latter they exclusively dwell in separate hamlets keeping their own ethnic identity as well as maintaining distance with the neighbouring ethnic groups. They generally live among other tribal communities whom they consider socially at par with them but construct their own houses detached from the houses of other communities.

Being a landowning community, settled cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy supplemented by wage earning, livestock rearing, forest collection, small business, share cropping and seasonal hunting and fishing etc. As their crop lands lies in uplands generally devoid of irrigation facilities they resort to monocropping.

With the passage of time, there are many changes happening in the Kharwar community. The age old traditional social institutions are declining under the impact of planned change and modernization. The Kharwars are now heading for a new modern life at the cost of their traditional values and virtues.

I extend my heartiest thanks to Shri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant (R & P) and Ms. Pollishree Samantray, former Research Scholar of ATLC who have contributed significantly for the production of this colorful photo handbook. Shri B.K. Paikaray, former RA also deserves my thanks for rendering assistance for this work. I hope this book will be interesting and useful for the researchers, tourists, academicians, laymen and everyone who are inquisitive to know about our tribal brethren.

Prof. (Dr.) A.B. Ota
Advisor-cum-Director
& Special Secretary

KHARWAR

A. B. Ota
S. C. Mohanty
Pollishree Samantray

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

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INTRODUCTION



The tribe Kharwar is numerically a small and little known tribe of Odisha and are sparsely distributed in Sundergarh and Jajpur districts of Odisha. They are also known as Lulkidihi. Kharwars are aboriginals. They claim themselves of Kshatriya origin as are descendants of Suryabanshi dynasty of Rajput king Ben (Bana) who being cursed had been exiled and lived a life of Chandala, the flesh eater. Etymologically the term Kharwar denotes Catechu maker or inhabitants of Khairagarh, their original habitat in Chhatisgarh from where they have migrated to Odisha. In another view, they are originated from Khairi spring for which their community is named as Kharwar.



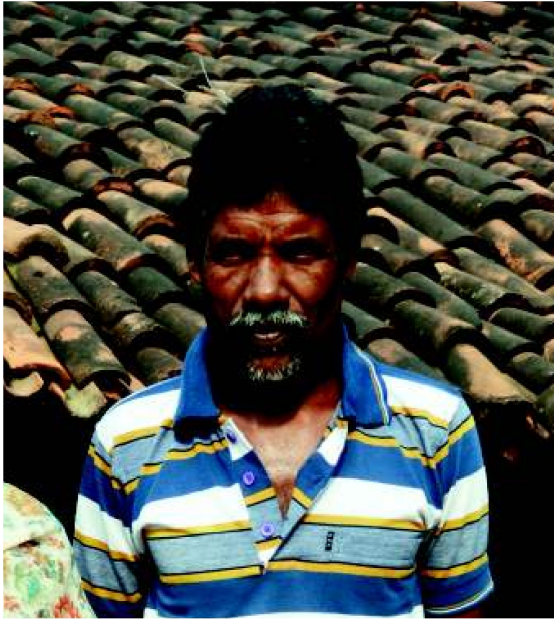
Their mother tongue is Kherwari which belongs to Austro-Asiatic family of languages in Proto-Munda branch. They have already forgotten their mother tongue. Apart from their mother tongue they speak Sadri (Indo-Aryan). It is a semi-autonomous non-literary dialect having inter-tribal function in western Odisha having language affinity with Odia and Hindi. They also converse in the regional language Odia and use the Odia script for writing. Racially they belong to Proto-Australoid stock.

The Kharwar community is divided into six endogamous sub groups, i.e. Suryabansi, Daulat bandi, Kheri/Chero, Bhogati/Ganju and Manjhia, which is again divided into a number of totemistic exogamous clans (Kili) like Nag, Aiyen, Karketta, Kachhap, Parasai, Parbandi, Tirua, Desuwari, Khairi, Patabandh, Benbanshi, Bhogta, Singruli, Chikchikwa, Khairaha, Kharchurha, Shandilya.



Their surnames are Naik, Aiyen, Kerketta, Kachhap, and Parasai. They use Majhi, Khandahor, Roy, Ohdar, Singh, Brahil, Bhitria, Pradhan, Panjiara, Sandi, Mirdha, Bhakat, Bhogta, Das, Gaunju, Kapri, Mahto, Mandar, Behera, Bair, Banria, Bandhia, Rout, Baria, Bail, Chadar, Bhitria, Kasyap, etc.

According to 2011 census, the total population of the tribe in Odishais 2265 out of which 1122 are males and 1143 are females. The ratio sex ratio is 1019. Their total literacy rate is 62.49 % in which male literacy is 73.48 % and female literacy is 51.87%.



In old days their dress pattern, were crude and underdeveloped due to their isolation and ignorance as well as living a life of food gatherers. During that period males were putting on a loin cloth (malkachha) - a short piece of worn out cloth to cover their private region only and women were wearing a short piece of hand woven coarse Saree which covered only up to their knees.

Now-a-days, due to the process of acculturation, the trend of modernity has been affirmatively noticed in their dress pattern. At present their males wear pants, shirts, banyans, dhoti, gamucha, lungi etc. and females wear mill made print sarees with coloured blouse and saya and girls put on fashionable frocks, salwar with kameez. Little children in their early childhood remain completely naked. During festive occasions or market days or while visiting relatives' house they put on modern dresses.



Women are fond of ornaments. They wear ornaments in head, neck, nose, ear, hand, wrist, fingers and feet. The ornaments are made of brass, bronze, copper, steel, fiber, seed, shell etc. Women of well-to-do families are using gold ornaments. They buy ornaments from the local vendors. The younger generations are using ready made garments and foot wears which are generally purchased from the local markets.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING PATTERN



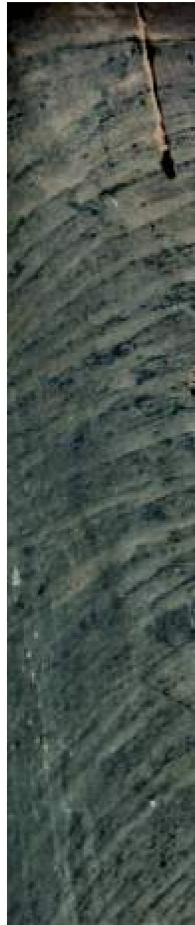
Kharwar settlements are generally homogenous and are located near hill slopes or foot hills where perennial hill streams are flowing to provide them drinking water throughout the year. But in heterogeneous settlements they exclusively dwell in separate hamlets keeping their own ethnic identity as well as maintaining distance with the neighbouring ethnic groups. They generally live among other tribal communities whom they consider at par with them in social ladder but construct their own houses detached from the houses of other communities.



Kharwar houses are arranged in linear pattern, leaving wide space as Village Street. Individual houses are built with clay walls and are thatched using forest grass and have wide verandahs both in front and rear sides which they use as their sitting place during recreational hours and to accommodate their guests. The verandah is generally higher than the plinth of their house. The walls of the house are regularly polished by their women using red and white clay and the verandahs with black clay. They also construct separate shed in rear side of their house to accommodate their livestock.



Their houses are generally low-roofed, having two rooms and without windows for ventilation. They leave a little hole in the front wall for light. The entrance room is usually bigger and is used as their living room and to store their grains and assets. The smaller one is used as their kitchen and in its corner lies the seat of their household deity. They have a cot, mat, *Machia*, *Sujani*, and sack for sleeping purposes. They have *pidha* for sitting and *sika* for placing food materials. Food grains are stored in soil-made granaries called *kothi* and earthen pots. Water is stored in earthen pots. Food is cooked in aluminium utensils. They have bronze *thali*, *lota* and glass. Some utensils of copper and brass are also found in their houses. Now-a-days, steel utensils, gas stove, fridges can also be seen in their houses.





LIVELIHOOD

Kharwar are a landowning community. Settled cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy which they supplement with allied pursuits such as wage earning in agriculture and other sectors, livestock rearing, forest collection, small business, share cropping and seasonal hunting and fishing etc. As their crop lands lies in upland belts near foot hills of forest clad region it is generally devoid of irrigation facilities for which the Kharwars resort to mono-cropping pattern during *Kharif* season, depending upon adequate rainfall for proper harvest of the crop.










Their major crop is paddy. They possess small patches of wet lands near valley or arable lands in meadows, where they raise paddy. In their uplands they grow padadhan, early varieties of hill paddy, ragi, *suan*, *kangu*, *gullji*, maize, pulses like *biri*, *kolatha* and oil seeds such as niger, mustard and til etc. They possess small patches of kitchen garden near their houses, where they produce varieties of vegetables like brinjal, radish, tomatoes, cucumbers, cowpea, drum sticks, bitter ground, papaya, pumpkin and chilly etc.

Their females contribute to family income substantially by participating in cultivation, wage earning and seasonal forest collection such as fruits, edible roots and tubers, green leaves, mushrooms, flowers, fuel woods, timbers, wild grasses etc. besides their routine household works.

Food Habit

Kharwar are purely non-vegetarians. Rice and ragi are their staple food. They consume locally available green vegetables and pulses and use mustard and *sarguja* oil as cooking medium. They relish on fish, meat, chicken, eggs, dry fish, frogs and pork but abstain from taking beef or flesh of buffalos. High salt consumption characterizes the Kharwar's food habit. They prefer water rice, which is taken with salt, chilly and edible greens collected from forests. People often take pepper (called *Silchuran*). In the harvest months, when the house is full of grains, people have several meals in a day. During the period of food scarcity, on the other hand, they often go without meals and survive mainly on wild leaves, flowers, fruits, roots and barks of the tree.





Both males and females are addicted to alcoholic beverages like country liquor *mohuli*, rice bear (*handia*) and toddy (*khajuri*) etc. Alcoholic drinks are indispensable for them in the matter of entertaining their guests, observances of life cycle rituals, festival as well as to appease deities and spirits. They either brew the liquor at home or purchase from the local vendors. The festivities, marriage ceremony and other rituals are celebrated with the consumption of rice bear.

Kharwar's are also fond of tobacco and both the males and females like to chew and smoke tobacco, which they grow in their backyards. They smoke hand rolled *pikka* and *bidi* and chew tobacco paste and powder which they raise in their backyard. Now-a-days, tea is becoming more popular due to outside contact.

SOCIAL LIFE

The Kharwar are related to each other in a specific social network based on consanguinity and affinity. The family is the smallest unit of the society. The Kharwar live in both nuclear and extended families. Parental property is divided among the sons equally, with the exception that the eldest son gets an extra share. The married sons start living with their wives in separate family. But for the smooth functioning of the family, they follow the division of labour based on age and sex. The cooking and the household management lies with the mother, while the outside management is done by the father. The daughters extend cooperation to their father.



The kinship system of the Kharwar presents a model of relationship based on family and marriage. It is transmitted from one generation to the next. The wife is an affinal relative before her marriage, but she is included in consanguineal relative after marriage. Adopted son is also included in consanguineal relatives. Cousins are also treated as blood relatives. On the basis of blood relation, each individual has his ascendants and descendants. Family, lineage and clan members are treated as consanguineal kin group. For establishing kinship through marriage, community endogamy and clan exogamy is the norm in Kharwar community. In kinship system, different kins behave following the rules of avoidance, joking. Avoidance relationship exists between elder brothers of a person with his younger brother's wife. Grand parents with their grand children enjoy joking relationship. All kindred of an individual are invited on the occasion of ceremonies and rituals. This witnesses the reciprocal exchange of invitation, visit, gift, presentation, service, feast, respect and hospitality.



LIFE CYCLE RITUALS



Birth

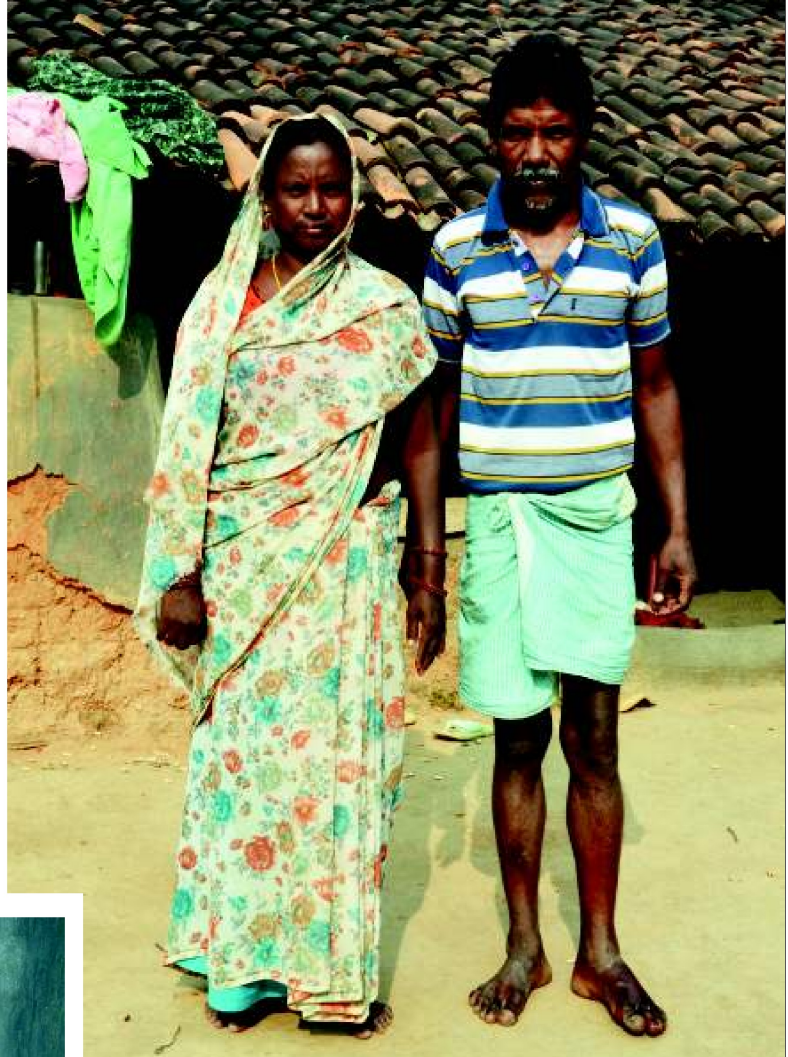
When it is confirmed that a woman is pregnant, she has to observe certain taboos by devotion and sincerity. Experienced and elderly women of the same community act as midwives at the time of delivery. After the delivery, the newborn baby is bathed and the mother cleans her body in lukewarm water. The birth pollution lasts for six days. During this period celebration of rituals and festivals, visiting or worshipping deities are tabooed.

Marriage

Monogamy is the general form of marriage and the earlier practice of polygyny is now being discouraged. Adult marriage has replaced child marriage. Widow re-marriage, levirate and sororate marriage are also permissible. The marriage outside the tribe is not permissible. The marriage within the same clan is not allowed.



Marriage by negotiation is considered as a prestigious and ideal mode of acquiring a life partner. The other modes of marriages are by mutual consent, by capture, by service and by exchange. The father of the boy has to visit several villages in search of the bride. Only then he is able to get the marriage settled. He approaches the father or the guardian of the girl. When the father of the girl accepts the proposal, he is requested to disclose the demand of the bride price. The bride price is demanded in cash and kind. But it is very nominal. In cash it varies between Rs. 25 to 51 and in kind, dress for the bride, bride's parents, brothers, sisters and food grains and goat for extending hospitality.



The bride price is paid a week before the marriage when, the father of the boy visits with the male kins along with the bride price. They are treated well by the kins of the bride and are entertained well by food with rice beer. When the father of the girl accepts the bride price, the marriage is settled. Then the village priest, who is generally a *Shakyadwipi* Brahman or *Kanyakubja* Brahman, is requested to fix a suitable date. The marriage is generally held in between the months of February and May.

Death

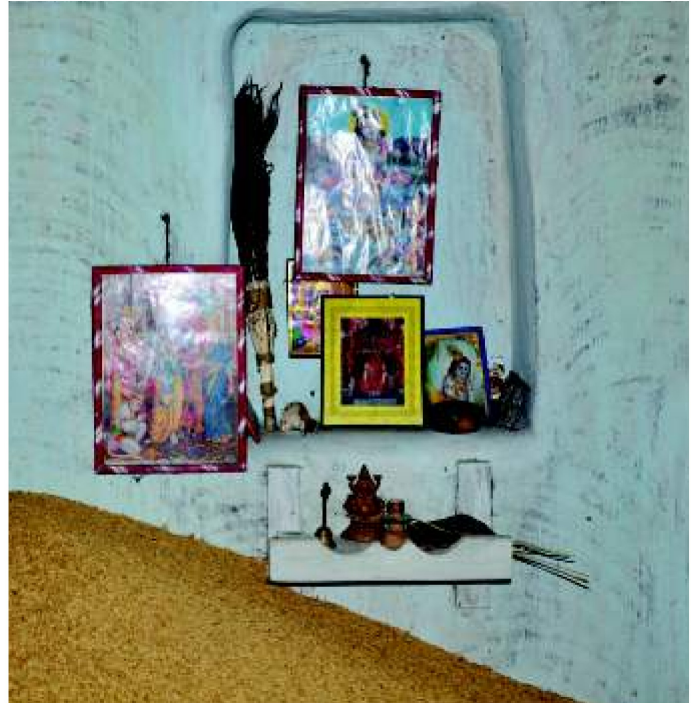
Death is a sorrowful event in their community. They practice burial and cremation to dispose of their dead and observe death pollution for ten to twelve days. On the twelfth day, a community feast is hosted. *Sraddh* is performed ten days after death and once in a year in the month of *Aswin*. Regular oblations are made for the appeasement of deceased ancestors in general.



RELIGIOUS LIFE

Kharwar's religion is animism amalgamated with some elements of Hinduism. The Kharwar observe religious rites to appease the supernatural elements for the betterment of the society and welfare of the community. They employ members of Munda tribe as their village priest. This indicates that the latter are the earlier residents of the country, and are on this account employed by the Kharwars for the conciliation of their indigenous deities.

Their priests (baiga), are from the Munda or from their own community. They officiate in Sarhul and Karma rituals and for protection of the people from evil spirits. For officiating over other rituals, they



depend on Brahman priests. Brahman priests conduct their marriage rituals. Every three years a buffalo and other animals are sacrificially offered in the sacred grove (sarna) or on a rock near the village to appease their deities.

They also worship the tutelary God of their village called Daur Pahar, Dharti, sometimes Purgahaila or Daknai. Durga, Mahadeo and Sitaram are popular deities. Gauri and Ganesh are worshipped during marriage. In addition to these, many deities whom Munda or Oraons worship are also worshipped by the Kharwar with reverence. They believe in the existence of ghosts and evil spirits.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION



Kharwars have their own traditional village council, (baithki) and inter-village council, (chata), to deal with their intra-community socio-economic disputes. These traditional councils are responsible to maintain the law and order in the society. The members of the council remain present during observance of rituals and ceremonies relating to birth, marriage and death. In case of serious offences the village council has the power to ex-communicate the guilty person from the society.





In case of partition of parental property and inheritance, Kharwars follow tribal customs. The eldest son of the senior wife, even if younger than one of the sons of the second wife, inherits the entire property subject to the obligation of providing all other legitimate children separate maintenance grants in favour of his younger brother. Daughters do not inherit ancestral property, but are entitled to live in the parental house until they are married.

Now-a-days, the traditional council of village elders is more or less defunct. They have accepted the new *panchayatiraj* system. People now prefer to go to a court of law for adjudication of disputes.

DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO



With the passage of time, there are many changes happening in the Kharwar community. The age old traditional social institutions are declining under the impact of planned change and modernization. Kharwars occupational pattern and means of subsistence have changed. Traditional batter scheme has been replaced by money system. Change has been observed in their living pattern, social customs, food habits and dress pattern. There is increasing use of modern electronic gadgets, cloths, cosmetics etc. Development is taking place in road links, housing, livelihood patterns, health and hygiene. Priority is being given to spread of education. As a result significant improvements in their level of literacy are remarkable. The socio-economic development activities have brought immense change in their cultural pattern and lifestyle.



Development and change are predictable and the Kharwars are no exception in this context. Kharwar youths are found engaged in small business, cottage industries, institutional services, etc. The Kharwars are now heading for a new modern life at the cost of their traditional values and virtues. However, our endeavor should be to preserve their unique tribal traditions and to see them socio-economically developed simultaneously.





**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute**
CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar : 751003
Website : scstrti.in, Email-scstrti@yahoo.co.in,
Telephone : 0674-2583648/251635

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