

# HOLVA



**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research  
and Training Institute (SCSTRI)**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar-751003



# PREFACE

This illustrative monograph on the Holva tribe is a part of the series of photo hand books on the tribes of Odisha. Briefly it narrates the life style and culture of Holva. Besides citing the socio-cultural identity of the Holva people, this short ethnographic hand book describes their settlements pattern, economic life, social life, religious life, political life and their process of change and development.

The tribe's name Holva originates from the word *holo*, meaning plough. It has synonyms like Halva, Holwa and Holbi. The tribe has several local divisions, such as Bastaria, Chhatisgarhia and Marethia. In Odisha, the Holva claim to belong to the Bastaria division. These Bastaria Holva form a separate sub-caste and do not have any relationship with the other divisions.

The Holvas are largely found in the Southern part of Odisha and Northern part of Andhra Pradesh. Their population in Odisha as per 2011 census is little more than twenty eight thousand and total literacy rate is 48.90 percent. Their mother tongue is called 'Halbi' which is an Indo-Aryan language.

Primarily, the Holvas are cultivators. They supplement their income from agriculture by allied activities such as share cropping, forest collection, basketry, hunting and fishing mat making etc. Their economic life is based upon production, consumption, distribution and exchange simply and fairly centering on family and lineage. In Holva community, every individual is skilled in some kinds of crafts and is traditionally trained in making several utility items to meet their needs. Some of the male members are very good bamboo and wood carvers and they do it as per the demand of tribesmen. A lot of utility items are made by them out of wood, bamboo, gourds, horns, leaves, stone, etc. for their own use. Their fascinating bead necklaces and excellent tobacco containers are vanishing crafts which need immediate attention for their preservation and promotion.

The Holvas are energetic sober people and faithful who keep their words. They are very hard working and responsive to planned change and development. Since development and change are inevitable, the Holva are no exception to it and they have exhibited growth positive characteristics.

Being associated with me, Dr. P. Patel, Senior Domain Expert of SLAU, S.D.C. have taken pains in providing inputs to this colourful booklet. My genuine thanks must go to Sri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant (Research & Publications) for his extra inputs in making the attempt complete in all respects. I hope this book would be of immense help for the tribal lovers, tribal tourists, tribal researchers and general readers.

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



# HOLVA

A.B. Ota & P. Patel



Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute  
CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar-751003

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# IDENTITY

The Holvas also known as Halva, Holwa and Holbi are one of the Scheduled Tribes of Odisha. The very name of the tribe is derived from the word holo, meaning plough. The tribe has several local divisions, such as Bastaria, Chhatisgarhia and Marethia. In Odisha, the Holva claim to belong to the Bastaria division. These Bastaria Holva form a separate sub-caste and do not have any relationship with the other divisions.



The Holvas are mostly distributed in the Southern part of Odisha and Northern part of Andhra Pradesh. In Odisha they are largely concentrated in the undivided districts of Koraput and Kalahandi. As per 2011 Census their total population is 28, 149 including 14, 006 males and 14,143 females registering a decadal growth rate of 169.06 percent between 2001 and 2011. Their sex ratio is 1010 females per 1000 males. Their total literacy rate i.e. 48.90 per cent is lower than total tribal literacy rate of the State which is 52.24 per cent.

They speak an Indo-Aryan language called Halbi and some of them are conversant with Bhatti, Chhattisgarhi, Oriya and Hindi. The Halba are short-statured with a tendency towards a round or broader head shape and have medium to long faces and a broad nose.





## Dress & Ornaments

The Holva's pattern of dress and ornament is not very spectacular. It is rather like that of their caste neighbours. The men wear a lungi while at home, but when they go to the market or attend any function they wear a *dhoti* and *chadar*. The women wear white saris with red borders. Unmarried girls wear printed saris of inferior quality. They put on silver ornaments mostly and gold ornaments occasionally. They adorn themselves with bead necklaces and silver chains, glass bangles, brass and silver *khadus* on the arm, ear rings, toe and finger rings, *pahuda*, *ghungurias*, etc. Men are not very fond of wearing ornaments.

# HABITAT, SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

Holvás settlements are generally located amidst irregular topography with amazing landscapes of mountain ranges of Kondakamberu of Eastern *ghat* region situated at about three thousand feet above the sea level. These are surrounded by lush green vegetation having climatic conditions of high humidity and moderate rainfall. They establish their settlements near the perennial hill streams which provide them drinking water throughout the year. The luxuriant growth of flora containing Sal, Mohul, Asan, Mango, Jack fruit, Kendu, Sago Palm, Bamboo, varieties of creepers, edible roots, medicinal herbs and shrubs, wild berries, flowers, seasonal mushroom which are plentifully available near their habitat. Likewise the common birds and animals those reside in their forest are elephant, leopard, monkey, rabbit, deer, *sambar*, wild goat, wild pig, wild fowl, hyena, jackal, wolf, peacock, snakes and reptiles etc. The shrine of the village guardian deity is installed at the village entrance.









Holva live both in homogenous and heterogeneous villages. Their homogenous villages are uniclans in structure which helps in fostering their community togetherness and social solidarity and keeps intact their cultural identity. Where they dwell in heterogeneous settlements, they always reside in separate hamlets maintaining social distance from other ethnic groups.

Holva houses in a village are arranged in a linear pattern in two rows leaving a broad space in between as the village street like those of the Dravidian speaking tribes of that region. Their houses are multi roomed with a verandah in front.

A typical Holva house has a rectangular ground plan with a gable shaped roof thatched with forest grass, straw or *khapar* (country tiles). The walls are generally constructed with mud or bamboo splits and wattles plastered with mud. Wall paintings of black and yellow colour are made by women. The house may have two or three rooms with a wide front verandah. The rooms are used for cooking, sleeping and storing food grains. Small shelves are made inside the rooms using bamboo for storing grains. Before constructing the house prescribed rituals are performed and offerings made to the household deity.



## Household Articles

Household articles of Holva consist of earthen ware vessels, leaf cups and plates, gourds, knives, carrying poles, leaf and cloth umbrellas, husking levers, etc. Aluminium utensils, brass plates, jars, lanterns, clothes and torch lights are also found in some houses these days. Various earthen ware pots are supplied to them by the potters living in the plains.







# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Holva is an endogamous community which has several endogamous social divisions, such as Bastaria, Chhatishgadia, and Marathia. Holvas in Odisha claim themselves to be of Bastaria section. Each endogamous division further subdivided into various exogamous totemestic clans (bargas) namely Monjur, Kochim, Honu, Goriapakshi, Bharadwajpakshi Nag and Bagh etc. which are named after animals and plants and are honoured by the concerned clan members. They have number of surnames like Siunea, Majhi, Naik, Bhal, Barobundia, Samarath, Nekal, Marapalia, Rana, Dera, Bhaia, Kuar, Bakra, Jeeram and Sukaloo. Now-a-days, marriage is avoided between persons having the same surname as well as between those of the same *barga*.



In Holva society, nuclear type of families is common and joint families are rare. The family is patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal. The father as the head of family controls the family. Parents without an issue may adopt a male child from the nearest patrilineage who may later on inherit the adoptee father's property. Inheritance and succession in family go along the male line.

A woman is considered to be a living economic asset to the family in Holva society. She helps her husband in all economic pursuits. In addition to this she cooks food, fetches water, rears children and takes care of sick members. Though there is a division of labour among the sexes, she shoulders the responsibilities of the family to a greater extent than other members. On the other hand, she is self-sufficient and by her hard work she adds to the earnings of her family in both kind and cash. Therefore women enjoy a high status in Holva society.



# LIFE CYCLE

## Pregnancy

Pregnancy and child birth are welcome events in a Holva family. A woman's pregnancy is indicated by cessation of the monthly cycle accompanied by allied symptoms like vomiting, morning sickness, etc. The woman communicates the news to her mother-in-law and husband in the second month of pregnancy. Sexual cohabitation is generally avoided during the advance stage of pregnancy. During pregnancy the woman continues to perform her normal household chores and works in the fields as usual. However, she must follow a number of pre-natal restrictions like not being allowed to go to a lonely place at night or eat the flesh of any ritually sacrificed animal.

## Childbirth & Afterwards

When the labour pain begins the mother-in-law calls the *Dhai* (traditional midwife) and an elderly woman of her own tribe to assist in the delivery. Delivery takes place at one corner of the living room under the guidance of the *Dhai*. At that time the pregnant woman sits on a wooden plank and holds a rope hung from the rafters of the roof of the house. As soon as the baby is delivered the *Dhai* checks its respiration by swaddling it with her hand. Then she cuts the umbilical cord with a sharp-edged arrow or blade.





Birth pollution is observed up to the twelfth day, during which the mother is not allowed to touch anybody. The first hair-cutting ceremony is held on the sixth day or any day after the stump of the naval cord drops off. Also on the sixth day, the name-giving ceremony is held in consultation with the Brahman priest. They observe the ear-piercing ceremony when the child reaches the age of five. The kinsmen, particularly those on the maternal side, are invited to a feast on this occasion.

From their early childhood the Holva children are taught how to lead a corporate life within the norms and patterns of the society, instead of aiming at individual achievement by competition. Their behavioural patterns are greatly influenced by early socialization processes, which start from birth to adolescence.



## Marriage

The marriage is considered to be an auspicious event in the life of a Holva. In their society the rule of clan exogamy is strictly observed. Monogamy is common though polygyny is also allowed. Child marriage is strictly prohibited. Girls marry at an early age.

Marriage by negotiation is common, in which a mediator known as '*Mahalia*' plays an active role in finalizing the marriage proposal by interaction with the groom's side and the bride's side. After the proposal is accepted by both the sides, the boy's father sends some fixed quantities of food grains to the girl's parents and visit her village accompanied by his kins and the maternal uncle of the boy. There he and his party is entertained with delicious foods and presents some cash to the girl. The wedding date is fixed on that day by the community priest.



On the wedding day the bride accompanied by her friends and relatives arrives at the groom's house, where the marriage is solemnized. On the third day the bride's parents visit the groom's house to bless the couple. They sing together with groom's relatives and enter the groom's house. On the fourth day, wedding clothes of the couple are tied together and they move around the marriage pendal seven times, the bride following the bride groom. The groom then puts vermilion on the bride's head and covers her head with a cloth.

On that occasion the groom's family hosts the wedding feast for all villagers, friends and relatives. After a week the couple visits the house of the bride's parents and stay there for three weeks. This type of arranged marriage is much preferred, as it reduces the marriage expenditure. The other type of negotiation marriage performed at the bride's home where the groom comes with his party for wedding is expensive.

Junior levirate, junior sororate and remarriage of widows and widowers and divorcees are allowed with the approval of the society. A widow can remarry the younger brother of her deceased husband.





## Death

The Holva cremate their dead. Those dying of cholera or smallpox and women who die during pregnancy or childbirth are buried. The dead body is anointed with turmeric paste and wrapped with a new cloth before it is taken to the funeral ground. In case of burial salt is sprinkled over the corpse and it is laid in the pit with its head towards the east in case of a female but towards the west in case of a male.

The kinsfolk of the deceased observe mourning and the death pollution for eleven days. During this period observances of rituals and festivals, visiting sacred shrines, relishing non vegetarian foods, use of oil and sexual intercourse in the bereaved family are strictly prohibited. The purificatory rite is performed on the tenth day in which the bereaved family members and their kinsfolk shave their hair and beards by utilizing the services of their traditional barber near a stream and take bath. On this occasion, the family of the deceased hosts a feast for their kith and kin, friends and villagers.

Like the caste Hindus, the Holva observe annual *shradha* rite in the month of Bhadrap and host a grand non-vegetarian feast for the lineage members by sacrificing buffaloes in honour of the ancestors.

# ECONOMIC LIFE

Primarily, the Holvas are cultivators. They supplement their income from agriculture by allied activities such as share cropping, forest collection, basketry, hunting, fishing and mat making etc. Their economic life is based upon production, consumption, distribution and exchange simply and fairly centering on family and lineage.

As farmers, they cultivate lands as owners and also as sharecroppers. They produce a variety of crops like rice, maize, pulses etc. They also grow sugarcane and tobacco to a certain extent. The main agricultural implements they use are the plough and hoe with or without an iron point. The iron implements used in agricultural operations are purchased from the local markets.

As regards their seasonal forest collections, the forest provides them food, fuel and fodder and materials for house construction and preparation of various utility items for everyday use. For food, they collect different varieties of mushrooms, green leaves, fruits, roots, tubers, stems, flowers, seeds, mango, etc. from the forest in their respective growing seasons. In early rainy season which is apparently their lean period they eat mango kernels and bamboo shoots along with several green leaves and mushrooms.







They get from the forest different varieties of bamboos, which are used for house construction and for preparation of various utility items for their own use and sell of the surplus in market to earn extra income. They make beautiful tobacco-containers, fishing traps, baskets, mats and materials made of bamboo splits. They also collect lac, honey, hill broom, fiber, leaves for preparation of cups and plates, the sale of which after meeting their needs fetch them some extra cash.

Fishing in local perennial streams also supplements their livelihood. A few people of this community are now in government jobs. Many of them work as daily labourers on different construction projects undertaken by the government.

## Food Habits

The staple food of Holva is rice. Cereals like *ragi* and *gurzi* are also eaten. They also eat curry prepared with edible leaves and vegetables along with rice. They use oil and salt in their food preparations. On festive occasions meat is cooked along with rice, dal and curry. Unlike other tribal groups they do not eat beef, but fowl, pork, mutton are eaten as and when available. During days of food scarcity they live on mango kernels and *mohua* flowers. Intake of intoxicants like rice-beer, *salap* juice and arrack distilled from the *mohua* flower are very common, and during the observance of socio-religious functions like marriages, dances, etc. they drink without any limit.



## Traditional Crafts

In Holva community, every individual is skilled in some kinds of crafts and is traditionally trained in making several utility items to meet their needs. They make bows and arrow, pellet bows, axes, adzes (a tool like axe), spears, swords, knives, harpoons, traps, nets, guns, agricultural implements, such as dibbles, pointed sticks with iron picks, hoes, spades, crowbars, ploughs, yokes, levelers, sickles etc. The musical instruments like flutes, conical drums, single membrane drums, violin, harp, trumpet, musical bows, etc. they make are further categorized according to their size, shape, modes and occasions of use. They also weave several types of baskets out of bamboo splits.

Some of the male members are very good bamboo and wood carvers and they do it as per the demand of tribes men. A lot of utility items are made by them out of wood, bamboo, gourds, horns, leaves, stone, etc. for their own use. Among household materials mention may be made of grinding stones, husking pestle and mortar, leaf made umbrella, caps etc. The personal belongings like smoking pipe, tobacco container of various designs and knives are significant. Although a lot of plastic and other modern items are used by them these days, their traditional artefacts still have their socio-cultural significance. Certain craft items made and used by the Holvas are parts of their cultural identity e.g. palm leaf knitted head bands, bead necklaces and the engraved bamboo tobacco containers etc.

Their fascinating bead necklaces and excellent tobacco containers are vanishing crafts which need immediate attention for their preservation and promotion. By and large, Holva in several villages have retained their traditional materials culture as much as possible.





# RELIGIOUS LIFE

Holva profess their own autonomous animistic religion which is amalgamated with few elements of Hinduism. They have incorporated a number of Hindu gods and goddesses into their pantheon, like Siva, Vishnu, Laxmi, Kali and Durga. They also believe in black magic, witchcraft and existence of evil spirits who can cause death and misfortune to humans and domestic animals and inflict fatal diseases like Cholera and Smallpox. In order to be saved from the wrath of these evil spirits they propitiate them by offering periodical oblations such as sacrifice of fowls and offering country liquor (*mohua*). Smallpox is not regarded as a disease but as the appearance of a goddess (*Thakurani*) on the body and the affected person goes to the priest, who makes offerings to *Thakurani* for his recovery.



In religious ceremonies; offerings are made to different gods and goddesses for a good harvest and the eradication of disease and natural calamities. The Holva observe the new mango-eating ceremony in *Chaitra*, the *Amas* festival in *Sraban*, the new rice-eating ceremony in *Bhadrab* and *Iswar* and Siva Puja in *Magh*. They participate in all festivals of their Hindu neighbours to which they are invited.



# LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL LIFE

In socio-political matters the village acts as a corporate body led by traditional officials namely Naik, Pujari and Barik. Naik - the secular head, presides over the village council meetings and takes decisions which are final and binding. At the regional level, the Jati Naik holds meetings and settles customary matters relating to a number of villages coming under his jurisdiction.



A person is punished and sometimes excommunicated by the traditional community council if he commits offence like killing of cow or one develops maggots (*machiapatak*) in his body. The Jati Naik can also release a guilty person from his sin after his due penance by eating food from his hand and there by taking all the sins on his own head. He is considered as an honourable person and is invited to attend all the socio-religious functions.



# DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

The Holvas are in a state of transition in the recent times. The socio-economic development activities initiated by the welfare Government in the post independent times have brought noticeable changes in their life style. The main factors responsible for their economic transformation is the vaqrious development and welfare programmes lunched by the Government and Non- Government agencies in different sectors to raise the standard of living and quality of life relating to health and sanitation, education, environment, infrastructure, livelihood and income generation etc. Introduction of modern agricultural inputs, multi cropping, use of high yielding variety of seeds, market facilities etc. have brought visible changes in their life pattern. This has also broadened their world view and outlook.



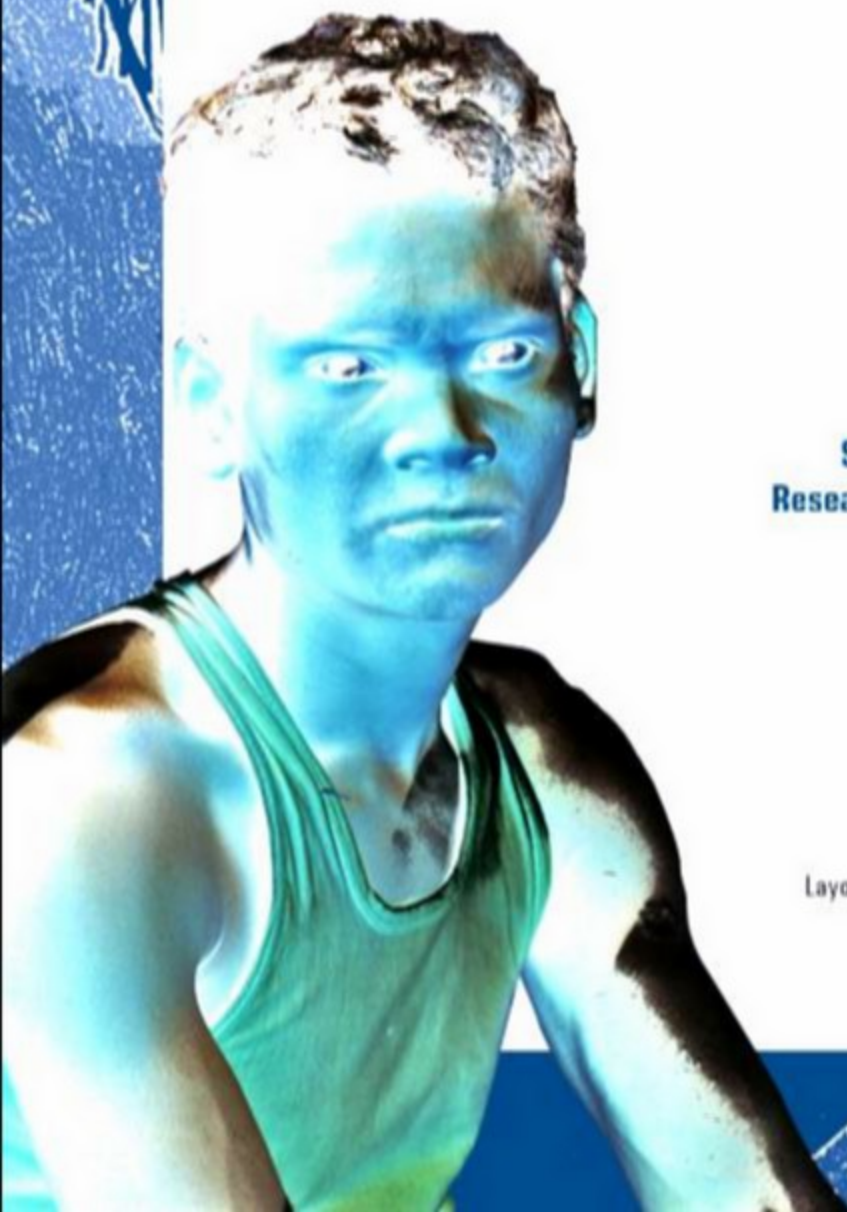
The Holvas are receptive to change. So far as their development perception is concerned, they have very simple and limited aspirations with primary focus in livelihood promotion. Their women folk have developed the propensity to save either in cash or kind and it is noticed from their modest contribution and involvement in maintaining Self Help Groups (SHGs). Although they still have confidence in their indigenous ethno-medicinal practices for healing, they have also shown interest for modern allopathic medicine at the time of dire need.



Now-a-days, young women work in road construction as daily laborers and under the private contractors. Some of them have adopted small business and trading. The modern public service institutions like public health center, schools, anganwadi centers, post office, weekly market, banks, LAMPs, Public Distribution centers and several others have contributed to the changing life of the Holva.



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**HOLVA** @SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar



**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes  
Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI)**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar : 751003

Website : [scstrti.in](http://scstrti.in), Email-[scstrti@yahoo.co.in](mailto:scstrti@yahoo.co.in),

Telephone : 0674 2563649/251635

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