

KORUIA



**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
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PREFACE

Numerically Korua is a very small and little known Kolarian tribe thinly dispersed in the districts of Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Kalahandi. They are also found in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. They are original inhabitants of Sarguja and Jashpur and Bilaspur area in Chot Nagpur plateau of Central Provinces. It is believed that during the past they have migrated from Satpura range to their present habitat in Odisha in course of their food quest.

The tribe is ethnically divided into two territorial endogamous divisions like *Paharia Korua* and *Diharia Korua*. The name of *Paharia Korua* is bestowed upon them by their neighbours as this section dwells on hills. They are also called as *Benwaria* as they practice *bewar* or shifting cultivation. The *Diharia Koruas* are permanent settlers who dwell in villages called *dih*. They are also known as Kisan Korwa. These divisions are subdivided into various totemistic exogamous septs (*gotar*) such as Edge, *Hansda* and *Kachmi* etc. which regulate their matrimonial alliance.

The Korua has its own mother tongue called Korwas which belongs to Austro-Asiatic (Mundari) family of languages under north Munda group. They are well-versed with *Sadri* an Indo-Aryan dialect which they use to talk to others. Korua living in Odisha are well conversant in the regional language Odia.

They are primarily hunters and gatherers. With rapid depletion of forests and strict enforcement of wild life conservation laws their traditional pursuit of hunting has declined to the stage of a past time. Majority of them are landless. Few among them are marginal farmers. In addition to that they practice shifting cultivation (*bewar*) where they get the scope. The annual yield from settled and shifting cultivation hardly meet their food need for three to four months in a year. Under the pressing circumstances they take up other economic pursuits such as seasonal forest collection, livestock rearing, fishing and wage earning to supplement their livelihood.

Over period of time changes have occurred in Korua society and culture. They have accepted many new cultural elements from the neighboring castes and tribes in course of their prolonged contact with them. Apart from the development interventions of Government, the role of external agencies like NGOs as well as the spread of education and awareness has been important in their transformation.

My sincere thanks are due to Shri B.K. Paikray, former Research Assistant, Dr. Sanghamitra Sethi, Asst. Director & Ms. Prachi Parimita Rout, Asst. Director of SCSTRTI for providing important inputs for the draft of this book. Shri S.C. Mohanty, the former Joint Director and now working as a Consultant of this institute has taken pains to edit the manuscript for publication. I hope this illustrated literature will be useful to the readers who are interested to know about this little known tribe of Odisha.

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KORUA

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2021



IDENTITY

The term Korua or Korwa has been derived from the tree Kodera or from *Dodawas* which means the earth digger. In Odisha they are notified as a scheduled tribe under the nomenclature Korua. The Koruas are original inhabitants of Sarguja and Jashpur and Bilaspur area in Chot Nagpur plateau of Central Provinces. According to Colonel Dalton, they are mixed up with the Asuras and another cognate tribe the Kurs (Korkus) or Muasis of Central Provinces and inhabit the passes from the Vindhayan to Satpura range. It is believed that during the past they have migrated from Satpura range to their present habitat in Odisha in course of their food quest. The Korua have a sub tribe called Korku. In Satpura range they are also known as Muasi which denotes raider or robber. Crooke defined that Korwa and Korku are probably branches of the same tribe.





By their physical traits, Korua are of short stature having average height of five feet four inches with good muscular development and dark brown in complexion. They are predominantly dolicho-cephalic with a broad facial profile and broad or flat nose

The Korua is numerically a very small and little known Kolarian tribe thinly dispersed in the districts of Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Kalahandi. They are also found in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.





According to 1971 Census the Korua population in Odisha was 3484; that declined to 986 in 1981 Census, increased to 1989 in 1991 census, again came down to 1280 in 2001 Census and further reduced to 499 (250 males and 249 females) in 2011 Census. The cause of fluctuation of their population across successive censuses may be attributed to that some of them have been enumerated as Kora. Their total literacy as per 2011 census is 32.60 percent. Gender wise it is 40.30 percent for males and 25.12 percent for females.

The tribe is ethnically divided into two territorial endogamous divisions like *Paharia Korua* and *Diharia Korua*. The name of *Paharia Korua* is bestowed upon them by their neighbours as this section dwells on hills. They are also called as *Benwaria* as they practice bewar or shifting cultivation. The *Diharia Koruas* are permanent settlers who dwell in villages called dih. They are also known as Kisan Korwa. These divisions are subdivided into various totemistic exogamous septs (gotar) such as Edge, Hansda and Kachmi etc. which regulate their matrimonial alliance.

The Korua has its own mother tongue called Korwas. It is a nonliterary dialect which ethnolinguistically belongs to Austro-Asiatic (Mundari) family of languages under north Munda group and they use it for their intra group communication. Sir G. Grierson states that Korwa dialect is closely related to Asuri and resembles to Mundari. They are well-versed with Sadri an Indo-Aryan dialect which they use to talk to others. Korua living in Odisha are well conversant in the regional language Odia which they speak and use its script for inter group communication.

Dress and Ornaments

Dressing pattern of Korua is very simple and has resemblances with that of their neighbouring communities. Traditionally, Korua men wear only a short piece of loin cloth around their waist during the working hours or in their leisure time but during their visit to the relative's house, market days and festive occasions they wear shirt and dhoti with under garments.

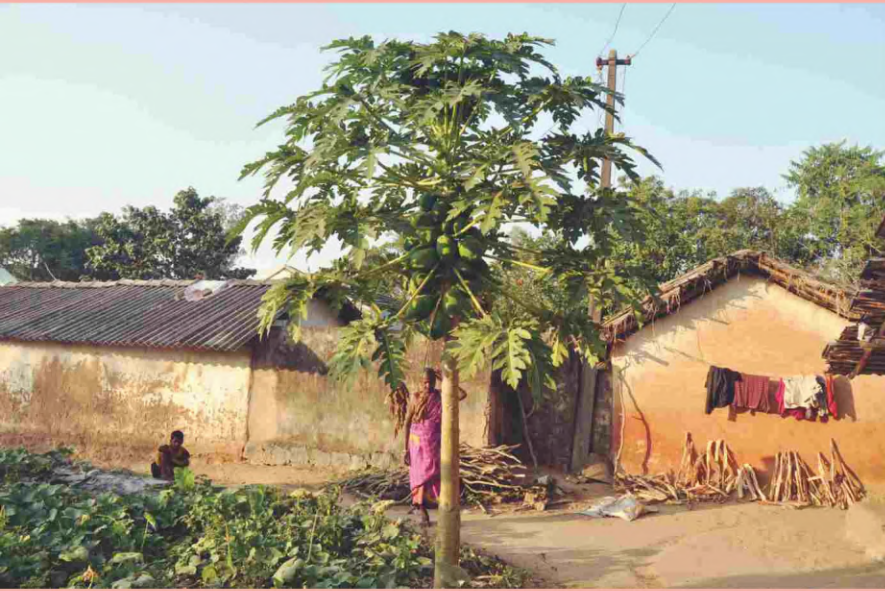
Women wear mill made coloured and print sarees with under garments such as *saya* and blouse. To look beautiful and charming Korua females adorn themselves with varieties of ornaments. They wear different coloured bead necklaces, ear rings, anklets, armllets, glass bangles as well as hair pins and hair clips. They purchase their ornaments from local vendors or from the weakly markets. On festive occasions they decorate their bun with wild blossoms. Their ornaments are made of brass or silver. Women of well-to-do families wear gold ornaments purchased from local gold smiths or from the jewelry shops.



SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

Korua settlements are exclusively homogenous and are located near foot hills or hill slopes amidst forest where perennial hill streams are flowing in proximity to provide them drinking water throughout the year. In multi ethnic settlements they dwell in separate hamlets maintaining distance with the neighbouring communities. In their settlements individual houses are arranged in linear pattern keeping space in between as Village Street.







Their houses are simple and are built with locally available raw materials. The walls are made with clay plastered over bamboo poles and polished with red clay paint. Individual houses consist of two rooms having wide verandahs both in front and rear sides which they use to sit and gossip with their friends during their recreational hours and to accommodate their relatives during night. Their houses are always low roofed, thatched with wild grasses and have no windows for ventilation. They possess few household belongings which includes their grass mats, cooking pots, brass or aluminium utensils, earthen jars, agricultural implements, hunting weapons, fishing traps and bamboo baskets etc.





LIVELIHOOD

Koruas are primarily hunters and gatherers. With rapid depletion of forests around their habitat and strict enforcement of wild life conservation laws, their traditional pursuit of hunting has declined to the stage of a past time. As regards agriculture, majority of them are landless. Few among them possess small land holdings which are unfertile terrace lands where they cultivate rainfed crops. In addition to that, they practice shifting cultivation (*bewar*) where they get the scope. This archaic pursuit is not very economical. The annual yield from settled and shifting cultivation hardly meet their need for food for three to four months in a year. Under the pressing circumstances they take up other economic pursuits such as seasonal forest collection, livestock rearing, fishing and wage earning to supplement the earning for their sustenance. They rear, cows, bullocks, buffalos, goats, sheep and pigs.



Food and Drinks

Koruas are purely non vegetarians. Rice and ragi are their staple cereal which they take with pulses like moong, kulthi or khesri. Besides that they consume wheat or maize and during lean season they also take edible green leaves, mushrooms, fruits, shoots, roots and tubers which they collect from forest. They relish on meat, fish, chicken, eggs, dry fish and pork etc. but abstain from taking beef as they consider it unclean. They use mustard oil as cooking medium.

Both males and females are addicted to drinking various kinds of alcoholic beverages such as country liquor (*mohuli*) and rice beer (*kusuna*) distilled at their own house or purchased from the local vendors or markets. They are habituated in smoking indigenous self-made cheroot containing raw tobacco rolled in Sal leaves.





SOCIAL LIFE

Family

In Korua society, family is nuclear in structure consisting of father, mother and their unmarried children. Vertically extended families are also seen in rare cases. Residence after marriage is patrilocal and descent is patrilineal. The eldest son succeeds father's office. Inheritance of ancestral property follows the rule of equigeniture in male line only. Issueless family may adopt a male child from the nearest kin of the patrilineage who might inherit the ancestral property and late adopted father's office. If the family has no male successor the married daughters may inherit the paternal property.

In the family inter personal relationship is very cordial and the elders are highly respected. The eldest brother enjoys superior status next to father. In their society joking relationship exists between the grandparents and grandchildren and between a man and his wife's younger brother and younger sister and the wife of the elder brother. They maintain avoidance relationship between a man and his younger brother's wife, his and son in law or daughter in law, father in law and mother in law.

In Korua society, women enjoy important social status as mistress of the family for their significant contribution to the family economy by way of their domestic works indoors and subsistence activities outdoors. They enjoy the privilege to participate in socio-religious activities and their opinion matters in family management and matrimonial alliances. They are consulted by the husbands in decision making in all socio-economic matters of the family.



Life Cycle

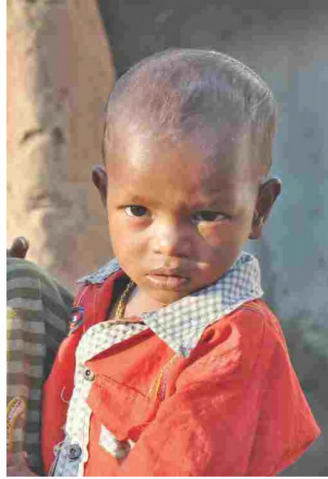
Pregnancy

A married woman is considered to be pregnant when her monthly courses has ceased. They believe that pregnancy as the blessing of the ancestors and gods and that a new member is going to take birth in their family who might help them in future in their economic pursuits.

For the safety and well-being of the pregnant woman and the baby in her womb, she is subjected to certain taboos and prohibitions such as to abstain from doing hard works, to fetch heavy load of fuel wood from forest, to be exposed during solar or lunar eclipse, to touch a corpse, to sleep alone, to go near the burial pit, to go out in dark night and to eat the meat of ritually sacrificed animals etc.



On the seventh month of pregnancy they observe the Sadakhai rite in which the pregnant woman is provided with various sweet meats by her paternal family first and then by her lineage members and relatives according to her desire. During this month they worship their village deity to obtain the blessings for safe and easy delivery as well as wellbeing of the mother and the fetus.



Child Birth

The pregnant woman continues her routine household chores till she feels labour pain. When the pain becomes unbearable she is confined in a separate chamber or enclosure in the rear verandah used as lying in room (*Chhutghar*). An experienced elderly woman of a lower caste is called to attend her as mid wife and to help for easy and safe delivery of the baby. If any obstruction is detected and delivery pain becomes acute or delivery is delayed they call their traditional medicine man who administers herbal medicine to the pregnant woman for easy and quick delivery of the baby. After child birth the naval cord (*navi*) is cut by a sharp razor or blade and the placenta is buried in the backyard of their house.

Post Birth Rites

Birth pollution is observed for a period of two months in case of birth of a male child and three months for a female child. After twenty one days of the child birth they observe the first purificatory rite ekusia in which the new born baby and the mother are allowed to enter into the living room from the lying in chamber. They also observe the name giving ceremony of the baby on the same day by availing the services of their traditional astrologer - the jatuk. They observe the tonsure ceremony after the baby attains three months of age when natal hair of the child is shaved by the maternal uncle. The mother is allowed to resume her routine household chores after the final purificatory rite is observed.





Puberty Rite

The Korua observe puberty rite for their adolescent girls on reaching the first menarche. The pubescent girl is segregated in a separate room for a period of seven days and during that time she is prohibited to look at or talk to any male member. She is looked after by her mother or girl companions. Pollution period continues for seven days and on the early morning of the eighth day she is escorted to the nearest hill stream by her mother or girlfriends where she takes her purificatory bath anointed with turmeric paste and mustard oil. There she disposes of her used clothes and wears new clothes presented to her by her family or maternal uncle. After that she becomes free from pollution. In the evening, her family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to the lineage members along with country liquor mohuli.

Marriage

Korua tribe is an endogamous community which consists of two non-inter marrying territorial divisions such as Paharia Korua and Diharia Korua and these endogamous divisions are further sub-divided into various exogamous lineages (gotra) such as Edge, Hansda, Kachmi etc to regulate their marital alliances.

Korua society is mostly monogamous but polygynous families are also seen in their society where the first wife is found to be a barren or physically handicapped. Many well-to-do males practice polygyny although the first wife is surviving for the purpose of getting extra helping hands in their economical pursuits.

They consider marriage arranged through negotiation as prestigious and ideal mode of acquiring a spouse. For negotiation of marriage they engage a mediator of their own lineage to

find a suitable proposal. Generally the boy's parents take the first initiative. Several visits are exchanged by both the proposed groom and bride's sides for negotiation of the alliance. The betrothal rite is concluded after consent of both the parties and the date of marriage is fixed on an auspicious day in consultation with their traditional astrologer- the jatuk. In their society, payment of bride price is obligatory and is paid in cash and kind on the day of betrothal at the bride's patrilocal residence.

On the wedding day the groom and the bride take ceremonial bath anointing turmeric paste and oil. The groom accompanied by his parents, lineage members, guests and relatives proceed to bride's house in a marriage procession dancing and singing their folk marriage songs to the tunes of music provided by musicians of their community. The wedding rite is performed in bride's home. Jhadua Brahman priest conduct the marriage rites reciting sacred hymns and offering oblations of ghee to the sacred homa fire. The newly married couple encircles seven times round the marriage alter (Satapadi). Then the priest unites the hands of groom and bride (hastalagan) and the groom puts vermilion mark on forehead of the bride (sindurdan) after which the marriage rite is concluded. The bride's parents host a non-vegetarian feast to relatives and guests along with country liquor (mohuli).



The nuptial rite (*chauthi*) is observed on the fourth day at the patrilocal residence of the groom where the marriage is consummated.

The other modes of marriages prevalent in their society are by exchange, by mutual consent, by capture and cross cousin marriage. Junior sororate, junior levirate and re-marriage of widows, widowers and divorces are permitted in their society. Divorce is allowed and either party can demand divorce on the grounds of maladjustment in conjugal life, cruelty, adultery, misconduct, extramarital relationship,

impotency etc. After divorce children are the liability of father. Divorce cases are decided by the traditional community council (*Jatisamaj*).



Death

The Korua community practise burial to dispose of their dead. When a death occurs, the death news is communicated soon to all their lineage members and relatives by a special messenger after which all of them congregate in the dead person's residence to console the bereaved family and take part in burial rite. The dead body anointed with turmeric paste and oil is given a bath and is clad with a white cloth.

Usually their burial ground is located near the river bank. The pall bearers prepare a bier (*derua*) with bamboo poles to carry the corpse to the burial ground. They dig a deep pit in their burial yard and place the corpse in it keeping its head towards south with some rice to serve as meal for the departed soul. Then they fill the pit with soil and cover it with Sal branches to protect from wild animals. They make a fire at a little distance and put ghee and incense on it as offering to please the ancestor spirit.

At present some of them practice cremation to dispose of their dead. They lay their dead on pyre keeping its face towards north and the eldest son of the deceased sets fire to the pyre (mukhagni).

Death pollution continues for eleven days. During this period they abstain from observance of rituals and festivals, relishing on non-vegetarian dishes or delicious sweet meats, visiting sacred shrines, worshipping deities, use of oil and ghee and giving alms to beggars etc. They observe purificatory rite on the eleventh day in which the lineage males shave their head and beards and the females pare of their nails near the river bank. Then they take purificatory bath and wear new clothes provided by the bereaved family. Then they perform the shradh rite offering cooked vegetarian foods to the departed soul after which the pollution period lapses. In the evening the bereaved family hosts a feast for his lineage members, relatives and guests.

Corpses of small children below five years of age and those who die abnormally due to snake bite, small pox and cholera are buried. They usually bury the dead body of small children either within their own homestead land or under an evergreen banyan tree with the belief that the departed spirit might live there well until its next birth.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Korua profess their own autonomous tribal religion animism amalgamated with elements of Hinduism. They rever the deity *Thakur Deo* and his consort the *Dulha Deo/Khuria Rani* as their principal deities, who reside in the sacred grove (*Deothan*) located at the outskirts of the village. The sacred grove premises are treated as a holy area from where cutting of tree or branches is strictly prohibited. The breach of this customary rule is considered as a serious offence and the offender is imposed with heavy penalty. They consider *Thakur Deo* as the deity of crops whom they worship to please in order to achieve good harvest and they believe that the deity protects them from epidemics like cholera and smallpox. Therefore they observe a festival on full moon day of the month of Pus and perform worship in the *Deothan* to gratify the deity by offering sacrifices of goat, fowl and country liquor (*mohuli*).



The deity *Garam Thakur* is their village deity who is worshipped during the new rice eating festival *nawanna*, held during August after harvest of their crops by offering first the cooked rice to the deity. They worship *Larha* - their traditional iron instrument used for clearing stones from their swiddens, during observance of *makar* festivals in January. *Karma* is their major festival which they observe during autumn season with dance and music to propitiate the rain god to get good rain fall and procure bumper harvest.

At present as they are coming in close contact with the caste neighbours many marked changes are seen in their religious practices and they are worshipping many Hindu deities such as Lord *Jagannath*, *Siva*, goddess *Laxmi*, *Samaleswari*, and observing Hindu fairs and festivals like *Dussarah*, *Makar*, *Dola*, *Diwali*, *Raja*, *Holi (faguwa)* and *Ratha yatra* etc. and making pilgrimage to sacred places like *Puri*, *Kasi* and *Gaya*.

SOCIAL CONTROL



The Korua tribe possesses its own traditional community council *Jati Samaj* both at village level as well as in the regional level to deal with their customary affairs. It is headed by the *Sabhapati* who is assisted by village elites who hold their office by selection. The *Samaj* acts as the custodian of traditional norms and customs and deals with their intra community customary matters to maintain orderly life in the society. It adjudicates cases pertaining to intra family disputes, misunderstanding in conjugal life, theft, rape, adultery, incest, molesting, extramarital affairs, matrimonial disputes, divorce, breach of traditional norms, inter and intra village rifts and delivers its verdict unanimously. It imposes penalty on the offender by cash or kind or in both according to gravity of offence. Its verdict is final and binding the disobedience of which may result in social boycott of the offender. It can readmit the offender into the society after his due penance. The council also regulates social functions and festivals of the village.

After introduction of statutory Grampanchayat system the role of the traditional panchayat is declining. Now the Panchayatraj leaders are taking an active role in the village affairs.

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE



Over period of time changes have occurred in Korua society and culture. The Koruas have accepted many new cultural elements from the neighboring castes and tribes in course of their prolonged contact with them. They have advanced with time. Apart from the development interventions of Government, the role of external agencies like NGOs as well as the spread of education and awareness has been important in their transformation.

On the other side, their age old traditional social institutions are declining under the impact of development and modernization. The way of life of the neighbouring castes has made inroads in to the Korua society and culture.

Government has launched various development programmes exclusively for tribal areas and tribal people with two fold objectives i.e. economic upliftment of tribal beneficiaries through Income Generating Schemes and area development through Infrastructure Development Schemes in various sectors. Government's initiatives by establishment of ITDAs in Korua concentrated areas has created a lot of positive impact on development of education, agriculture, communication, drinking water, housing, health and sanitation. Initiative have been taken at GP and Block level to create awareness among them about different development schemes so that they can reap the benefit out of it and become prosperous.

Implementation of PESA Act in tribal area has also brought a lot of changes in the quality and pattern of leadership among the tribe. Korua's occupational pattern and means of subsistence have been changed. Money economy has replaced the traditional barter system. Change is observed in their living pattern, social customs, food habits and dress pattern. There is increasing use of modern electronic gadgets, mill made cloths, cosmetics etc. A majority earn enough to sustain themselves and to purchase several varieties of modern articles like watches, radios, cycles, motor cycles, dresses and other household articles. Their area has become accessible, and many villages have approach roads and electricity.



Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series-61
KORUA @SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar



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Photography : Suman Vision, Bhubaneswar
Layout, Design & Printing : **Capital Business Service
& Consultancy, Bhubaneswar**

ISBN : 978-93-80705-72-9