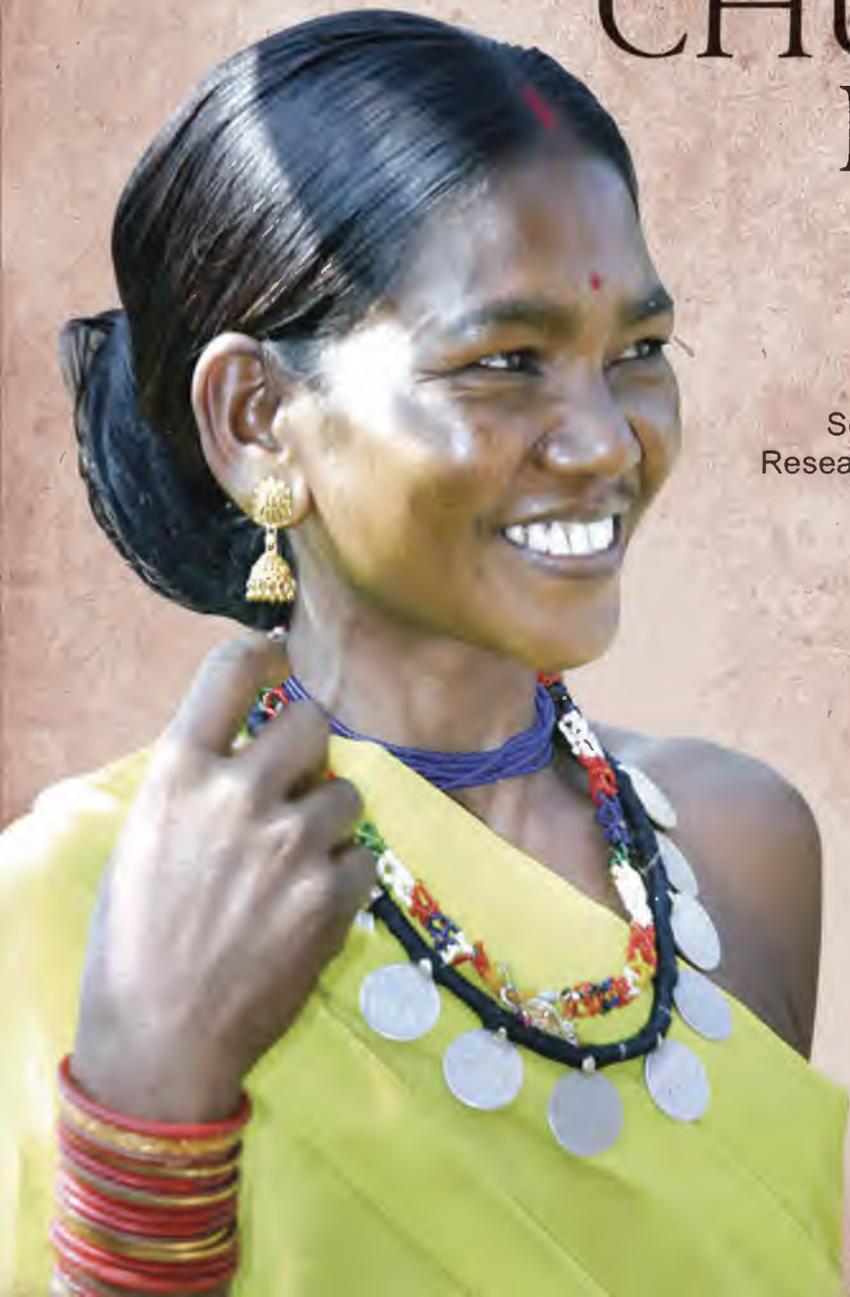


CHUKTIA BHUNJIA

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FOREWORD

The tribal Orissa is well known for its 62 Scheduled Tribes and 13 Ethno-Culturally Vulnerable Tribal Groups, who are officially identified as the particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group or the PTGs. Preparation and publication of Photo Handbooks of all the 13 PTGs of Orissa is an honest attempt by SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar which will provide short photographic and ethnographic account of the PTGs. The main objective is to acquaint the readers with various tribal traditions, customs and socio-cultural institutions and practices, their habitats, socio-economic activities and interactions, rituals and festivals along with the changes of this socially and culturally vibrant community to highlight both the traditional material culture and social life and the changing life style.

The Chuktia Bhunjia Handbook is the 9th in the series of publications under Photo Hand Book of PTGs. The Chuktia Bhunjia as a little known tribe of Orissa represents the tribal world. Their settlements amidst the scenic natural forests, diverse landscapes in the wildlife sanctuary in the Sunabeda plateau of Nabarangpur district western part of Orissa is a treat of watch.

This book as a glimpse of lifestyle of the Chuktia Bhunjia tribe will not only will be useful to the academics, researchers, tourists, but will also be extremely helpful for the administrators, planners and development practitioners in effective planning for tribal development. I am thankful to Prof. (Dr.) A.B. Ota, Director and Sri T. Sahoo, Research Officer who have painstakingly conceived, designed and produced this colourful Photo Handbook. I do hope learned readers will find this book interesting and useful.

(Shri A.K. Tripathy, IAS)

Principal Secretary,
ST&SC Development Department,
Government of Orissa



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Socio-Cultural Identity

The Bhunjia is a numerically small and little known tribe of Orissa belonging to the Proto-Australoid racial group. The name, 'Bhunjia' signifies one who lives on the soil. It is derived from the word 'bhum, the earth and ia, depend on'. The Bhunjia speak a mixed dialect of Baiga and Chhattisghari. The tribe is divided into two sections, Chuktia Bhunjia and Chinda Bhunjia. The former represents the one Particularly vulnerable Tribal Group (PTG). The latter section is perhaps of mixed 'Holva' and 'Gond' descent, and consider them as the autochthones of hills of Sunabeda Plateau. As per 2007 Survey, population of the Chuktia Bhunjia in the CBDA, Sunabeda Micro project area was 2269 (Male 1124 and Female 1145). The growth rate among them during the period 2001-2007 was 3.96 per cent. The sex ratio is 1018 females per 1000 males. The literacy among them was 18.77 per cent, (28.55 per cent for males and 9.17 per cent for females).



The Chuktia Bhunjia socio-cultural identity is distinct with their sacred kitchen-shed, *a small one*, built a little away from other rooms and enclosed around to guard it from the touch of any outsider including their married daughter. If any outsider touches the kitchen shed, it is set on fire and razed down to the ground. Until a new shed is built, the food is cooked in a makeshift kitchen in an enclosed / open space.

The women do not use any under garment but wear only saris. They use necklace made of beads and coil, brass and glass bangles, anklets and ear-rings made of either aluminum or silver. The women-folk comb their hairs in a very decent manner and dress the hair into a massive bun at the back of the head by using a bulky tassel and fixing pins into it to keep the bun in position. Tattoo marks add to the body beauty of women. Over generations women both young and old used to beautify their arms and hands with tattoo marks of different designs. Currently the younger generation under the influence of modernization has become disheartened to have such tattoo marks.



The men mainly wear a piece of cloth and the affluent group wears under wear and shirts. As religious injunctions from Supreme deity, 'Sunade'i', the tribesmen do not use tiles for roofing, cots for sleeping and country husking *dhenki*, for husking grains.



Settlement



The settlements of the Chuktia Bhunjia vary in size ranging from 8-10 households to 50-60 households. The Village boundary is guarded by many Gods and Goddesses who protect the village from the infiltration of evil spirits. The Chuktia Bhunjia houses are arranged in a peculiar way, two or more households taking a wide open space build their individual houses there. A Bhunjia house, generally has three huts, the biggest one serves as the living-cum-store room, the second hut built adjacent to it by its side is used as the cattle-shed and the third one in the front, is the kitchen..

The house is made of mud and thatched with wild grass. It is devoid of door, except the living room and kitchen-shed. The floors are plastered with either cow dung or red earth and the walls with red and white soil. The walls of most of the Bhunjia houses are painted with floral and animal designs.



Habitat

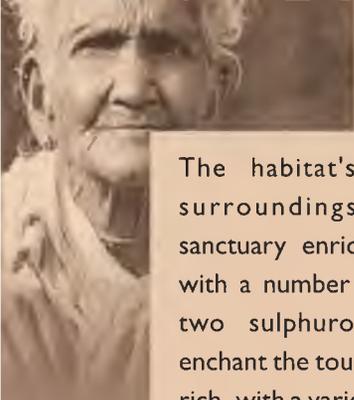
Up in the hill ranges of Gatibeda amidst a picturesque physical setting there lives the primitive tribe, Chuktia Bhunjia, in the Sunabeda Plateau, which forms an important part of Khariar ex-Zamindari in the erstwhile Kalahandi (now Nuapada) district of Orissa. In this plateau, the home of the Bhunjia, lies between $21^{\circ} 25'$ North and $21^{\circ} 30'$ North Latitude. Sunabeda plateau lies in the westernmost series of hill ranges in which the Hill Bhunjia settlements



are situated. Sunabeda village, the centre of the plateau is at 3000 ft. above the mean sea level.

A road of 35 kms crosses Sundar river at Vela village and runs through a series of high hill ranges and hill streams and connects the Sunabeda village with Komna block headquarters on the Bhawanipatna-Nuapada State highway in the plains. Besides, there are a few cart tracks and foot paths running in different directions from Sunabeda villages used by people for marketing and visiting sacred centres.





The habitat's sylvan forest surroundings and wildlife sanctuary enriched with beauty with a number of waterfalls and two sulphurous hot springs enchant the tourists. The forest is rich with a variety of wild animals, like buffalo, leopard, bear, tiger, wild bore, hyena, chital, barking deer and dog. Among the birds, pea-fowl, partridge, hill myna, bulbul are the main species. Besides, reptiles, like Indian python, kobra and some types of krait are seen. The forest is mainly of northern tropical dry mixed deciduous type. Its vegetation includes Sal, Mahul, Teak, Bija, Sahaj, Dharua, Haldu, Sisoo, Kendu, and Harida trees. The main forest produce includes timber, logs, planks and poles, charcoal, firewood, bamboos, kendu leaves, marybolans, mahua flowers, mahua seeds, sal seeds, siali fibres and leaves, simul cotton, soap nuts, gums resins, roots and tubers, fruits, flowers and medicinal plants & herbs.





The household belongings comprise mats (*Champ*), earthenware pots, mortar and pestle, stone grinder, umbrellas (*Mayur*) and some agricultural, hunting and fishing implements, fishing traps (*Chapa*), digging sticks, sickles (*Hansia*) and axe (*Tangia*) and . Besides these, they have cooking utensils, clothes and baskets and bags for storing food-stuffs and forest produce.



Food & Drinks

Rice is the staple food of the Chuktia Bhunjia. Sun-dried rice is mostly consumed. They also eat maize, bajara and minor millets, pulses and vegetables, like papaya, pumpkin, brinjal, sweet potato, mustard and other oil seeds. Various preparations of millets and vegetables cooked with rice gruel are their food items. Mahua flower is their favourite food as it is delicious and nutritious. They fry the flowers and make them jelly-ball and store them for future use. Both men and women are non-vegetarian and teetotalers. Occasionally, they eat meat of the animals which they rear, sacrifice and hunt, they also consume egg and fish. Women are forbidden to

take chicken and pregnant women refrain from taking sacrificial meat.

Both men and women drink tea. Chewing tobacco powder is very popular among the Bhunjia males. Men smoke tobacco and country *biri* or cigarette. Many kinds of roots and tubers, fruits, flowers, etc. collected by them supplements their food requirements. The bamboo shoots (*karadi*) are their favourite food stuff. An adult takes two meals a day, one in the mid-day and the other in the evening just after the sun set. There is no such time limit for the children who take food number of times.

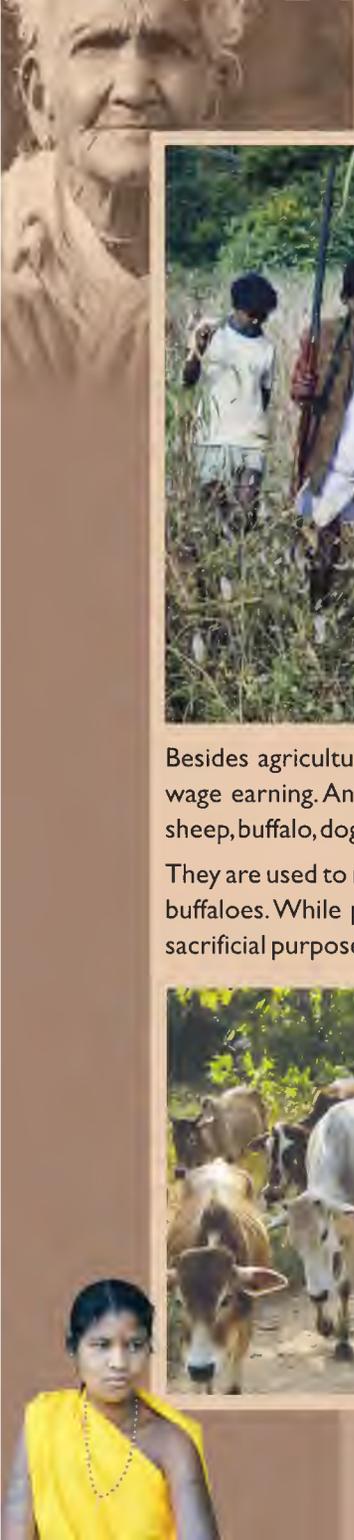


Livelihood



The economic life of the Chuktia Bhunjia is subsistence oriented. Agriculture is their mainstay. They pursue wetland cultivation in small chunks as well as practise shifting cultivation which they called *Bewar*. In *Bewar* cultivation they use labour co-operatives. The group of volunteer workers are hosted with a feast on the workday but no payment is made to them. In the *Bewar* field they grow minor millets, like *ragi*, *suan*, *gulji*, etc. and pulses and vegetables, like *biri*, *kandula*, *Jhudung* (bean), brinjal, etc. and *ramtila* (oil seed). They cultivate minor millets, such as bajra and janha, cucumber and mustard in *bari* lands (kitchen garden). Paddy is cultivated in the plain wet lands through broadcasting and transplanting (*Dahi*) methods. Bullocks and buffaloes are used for drawing plough and cart and harvesting. Very few number of progressive farmers availing dug well scheme now are able to grow cash crops like sugarcane and vegetable such as banana, tomato, cabbage and chilly.





Besides agriculture, they practise other economic pursuits, like hunting, gleaning, animal husbandry, fishing and wage earning. Animal husbandry is not very popular among them though they domesticate cow, bullock, goat, sheep, buffalo, dog, fowl, pigeon and parrot.

They are used to natural grazing of livestock in the forest. They depend on forest for grazing cattle, goats, sheep and buffaloes. While parrots are talking friends to the Chuktia, the goats and fowls are reared by them mainly for sacrificial purpose and often for sale for meeting contingent expenses.





Though not expert in fishing, they catch fish occasionally from the reservoirs and streams nearby the village by using *thapa*, *singa*, bow and arrow and also by intoxicating the fish with the food particles (*Keukanda*), the intake of which makes the fishes senseless. The local varieties of fishes are, like *Seul*, *Bambi*, *Magura*, prawn, *Rohi*, etc. which they catch, consume and often sale.

They mostly collect fire wood and transport those on head-load and collect wild grass and prepare brooms for their own use and often for sale.

The Chuktia Bhunjia collect bamboo from the forests, cut the bamboo into slits and prepare *singa*, fishing tools, baskets for storing grains and frames of bamboo for use in houses and fences.



Social life

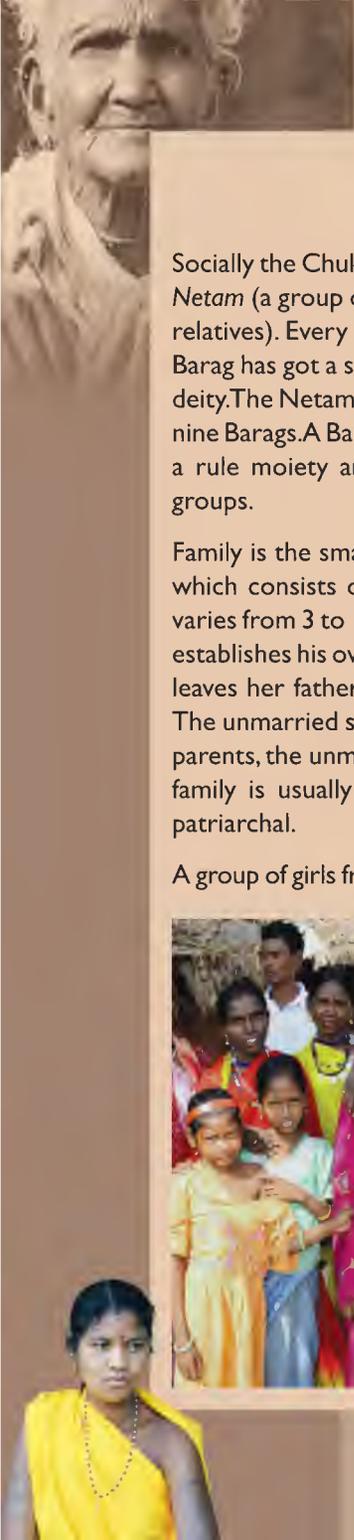
Socially the Chuktia Bhunjia are divided into two exogamous moieties, the *Netam* (a group of consanguineal relatives) and *Markam* (a group of affinal relatives). Every moiety is sub-divided into a number of Barags and each Barag has got a specific designation as per the ritual duties of the assigned deity. The *Netam* moiety has as many as ten Barags and *Markam* moiety has nine Barags. A Barag consists of a number of families with blood relation. As a rule moiety and Barag are exogamous and thus, non-intermarrying groups.

Family is the smallest social unit among the Bhunjias. It is nuclear family, which consists of parents and their unmarried children. The family size varies from 3 to 10 or even more members. After the son gets married, he establishes his own family in a separate place in the same village. A daughter leaves her father's house after her marriage and lives with her husband.

The unmarried sons and daughters continue to live with their parents till their marriage. In case of death of the parents, the unmarried brothers and sisters stay with their married brother till their marriage. The head of the family is usually the eldest male member of the family. Thus a Bhunjia family is patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal.

A group of girls from all the families of a Chuktia Bhunjia village at the age of about ten undergo **pre-puberty rite**,

Kundabera, at a time. A girl younger in age puts palm leaf-caps on the girls' heads and takes them to the nearby river for a ceremonial bath. Then all the girls return home and walk seven times around an arrow fixed on the ground which is followed by a feast arranged for the guests and relatives. Unless *Kundabera* is celebrated, no girl marries and once she undergoes this ritual, she is treated at par with adult woman and observes all restrictions.

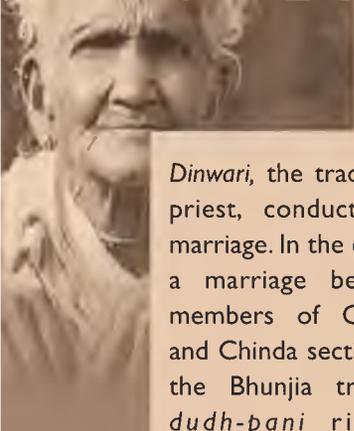


Marriage

After menarche, the unclean girl is confined for a week in one room. On the seventh day, she anoints turmeric paste mixed with *mahua* oil and takes bath in river and then goes to her mother's brother's house, where she cooks food in a brass pot in a new hearth made in the kitchen shed. Like *Kundabera*, this rite is necessary before a girl's marriage. Incestuous relationship is tabooed among the Chuktia Bhunjias. **Marriage, byhaghar**, is believed in their society as a union of man and woman for procreative and economic purposes. **Adolescent as well as cross-cousin marriage** is prevalent among them. A man can marry either his father's sister's daughter or his mother's brother's daughter. Monogamous marriage is the most common among the types of marriage. Besides, marriage by exchange, elopement, levirate and surrogate are some of the types of marriages prevalent among the Chuktia Bhunjia.

The marriage process is very simple and inexpensive and the rite is not elaborate. Marriage takes place in the bride's father's house and it is solemnized there by walking around the sacred post.





Dinwari, the traditional priest, conducts the marriage. In the case of a marriage between members of Chuktia and Chinda sections of the Bhunjia tribe, a *dudh-pani* rite is observed in which an affine washes the mouth of the bride with milk before she is taken in as a member of the groom's group. They do not have any custom of bride price. Divorce is socially permitted in their society.



In Chuktia Bhunjia society, pregnancy indicates rebirth of an ancestor, which may be a boon or a bane. A woman in carrying stage observes restrictions, like not to touch dead body and not to go to burial ground, not to do hard work and forbidden to take sacrificial meat. An elderly woman of her lineage helps in the delivery and cut umbilical cord with an arrow head.



Death Rite



The dead body is given a clean bath and covered with a new piece of white cloth. Then it is carried to the burial ground on a bamboo frame. At the burial ground the nephew of the deceased anoints turmeric paste on the face of the corpse before it is buried and stones are piled over. On the third day of the death all the relations of the family are invited for the mortuary feast. On this occasion the nephew sprinkles cow milk all over the house, throws away all the used earthen ware pots and cooks food in the new pots. The eldest son of the deceased is shaved by the nephew there after he puts on a new cloth and takes the cooked food in three leaf cups to the burial ground. Thereafter the relatives are fed.

After death ritual it is believed that the abode of *Dumba*, spirit of a dead married dead find place in the kitchen shed. Unlike *Dumba*, *Mirchuka*, the spirit of the unmarried dead represents a wooden pole fixed to the ground in the courtyard of the house. The *Dumba* and *Mirchuka* are worshipped by head/elderly person of the household by offering coconut, milk and ghee for happy and prosperous life and wellbeing of the household.



Religious life

The Chuktia Bhunjia worship many Gods and Goddesses. Their supreme deity is known as *Sunadei*. She is installed in a shrine at the Village Sunabeda. Three ritual functionaries, like *Pujari*, *Chhatriya* and *Katariya* are associated with the worship of the *Sunadei*. The *Pujari* is the ritual head in the worship of *Sunadei*, who offers food and prayer. While the *Chhatriya* holds the umbrella open at the time of worship and the *Katariya* sacrifices the animal. The main worship takes place on *Dasahara* in the month of September-October in which all the Bhunjias of 84 villages gather at Sunabeda and worship the deity. Buck and parrots are sacrificed. If properly appeased, she brings rain and prosperity to the village and villagers and blesses the barren women with children.



Besides, each *barag* has a specific deity and based on the worship of that deity the designation and nomenclature of the *barag* is derived. For example the people belonging to Barge, *Matihar* worships earth goddess known as *Maiti* (earth) in the months of September-October by offering buck, fowl and pig for bumper crop. The Bada mahji worships Dharani deity in November-December and sacrifices for preventing illness of all kinds, particularly fever and small pox and to drive away all wild animals and snakes and save people from danger. They also worship many Hindu Gods and Goddesses which is a recent phenomenon.



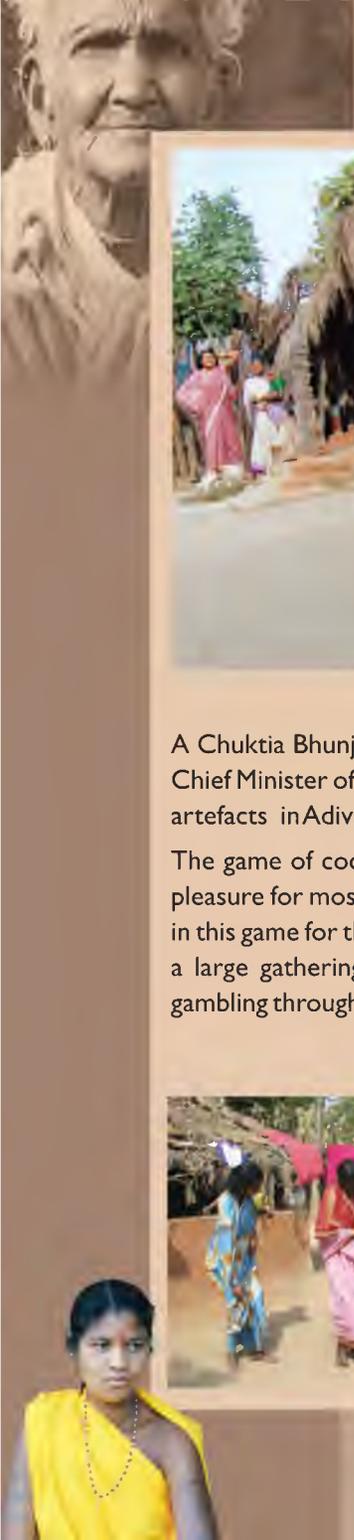
Fairs, Festivals and Entertainment



The Chuktia Bhunjia observe three annual fairs and festivals on the occasions, like Dasahra, seed sanctification and mahua collection, which are related with their livelihood and socio-physical wellbeing. A 15-day long festival is held in the month of October-November during Dasahara at the shrine of Sunadei. Every day a lamp is kept burning in the shrine of the Sunadei. On the 15th day of the festival which witnesses a large gathering of people from far and near to see the burning lamp brought to abode of the *Linga* (phallic symbol of Lord *Siva*) under the big and old Banyan tree and participate in the function. The speciality of the Banyan tree is that it stands on the rocks without much anchorage of the props and roots, and thus considered sacred.

Another festival is observed under the Banian Tree in the month of March-April, which also attract large gathering of the devotees of the plateau. The speciality of the festival is that for the first time in the year *dahi* cultivation (shifting cultivation) the worship is performed on this occasion. A ritual for sanctification of seed is observed in which the *Chhatriya* of *Sunabeda* village provides 5 kgs. of paddy seeds for the purpose. These seeds are sanctified before the deity through the ritual and distributed among all the Bhunjias to use as seeds in the *dahi* cultivation. The shrines of Budharaja and Viema deities are at Sosenga, a sacred and important place in the plateau for all the Bhunjia people. The place is abounded by large number of *mahua* trees. The mahula harvest festival of Chuktia has a forest and seasonal background. The Bhunjia people of the plateau assemble at this place in March and April to share devotional songs relating to the deities. The principal priests, like Majhi and Chhatriya worship them. Mahua flowers, bucks, fowls and wine are offered to the deities for bumper *mahua* crop and good collection of *mahua* flower. After the festival the devotees along with their family members continue to stay there in leaf hutments for a month or so for collection of mahua flowers.





The women folk of the Chuktia Bhunjia, young and old alike, enjoy all the fairs and festivals through dance, songs and music.

Towards the preservation and promotion of tribal culture, the participation of Chuktia Bhunia people in the Annual Adivsi Exhibition is a very recent phenomenon. The theme pavilion set up by SCSTRTI on the eve of Annual Adivsi Exhibition 2009 at Bhubaneswar displayed the Chuktia Bhunjias' material culture.

A Chuktia Bhunjia had the privilege to welcome Hon'ble Chief Minister of Orissa to see the replica of his hut, art and artefacts in Adivsi Exhibition 2009 at Bhubaneswar.

The game of cocks' fights in the weekly market is a great pleasure for most of the Chuktias. The winning possibilities in this game for the cock owners and the spectators attract a large gathering and most of them love and enjoy the gambling through the cock fights.



Village Traditional Council



Political organization of the Bhunjias comprises village council and the inter-village council. Each Bhunjia village is an independent socio-political unit having its own village council and a group of traditional leaders. The traditional village council comprises a corporate body of elderly male members called *Bhal-bhai*. The traditional office bearers, like *Pujari*, *Chhatriya*, *Katariya* and the eldest male members of all barges are bonafied members of the village council. The council does not meet regularly. Generally the women are not allowed to participate in the meeting of the council of elders but they are summoned as parties to the disputes and as witness. The Council settles disputes relating to matters, like quarrels, breach of taboos, inheritance of property and it is confined

to the members of the village only. The decision of the Council is based on consensus. It is always impartial and binding upon both the parties. The cases, like suicide, homicide, theft and damage of public property are decided in the court of law. The delegates of the Council of elders of all the concerned villages form the Inter-village council. The Chairman, the Chief spokesman of the Inter-village Council is known as *Kurha*. It settles disputes of all concerned villages and villagers in special meetings arranged for the purpose. Previously the macadam was acting as the ex-officio *Khura* for 84 Bhunjia villages. Important cases which can not be settled at village council level are referred to the inter-village council for decision. Every body honours and obeys the decision of the Inter-village council. The remarkable changes in the village socio-political structure of the tribe are the abolition of the *Zamindari* system and a switch over from a system of traditional political organization to a well defined democratic system of statutory political institution. After introduction of Panchayati Raj system, there is co-existence of

both the systems, the *Bhala-bhai* and PRI in the Chukhtia Bhunjia villages. Consequent upon the introduction of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, the traditional system is declining and elected peoples' representatives have assumed their roles with reservation for women. However, both the systems co-exist in cooperation rather than contradiction.



Change and Development



Change is inevitable. In course of time, the Chuktia Bhunjia society and habitat have undergone many changes. The frequent visits of Forest Officials to the Sunabeda area, construction of forest bungalow and setting up a Micro Project (Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency) in the year 1993-94 by Government of Orissa with financial assistance from Ministry of Tribal Affairs, GOI, New Delhi for the total development of the Chuktia Bhunjia (PTG) and the conversion of the forest resources in to a Wildlife Sanctuary for preservation of wild lives in the plateau have brought forth changes into the life of the Chuktia Bhunjia.

The development interventions, like construction of village roads, installation of tube wells and digging of sanitary wells, irrigation tanks etc, initiated by the Gram Panchayat in the 90s have now been intensified and widened by the Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA), Sunabeda. Due to restriction of forest officials, *Dahi* cultivation has been banned causing a great loss of food grain to the people. Development interventions by the Chuktia Bhunjia Development Agency (CBDA), Sunabeda has brought forth socio-economic development and effected creation of critical infrastructure in the villages. The functionaries of the CBDA have been playing a catalyst role in bringing total development among the Chuktia Bhunjias and their village welfare. After construction and Improvement of roads, the boon of development through the CCD plan 2007-08 implemented by CBDA, Sunabeda made the villages in the Sunabeda plateau accessible throughout the year and also the Chuktia Bhunjia people were provided with gainful employment through the construction works.





The Chuktia Bhunjia considered their life in feudal dispensation (Ex-Zamindari) was better as they used to do *Bewar* and *Dahi* cultivation freely and grow ragi plentifully. Then the plateau was inhabited mostly by them with a few families of Gond and Paharia. Immigration of people, firstly like Gond and Paharia (Kamara) and then Kulta, other castes in to the forest areas of the plateau effected *Dahi/Bewar* land alienation among the Chuktia Bhunjia. Reversely, the Chuktia Bhunjias' contact with Kulta caste people was a boon for the former as they had learnt the advantage of the schooling and modern farming practice from the latter.

Educational development programmes for the Chuktia Bhunjia children has been a priority of the CBDA. It has made special efforts towards promotion of pre-primary education for the pre-school children at villages.





Students of Educational Complex, Saleipada



Educational Complex Saleipada, CBDA-Sunabeda, Nuapada

This has been helping the Chuktia children in enrolment at Residential Ashram Schools for education. Especially, the establishment of a Residential Educational Complex at village Saleipada and its functioning in the year 2008 by engaging the Chuktia Bhunjia HSC passed youths as contract teachers and non-teaching staff under CCD Plan for promotion of primary education of as many as 200 Chuktia Bhunjia girls seem to be quite useful for the plateau dwellers.

Dugwell at Nunapani C.C.D. Plan - 2008-09



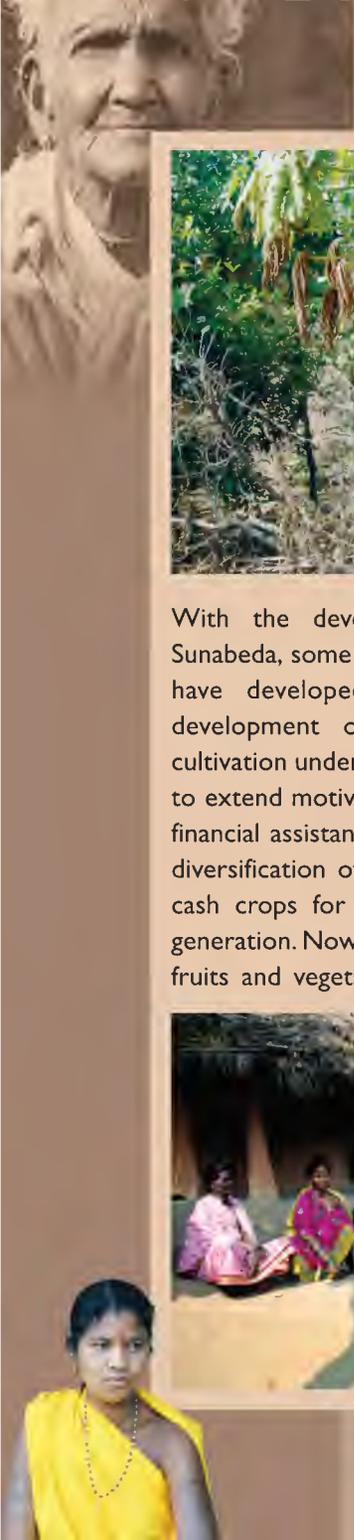
Excavations of tanks with the financial assistance by CBDA under CCD Plan helps increasing of the water level of the surface and checks the soil erosion and provides irrigation facility to the Chuktia Bhunjia fields, besides generating employment and income.

Continuing efforts in scientific farming through land development, irrigation facilities, like dug wells, Check Dams and extension of field channel for assured flow irrigation and supply of agricultural inputs to



the Chuktia Bhunjia farmers and undertaking crop demonstration programmes for them have brought a revolutionary change in the agrarian activities of the Chuktia Bhunjia and promoted their economic empowerment.





With the development interventions of CBDA, Sunabeda, some Chuktia Bhunjia progressive farmers have developed fruits and vegetables gardens. development of papaya, banana and vegetables cultivation under horticulture programmes has helped to extend motivation to the Chuktia Bhunjia farmers, financial assistance, inputs, technical guidance, etc. for diversification of farm activities through undertaking cash crops for employment and additional income generation. Now, they grow cash crops, like sugarcane, fruits and vegetables, such as banana, papaya, brinjal,



tomato, cabbage, cauliflower, and chilli, etc. in a sustainable way.

The attitude of Chuktia Bhunjia People towards cooperation, skill up-gradation training and value addition to MFPs and goat and sheep rearing through the financial assistance in a group mode efforts of CBDA help promote women SHGs, resulting in social and economic empowerment and self reliance of women folk.



Breaking the traditional beliefs, the Chuktia Bhunjia people have used khapar tiles in the roofs of their houses. The importance of the traditional elites has been reduced with the implementation of 73rd Amendment of the constitution relating to Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat under the Panchayati Raj system. Previously, the Sarpanch of the statutory Gram Panchayat was selected from among the Chuktia Bhunjias, now the post of Sarpanch has gone to the hands of Gond/other tribe. The ceremonial hunting and free use of forest produce for household consumption have been checked in the forest core area covered by the Wild Life Sanctuary. Amidst change, there

is also persistence, like the shrines of Sankarji Linga under the Big banian tree and shrine of Sunadei, the Supreme Deity of Chuktia Bhunjia and the worship and month long mahua collection festivals at Sosengia and that confirm no/little changes, particularly in religious activities and festivities without compromising the socio-economic development.





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