

# KOYA



Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute  
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# FOREWORD

**T**he Koyas inhabiting the Malkangiri district of south Odisha are an ancient tribe credited with a unique way of community oriented life and a rich cultural heritage. They call themselves 'Koya' or 'Koitor' meaning 'people'. The Koyas living in adjacent Bastar region of Chhatisgarh are called Dorla and Madia. Their mother tongue is Gondi- a Dravidian language. They can also speak Odia and Telugu languages.

Traditionally, the Koyas are pastoralists and shifting cultivators but now-a-days, they have taken to settled cultivation supplemented by animal husbandry and seasonal forest collections. They own large herds of cows and bullocks. According to their traditional system, *chom* or wealth means cattle, because a Koya without cattle has no status in the society. They maintain community funds and grain banks at the village level to help the needy families and provide food security. They erect menhirs in memory of the dead.

The Koyas, have retained their rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music which form an integral part of their festivals and rituals. The Koya dance is characterized not only by its originality and spontaneity but also for its wide range of movements. For dancing the Koya men wear huge head gears of bison horn which are richly decorated with peacocks feathers and cowries. The girls adorn themselves in colourful costumes and ornaments, wearing flat brass band in their foreheads and holding sticks fitted with tinkling bells. They dance in circles striking the sticks during the dance in between the beats. When happily inspired, they can coin a song then and there and sing it. When they see things of beauty and meet pleasantly, they express their pleasure and happiness by composing songs.

Since the good old days the Koyas have been living undisturbed in their remote habitat propagating their unique life and culture. After independence the peace and tranquility of their area has been affected by immigration of large number of people of different cultures and execution of development projects. They are now struggling hard to save themselves and their culture against the dominating pressure of advanced refugees and outsiders.

This photo hand book as a glimpse of the lifestyle of the Koya tribe will be useful to the interested laymen, academicians and researchers. I am thankful to Prof.(Dr.)A.B. Ota, Director, Shri T. Sahoo, O.S.D. and Sri S.C.Mohanty, O.S.D. who have painstakingly conceived, designed and produced this colorful Photo Hand Book.

**Commissioner-cum-Secretary**  
ST&SC Development Department  
Government of Odisha

# KOYA



A.B. Ota  
T. Sahoo

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

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A close-up portrait of a smiling Koya woman. She has dark skin and curly hair. She is wearing a red bindi on her forehead, two circular gold nose rings, and a small earring. She is wearing a green sari with an orange border. The background is a soft, out-of-focus natural setting.

# IDENTITY

The Koyas are an ancient tribe credited with a unique way of community life and a common cultural heritage. In the long past the Koyas were identified as a warrior tribe. The last Queen of Malkangiri, Bangaru Devi who ruled over Malkangiri from 1855 A.D. to 1872 A.D had a powerful large Koya Army and defeated King Ramachandra Deva III of Jeypore. During the British period in 1880, Koya Rebellion led by a Koya youth Tama Dora took place. Then the Koyas started offering resistance off and on to the British Government.

In Malkangiri, Koyas constitute the principal tribe and are widely found in Kalimela, Mottu, Podia, Mathili, Korkonda and Malkangiri blocks. They call themselves *Koya* or *Koitor* meaning 'people'. Ethno-culturally, the *Koyas* of Malkangiri are more connected with the Bison-Horn *Murias* of adjacent Chhatishgarh. The *Koya* are known as *Madia* and *Dorla* in the Sukuma and Bastar region of Chattishgarh.

The *Koyas* are a branch of the Gondi-speaking people. Their mother tongue comes under the Dravidian group of languages. This dialect also differs among the two groups of Koya - the north and the south. There has been some incorporation of Telugu, Hindi and Odia words into the language of the southern and northern Koyas respectively. It is evident that the Koya of the two regions of the district are more or less similar linguistically, the slight differences being seen due to the contact with Odia or Telugu speakers. The southerners have been much influenced in dress, ornaments and hairstyle by the Telugus, while the northerners have retained their primitiveness to a great extent.





Koyas of older generation use very scanty clothes, Men use only loin cloth. Older women wear narrow shorts covering the portions of body from waist to knee, and use another piece to cover the upper part of the body. Now-a-days women of younger generation wear *saree*, blouse and petticoat and young men wear dhoti, half pant, lungi etc. Women wear several ornaments on their wrists, ankles, ears, nose and neck.

According to 2011 census, the total population of Koya tribe in Odisha is 1 47 137 including 71 014 males and 76 123 females . Their sex ratio comes to 1072 females for 1000 males. The literacy among the Koyas is leveled at 29.87 percent (36.46 percent for male and 23.77percent for female). Their population has registered a negative growth rate of 20.08 per cent during the decade (2001-2011).



# HABITAT SETTLEMENT & HOUSING







The Koyas inhabit the hills and forests north of Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh and Malkangiri district of Odisha. This district is comprised of vast forest areas in the Eastern Ghats mountain range, which has an elevation of 3000 feet at its eastern boundary. The northern region has an elevation of 800 feet near the foot of the *ghat*. From north to south the elevation gradually diminishes and the southern most point has an elevation of 400 feet where the river *Sileru* and *Saberi* join and flow together with a name '*China Godavari*' towards the junction at Komanavaram where they meet river Godavari. The rest of the district constitutes of forest plains with a number of rocky wooded hills, some of them rising







The Koya villages are situated on the patches of clearings in the midst of forests surrounded by different trees like *Mahul* (*Basia latifolia*), and *Salpa* (*Caryota urens*). In each village there is one structure called *bijagudi* or 'House of God'. This is situated either inside the village, or near the village boundary or even in front of the head man's house. The sacred shrine of *Gudimata* – the village goddess, is located in a group of *Mahul* trees inside or near the village. In each village there is a dormitory house which is used by the unmarried girls of the village for sleeping and gossiping at night. But this practice is going out of vogue in these days.







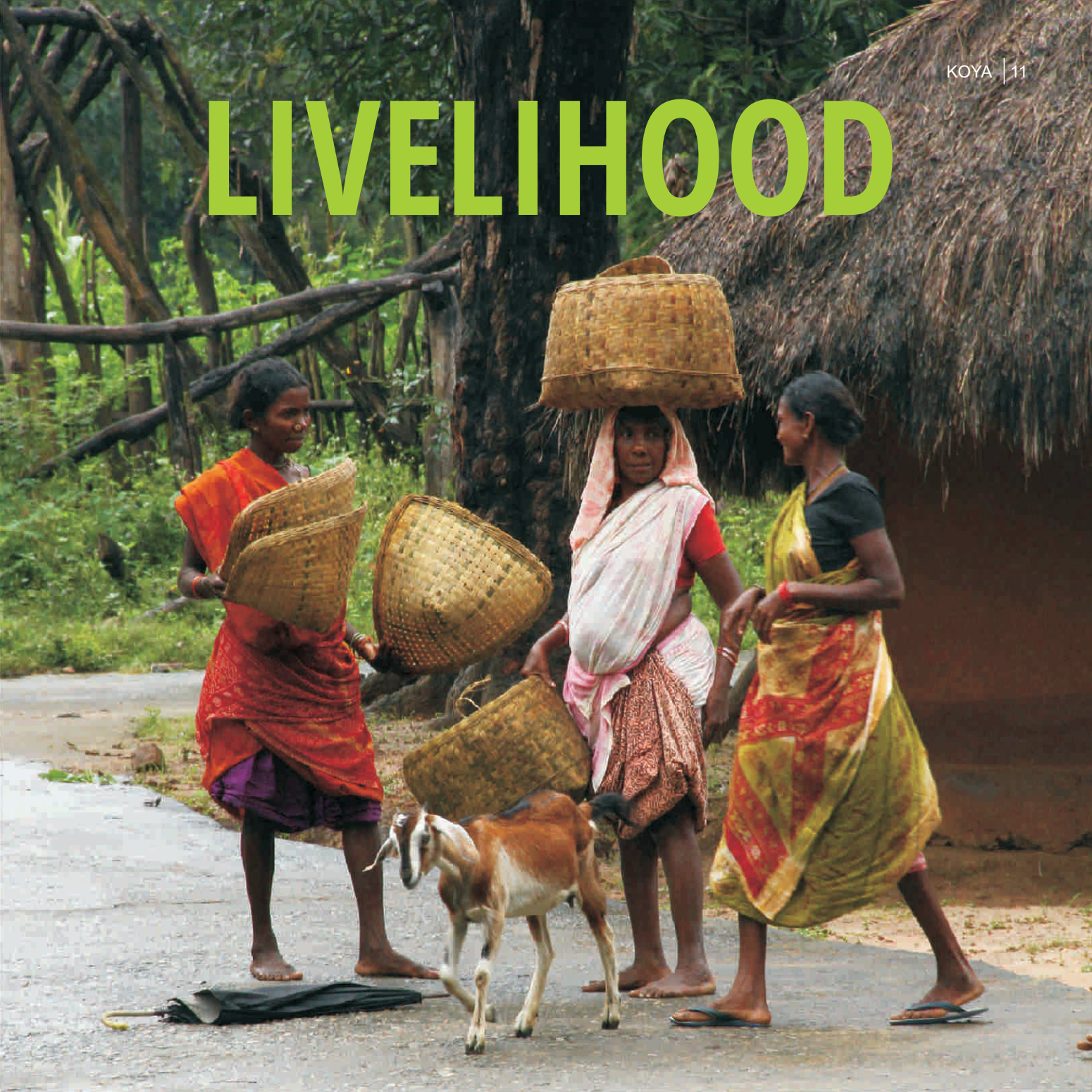
The boundary of each house site is demarcated by fencing made of neatly woven bamboo splits. There are small sheds for pigs, goats and fowls. Each Koya house is attached with a kitchen garden. There they grow tobacco, mustard, vegetables, maize and millets. The roofs of almost all houses are covered with vegetable creepers. They plant *Sikad* or beans in the garden or near the house.

Mostly, the access to the Koya villages is by narrow footpaths of *kacha* type. In every village, one finds two or more clusters of houses. The Koya live in low thatched houses. Each house consists of one or two small huts, which are used as sleeping rooms. The walls of a house are made of tree branches and bamboo, which are thickly plastered with mud. The roofs are low thatched with a type of wild grass, locally known as *sindi*. The houses are rectangular in size and partitioned into rooms by walls of bamboo plastered with mud. The house is windowless and the hearth is situated in its one corner. A verandah (*arra*) runs almost on all the sides of the house. There are no separate storerooms. The agricultural produce and forest collections are stored under the roof over a shelf inside the sleeping rooms. The shelves are made of bamboo and wooden pillars.





# LIVELIHOOD





In the past the Koyas were mainly shifting cultivators. But nowadays they have taken to settled cultivation. They cultivate mainly paddy, maize, *mandia* (millet) and tobacco leaf. During the harvest time, all the families go to their respective *ketuls* (field huts) in their crop fields, where they spend the whole day to watch the crop and come back home in the evening. As the agricultural yields do not suffice for a family to survive for the whole year, the Koyas resort to other types of food quest, i.e. the collection of roots and fruits from the jungle and the growing of minor crops like *suan*, *maize* and *pulses*.



Collection of roots, fruits, leaves, tubers, herbs etc. from the nearby forest constitutes one of the important livelihood activities of the Koyas which supplements their food and income. They collect Tumid (Kendu fruit) in large quantities from the forest when they are ripen and are stored after being dried in sun to be used during the period of food scarcity. Mahul trees grow in abundance in the Koya area, and during the months of March and April large quantities of Mahul are collected, dried and stored for future use. During the months from July to September several types of roots are collected from the jungle and eaten.



Roots collected from the jungle are another source of food for the Koyas. Roots constitute a major diet of the Koyas. These are also used as medicines. Young green shoots bamboo are also eaten. The women folk collect a large variety of wild greens which they call Kusir from the fields, jungles and the edges of the water. These greens are cooked and eaten with rice. There are also some seasonal forest fruits like Nendu (Jamu), Edka (kusum), and Marka (mango) etc. which are collected and eaten but not stored.



The Koyas own large herds of cows and bullocks. According to the Koya traditional system, chom or wealth means cattle, because a Koya without cattle has no status in the society. The cattle are used as a means of purchasing necessary household articles. Now-a-days, cattle are sold for money. The cattle and cows are used to plough fields. Oxen and cows are slaughtered as offerings at funerals and other festivals. The Koyas do not properly maintain their wealth of livestock. The animals are not properly sheltered. The forest nearby is used for grazing and no other provisions are made to feed the animals.

They also rear pigs, goats, cows, duck and hens. They prefer hatching of chicks but do not prefer consuming eggs.





They are skilled hunters. Since the wild games have become scarce and hunting wild animals is totally banned now they go out for hunting rarely during festive occasions.

Koya women contribute a lot in the household activities, agriculture, livestock management, procurement, management and value addition of non-timber forest products (NTFPs), agricultural surpluses and collection of fire woods. But encroachment of forest resources and alienation of community land has restricted the scope of their participation in the livelihood pursuits

The community fund maintained in the form of both cash and kinds and circulated to the needy persons on low interest reflects their community oriented living and management skills. The functioning of their traditional seed bank and grain bank not only meets the emergency requirements of the villagers but also functions as the gene pool and ensures food security of the village.





## Food Habit

Koya take two principal meals a day, and a third minor meal. The morning meal mainly consists of *jawa* or rice gruel. Sometimes, they also take millet gruel. During the midday, they take either rice starch or millet starch. Children may take boiled horse gram or sweet potato. The evening meal consists of boiled rice and a curry of mixed vegetables or pulses and spinach.

Seasonal variation is noticed in their food habit. During the lean period roots, tubers green leaves, and wild fruits constitute important items of their food. All types of wild animals and birds except tigers and bears are eaten by the Koyas. The squirrels, wild rats and hares are also relished and are often hunted. During the monsoon they collect snails, oysters, crabs, fish and mushrooms for their supplementary food. They also eat eggs of red and white ants. They too take mutton, chicken, beef and pork. During summer months they almost subsist on palm fruits, mangoes, jackfruits, plums and Kendu (*Drospyros melanocylon*).





Mahula and Salapa are their ideal drinks. They take very little quantity of milk. *Mahul* flowers are used not only as food but also as an intoxicating drink. The Koyas prepare a kind of alcoholic beverage by boiling Mahul flowers in their indigenous way. This is called Surate or Uram and is deep red in colour. The Koyas also prepare oil from Mahul, which they use for cooking and also anoint it on their body and hair.





# SOCIAL LIFE

The Koya tribe is dichotomized between two types of kin in groups, called *kutumam* or consanguineal kin and *wiwalwand* or affinal kin. The consanguineal kin of a person belongs to the same phratry as that person. There are five such phratries present in the Koya society. These are (1) *Kowasi* (2) *Odi* or *Sodi* (3) *Madkam* (4) *Madi* (5) *Padiam*. A *Kowasi* can take a wife from any of the four remaining phratries other than his own. A person cannot marry a girl of the same phratry to which he belongs because all persons in that group are believed to have a blood relationship among themselves.

The family is the smallest unit of social grouping in Koya society. The family is called *lotam* in the Koya language. It includes the parents and their children. Sometimes, the family also includes the *olaam* or the groom who stays in his father-in-laws house with his wife under the custom of 'marriage by service'. As soon as the sons grow up and get married, they build their own houses near their parent's house and live separately with their wives, though they may share a common kitchen. If any of the adult sons wants to live separately from the rest of the family, he asks the father to give him some land for his livelihood.



# LIFE CYCLE

## Pregnancy & child Birth

When a Koya a woman conceives, it is believed that God has put the baby inside her womb. A pregnant woman carries on her routine work until the expected month of delivery. When her labour pain starts, she is taken to a hut erected behind the main house for delivery. The *wadde* (magico-religious functionary) conducts necessary rituals to save the child and mother from the evil spirits and facilitate smooth delivery of the baby. An old lady along with two or

more ladies constitutes the team of nurses to facilitate the delivery. They cut off the umbilical cord of the newborn with the help of a heat treated arrowhead or a sharp piece of new broken earthen pot after tying the base and apply turmeric mixed oil there. In the early days, they used to apply freshly prepared ash with oil. The new born and the mother are bathed with warm water after turmeric mixed oil has been applied twice. Six to seven days after the delivery of the child, the mother returns home.







Till the end of the weaning period a child is treated with kindness and after that period he/she is lightly coerced if his/her impulse found unruly. After the age of ten or twelve the mother trains the daughters and father trains the sons to work as per the division of labour. The children participate in all works of the family.

Name giving ceremony of the new born is performed after 2 to 3 months of birth and in some cases even earlier, when the family has the means to afford the expenses. On this occasion all the village ladies take bath and assemble in the house of the new born along with the team of women present at the time of delivery. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday are considered auspicious for this ceremony. Uncles and maternal grandparents are invited. They come and apply turmeric paste on the forehead of the child and place some coins on a plate. The lady who had severed the umbilical cord holds the child and starts singing song, which the other ladies recite. She starts with the name of a dead ancestor and says "We don't know in which heaven you are. We want to have you; shall we call the child by your name? You will bless the child" etc. Then she disperses some rice over a piece of bread and breaks it in to two. If it ends with an equal distribution, then the child will be named after him and if it does not, she throws the rice and starts singing again with another name. After the child is named, a pig is sacrificed and a feast is organized for the village women.



## Puberty Rites

The maturity of a girl is known as *erata*. When a girl attains her first menarche some of her relations go to the nearby forest, select an isolated spot and make two small huts over two adjacent trees. An old lady accompanies the girl and they both stay on two different huts on the trees for 7 days. Then, the villagers are informed about the stay of the girl in the particular forest area. The girl remains secluded and out of the sight of men for those 7 days. The old lady cooks for the girl. Both of them sleep in different places during night. On the 7th day the girl is bathed with turmeric mixed water. During these 7 days of pollution no *puja* or festival is observed in the village. The Koyas think that if the girl during these seven days walks over the earth it shall become barren; the trees which she shall touch will not bear fruits.



The Koyas think that a boy attains maturity when hairs grow in his armpits and face. Usually these things happen when a boy is aged twelve to thirteen. Hence the marriageable age for boys starts at thirteen. A girl becomes marriageable when she attains puberty (*erata*), irrespective of her age. During the time of adolescence they learnt how to live independently. They co-operate the family in all socio-economic activities along the lines of division of labour. In Koya society division of labour is observed along all the grades of age and sex.

The youth dormitories of Koyas play a major role for promoting their culture and tradition. The dormitories are the institution for unmarried youths. The Koya boys and the girls spend nights there in separate rooms. The girls' dormitory is called *Pikin-Kudma*. The girls gather there in the night for singing and gossiping and they sleep there together. But this practice is gradually being abandoned and in many villages *Pikin-Kudma* is not in existence. An open space left opposite the dormitory is meant for practising dance. It would not be wrong to say it as school of dance for the Koya youths. This dormitory also facilitates selection of life partner by the youth. It is indeed a democratic institution for promotion and propagation of Koya culture.



## Marriage

Koya marriage or *pendul* is one of the most important social functions. In selecting a bride, preference is given to the maternal uncle's daughter (crupiki) or father's sister's daughter (crupiki). In arranged marriages the groom's parents take the initiative in marriage negotiations. Where freedom is exercised by any girl or boy in choosing their mate, the marriage is settled but through a very complicated procedure of the payment of compensation. In many cases the age of wives is more than that of their husbands.

The commonly practiced form of marriage is known as *Pendul*. In *Karsu Pendul* form of marriage, the boy with the help of his friends picks up the girl of his choice in the forest or field. In this case compensation has to be



paid to the bride's father by the boy's side. In the case where a boy selects a girl he has to obtain the consent of the girl. Then with his father's consent, he brings the girl to his house with the help of his friends. The bride's father demands compensation in terms of cash and kinds. The compensation amount is shared by the villagers and the bride's father. The marriage can take place by giving cattle to the girl's father as the bride price.

In another type of marriage, when a girl loves a boy intensely, she forcibly enters into the boy's house to stay there. It is called *lon-udi-wata* marriage for which the payment of bride price is much less than the other forms of marriages. The marriage ceremony continues for three days. It begins with the ceremonial fetching of the water (*putu eru* or bath water) from nearby stream by the *yange* - the elder brother's wife accompanied by a group of women singing songs. The groom sits on the lap of his elder brother's wife. Tamarind and turmeric

paste with ghee is smeared on the body of the groom. Water is poured over him and he wears a new cloth. Then with the accompaniment of drums he makes visit to all other families of his own clan in the village. On being invited a few men go to the village of the bride to fetch her.



On the day of the wedding, the bride is brought to the groom's house, accompanied by her friends and relatives. They are given rice beer (*landa*) to drink and some food. During the marriage ceremony several types of songs are sung by the women folk of both the parties. The Koyas also perform the ceremonial dance, wearing bison horns on their heads during the marriage ceremony.



## Death

After the death of a person a new cloth is put on the dead body. Traditionally in the past, the dead body was being removed out of the house by making a hole in the roof. But this practice is being given up slowly. The dead body is bathed with oil and turmeric and then some salt and spade are kept over its abdomen. All his daily used items (arrows, bow, axe and sickle etc.) are kept by its side. The body is placed over a bamboo mesh and is raised to shoulders by the family members and relatives. Before doing so, few coins are laid on its mouth and hand according to the capacity of the family. Then the dead body is carried to the cremation ground keeping the head towards the east. All the personal belongings are also brought there. In some places, even a bullock or a cow is also brought to the graveyard. The tail of such animal is touched to the hand of the dead man and then the tail is cut and the dead body is again laid facing east and the nephew lights the pyre. The cattle is then sacrificed and a feast is arranged for the friends and relatives.

On the day of the disposal of the dead body, few logs of wood are burnt at the entrance of the village. The *wadde* puts rice and egg chanting mantras so as to prevent the spirit of the dead to enter into the village. He also worships the village God. During this time the women sing songs remembering the dead. Sometimes the spirit of the dead person enters into some of the close relatives or friends. He/she or (may be more) dances as per the songs. This is known as *Pretar* dance of Koyas. On the ninth day, an idol of a deity is made with rice and flour. All the family members and relatives put *kal* or *pendum* in the mouth of the deity so prepared. They erect menhirs in memory of the dead.



# RELIGIOUS LIFE

The Koya observe mainly four annual religious festivals such as *Bijja Pandu*, *Kodta Pandu*, *Bimud Pandu* and *Idu or Ikk Pandu*. *Bijja Pandu* is the most important agricultural festival held to worship the Earth Goddess to get a trouble free agricultural season and a good harvest. The *Bijja Pandu* is the sacred seed from which the festival takes its name. It is celebrated in the month of Chaitra, when the earth Goddess is worshipped with offerings of cocks, pigs, eggs and mangoes. At the approach of monsoon, *Peda*, the village chief fixes a date for the festival in consultation with his co-villagers. Paddy seeds are also

placed before the Goddess, believing that those seeds will become productive by the divine touch. The priest requests the Goddess to render a good harvest. Mangoes are eaten ceremonially during this festival. Ceremonial hunting (*bijja wata*) follows this festival. Koya men go out for hunting and fishing in groups and return home before dark. The women enjoy by singing and dancing, waiting for their men to come. In the evenings all of them unite, feast, drink and dance together. They have special variety of dance for this festival. They dance in circles singing songs of love. Work during this festival is a taboo.







*Bimud Pandu* is held in the month of *Magh-Phalgun* for worshipping the rain god. It is observed just after the completion of the harvest of all types of crops. Two small clay models of the rain god and his wife are made and kept under a *Mahul* tree, over a piece of stone on the festive day. The villagers, with the priest and the headman gather at the site with crops of all types. After worshipping the God, the priest fills the empty baskets with crops that is followed by the headman and the villagers. An unmarried girl is made to stand between the clay models and the priest. The villagers throw water over them and laugh, saying that the marriage of the rain god is over today (*gajje bimud pendul nend terta*). Then, the ceremonial dancing and singing begin.



*Ikk Pandu*, the tamarind festival is observed during February-March to commence collection of ripe tamarind which is an important food item of the Koyas. The village priest worships a tamarind tree inside the village offering the sacrifice of eggs and chickens. Similarly the Koyas observe *Ikk Pandu* to start collection of *Mohul* flowers.

*Tadi Pandu* held in the month of March marks the beginning of collection of Tadi i.e the palm juice which is a favourite drink of the Koyas. In the month of *Kani* (*Bhadrab-Aswin*) *Kurum Pandu* is observed when suan crop is eaten ceremonially. The new rice eating ceremony is observed in the month of Dashara (*Aswin-Kartik*). *Sikud Pandu* or the new bean eating ceremony is celebrated in the month of *Dewad* (*Kartik-Margasir*). *Karta Pandu*, the new rice eating ceremony is held during September-October. *Sikud Pandu* or the new bean eating festival is observed in the month of February when the beans (*sikud*) ripens. In the month of *Kandi* (August-September) *Kurum Pandu* is observed when the *Suan* is eaten ceremonially. *Marka Pandu*, the new mango eating ceremony is performed in the month of June-July.

In all these new eating festivals the village deity (*Gama*) and ancestral spirits in the households are worshipped by the village priest and household heads respectively. Animal sacrifices are made and the new crop, fruit or vegetable are offered to the deities after which the Koyas eat them. No Koya dares to eat new

fruits or crops before observing the new eating ceremony in which the fruit or crop is ceremonially offered to the Gods, village deities and the ancestral spirits.

The Koyas also worship few other Gods and deities installed in other parts of the Koya area. The three Gods in *Manyemkonda* temple are worshipped by the Koyas, other tribal communities and Hindu castes. The festival of worship is held in every three years and the devotees come from far and near spending couple of days on journey. On the day of the festival the temple priest conducts the rituals in the temple and the animals offered by the devotees are sacrificed before the Gods.

In Koya society, Magic and religion are complementary to each other. The Koyas worship their Gods and appease them and get their blessings. When this worship fails to bring them any result they resort to magical practices with the help of *Wadde* (the magico-religious specialist). *Wadde* is called upon to perform magical rites to cure diseases, effect smooth delivery of a child and ward off the calamities and epidemics.





# AESTHETIC LIFE

The Koyas, have retained their rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music forming an integral part of their festivals and rituals. Among them, the dance, song and music are developed and maintained by themselves as a folk tradition without the aid and intervention of any professional dancer or teacher. The performance of these only gives expression to their inner feelings, their joys and sorrows, their natural affections and passion and their appreciation of beauty in nature and in man.



Although the pattern of dance and music prevalent among them vary one from group/section to another, yet there are certain features common to all. Koya dances have some accompaniments by means of which the rhythm is maintained. This consists of clapping of hands or beating of drums or an orchestra of different instruments. Every dance is accompanied by a song which is sung by the performers. Both men and women, young and old dance and invariably sing

but the accompanying orchestra or music is usually provided by the male members. Koya dance is characterized not only by its originality and spontaneity but also for its wide range of movements. Many parts of the body such as head, back, arms, feet, finger, etc. are brought into play. Some of the groups put on colourful dancing costume during their performance.

Like dance, the songs sung by different groups differ from each other. When happily inspired, they can coin a song then and there and sing it. When they see things of beauty and meet pleasantly, they express their pleasure and happiness by composing songs. One finds in these songs humours, jokes, romance, satires, criticisms, accusations and anger. On the occasion of performing pujas and observance of festivals, the songs sung are different. Such songs are adopted from the past so many years describe the history of gods, the myths of creation, some epics and legends. In Bija Pandu dance, the Koyas form two separate groups: one of males and the other of females for dancing. The male dancers hold a drum and they beat them while dancing. They wear huge head gears of bison horn which are richly decorated with peacocks feathers and cowries. The girls adorn themselves in ornaments, wearing flat brass band in their foreheads and holding sticks fitted with tinkling bells they dance in circles striking the sticks during the dance in between the beats.

# SOCIAL CONTROL

**A**mong the Koyas, if anyone breaches their tribal customary rule, the village community takes corrective action by imposing penalties like fine upon the wrong doer and then worships the deities to avoid the calamities expected to follow because of the anger of the supernatural beings. On the other hand such beliefs and practices ensure social discipline and conformity. Functioning of traditional institutions of social control among the Koya reflects that both secular and sacerdotal leaders play a major role in the village through the traditional village council which effectively manages inter and intra-village disputes and awards punishments and rewards.

The traditional head of the Koya village is called "Peda" around whom the leadership, both political and social revolves and the post is hereditary. He occupies a key place and enjoys certain prerogatives which make him virtually all powerful in a village. He functions as the secular headman in addition to his religious duties. He takes decisions in customary matters of his village. He sits with the village elders and the parties involved in a dispute - each party sitting on one side to conduct hearing and decide the cases. The Peda also sits in the *kula panchayat* of a particular clan, even though he is





not a member of that clan to discuss and decide disputed matters relating to commitment of incest within the clan.

A decision made by the Peda is never challenged. If a Peda becomes unpopular for some reason, the villagers sit together and select another headman. The people of Koya village sit together once a year to discuss about the headman's activities. The headman sits and listens to what his people say. If he is accused or criticized for any reason, he is given a chance to defend himself. This occasion is known as *peda gudma*. When a new Peda is chosen, the villagers hold a. A new cloth is wrapped around the new Peda's head like a turban by the village priest and he is led to the seat of village goddess to swear to remain just and good.

Beyond the village organization there is another wider unit at the regional level known as *mutha panchayat*. It consists of members who are the headman of the different component villages. It takes a care of inter-village disputes of serious nature. This *panchayat* mainly deals with the cases like eloping with another mans wife, which is considered as a big crime. The aggrieved person asks the headman of his village to summon the *mutha panchayat* to demand compensation from the accused person. Crimes like witchcraft and sorcery are also dealt with in this body, if these happen to involve persons belonging to more than one village.

Koya traditional authority structure gives little scope for their women to participate in decision-making process both at household and community levels.



# CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

**T**he Koya's habitat, economy and society and cultural life in Malkangiri have undergone a process of change from the nineteen seventies onwards due to rehabilitation of refugees from Bangladesh in Dandakaranya Development Project and Odia refugees from Burma and Tamil refugees from Srilanka on transit basis and displacement of Koya families due to Duduma, Balimela, Upper Kolab dam projects. Besides, the influx of people of different cultures from outside, has affected the life and culture of the Koyas. At present the Koyas are struggling hard to survive vis-a-vis the resettlers, who are far superior to them in their life styles.

Rehabilitation of the refugees from Bangladesh in the Koya habitat in the 1960s has encouraged the in-flow of outside forces into the district. Increase of population in the area has conversely depleted the traditional natural resources of the Koyas. The Government converted their traditional pastures for their cattles to agricultural lands for the resettlers. The Koya pastoral economy suffered a major setback for lack of adequate pasture. Thus, the Koyas are hard pressed economically in their own habitat. Over couple of years, the entry of market forces into their

regions has affected their life and livelihood. This has immense impact on the traditional skill and economic base.

During the Fifth Five Year Plan with the introduction of TSP strategy and establishment of an I.T.D.A in Malkangiri, the Koyas and other tribal communities have derived some benefits. The Malkangiri I.T.D.A. has been launching multi-sectoral development programmes from 1975-76 onwards, mainly for income generation and infrastructure development in the area.

The extension services made available through different line departments in the sectors of agriculture, animal husbandry, health, education, soil conservation and horticulture have limited impact on their socio-economic life. The Koya have strong adherence to their traditional knowledge based practices and technologies and thus gaps have been observed in the planned development delivery mechanisms, skill up gradation approaches and technologies adopted at the provider's levels. For example, the modern allopathic health service delivery system is yet to be accessible to the Koyas both at physical, economic and knowledge levels. The



traditional healing institutions among the Koyas are still performing and reaching at their doorsteps.

There is still a conspicuous gap between the expectations and achievements among the Koya. This has moderated the impact of various development programmes on their life and livelihood. It cannot be

said that nothing has been achieved so far. However, in the planned development interventions of the Government the Koya people need to participate fully for successful implementation of projects/schemes for maximization of benefits for their sustainable socio-economic development.





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**@SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar - 751003

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

Telephone : 0674-2563649/2561635



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