



# JATAPU



**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute  
(SCSTRTI) Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India, 751003**

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# FOREWORD

Their full name is “Konda Jatapu Doralu” ie, the lords of the hills. When they resided in hills, they were fully totemistic but later when they came in contact with the culture of the plains they took to many non-totemistic surnames of the plains. They make the offerings of the first produce to ancestors at harvest festivals. Cross-cousin marriages, rules of exogamy and incest, puberty ceremony for girls, a limited pantheon of gods and rituals, are their distinguishing socio-cultural characteristics. Many well-to-do families of the tribe were landlords in the plains between the 16th to 18th centuries.

They are called Jatapus, who are also known as Jatapu Dora and Samanthulu. They are an offshoot of the great Kandha tribe. Their mother tongue is Kuvi- a Dravidian language spoken by the Kandhas of Koraput district.

They are numerically a small tribe of Odisha hardly numbering 14 thousand persons as per 2001 Census. They live in the hilly terrain and foot hills of undivided Koraput and Ganjam districts of South Odisha and adjoining Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh. In their settlements, houses are arranged in a linear pattern in a parallel row leaving a wide open street in between. The shrine of their village deity called *Zankari Penu* is installed under sacred trees at the village outskirts.

This photographic documentation of their life style is a part of the series on the tribes of Odisha. Prof (Dr) A.B. Ota, Director and Shri S.C. Mohanty, O.S.D. (Research) of SCSTRTI have taken all the pains in preparing this colourful booklet. I thank them profusely and hope that it will be useful to all who are interested in the tribal culture of Odisha.

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

# JATAPU



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## IDENTITY



They are known as Jatapu and have synonyms like Jatapu Dora and Samanthulu etc. Believed to be a civilized section of the Kandha tribe, now they are a distinct community and consider themselves socially superior to the Kandha. According to Thurston (1909), the name 'Jatapu' is popularly believed to be an abbreviated form of Konda Jatapu Doralu or lords of the Kond (Kandha).

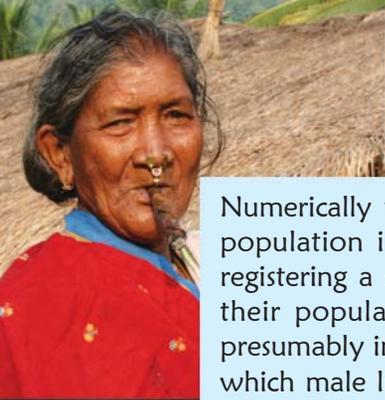
They live in the hill terrain and foot hills of undivided Koraput and Ganjam districts of South Odisha and adjoining Srikakulam and Vizianagaram districts of Andhra Pradesh.





They speak Kuvi - a Dravidian language spoken by the Kandhas of Koraput and Odia - the regional language of Odisha State. The Jatapu residing in boarder area adjacent to Andhra Pradesh speak Telugu to communicate with their Telugu speaking neighbours. But their mother tongue "Kuvi" is a Dravidian language closely akin to the Telugu language for which they are very conversant with Telugu.





Numerically they are a minority tribal community in Odisha. In 2001 census, their total population in Odisha was 13,804 out of which 6832 were males and 6972, females registering a sex ratio of 1020 females per 1000 males. In between 1991 and 2001 census their population in the state has registered a phenomenal growth rate of +51.04% presumably indicating migration across the borders. Their level of literacy is 32.32% out of which male literacy is 46.02 % and female literacy is 19.04%.



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## DRESS AND ORNAMENTS

Males wear coarse loin cloth (*gochi/koupin*) leaving the entire body bare. Women wear coarse handloom sarees purchased from the local weavers or from the nearest weekly market. They put on the saree above their knees to cover the entire body which is knotted on left side of their neck. At present both males and females are using modern dresses. Particularly on festive occasions, for visiting relative's house or on market days males use pants, shirts and banian and females wear mill made coloured sarees with petticoat and blouse etc.



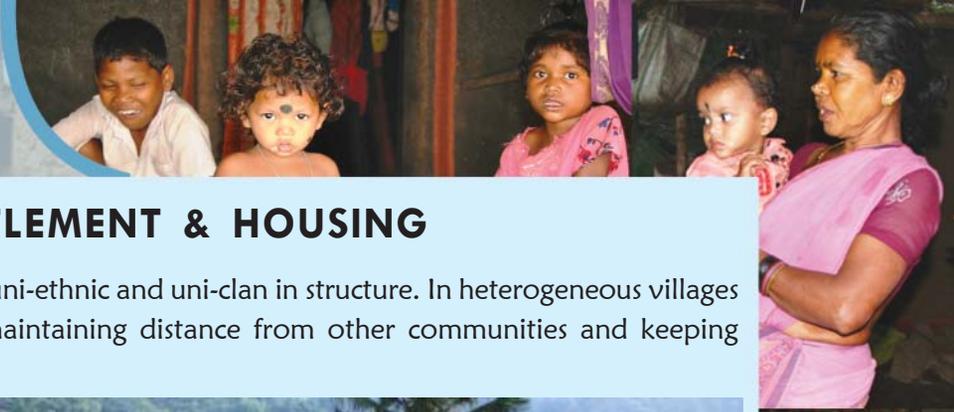


Jatapu women love to adorn themselves with varieties of ornaments to make their appearance charming and attractive. They wear *pusti*, *pateli*, *tigi* on their neck, *nagul* and *bagdalu* on their earlobes and *kanish kamulu* on their nose helix, varieties of finger rings *mudi* made of old coins on their fingers, coloured glass bangles on their wrists and silver waist chain *pati*. They also wear attractive ornaments like *kami*, *gundu* and *pusapuru* on festive occasions.



Females anoint their body with turmeric paste and comb their hair applying castor oil. They plait with hair knob at left side beautifully and decorate it with wild blossoms.





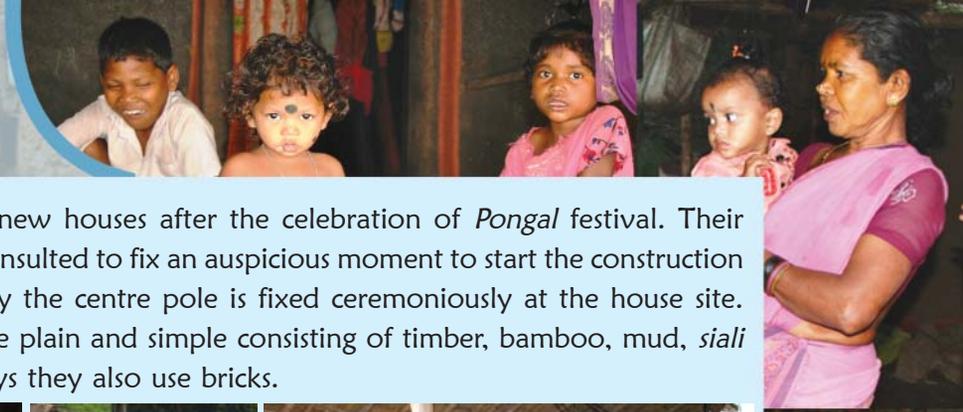
## SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

Jatapu settlements are generally uni-ethnic and uni-clan in structure. In heterogeneous villages they dwell in separate wards maintaining distance from other communities and keeping their own identity.



They live near foot hills or hill slopes surrounded by forest and perennial hill streams that provide them drinking water throughout the year. In a Jatapu settlement houses are arranged in a linear pattern in a parallel row leaving a wide open street in between. At the village outskirts the shrine of their village deity Zankari Penu is installed under sacred trees.





They generally construct their new houses after the celebration of *Pongal* festival. Their traditional priest- the *disary* is consulted to fix an auspicious moment to start the construction work. Preferably on Wednesday the centre pole is fixed ceremoniously at the house site. The house building materials are plain and simple consisting of timber, bamboo, mud, *siali* fibre and wild grass. Now-a-days they also use bricks.



Houses are rectangular in shape and two roomed having high plinth and wide verandahs both in front and rear sides. The houses usually face east. The doors are made of wood or split bamboos plastered with mud and the walls are cleanly polished with coloured clay.





The bigger room is used as living room and to store the food crops and smaller one is used as kitchen. The house has no window for ventilation.



They keep their domestic animals in a separate shed in their backyards. In their rear verandah they construct a separate compartment to accommodate women during their menstrual period. They keep their surroundings neat and clean.



They possess limited household assets. Their household utensils consisting of some aluminum pots, earthen wares and gourd vessels which are stored in the kitchen near their hearth.





They keep their clothes, on a bamboo pole hanging on strings from the roof. Their hunting weapons like bows, arrows, spears and axes are hung on the walls of the living room.

On their front verandah they keep their agricultural implements such as hoes, ploughs, leveler, yokes etc. Near the entrance of the living room they have their wooden mortar and pestle (*paurani*) on the floor for husking the grains by the female folk. On the rear verandah they keep a stone disc to grind the condiments.





## LIVELIHOOD



Cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy. They depend mainly on slash and burn (*podu*) cultivation carried out on the hills around their habitat and also practice low land paddy cultivation (*garavu*) near foot hills. Those having no land have turned to working as agricultural labourers and wage-earners.





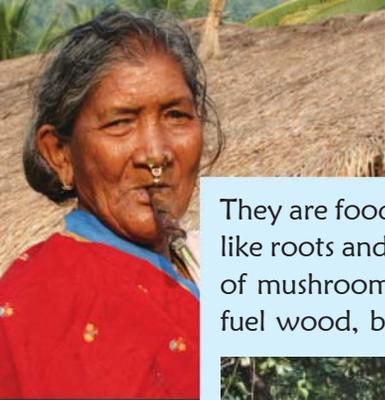
Usually they produce *ragi*, *padadhan* (a type of paddy), turmeric, zinger, *kangu* (a millet), *kosla* (a millet), *alasi* (nizer), *janna* (a millet), *dangaranim*, *bodhei*, *kulthi* (horse gram), *biri* (black gram) and red gram etc.

They have some upland near the hill slopes where they raise *kandul*, maize, chilli, *jhudung* (cow-pea) and *semi* (pea).



In their kitchen garden they grow brinjal, *kumuda* (pumpkin), *kakudi* (cucumber), chilli, *lau* (gourd), and varieties of other vegetables and green-leaves.





They are food gatherers. They depend on forest to collect varieties of seasonal forest produce like roots and tubers such as, *karadi*, *sarenda*, *pita kanda*, *tarek kanda*, *sereng kanda*, varieties of mushrooms, green leaves, fibers, fruits, flowers and medicinal roots and herbs, timbers, fuel wood, bamboo, fodders and grasses to thatch their roofs.





Among the subsidiary occupations which they resort to are animal husbandry carpentry, bamboo basketry and manufacture of ropes made out of *siali* fibre.

Females contribute substantially in the field of cultivation besides their household chores.





## FOOD & DRINKS

Rice and *ragi* gruel constitute the staple food of the Jatapu. Other minor millets like *suan*, *ghantia*, etc. are also eaten. During the days of food scarcity they eat gruel made out of a powder consisting of dried mango kernels and tamarind seeds. Non-vegetarian food, which consists of certain preparations of meat, fish and dried fish, are relished much more than the vegetarian food.



They consume alcoholic drinks like, rice beer, sago-palm juice and *mohuli*. Smoking of hand made cigarettes is common among men and women.



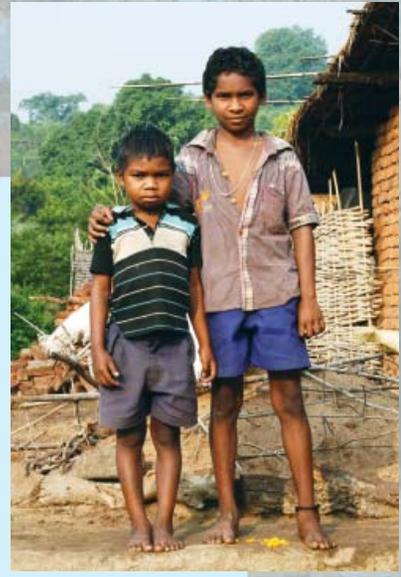


## SOCIAL LIFE

Jatapu family is mostly nuclear. Adult marriage and monogamy is the norm but polygyny is also allowed. They follow patrilineal rule of descent and patrilocal rule of residence. Descent groups are classified as *lohagond thari/bhagarulu* consisting of agnatic descendants having right to inherit metal knife and axe, the property of the deceased kinsman and *vamsa*.



The *vamsa* is again classified into three categories i.e. a) *tainga* (brother), b) *tone-tainga* (friend or *bandhu*), c) *samading* (son or daughter's parents) affinal lineages. Their *vamsa* or phartry organizations are exogamous, totemistic and are named after plants, animals or objects. They revere their totem objects of *vamsa* and do not do any harm to it. Members of a *vamsa* consider themselves to be descendants from a common ancestor for which marriage within them is tabooed.



There are several exogamous *vamsas* i.e. *kadraka* (fowl), *korada*, *bidika*, *kondagare* (sheep), *pagoka*, *minaka*, *puala*, *padaka*, *toyika*, *harikanga* (tortoise), *itringi* (a black bird), *puridi* (a yellow bird), *lendruka* (a tree called neradu), *thandangi* (plantain tree), *thorika* (wild fowl), *mamdangi* (bull or cow), *navali pitta* (peacock), *koalaka* (arrow), *kutraki* (wild goat) and *vinka* (termite), *addaku*, *arika* (a millet), *prahka*, *neehka*, *moohka*, *agrigala* (a millet) and *winka* (white ant), etc.



The pregnant woman is subjected to certain taboos for the well being of herself and her baby. She is prohibited to stand or sit near doorway or sleep alone and her husband is tabooed to kill animals or take part in hunting expedition





The child birth usually takes place in a separate lying-in-room near the rear the verandah enclosed for the purpose. They engage an experienced woman (*dai-budi*) of their own tribe or from Konda Dora tribe to assist the expectant mother for easy delivery.



The village medicine man or Disari is consulted in case of a difficult delivery. The umbilical cord is cut using a knife and the placenta is buried in a pit at the backyard. After delivery of the baby, the mother is administered with date palm root to avoid exposure to the cold and to help in lactation. During the first three days of confinement, she is given hot gruel, which is later changed to a small quantity of boiled rice with *dal*. As a rule, she is not given any curry.





Birth pollution continues for seven days and on the seventh day the mother and the new born baby takes purificatory bath. On the eleventh day the final purificatory rite is observed. It is conducted by their traditional priest the *Disary* and the name giving and the tonsure rites are also observed ceremoniously. Generally, the name of the ancestors are chosen for the new born baby applying rice divination method in which they offer *arua* rice to a cock uttering names of the ancestors and select the name on which the fowl picks the grain. On this occasion a feast is arranged for the kith and kin.





They observe **puberty rites** for adolescent girls on their first menstruation. The girl is kept in seclusion for a period of seven days. During this time, the girl is tabooed to look at the male persons and enter into the kitchen. She takes her purificatory bath on the morning on the eighth day and her family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to the kinsfolk in the evening during which the latter offer presentations like new dresses and cosmetics to the girl.



**Marriage** is a joyful incidence in Jatapu life. They consider marriage arranged through negotiation is ideal and prestigious. They prefer cross-cousin marriage like marrying one's maternal aunt's or paternal aunt's daughter.



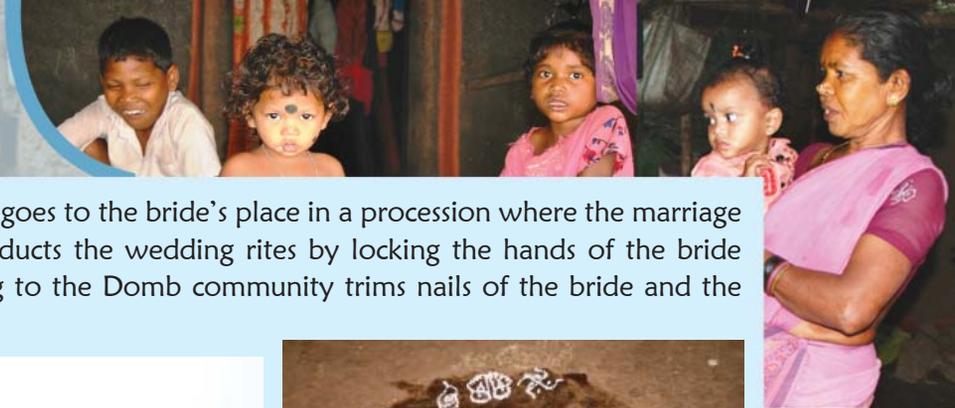


The other forms of marriages are by elopement (*maganali*), by capture, by service (*ilarakaon*), by exchange, which are exceptions. In their society, the younger brother can marry his deceased elder brother's widow. Similarly a man can marry the younger sister of his deceased wife. Remarriage of widow, widower and divorcees are permitted. Divorce is allowed on the grounds adultery and maladjustment in conjugal life.



Arranged marriages are finalized after two or three visits from the groom's side to the house of the bride. After obtaining the consent of the bride's side, betrothal is undertaken observing the customs of bride price (*woli*), since payment of bride price is obligatory. It consists of presentation of certain amounts of cash, some gold ornaments and clothes to the bride and some jars of country liquor from the groom's side. Then the village priest, *Disary* fixes the date of the marriage.



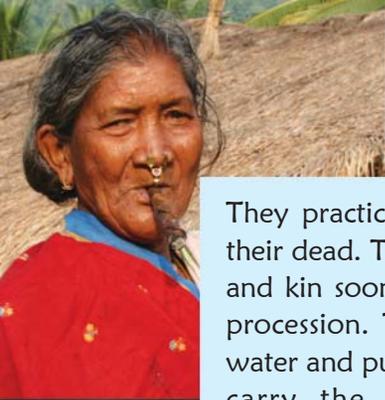


On the wedding day the groom goes to the bride's place in a procession where the marriage rites are performed. *Disary* conducts the wedding rites by locking the hands of the bride and the groom. Barik belonging to the Domb community trims nails of the bride and the groom (*kallagola sambramam*).



After the marriage ceremony, the party, with the bride and the groom, returns to the groom's village in a procession. The next morning the toe nail-cutting ceremony (*Kalla gola sambranam*) takes place. The priest attaches a *kankanam* (wrist thread), tying the wrists of both the partners together. Then the couple take a bath in water fetched by unmarried girls. Finally, the groom's family entertains the kinsfolk, relatives and guests with a grand feast with country liquor. They enjoy the occasion by singing, dancing and merry making.





They practice burial or cremation to dispose of their dead. The news of a death is sent to the kith and kin soon to enable them to join the funeral procession. The corpse is bathed with turmeric water and put on a bamboo bier. The pall bearers carry the bier to the cremation ground accompanied by all the adults of the village in a funeral procession. The eldest son ignites the pyre. They return after the cremation is over and obstruct their path of return with thorny branches to prevent the departed soul to return to village and cause harms to the villagers.



Death pollution is observed for three days. During this period economic pursuits and household chores are suspended and the villagers provide food for the bereaved family. The death rites are held on any day after the third day of death, and a female sacred specialist, (*Pejuni*) plays an important role in performing the rites.

The family offers annual *sradha* (*panduku*) on the honour of the dead on every *Makar Sankranti*. On this occasion a fowl or a goat is killed and cooked in the house, and a small portion of the cooked food is placed in a plate on the roof of the house in honour of

the dead. A joint ceremony for commemorating the dead involving all the tribesmen of the village is also performed every twenty years.



## MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE



Jatapu religion is a mixture of Hinduism and animism. Their pantheon includes a number of deities. Some of them are benevolent and some are malevolent.

They believe that some of the deities possess great powers to take quick action and some are less powerful. They install the powerful deities in the centre of their village street or at the village outskirts under shady trees in shape of oblong stones. The less powerful deities are installed in the house of their traditional head - *Zanni*.



They believe that there are supernatural powers who control the fate of human beings. Therefore they propitiate them with great reverence on festive occasions offering sacrifices of animals or fowls and country liquor seeking their blessings for their well being.

Goddess *Zankri Penu (Jakara Devata)* is their principal deity. She is worshipped with the sacrifices of pigs, sheep and buffaloes. After harvest of crops, it is ritually offered to her at first,

before consumption. All other important community festivals are celebrated at the shrine. They also propitiate Goddess *Goddali* before the harvest of crops. *Istha Debata* is their household deity.





Their religious activities are primarily communal. *Dissari*, *Zani* and *Pejuni* maintain the relationship with the deities and supernatural beings.



Among the festivals, *Pongal* or *Pondugu* is the most important. Another festival called *Bhagadi* is observed in the month of *Chaitra*. They also observe all local Hindu festivals like *Dasara*, *Nuakhia* and *Sankranti* and worship Hindu Gods and Goddesses.





## SOCIAL CONTROL



Jatapu have their own traditional community council headed by *Nayudu*. He is also called as Samanthi or Dora. He is assisted by *Dissari*- the astrologer, *Zanni* - the priest and *Barik* -the messenger. The posts of *Nayudu*, *Dissari* and *Zanni* are hereditary. The messenger -*Barik* is from other community and is appointed by nomination.



During the past, the political organization of Jatapu was headed by a *muttadar* appointed by the local *zamindar*, who was responsible to collect revenue and maintain law and order.

Their traditional community council handles their customary intra-community affairs relating to family disputes, rape, theft, adultery, partition of property, divorce and other social matters according to their social norms and customs. It acts as guardian of their customary norms and traditions and the office bearers are respected. The *Nayudu* presides over the council meetings and before taking any decision, he consults with other office bearers and community elders. The offenders are imposed with penalty in cash and kinds according to gravity of their offences.



## CHANGING SCENE

Since the remote past the Jatapu lived undisturbed in their remote sylvan habitat. In modern time, the rapid changes in administrative set-up and political climate of the country and their exposure to the external world have influenced their way of life.



After independence, the welfare Government has taken a very benevolent attitude towards improving the lot of the backward tribal people of this country including the Jatapus. Various protective, welfare and development measures initiated by the Government have resulted in exposing the tribesmen more and more to outside contact with pressures of ever-advancing and powerful social, economic and political forces. They have been benefited from different tribal development programmes. In spite of that they have preserved their cultural identity.





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