

DAL



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2018

PREFACE

The Dal is a numerically small tribe of Odisha who as per 2011 census number 25, 598. They are largely concentrated in Bolangir and Nuapada districts. By their myth and tradition, they consider themselves as a section of the Kandha tribe and speak the Dravidian tribal language “KUI” – the language of the Kandhas of Kandhamal district. As their folklore says, in the remote past, some members of the tribe, went to the holy temple of Lord Jagannath in Puri and received sandal wood and *tulsi* leaf as recognition to act as priest in the temples of Hindu deities. Conforming to the tradition, members of the tribe act as priests (Pujari) in the famous Harishankar temple of Bolangir district.

There is nothing so remarkable in their pattern of dress and ornaments except the traditional hair style of their women. Though, like other tribes they are an endogamous community, their clan system is interesting. Traditionally, the tribe is divided into six exogamous clans but in course of time four of these have become endogamous.

The Dals are agriculturists. In these days, they have been adopting modern techniques and inputs of agriculture by use of high yielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides for higher farm production. Their livelihood is supplemented by share cropping, animal husbandry, backyard plantation, brick and tile making. Their womenfolk play an important role in the economic activities of their family. The Dals are non-vegetarians.

At first the Dals were animists. Their socio-religious system has been changed. Over period of time they have made a colourful religious journey from an indigenous aboriginal faith to Hinduism.

The impact of planned change and modernization are visible in their life style. Still, in their socio-cultural system they have retained some basic tribal features which distinguish them from other ethnic groups.

This photographic documentation of the life style of the Dal tribe is a part of the series on “The Tribes of Odisha” published by SCSTRTI. Sri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant and Sri P.K. Samal, R.A. of SCSTRTI have worked hard in preparing this colourful booklet. I thank them sincerely. Lastly I hope it would be useful for all those who are interested in the tribal culture of Odisha.

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DAL

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IDENTITY



The Dals constitute a numerically small tribe who are mainly concentrated in Bolangir and Nuapada districts of Odisha. According to their own myth and tradition, their forefathers were a section of the Kandha tribe. Earlier they used to move from one place to another in groups and hence were called “Dal” (group). In Odia, “Dal” stands for “group”. As their folklore says, in the remote past, some members of the group went to Puri, the holy city of Lord Jagannath and received sandal wood and *tulsi* leaf as a recognition to act as priest in the temples of Hindu deities.

The Dal people are multi-lingual. They speak ‘Kui’, a Dravidian language at home and use “Sambalpuri Odia” for inter-group communication. Kui is the mother tongue of the Kandhas of Kandhamal district. Some of them are also found to be well versed in Hindi, the national language. The Dal people are mostly rural but they consider themselves as a “clean caste” in the local society.





As per 2011 census, their total population in the state is 25, 598 including 12, 626 males and 12, 972 females showing a favourable sex ratio of 1027 females for thousand males. The decadal growth rate of the tribe is 66.18. Their literacy rate is 43.20%. For the males it is 58.99% and for the females, 27.89%.



Dress & Ornaments

Ordinarily their pattern of dress and ornaments are same as that of their caste Hindu neighbours. Traditionally, the ornaments their women wear are of the cheap, simple and lighter varieties. They rarely wear gold ornaments. Now days, Dal women put on varieties of ornaments made of gold, silver and aluminum alloy. The traditional hairstyle of the Dal women is unique. They spend a lot of time in dressing the hair and decorate it with coloured ribbons, clips and specially designed combs.



HABITAT, SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Dal community prefers to live in the lap of nature and natural beauty. They preferably dwell in the lush green hilly regions of Bolangir, Sambalpur, Nuapada and Kalahandi districts of Odisha. Their habitat is very well known for undulating picturesque scenes and surroundings. The soil and climatic condition of their settlement area is favorable for agro-economic pursuits.

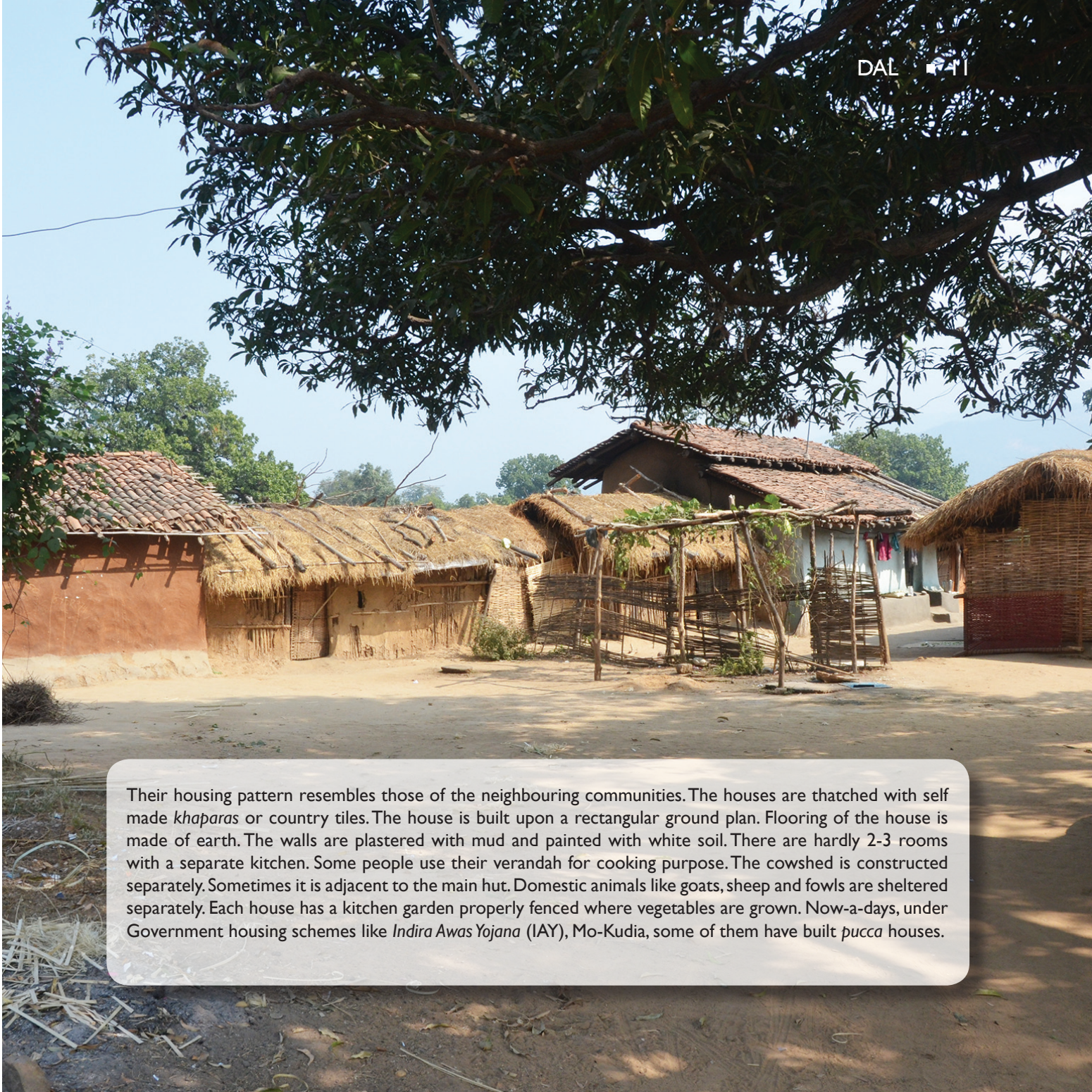




Their settlement pattern is socially heterogeneous. They live with other caste people like the Bhuliyas, the Loharas and the Panos. Generally the Dal settlements are found near the perennial hill streams which provide them with drinking water throughout the year. Within the settlement, one finds the Dal houses, positioned in a scattered manner, having a thin serpentine pathway running in between the houses.







Their housing pattern resembles those of the neighbouring communities. The houses are thatched with self made *khaparas* or country tiles. The house is built upon a rectangular ground plan. Flooring of the house is made of earth. The walls are plastered with mud and painted with white soil. There are hardly 2-3 rooms with a separate kitchen. Some people use their verandah for cooking purpose. The cowshed is constructed separately. Sometimes it is adjacent to the main hut. Domestic animals like goats, sheep and fowls are sheltered separately. Each house has a kitchen garden properly fenced where vegetables are grown. Now-a-days, under Government housing schemes like *Indira Awas Yojana* (IAY), Mo-Kudia, some of them have built *pucca* houses.



Social Divisions

The Dal tribe is endogamous. It has internal social subdivisions as exogamous clans groups. Their clan system is very interesting. Traditionally among them, there were six clan groups namely Bhoi, Jhankar, Majhi, Mallik, Bisal, and Jani. In course of time four of these clans such as Bhoi, Mallik, Majhi and Jani have become endogamous units each having different segments. For example, the Bhoi group is divided into two segments, namely Satgachhia and Bargachhia, i.e. seven trees and twelve trees. Satgachhia consists of seven lineages like Gurusk Bhoi, Jugaska Bhoi, Libujka Bhoi, Chilmilka Bhoi, Jadaka Bhoi, Jalongia Bhoi and Sat Malika Bhoi. The other segment, Bargachhia, consists of twelve different lineages, namely Patra, Mutka, Jabaska, Lipu Chika, Lurka, Karka, Bharka, Bisal, Kunar, and Tilika. Banjahlika and Thanapets. Further, Mutka and Banjahlika lineages have become exogamous in course of time. However, the remaining two exogamous clans like Bisal and Jhankar have retained the traditional exogamous nature who make marital alliances with the other four clans.



SOCIAL LIFE



Family

Dal family, the smallest social unit of their society, is patrilineal and patrilocal in nature. Generally, it is nuclear and monogamous. In few cases of vertically extended family, the grandparents and married sons live in the family. Though a married son sets up a household of his own, he still maintains his close links with his parents and the other unmarried brothers and sisters. In all social, economic and religious matters the entire family works together as a single unit. Until and unless the sons and daughters are not married, parental properties are not partitioned. Inheritance of property follows the rule of equigeniture in male line only.

The mother plays a pivotal role in household management. Inter-personal relationships among the family members are intimate and cordial. The elders are shown respect by the youngsters while the youngsters are looked after by the former with love, care and affection. Above all the family bond is cordial, strong and heavenly in Dal community.



Life Cycle

The life cycle of the Dal from the mother's womb to death is marked by successive *rites-de-passage* connected with pregnancy, birth, puberty, marriage and death.

Pregnancy and Child Birth :

Pregnancy and child birth is always welcome the Dal community because, they despise barrenness. They say barrenness is caused by the wrath of evil spirits and also by incurable diseases. Barrenness is thought to be removed by worshipping the village deity. Now days, the Dal also get medicines from the hospital and accept the advice of the doctor for removing barrenness.

They believe that pregnancy (*garavbas*) is the blessings of Almighty God. In 5-6 months of pregnancy when the foetal movement starts, certain diet and other restrictions like taking medicines, eating non-vegetarian food, seeing or touching corpse, going to rivers, streams, burial ground, temple or tie knot during solar or lunar eclipse are strictly imposed on the pregnant woman to avoid complications in delivery.

No pre-delivery rituals and traditions are observed. Their poor economic conditions often deprive a pregnant woman of balanced diet and she has to nourish herself with simple boiled rice, dal, edible leaves and vegetables available locally or from kitchen garden. If any major complications arise they prefer to take doctor's or midwife's assistance immediately.



A pregnant woman attends to her routine works till her advanced stage. But she is not allowed to undertake strenuous works which are considered to cause harm to the foetus in her womb or cause miscarriage.

When a pregnant woman feels labour pains, she immediately informs her mother-in-law or any other elderly female member of her family. The mother-in-law or any elderly married women having expertise and experience in handling such cases helps in child birth. The corner of a living room is used for this purpose. Sometimes, the woman attendant massages the pregnant woman's waist and belly with groundnut oil for effecting a smooth delivery. Some elderly women of the community also remain present in the lying-in room to assist the pregnant woman in the delivery. No male person can enter into the room. After birth, baby's umbilical cord is cut by a woman using a knife or blade. The placenta is buried by a male person in the backyards kept in an earthen pot. The pit is covered with a stone, so that it is not eaten away by a dog or any other animal.

Soon after child birth the female attendant cleans the baby with a piece of cotton cloth. Then she anoints both the mother and the baby with castor oil or til oil or groundnut oil and bathes them in tepid water. Five to six hours after, the attendant or the mother herself extracts some milk from her breasts and throws it away. Then she anoints the nipples with warm cow's ghee and starts feeding the new-born child. Thereafter, whenever the baby cries the mother immediately feeds it. The frequency of feeding varies from child to child. If the mother dies the child is breast-fed by other who have small childrens of about same time for a month or so. Thereafter, cow's or goat's milk added with water is given to the baby in a feeding bottle. If mother's milk is not sufficient the baby is given cow's milk. The new-born infant is warmed up three times daily for thirty consecutive days. Then this is reduced to two times and stops when the baby is six months old.



On the day of delivery the mother is given a liquid diet. She also takes some powder of akanbindi leaves for three consecutive days. From the second day onwards she is given boiled rice, together with a handful of garlic fried in ghee once a day for a week or so. From the twentieth day onwards she is given full meals twice a day. Sometimes she is given allopathic treatment if considered necessary for a period of six days or till the naval cord drops off.

Birth pollution is observed for six days. On the seventh day both the mother and child take a purificatory bath in the morning with warm water after being anointed with oil and turmeric paste. The lineage members (*kutum lok*) celebrate a purificatory rite called *handi dharana* in which 7-9 women take the new mother to the kitchen for touching the cooking pot containing the prepared food. Later on, the same food is served among the members and guests present there. From that day, the mother resumes all her routine household chores.

Naming Ceremony:

A ceremony popularly known as *ekosia* is observed on 21st day. On this day or on the 30th day, name giving ceremony is performed. The mother and the new born baby take purificatory bath and put on new clothes presented by the maternal uncle. Friends, relatives, neighbours are invited. A Brahman priest performs the *ekosia* puja and gives a suitable name to the child. All present there enjoy the feast hosted by the child's family.



First Hair-Cutting & Rice Eating

The first hair-cutting rite of the infant takes place when he/she attains three months of age. The maternal uncle or, if he is not available, any person of the clan first shaves the infant after sacrificing a fowl to the deities. The infant is given rice and other starchy food at his/her seven months of age by performing the first rice eating ceremony. In most cases the cost of the ceremony is borne by the maternal uncle and in his absence by the father. On this occasion the baby, dressed in a new cloth fed rice porridge from a new plate.

Child Rearing & Socialization

The new-born baby sleeps most of the time, preferably on a cot. There is no provision of a cradle but sometimes a child sleeps in a *charpoi* hung from the roof of the house. At night it sleeps with the mother until it is 6 to 7 years old. Generally the child begins to walk at about one and half years. But in many cases this is delayed because of poor growth. Walking is taught to the babies by their elder siblings.

The mother does not wean the child away from breast-feeding deliberately as it is considered a sin. The baby is allowed to take breast milk as long as it is there. On the arrival of a new baby the previous one is weaned away gradually.

For the first six months, the baby is allowed to urinate and defecate on a piece of cloth spread over its bed. The mother changes the wet cloth whenever it is noticed. During this period the mother cleans the child's mouth with a piece of cloth soaked in oil. Subsequently, he/she is taught to use a *nim*, *karanja* or *sal* twig to brush his/her teeth. Children at the age of three years are taught

by their mother and elders about bathing and bodily cleanliness, wearing dresses and combing the hair.

Up to three years most children go naked. Sex differentiation is observed in their children's dress pattern. Little girls are found wearing frocks and panties, and boys putting on shirts and shorts. Girls from 7 years to 8 years of age wear small saris, but the boys continue to wear shirts and shorts.

The first words taught to the baby are *bua* (father) and *ha* (mother). Most children start talking at the age of one to two years. No care is taken to help the children to talk. In such cases the children learn it by hearing older people. Sex differentiation is observed right from childhood in their play. Male children play separately with toys made of wood sticks and stones, while the girls play with coconut shells, tile, lid and bottle corks. Grown-up girls go to the field in a group to defecate in the morning and evening and also to bathe in the nearby pond or stream. The boys also form a peer group and wander in and around the village to play and gossip. The boys of poor families do not go to school but help their parents in economic activities.

Physical punishment is inflicted on children when they are capable of understanding language, i.e. after three to four years. Punishment is given immediately after a mistake is committed in early childhood. Physical punishment generally consists of beating and pulling the hair or ears. Grown up children are not beaten but scolded for their mistakes.



Puberty Rite:

At the onset of puberty i.e., the first menstruation, a girl is considered to be physically matured and fit for marriage. She is kept confined in a house for a week and is restricted to see the face of any male member during this period. The mother and other female members take care of her. On the early morning of the 8th day she takes a purificatory bath by anointing oil and turmeric paste. Then she wears new clothes and prepares rice porridge and serves it to family members, friends and relatives.



Marriage

Adult marriage and monogamy is the norm in the Dal society. Yet in certain cases polygyny is allowed if the first wife is found to be barren. Cross-cousin marriage is the preferential form of matrimony. Levirate and sororate are also allowed.

Arranged marriage is very common and marriage by mutual consent is also allowed. In arranged marriage, the boy's side takes the initiative to select the bride and settle the matrimony through the process of negotiation. Usually the proposal of marriage is made by the boy's parents. The parents or the elder brother of the groom goes with a pot of liquor and a basket full of fried rice (*bhuja*), lia (khan) or flattened rice (*chuda*) to the bride's house accompanied by his relatives. If the bride's father accepts the liquor and eats the *bhuja* and *chuda*, the proposal is considered to be approved. On that day, the customary bride price is settled and the date for the marriage is fixed in consultation with the village astrologer (*Nahaka*). The bride price is paid by the boy's side to the bride's side before performing marriage. It usually consists of some cash, clothes for all the members of bride's family, one quintal of rice, a goat and about twenty bottles of liquor.

On the scheduled date of wedding, the bridegroom goes to bride's place for marriage. The priest (*jhankar*) officiates in the wedding rites which resembles that of the caste Hindus. The groom sits on a sacred mat on the wedding altar and the rituals start. The wedding rites include burning of sacred fire (*homa*), joining and tying of hands of the bride and the groom (*hastagranthi*) while chanting mantras. The marriage feast is hosted by both the families. After marriage a married woman ties *bratagranthi* in her right upper arm.





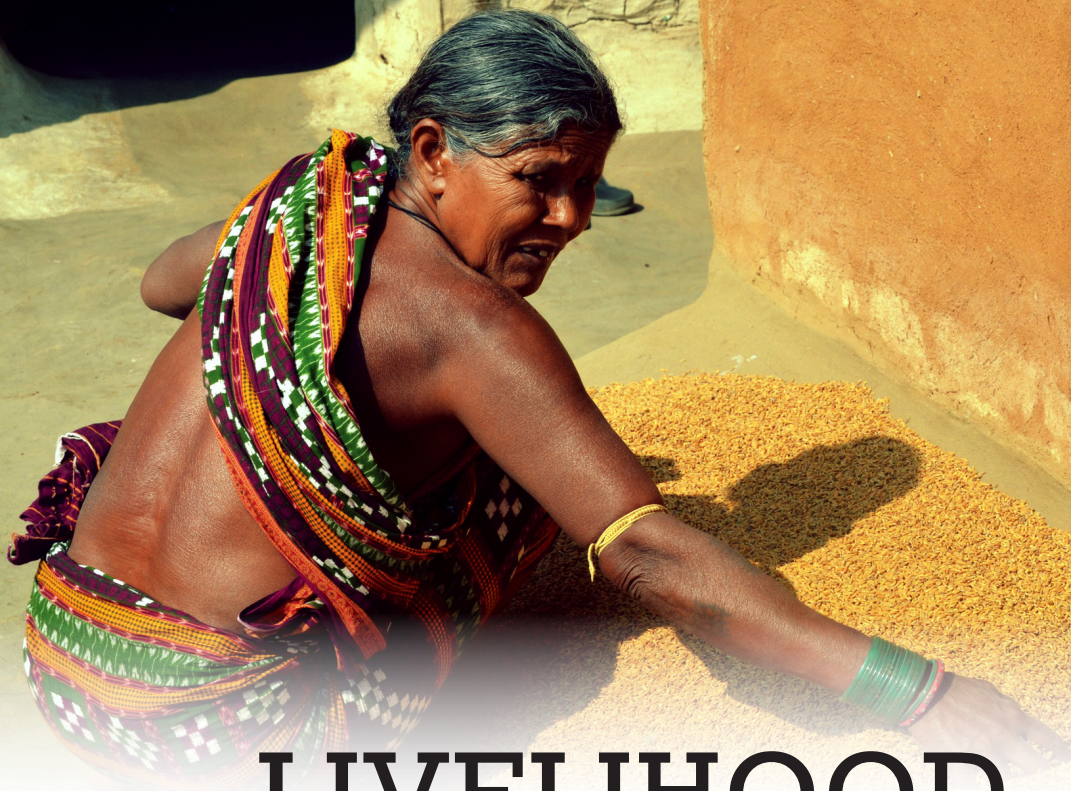
Divorce

Under the genuine grounds of adultery, impotency, barrenness, maladjustment and chronic sickness of either of the spouse, divorce is allowed by the traditional community council (*Jatia Samaj*) of the Dal tribe. Some persons of the tribe designated as Mahamanab play an important role in settling internal customary disputes including divorce. In cases of divorce, the man and woman seeking divorce are brought before the Jatia Samaj where the matter is discussed and finalized after which the man gives the woman some cash and a new cloth. No other compensation for divorce is allowed. Infants go with mother and elder children stay with father. After the divorce is formally sanctioned by Dal Jatia Samaj, the man and woman are free to remarry since remarriage of widows or widowers and divorcees is allowed by Dal Samaj.

Death:

They cremate the dead. The lineage members and relatives are informed about the death. They come to help in cremation. On the 3rd day telaghara ceremony is observed. Inmates anoint *tolo* oil (oil extracted from mahua seeds) and take first purificatory bath. Then after being ritually clean, the bereaved family starts cooking and is free to mix with their neighbours. They observe death pollution for 10 days. Final purificatory rite takes place on the 10th day. They wash their clothes and houses. A feast is hosted for neighbours and relatives.





LIVELIHOOD

Agro-Economy

The Dals are agriculturists. They practise both wet land and up land cultivation. Paddy, *kodua*, *ragi*, pulses like *moong*, *biri arhar*, *masre*, *kulthi* and other seasonal vegetables are grown by them for their sustenance. Those having no land go for wage earning and share cropping. Animal husbandry, seasonal forest collection, brick moulding and *naria-tile* making are supplementary sources of income for them. Dal rear goats and cattle. Most of the Dal children are engaged in tending the livestock.

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Now-a-days, the *Dals* have taken up modern agricultural practices by use of high yielding variety of seeds, chemical fertilizers, insecticides and pesticides for higher farm production. Besides they pursue backyard plantation and kitchen gardening. They grow tobacco plant in their kitchen garden and consume it in their day to day life. They plant a variety of fruit bearing trees like mango, guava, jackal fruit and *mahua*. Preparation of country liquor from *mahul* flower is very common. It is a source of good income for them.

The Dal women play an important role in the economic activities of their family. They collect seasonal roots, tubers, green leaves, mushrooms etc from the forest nearby for domestic consumption. They also gather *mahua* flower, *mahua* seeds and *kendu* leaves for sale in the local market from which they get a good income in cash to meet the day to day household expenditure. They take part in wage earning and agricultural operations in addition to their routine household chores.





Food and Drinks

The Dals are non-vegetarians. They eat fish, meat and chicken. Pork and beef are prohibited. Rice is their staple food. Gram, urad, masur and kulthi pulses are of very common food stuffs. They take potato, tomato, brinjals, pumpkins, bins, radish, ladies fingers and other vegetables. Roots and tubers are also consumed. Groundnut oil is used for cooking. They eat fruits like mango, jackfruit, orange, lemon, guava, coconut etc. Milk and milk products are also consumed.

Mahua liquor is their favorite drink. To entertain friends, relatives and to appease their deities and ancestors they offer it. They smoke bidis, chew betel and use an indigenous cheroot.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Their past history reveals that a group of Dal people received sandalwood paste and *Tulsi* leaf from Lord Jagannath Temple and were directed to act as priests (pujari) in Hindu temples. Dal act as the priests of famous Harishankar temple situated about 80 Kms away from Bolangir town and about 40 Kms away from Patnagarh. Hari (Lord Vishnu) and Shankar (Lord Shiva) (Dal's Shankar Baba) is the admixture of Vaishnavism and Shaivism. Besides, they worship goddess Maa "Vairabi" (matru Shakti) in Harishankar temple. It indicates the pluralistic approach of their religion (Bahu debata bada).

Dal religion is in a transitory mode. Their socio-religious system has changed with the passage of time. Over period of time, they have made a religious journey from an indigenous aboriginal faith to Hinduism. At first they were animists. Deities of forest and land were being worshipped since time immemorial. Now they worship Hindu deities. They believe that life is mortal and mundane. God is immortal and almighty. They have their strong faith on supernatural beings. Gods and Goddesses are considered as the real controller of this mundane world. By virtue of worship (*puja*) and appeasement of the deities and spirits one can get eternal peace.





Dal Pantheon:

Ancient Deities: Biru, Patakhanda, Babuna, Jharjhara, Mauli and Dharni

Forest Deities : Mamuli, Khud, Dharani, Jadar and Lili are their forest deities whom they worship to save themselves from danger and disadvantages that occur in the jungle and in other life situation.

Clan (Gotra) Deities : Gotra based deities are another religious feature of Dal which shows their innate love towards the supernatural beings, gods and goddesses. Among them, Bhoi group worship Vaira and Jamnakarher gods and Janni group, Dolkribudhi, Patkhanda. Likewise the Bisal group worships Duarsani, Chandi Majhi and Bar Roul.

Hindu Deities: Jagannath, Rama, Krishna, Shiva (Shankar Baba) Vishnu, Laxmi, Kali, Durga and other the gods and goddesses of Hindu pantheon are worshipped. Besides this they also worship regional deities like Samalei, Pataneswari, Bhairabi, Barul etc...



Sl.No	Name of the Ritual/ Festival	Period of Observance	Deities Worshipped	Offerings/ Sacrifices	Communal/ Individual
1.	Magha Tiar	Magha (Jan-Feb-March)	Family Deities	No Sacrifice	Individual
2.	Mahul Kuchi	Phaguna (Feb-March)	Ancestral Spirits	Cock, Mahua liquor	Individual
3.	Shivaratri	Phaguna (Feb-March)	Shiva (Sankar Baba)	No Sacrifice	Communal & Individual
4.	Chaita Parab	Chaita (Mar-April)	Family Deities	Goat, cock	Communal & Individual
5.	Bihan Behera	Baisakha (Apr-May)	Village Deities	No Sacrifice	Individual
6.	Mati Jatra	Jestha (May-June)	Mother Earth	No Sacrifice	Communal
7.	Asadha Khai	Asadha (June-July)	Mother Earth	No Sacrifice	Communal
8.	Kodua Jatra	Sravana (July-August)	Family Deities Ancestral spirits	No Sacrifice	Communal & Individual
9.	Navana Puja		Family Deities	No Sacrifice	Individual
10.	Panchhada Puja		Tulsi	No Sacrifice	Communal
11.	Chauldua	New rice is washed cooking			Individual
12.	Laxmi Puja	Margasira (Oct-Nov)	Laxmi	No Sacrifice	Individual
13.	Pus Punei	Pussa (Nov-Dec)	Family Deities	Fowls	Communal & Individual

Their socio-religious behaviours have changed a lot after their pious recognition as Pujaries. They simply put emphasis on purity of soul and transparency of character. Their moral and ethical values presuppose a spiritual foundation in the Dal society.



Aesthetic Life

The Dals have good aesthete sense. The hair style of Dal women is very beautiful. Coloured ribbons, variety of clips and designed combs used in womens' hairdo exhibit their aesthetic sense. Cheap and simple, ornaments were being used in the past. Now women put on ornaments made of gold, silver and aluminum alloy.

The Dals are very fond of dancing and singing. Both boys and girls sing and dance together. As soon as night approaches the unmarried boys and gather for dancing and singing. The boys and girls of the same village do not dance together, as they are considered as brothers and sisters. In fact, dancing and singing are organised on various ceremonial occasions. Their musical instruments include dhola, nisan, ghumra, badadhola and bainshi (Flute). Before dancing, country liquor is habitually drunk by the Dal.



SOCIAL CONTROL

In the past the Dal had no organized community council found at the village level except an informal body of village elders sitting, as and when required, to handle the cases of violation of customs and traditions. Now they have community council (Jati Sabha) headed by a President and a Secretary to deal with their customary matters. Any violation in customary rules are discussed and decided by the village leaders and elders in a formal meeting of the council. The council adjudicates cases pertaining to family disputes, theft, rape, incest, divorce etc. It also makes arrangements for organization and management of village level rituals and festivals.

In the present times the Dal has the experience of functioning of the democratic system of Panchayatraj. In the new set-up, elected members like Ward Members, Sarapanchas, Panchayat Samiti Chairmen and members are working to take care of their socio-economic development needs.



CHANGING SCENE

In tune with time the socio-economic situation of Dal community has changed. Now-a-days some of them are working as teachers and some are engaged in different government and private sector jobs. Different schemes, programmes have been launched by the government for their socio-economic upliftment.



In recent times, most of the dropout students of this community have been enrolled in the nearby schools successfully. Parental attitude towards education has changed. Children are no more used as domestic helps. Today they are more vigilant about their health. Though indigenous medicine has not lost its importance among them, they avail the available health care facilities for better and modern treatment. They use modern inputs for better agricultural production. Women Self Help Groups among the Dal community have become the hub of economic empowerment.

Awareness programmes on different development schemes and programmes have made them conscious about the outer world as a whole. The impact of planned change and modernization are visible in their life style. Still, in their socio-cultural system they have retained some basic tribal features which distinguish them from other ethnic groups.



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