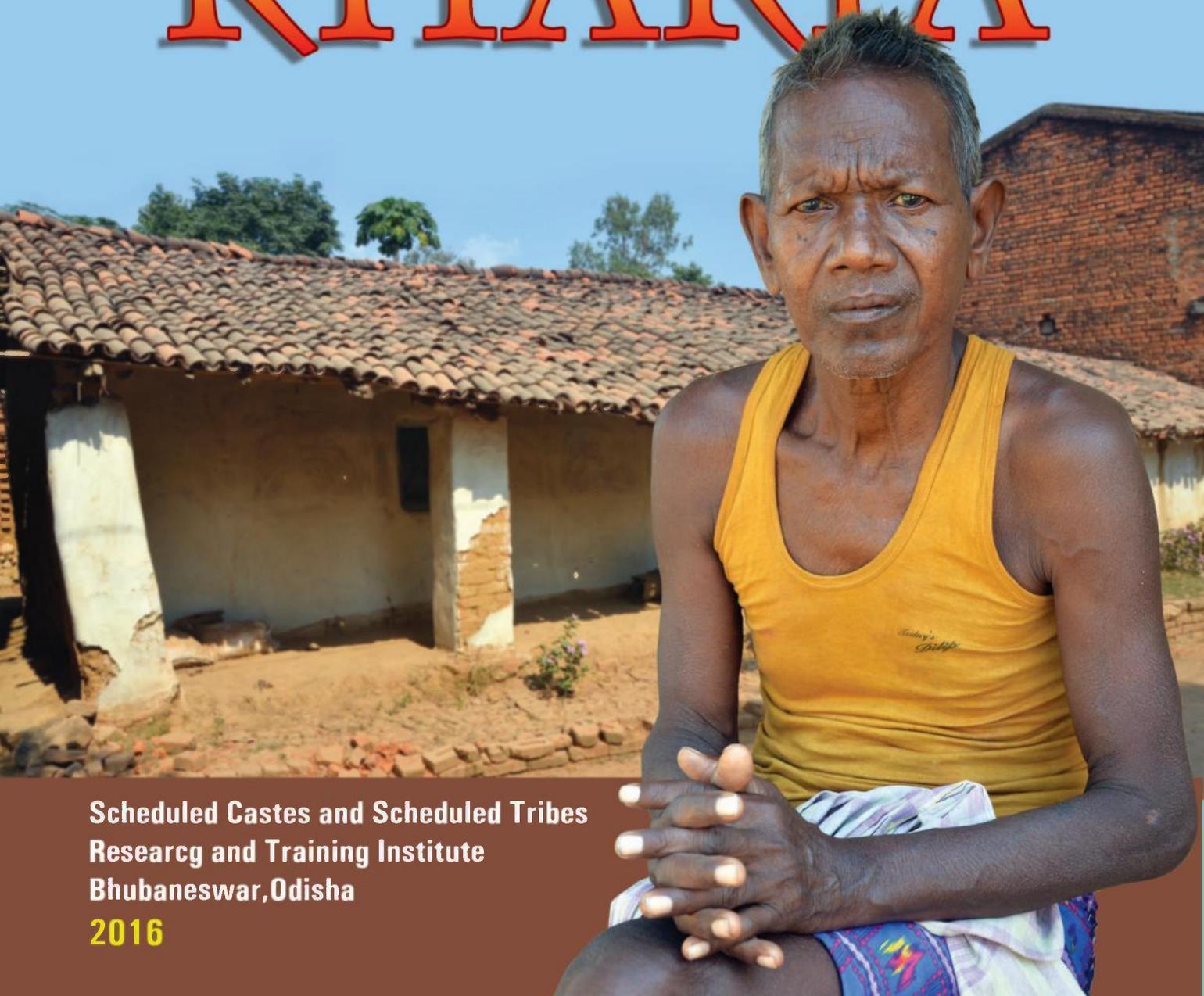


KHARIA



Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute
Bhubaneswar, Odisha

2016

FOREWORD

Odisha has the unique distinction of having as many as 62 Tribal Communities including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PTGs) spread over different parts of the state. The varied cultures of these tribal communities are extremely significant and they produce many beautiful arts and artifacts which have attracted tourists from different regions of the globe. Similarly, these tribal groups are unique for their colourful and vibrant life style as well as rhythmic dances which are culturally significant. Some of their fairs and festivals have rich cultural significance. But the pity is that their rich socio cultural life and their performing arts are disintegrating fast. In view of this, there is an urgent need to document the rich culture and socio-economic life of these tribal communities before they become antiquity so that government as well as non-government agencies can know about them and can take appropriate steps for conserving their rich cultural traditions and practices.

Keeping the above facts in view, SCs and STs Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), Bhubaneswar, Odisha has taken the initiative to document the socio-economic and cultural life of all the 13 PTGs as well as most of the culturally significant tribal communities of the State and publish Photo Hand Books on each of these tribal communities. Photo Hand Books on the PTGs and many of the other tribes have already been published which have been highly appreciated by wide range of readers.

Kharia is a major tribe of Odisha having three sections i.e. Hill Kharia, Dhelki Kharia and Dudh Kharia. The Hill Kharia being basically forest collectors are identified as a PTG. The, Dhelki and Dudh Kharias are settled groups who depend upon agriculture.

The Photo Hand Book on KHARIA is one of the series of Photo Hand Books on the tribes of Odisha. I take this opportunity to profusely thank both the authors, Prof. A.B. Ota, Director and Mrs. Kabita Patnaik, Sr. Lab. Asst. for making all the efforts in bringing out this hand book. Shri S.C. Mohanty, OSD (R) and former Joint Director, SCSTRTI deserves special thanks for adding to and editing of the Hand Book. I hope this book will be useful and appreciated by the academicians, researchers, planners and lovers of tribal culture.

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

KHARIA



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IDENTITY

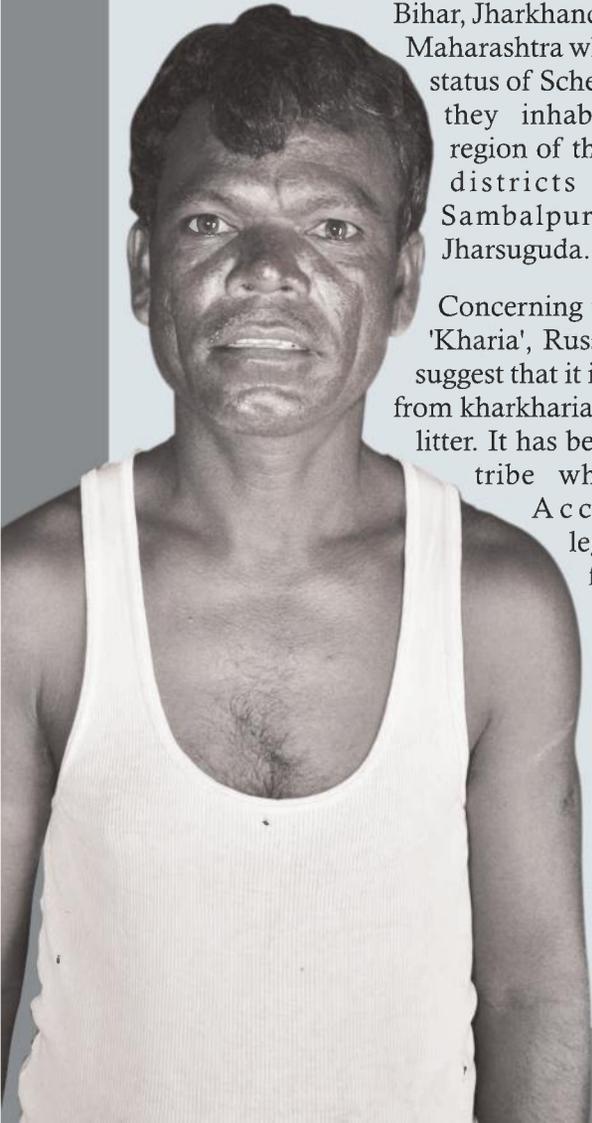
The Kharia is a major Scheduled Tribe of Odisha. They are also found in the states of Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where they also enjoy the status of Scheduled Tribe. In Odisha they inhabit the north-western region of the State comprising the districts like Sundergarh, Sambalpur, Mayurbhanj and Jharsuguda.

Concerning the origin of the name 'Kharia', Russell and Hiralal (1916) suggest that it is a jargon term derived from kharkharia meaning palanquin or litter. It has been given to the Kharia tribe who carry palanquin.

According to their legendary tradition, their first ancestors carried a banghy (carrying pole). It resembles that of the Mundas and tends to show that they are an elder branch of that tribe. Their history of origin shows that their traditional occupation had been to till the soil and

carry banghy. Dalton (1876) reported: 'There is a tradition that the Kharia with another tribe called Purans were the aborigines of Mayurbhanj... They aver that they and the family of the chief (Bhanj) were all produced from a peafowl's egg, the Bhanj from the yoke, the Purans from the white and the Kharia from the shell.'

The Kharia are divided in to three sections namely Hill Kharia, Dudh Kharia and Dhelki Kharia. In the district of Ranchi, they are concentrated on the banks of the river Koel and Sankh. The Hill Kharias are a primitive community identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PTG) in Odisha.





The Hill Kharias, also known as Savar, are still dependent upon forest resources. They subsist on the collection of edible herbs, roots, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds, honey, wax etc. The Dudh Kharias and the Dhelki Kharias are better off than the Hill Kharia. They have taken to plough cultivation. So far as the manner and customs of these three sections of the Kharia are concerned, they are separate and distinct branches of the Kharia tribe. Marriage does not take place between these three sections. Each section is endogamous.

As per 2011 census the total population of Kharia in Odisha is 1,88,331. Between 1991 and 2001 census their

population has registered a decadal growth rate of 11.83 percent. Their sex ratio is 1015 females per 1000 males. Their literacy rate is 45.23 percent. Among the males it is 56.16 percent and among the females, 34.52 percent. They show little interest in educating their children irrespective of gender.

Linguistically, they belong to Munda language family. In course of time their language has been



forgotten and now they speak and understand Odia, Hindi and also broken Bengali.

The Kharias are racially of Proto-Australoid stock. They have fairly strong and stout physique. Though their stature vary from tall to short, most of them are of medium height.

Personal Appearance

The Kharia children in early childhood wear only banyan or shirt in upper part of body. The lower part generally remains naked. But in late childhood, boys wear pant, banyan and shirt, while girls wear pant, frock and salwar-suits. Adult men wear only short dhoti and banyan at the time of work, in the house and village. But when they go out of the village, they wear full dhoti, banyan, kurta (shirt) and gamchha (napkin). The aged women wear saree and jhula,

but the young women wear saree, saya (petti coat) and blouse.

Like all women the Kharia women are fond of ornaments. They wear ornaments in hair, neck, nose, ear, wrist, feet and fingers. The ornaments are made of brass, bronze, nickel, shell, beads, thread, seeds, silver, imitation gold and silver. These are glass or metal bangles, anklets, armlets, ear, nose and toe rings, finger rings, hairpin, bead or metal necklaces. The elder and older women decorate their bodies with tattoo marks especially on their foreheads, eye corners and in both hands and legs.

There is no such uniqueness reflected in their dress pattern. Now the younger generation prefers to use modern dress and not interested for tattooing.



SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Hill Kharia lives in the hills and forests of Mayurbhanj. Their settlements vary in size from five families to twenty families or even more. Their huts are located in a linear or scattered manner on hill tops, slopes and bottoms adjacent to a hill stream.



A typical Hill Kharia house is a small multipurpose rectangular hut with walls made of sal wood and plastered with mud. The roof is made of a gable sloped wooden frame thatched with grass or straw or khapar (country tiles). The house have only one multipurpose room, which is utilized as bed room, storeroom, kitchen and guest room. There are no windows and only one door and a small verandah. Goat pen and cowshed are built adjacent to the house. Other pet animals and birds are accommodated insides the single living room of the house.





The Dudh Kharia and Dhelki Kharia live alongside other castes and tribes in villages of larger sizes in the plains. Their houses are multi roomed. The well-to-do among them have more than one hut with a kitchen, a separate cow-shed

and pigsty. In Sambalpur and Sundargarh districts most of the Kharia houses are thatched with khapar tiles. Well-to-do families and those who have got houses under different government housing schemes have constructed pucca houses.



Household Articles

The household articles of Kharia are scanty. For sleeping purpose they keep date palm leaf mats and string cots. For cooking and storing food materials they use earthen vessels, gourd vessels and aluminium utensils, bamboo baskets, leaf plates and cups. Besides these, the agricultural implements like plough, digging stick, leveler, yoke, axe, knife etc. are also kept in their houses. Other important articles, like sling (sika), rope, ladders, snuff boxes, combs, winnowing fan, broom stick, mortar and pestle, grinding stone, spinning instruments, rain hats, umbrella, different types of fishing nets and traps, bow and arrow etc. are also kept and used by them in their day to day activities.



LIVELIHOOD

The Hill Kharia section of the tribe is the most ancient and marginalized community. For their sustenance, they depend mainly upon forest resources. They are expert tree-climbers and honey collectors. They collect minor forest produce like honey, bees-wax, resin, arrowroot, edible roots, fruits and herbs which they consume and sell the surplus to the people of other castes and tribes.

The honey is available in plenty for collection in two main periods, first from March to June and then from October to November in a year. They collect sal resin (jhuna) during the months of September to November and from March to June, which gives additional income to them. They are also skilled in making ropes from Sabai grass and wild fibers collected from the forest. They move and camp in the forest in search of food and other items round the year.







The other sections of the tribe pursue cultivation as the major source of livelihood and also depend upon seasonal forest collections. The Kharia women are expert in weaving mats out of date palm and splits of bamboo for their personal use. They also prepare leaf plates and cups of siali leaves for their own use as well as for sale.



Animal husbandry and fishing is their supplementary occupation. The Kharias rear fowls and different types of animals like cattle, pigs, goats, sheep, etc. for their agricultural works, domestic consumption, ritual requirements and sale for meeting the expenses in festivals and rituals. At the leisure time they go to nearby streams and rivulets for fishing. They are expert in hunting wild animals and birds. Using bow, arrows, spear, gum sticks and traps they hunt wild games like deer, sambar, boar and catch rabbits, pea fowls, wild cocks, snipes and squirrel.

At present they have adopted some new occupations like small business and vending of vegetables for their livelihood and some of them migrate to nearby cities to work in mines or industries as daily wage labourers.



Food Habits

The staple food of Kharia is rice. It is supplemented by different edible seasonal forest products like fruits, roots, tubers, green leaves, mushrooms, flowers etc. which are boiled and eaten. In the morning usually they take watered rice with fried green leaves, green chilies and salt. For lunch and dinner they eat boiled rice with vegetable curry. Besides rice, they also eat ragi gruel, maize and other minor millets like janha.

Like other tribal people they are fond of non-vegetarian items. They consume the meat of goats, chickens and fish, which they catch from the fresh water in the hill streams. During festive and ritual occasions they prepare special food, like-boiled and baked rice cake and meat curry for their consumption.

The Kharias drink two varieties of liquor i.e. rice beer (handia) and Mahua liquor (mohuli mad). Liquor is first offered to the deities, spirits and ancestors to satisfy them during festivals and rituals. Tobacco is very popular among them. It is smoked and chewed with lime.



SOCIAL LIFE

The Kharia live in a patriarchal society. Family is the core of social set up in their society. It is nuclear, patrilineal and patrilocal in nature. Descent, succession and inheritance go along the male line. The father as the head of the family controls the family affairs and allots duties and responsibilities to each member in consultation with grown up male and female members of the family. Property owned by the father, is divided among the sons after his death. The sons of the second wife are entitled to inherit the father's property. While an adopted son can

inherit the property of the adoptive father, a daughter is not. The general trend is that the children of Kharia tribe live separately after getting married.

Women in the family assist men in most of the economic activities. They are tabooed to plough land or thatch the house. They are also not allowed to take part in their traditional council as well as worshipping ancestors. However, women are well treated by their husbands as well as in the society.



LIFE CYCLE

The life-cycle of Kharia begins with conception and child birth and passes through certain successive stages and events, like childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, old-age and ends in death.

Pregnancy and Child Birth

Pregnancy and child birth is an important landmark in the Kharia life cycle. Among the Hill Kharia the birth pollution is observed for nine days. On the ninth day the mother and child come out of seclusion and take a ritual bath. After this the mother resumes her routine activities. A few families observe a second purificatory ceremony on the 21st day. Name-giving ceremony is held either on the ninth day or any day afterwards. The next important ceremonial event is the “ear-piercing ceremony” which is held on any auspicious day during the period of early childhood i.e. before the child completes five years of his/her age.



In the case of the Dudh and Dhelki Kharia, the first phase of pollution is observed for seven days, and the final purificatory rite is observed after two weeks. During the purification ceremony a magico-religious rite is performed and then the baby is given a name. On this day a small feast along with traditional drinks like rice beer and wine is hosted by the family to all the relatives and neighbours. The next event i.e, the ear-boring ceremony, is held when the child reaches five or six years of age.

Puberty

The Kharia girls generally attain puberty at the age of 13-16 years. During the onset of menses the girl remains in seclusion for a period of 7 days during which she is considered to be polluted and tabooed to look or be looked at by the males. At the end of the period she takes a purificatory bath anointing turmeric paste and oil and wears a new saree. Her family hosts a small feast for their relatives.



Marriage

The Kharia tribe is endogamous. Marriage with other tribes and castes are regarded as social crime and the offender is excommunicated from the society. Among them, there is prevalence of exogamous clan system which regulates their marital alliances. Different sections among the Kharia never intermarry.

Marriage is an important institution in the Kharia society. They prefer adult marriage. The boys and

girls are considered fit for marriage after attaining the age of eighteen and sixteen, respectively. They enjoy liberty in choosing their mates and so, the consent of both the partners, especially, the consent of the girl is a deciding factor in finalizing the matrimony.

They practice monogamy though at times polygyny is permitted. Their modes of acquiring mates are by elopement, by negotiation, by intrusion and by service. Besides, levirate, sorrorate and widow remarriages are allowed





under certain situations. Parallel cousin marriage is prohibited and classificatory cross-cousin marriage is allowed. Bride price is an important element of the marriage. The groom's party pays bride price to the bride's side in the regular type of marriages and sororate marriages except marriage by intrusion, marriage by service and 'son-in-law in house' types.

After marriage, the Kharia couple set up their separate residence in the groom's village. However, depending upon individual situations the couple may stay at the bride's village or at the groom's maternal uncle's village or with any of their kins.



Divorce

Among the Kharias divorce is allowed on certain grounds like infertility or incompatibility. The traditional community council is the tribunal to adjudicate on the validity of the claim for divorce. On the ground of adultery divorce is permitted. In such cases wife's family is required to return the cash and kind which they received as bride price.



Death

When a married person dies, he/she is cremated and the un-married are buried. In case of cremation, the bones and ashes of the deceased are put in new earthen vessel with some parched rice and thrown into deepest part of a river. The death pollution is observed for ten days and mortuary rites are performed at the end of the period. The relations and friends of the deceased are given a feast and a tall slab of memorial stone set up near his house.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The stronghold of religion is conspicuous in the Kharia way of life. They worship a number of supernatural beings and their propitiatory rituals and festivals are associated with their traditional subsistence activities round the year. “Thakurani” or the Earth Goddess (Dharani Devata) and the Sun God (Dharam Devata) are their supreme deities. They have strong faith in spiritual beings that they are endowed with personality and they preside over various fields of human life and capable of influencing human destiny. They believe that the spirits who reside in the hills and forests control nature.





Their religious beliefs and practices comprise the propitiation of the deities and spirits in various ways, like magico-religious rites, ceremonies, and sacrifices etc. According to their belief, the powers and forces of nature are personified by different

supernatural beings. There are several hill-spirits or “Pats”. Besides, there are village deities, clan spirits and other malevolent spirits or ghosts. The Kharia also strongly believe in black and white magic. But now-a-days, their religious ideas, beliefs and rituals show traces of Hinduism owing to the impact of neighbouring caste Hindu communities.

Their traditional village sacerdotal leader is called 'Dehuri'. His post is hereditary. He shoulders the responsibility of worshipping the deities and spirits during rituals, festivals and ceremonies that in certain cases involves appeasing the deities by offering liquor and animal sacrifices. Besides he also discharges some secular duties and responsibilities for which he is held in high esteem.



Festivals

The Kharia observes a number of rituals and festivals round the year, which are mostly, connected with their subsistence activities connected with agriculture, hunting, seasonal forest collections, first eating of seasonal fruits as well as prevention of diseases and epidemics etc. Some of these festivals have been adopted from their caste neighbours. The Kharia who live from hand to mouth celebrates these occasions rather with austerity. Their important festivals are, Phagu, Paridhi (ceremonial hunting), Am Nuakhia, Karma Puja, Chait, Kali Puja, Pus Parab, Makar, Simadeota Puja, Jeth, Nuakhia, Raja, and Dassara etc.

The festival of 'Phagu' has its origin in food gathering and hunting stages of Kharia. The festival consists of two parts. One part is the ceremonial hunting expedition (Paridhi). On the day preceding the full-moon day of the month of Phagun (February–March), all the Kharia males join in a ceremonial hunting expedition. In the morning all the men assemble with their bows, arrows and axes. Under the leadership of the Dehuri – the village priest, they start the hunting expedition. No hunter is allowed to carry any copper coin or article with him as it is believed to abort the expedition. The other part of the festival is the conservation of fruits, edible leaves, tubers and other produce of the season before first eating or using them.

The festival of 'Am Nuakhia' is observed for the first eating of mango. In the month of Bhadrab (August-September) the deity Karma Thakur is



worshipped. Pus Parab, one of the important festivals of the Kharia, is observed in the month of January (Magh). It is celebrated for the first eating of rice after offering it to the ancestors and the village deity with sacrifice of animals. The main idea of worshipping such deities is to get their blessings for the general well-being of the people and for getting food all the time and also for success in their various economic activities without falling into any accident and illness.

Dance & Music

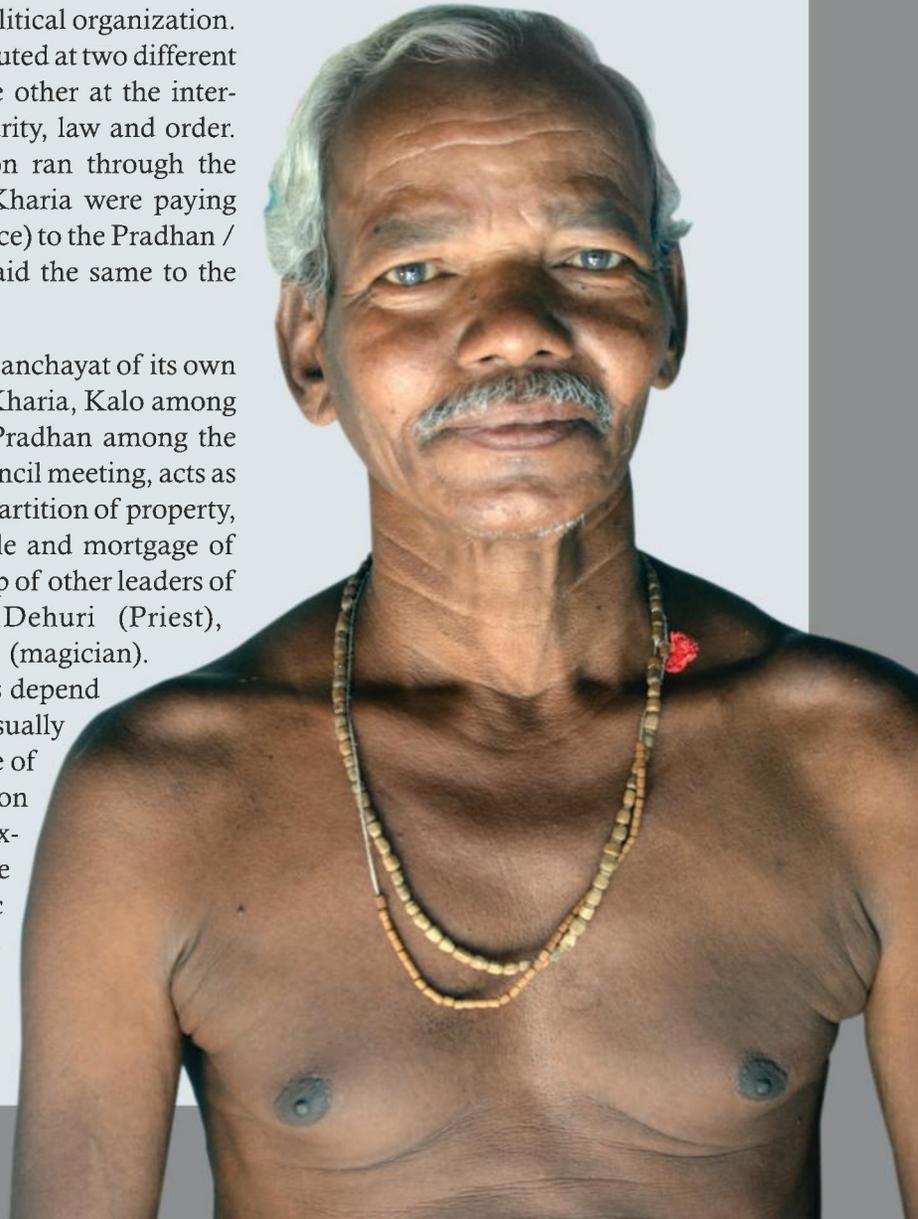
Traditional dance and music still continue to be the main forms of recreation in the life of the Kharias. Dancing and singing are performed on the occasions of rituals and ceremonies. Young boys and girls of the neighbouring villages come in batches and participate in changu dance at a village. These occasions provide a common ground for the unmarried boys and girls of different villages to mix freely and select their prospective spouses. During the festivals, at the time of dance, the Kharia use musical instruments like changu, nagra and flute etc.



SOCIAL CONTROL

The Kharias have a simple socio-political organization. Their traditional council is constituted at two different levels, one at the village level and the other at the inter-villages level to maintain social solidarity, law and order. During king's rule, the administration ran through the Sardar / Zamindar (Pradhan). The Kharia were paying revenue in shape of kinds (forest produce) to the Pradhan / Sardar of the locality, who in turn paid the same to the king.

Every Kharia village has a traditional panchayat of its own headed by a Pradhan among the Hill Kharia, Kalo among the Dhelkis, and Kalo or Bainga or Pradhan among the Dudh Kharia. He presides over the council meeting, acts as a judge and settles disputes relating to partition of property, divorce, adultery, breach of taboo, sale and mortgage of land, marriage, bride price with the help of other leaders of the council. He is assisted by Dehuri (Priest), Chhatia/Dakua (messenger), Gunia (magician). The punishments given to the convicts depend upon the gravity of their offences. Usually the convict is asked to pay fine in shape of kind and cash. In case of serious violation of the social norms, the convict is excommunicated. The traditional village panchayat also raises funds for public worship, religious feasts, festivals and sacrifices as a matter of routine and also during crises.





Above the village council is the inter-village council called Parha Panchayat or Kutum Sabha or Bhira. Among the Hill Kharia the Bhira consists of the representatives of the inter-linked settlements of a clan and is headed by the eldest, wisest and most influential Pradhan of these settlements. Among the Dhelkis, the head is designated as Dhira or Dandia. The Parha Panchayat / Kutum Sabha is composed of members from villages of more than one clan. A man from the Muru clan acts as Paindiha or master of ceremonies and a headman of the Samad clan acts as a Bhandari (the Barber).

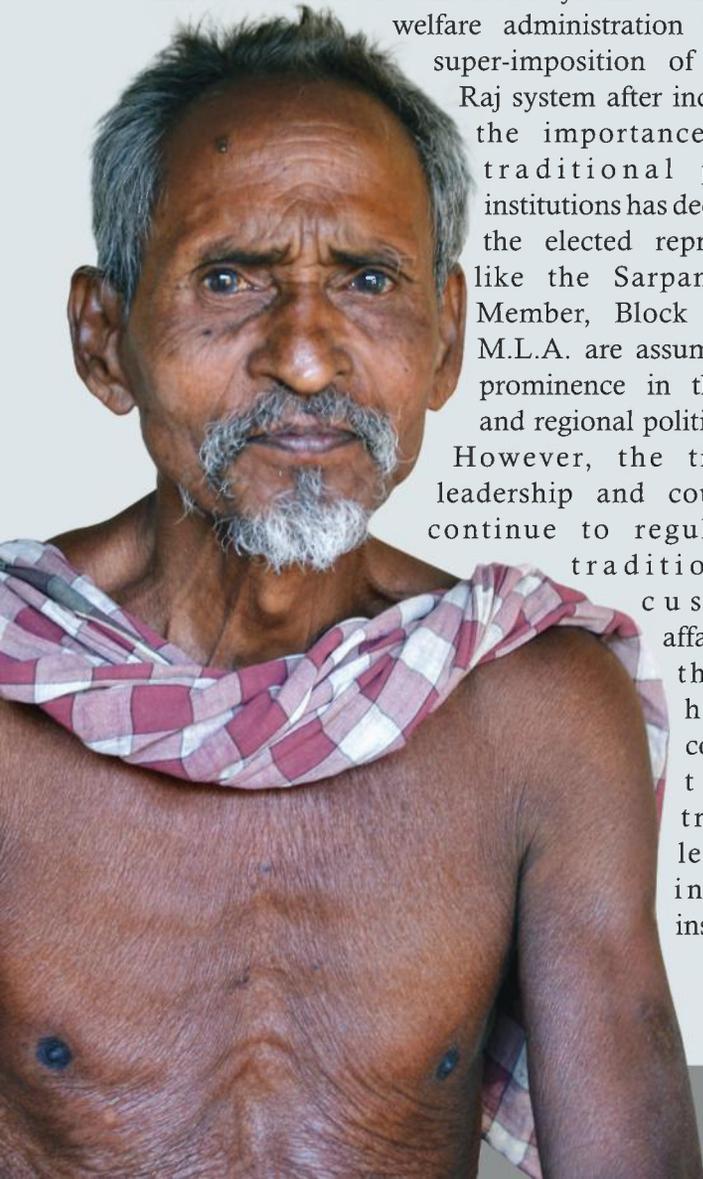
Among the Dudh Kharia the body is composed of villages of more than one clan. The head of the Parha is called the Kartaha and this post is hereditary. Now-a-days, he is appointed by election.

The regional panchayat acts as the custodian of tribal customary law. The cases which cannot be decided by the village council are referred to the inter-village council. It has the exclusive power to readmit an ex-communicated person into the tribe.

This traditional socio-political system of the Kharia had been duly recognized and reinforced by the erstwhile feudal administration of the ex-Princely States and later by the British administrators as they did not want to interfere with the traditional way of life of the tribals. But with the introduction of democratic system of elections and welfare administration as well as super-imposition of Panchayat

Raj system after independence, the importance of their traditional political institutions has declined. Now the elected representatives, like the Sarpanch, Ward Member, Block Chairman, M.L.A. are assuming greater prominence in their village and regional political spheres.

However, the traditional leadership and councils still continue to regulate their traditional and customary affairs because the people have confidence in their traditional leaders and indigenous institutions.



CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Change and planned change through development interventions are inevitable. The Kharias are no exception to this. Their lives are not static, or 'stuck in the past'. In recent times, like others, they have adopted new ideas and new situations. A host of factors such as their prolonged contact with their neighbouring

castes, tribes and other communities, impact of the protective and promotional state policies including various planned development interventions by government and non government agencies have brought noticeable changes in the life and livelihood of the Kharias. These changes are reflected in their economic, religious and social spheres of life.



Now-a-days, they have taken up the diversified economic activities like settled agriculture, animal husbandry, wage earning for their livelihood. They have adopted modern methods and techniques of agriculture and allied pursuits. This they have to adopt as an alternative to their traditional forest based subsistence economy for rapid deforestation and enforcement of stringent forest and wild life conservation laws against exploitation of forest resources and hunting wild animals.



The recent development interventions through SHGs of both men and women have brought significant changes in the socio-economic life of Kharias. They are preparing and processing broomsticks, leaf plates; honey, resin, arrowroots, pickles etc. and selling these products in the local market. Financial assistance is provided to these SHG by different government and non-government agencies.





Now different ITDAs and blocks of Sundergarh, Sambalpur and Mayurbhanj districts and the PTG development Micro Project named the Hill Kharia and Mankirdia Development Agency (HKMDA) of Jashipur in Mayurbhanj district are implementing various developmental activities like construction of roads and bridges, check dams, education complex, 100 seated ST Girls Hostels and such other income generating and infrastructure development schemes in the Khadia inhabited pockets.

The change and modernity is visible in different spheres of the way of life of the Kharia tribe. Their level of literacy and education as well as income has been improving. Currently, one may look forward to the Kharia to advance socio-economically and come up to the level of the general population in course of time.



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