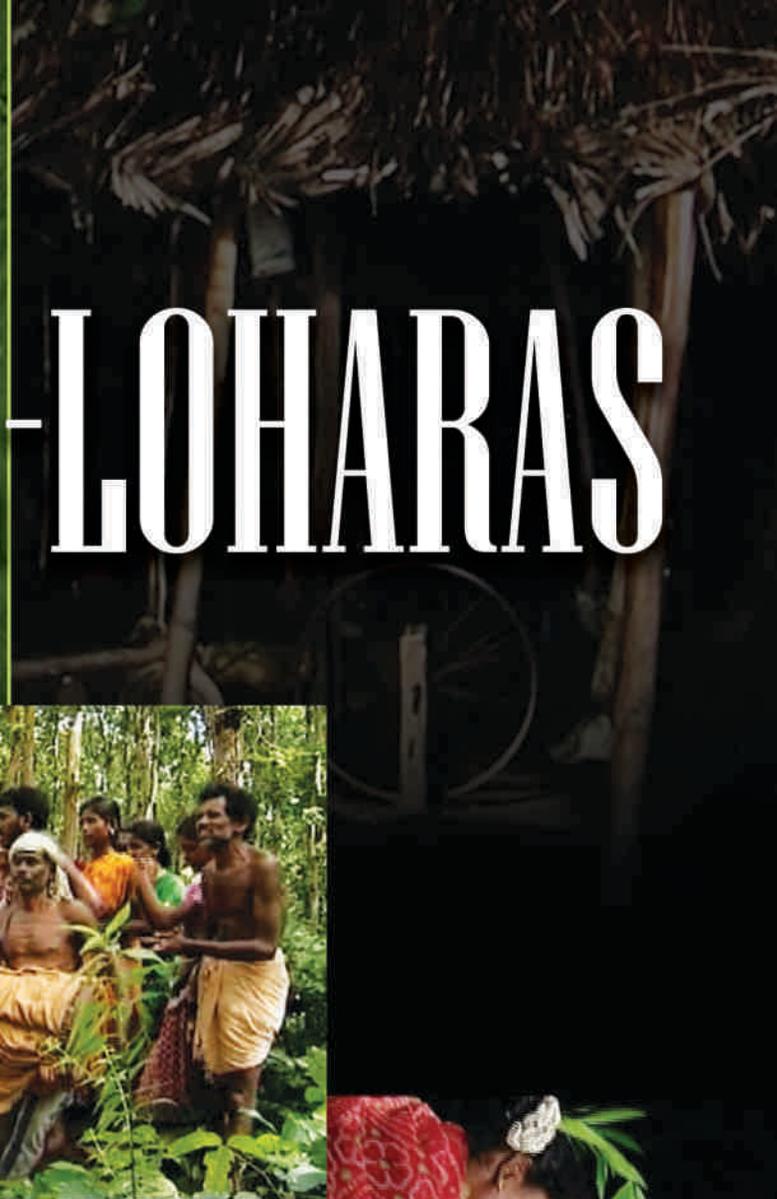




KOL-LOHARAS



**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute (SCSRTI)**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar-751003



PREFACE

The Kol-Lohraas constitute a section of the great and ancient Kolarian tribes who are called in various names like Munda, Kol, Kolha, Ho, LarkaKol etc. in different localities. They are also the Mundari tribes who inhabited in the Kolhan region in Singbhum district of Bihar and in course of time migrated to the neighbouring districts of Odisha, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. In Odisha they are numerically small tribe largely distributed in the Northern and Western districts namely, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundergarh.

Traditionally they are distinguished as artisans who worked as village blacksmiths who served the local peasant community by way of manufacturing and supplying iron implements. "Lohar" or "Lohra" is a term derived from "LOHA"- the iron. So "Lohar" or "Lohra" means the man who works with iron.

In these days, the potent forces of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and high technology have pushed the traditional rural economic system to the point of obsolescence. The age-old profession of the Kol-Lohara is also hit hard as their crude implements are gradually being replaced by sophisticated, factory-made precision implements. So they are now trying to switch over to agricultural pursuits. Since most of them are landless and few of them are marginal farmers, there is no way other than wage earning. The number of unemployed and under-employed persons, wage-seekers and wage-earners among them are increasing day by day.

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 and kept intact their cultural identity which distinguishes them from other ethnic groups.

This photographic documentation of the life style of Kol-Lohara is a part of the series on the tribes of Odisha. Shri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant of SCSTRTI have played a major role in preparing this colourful booklet. I hope this book would be of immense help for the tribal lovers, tribal tourists, tribal researchers and general readers.



Prof. (Dr). A.B. Ota
Advisor-cum-Director & Special Secretary

KOL-LOHARAS

A. B. Ota
S. C. Mohanty

**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research
and Training Institute (SCSTRI)**

C.R.P. Square, Bhubaneswar -751003



IDENTITY

The Kol-Lohras belong to the great and ancient Kolarian tribes who are called in various names like Munda, Kol, Kolha, Ho, LarkaKol etc. in different localities. They are also known as Mundari tribes who inhabited in the Kolhan region in Singbhum district of Bihar and in course of time migrated to the neighbouring districts of Odisha, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. All the eminent and early ethnographers namely, Dalton, Risley, S. C. Roy, Russell and Hiralal unanimously say that Munda, Ho, Kol, Kolha and Kol-Lohra are one and the same as they belong to the same ancestral stock. However each of them has been notified as Scheduled Tribes presently.



They are distinguished as artisans who worked as village blacksmiths. In local language, "Lohar" or "Lohra" is a term derived from "LOHA"- the iron. So "Lohar" or "Lohra" means the man who works with iron. As the name indicates, the Kol-Lohra is an occupational group, who served the local peasant community by way of manufacturing and supplying iron implements.

The Kol-Lohra are mainly found in Bihar, West Bengal and Odisha. In Odisha they are largely distributed in the Northern and Western districts namely, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar and Sundergarh. They recall their history of migration from the bordering districts of West Bengal and Bihar.





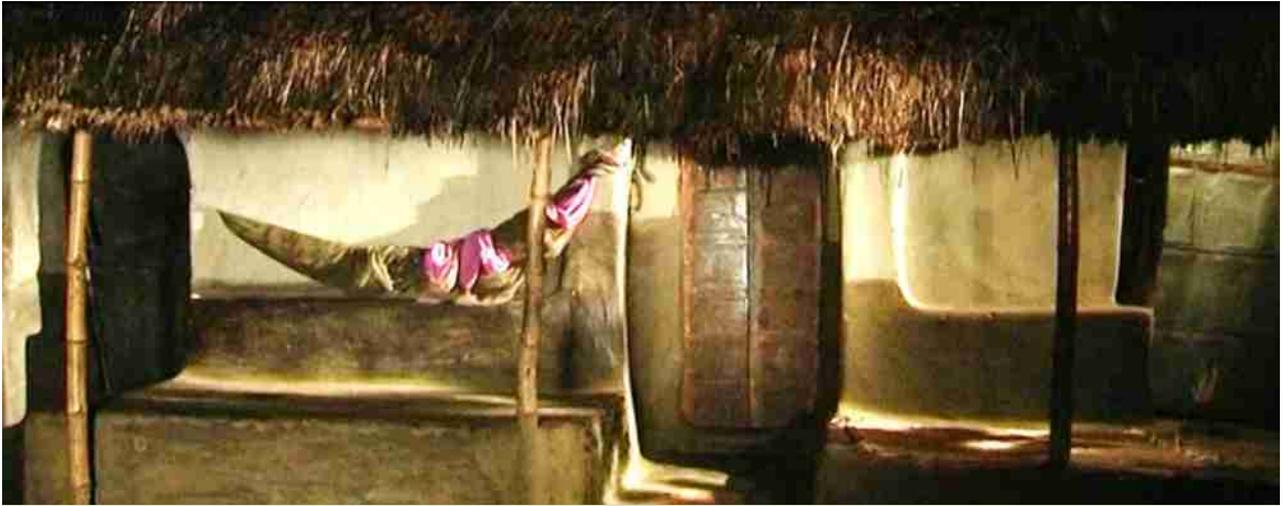
As per 2011 Census, their total population in Odisha was 9558 comprising 4707 males and 4851 females. Their population has registered a decadal growth rate of -0.87 % between 2001 and 2011. The total literacy rate among them is 52.68 %. It is 62.40% for males and 43.25 % for females. The sex ratio is 1031. They speak the Kolarian or Mundari language among themselves. They also speak the regional languages such as Odia, Bengali and Hindi while communicating with others.



SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING PATTERN

They reside in multiethnic settlements in separate hamlets, maintaining social distance from other communities. Their houses are arranged in a linear pattern but detached from each other leaving a narrow street in between. Their settlements are established near the foothills where perennial hill streams are flowing which provide them drinking water throughout the year.





Individual houses are built with mud walls and are thatched with piri grass. The walls are cleanly polished using white or red clay. Houses have two rooms with no window for ventilation and are low roofed. At present some of them have constructed asbestos or tiled roofs under various housing schemes.

They construct their workshops (*kammarsala*) at the village outskirts where three to four families jointly undertake the blacksmith works.

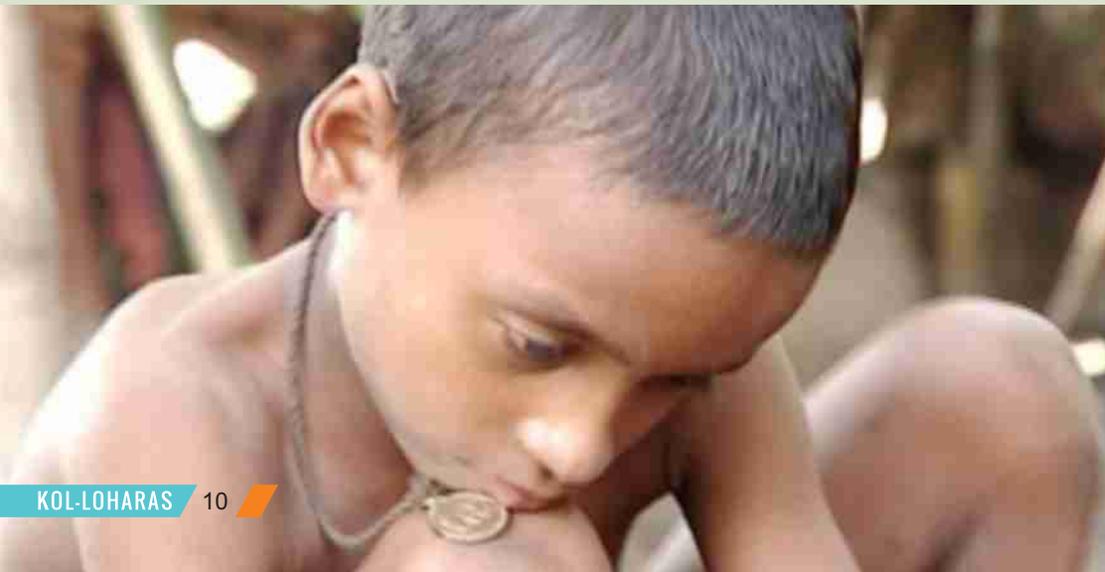


SOCIAL LIFE



The Kol-Loharas have no sub-tribes. Their society is divided into a number of totemic and exogamous clans or septs namely Tudwar, Hansdawar, Golwar, Kaithwar, Bandwar, etc which they call Killi. These names are derived from the names of certain trees, animals, villages, household objects and natural objects. It is easy to know the clan of a Kol-Lohra as he often uses his clan name as his surname. They also use Lohra or Lohar or Kol-Lohra as their surname. In these days, they prefer to call themselves as Munda-Lohra which they consider to be more prestigious. However in the social hierarchy of the greater Kol society, the Kol-Lohras are ranked lower than other sections of the tribe.

Their clan or Killi is associated with totemism. The members of each clan are believed to have descended from a common mythical ancestor. The mythical ancestor represented by a totemic object is highly respected. Clan members observe certain taboos against killing or injuring the totemic object. By virtue of tracing their descent from a common mythical ancestor, the members of each clan, claim to be related by common blood ties. So, marriage of persons belonging to the same clan amounts to clan incest and therefore strictly tabooed. Thus clan exogamy is the rule.





Family constitutes the elementary social unit in their society. Monogamous and nuclear families are quite common. However some cases of polygynous and extended families are also found. The nature of authority in the family is patriarchal. Father or senior most male member is the head of the family. Inheritance and succession is partilineal. Only sons and male heirs have the right to inherit father's property which is equally distributed among the sons after father's death. Usually the eldest son succeeds to any traditional office held by the father. Girls after their marriage cease to be members of their natal family.

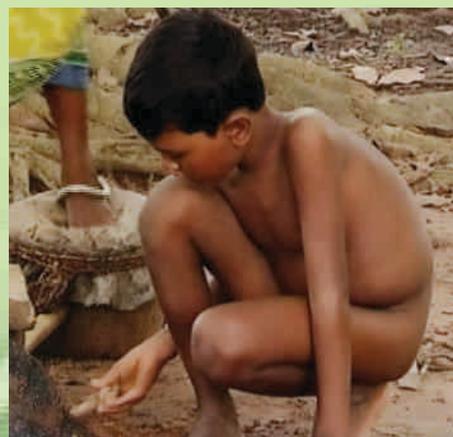
There is a relationship of avoidances between a man and his younger brother's wife, his mother-in-law and his wife's elder sister. Joking relationship exist between grandparents and grand children, a man and his wife's or his brother's wife's younger brothers and sisters and his elder-brother's wife.



LIFE CYCLE

Pregnancy & Child Birth

Pregnancy is a welcome event and some minor taboos are observed by a pregnant woman regarding her food, work, movements and sexual activities. An elderly and experienced woman belonging to Ghasi caste, a scheduled caste community, attends the pregnant woman during child birth. Other elderly women such as her mother-in-law, sister-in-law also attends her at this time. To facilitate easy delivery, the mother squats on the floor seating on her heels and bends over a large basket. The naval chord of the baby is cut off with a sharp arrow head or a razor. The newborn baby is bathed in luke warm water and then gently massaged with til oil. The relatives who remain present at the time of child birth are served with rice-beer.



On the ninth day, Chautkate- the first hair shaving ceremony is observed when the stump of the umbilical cord has fallen off. The mother comes out of seclusion on the twelfth day. She takes bath and resumes her daily activities on that day. The twenty first day ceremony called Ekosia is observed to name the child. No first-feeding and ear-piercing ceremonies are observed.



Puberty Rite

Puberty rite (Jubasta) is performed when a girl attains puberty. She remains in seclusion for seven days. During this time she is to avoid the sight of male members. On the early morning of the eighth day she takes bath, wears new clothes and comes out of seclusion.



Marriage

Marriage is the most important social event in a Kol-Lohara's life. They strictly practice tribal endogamy and clan exogamy. Cross-cousin marriage, junior levirate, junior sororate widow remarriages are allowed. Marriage by mutual negotiation and arrangement between the groom's side and bride's side is quite common and it is considered prestigious. Marriage by capture (Opertiandi), marriage by elopement or love marriage (RajiKusi), marriage by exchange (Badalandi), marriage by intrusion (Anader), and son-in-law-in-house (Gandi Jamal andi) type of marriages are also permitted in their society.

Monogamy is the common practice and cases of polygyny are few. If a married man wants to have a second wife he should preferably marry his wife's younger sister with the permission of his first wife. Bride-price (Ganang) comprising some cash, clothes, few heads of livestock and some amount of rice is paid by the groom's side to the bride's side to settle the marriage. The wedding rituals are performed at the bride's house, and on the fourth day, the nuptial ceremony is observed at the groom's house. As a matter of custom, married women put a vermilion mark on their forehead and wear earrings and glass bangles.





Divorce (Chhadpatar) is allowed on the grounds of adultery, maladjustment, cruel treatment etc. among the partners. Either of the partners can initiate the divorce proceedings before the traditional community council. The aggrieved party demands compensation from the accused. Once the divorce is sanctioned the children become the liability of the father. Both the partners are free to remarry after the divorce. The remarriage of widows, widowers, and divorcees is socially permitted.

Death

The dead bodies are buried. Death pollution is observed for ten days, during which the bereaved family members and close kins abstain from taking non-veg food items. On the tenth day, purificatory rituals are observed. The deceased's family members and kinsmen cut their nails and shave following the Hindu traditions. A feast is also given to the villagers and guests.





Inter-community Relationship

They accept cooked food and water from other tribesmen Santal, Munda, Bathudi, Gond and Dharua and Hindu castes like Tanti, Kamar, Teli etc. but not from the untouchable Scheduled Castes like Ghasi, Pano, Dom, Mangan etc. The Brahmin and Dharua Castes do not accept food and water from them. As the Kol-Lohra live in multi-caste villages, they are treated at par with other service castes like Carpenter, Barber, Oil man, Potter etc. and are allowed to share the common water sources with other clean castes where as the Scheduled Castes are not allowed to do so. But they are not allowed to use the cremation ground of the clean castes and so they have their own separate burial ground. However they are permitted to enter in to the Hindu-temples and participate in fairs and festivals.



LIVELIHOOD

The tribesmen had been earning their livelihood mainly from their traditional occupation of black-smithy that was supplemented by wage earning, marginal agriculture and seasonal forest collections. They were manufacturing and selling agricultural, hunting and household implements to the peasants in traditional rural economic setup. They maintained patron-client relationship with the neighbouring castes and tribes to whom they were supplying iron implements. As such as a community of professional and skilled iron workers, they were an integral part of the productive organization of the rural society in north-western Odisha.





In these days, the potent forces of modernization, industrialization, urbanization and high technology are pushing the traditional rural economic system to the point of obsolescence. The age-old profession of the Kol-Lohara is also hit hard as their crude implements unable to stand competition from their modern counterparts are gradually being replaced by sophisticated, factory-made precision implements. So they are now trying to switch over to agricultural pursuits. Since most of them are landless and few of them are marginal farmers, there is no way other than wage earning by working as daily agricultural labourers, contractual labourers and herdsmen. The number of unemployed and under-employed persons, wage-seekers and wage-earners among them are increasing day by day.



They are non-vegetarians and relish on fish, meat, egg, chicken, buffalo meat and pork. Rice is the staple food, supplemented with maize and ragi. They eat onion and garlic and use sesamum and tiloil as cooking medium. They drink tea, milk and milk products. Seasonal fruits like mango, jackfruit and guava and other edibles collected from the forest are eaten.

They consume pulses, roots, tubers and leafy vegetables. Both men and women drink alcoholic beverages and smoke beedis, cheroot, chew tobacco and betel leaves.



RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES





The religion of Kol-Loharais a mixture of their own tribal religion and Hindu religion. Their supreme deity is Sing-Bonga- the Sun God who is also the supreme deity of other Mundari or Kolarian group of tribes. He is worshipped "to avert sickness or calamity and to this end white goats or white cocks are offered to him. Next to him comes Marang Buru, the mountain god who resides on the summit of the most prominent hill in the neighbourhood. Animals are sacrificed to him here and the heads left and appropriated by the priest. He controls the rainfall, and is appeased in time of drought and when epidemic and sickness is abroad. Other deities preside over rivers, tanks, wells and springs, and it is believed that when offended they cause people who bathe in the water to be attacked by leprosy and skin diseases". There is also the village deity who "lives with his wife in the sarna or sacred grove, a patch of the primeval forest left intact to afford a refuge for the forest gods". (Russel and Lal; 1916, 512).





In addition to their Kolarian deities they also worship some Hindu deities namely Siva, Durga, Kali, Vishwakarmaetc, and observe certain Hindu festivals and rituals.

Being anartisan group they observe Biswakarma Puja to propiate God Biswakarma- the Hindu God of architecture and technology. They pay reverence to other important Hindu Gods such as Siva, Parvati, MahaLaxmi, Jagannath, Durga, Kali etc. They pay homage to theKichakeswari temple at Khiching in Mayurbhanj district. They also observe regional festivals like Karma Puja, Nuakhia, Dasahara, Makar, etc.

The Kol-Lohras are strong believers of magic, witchcraft and the dominant influence of ghosts and spirits on human life. All the happening and mishappening are attributed to the action of spirits, magic and witchcraft. Magic-practitioners, shamans and witch-doctors are dreaded and respected in their society. Their help is sought after to diagnose and prescribe remedy for human suffering caused by the magic and evil spirits.



SOCIAL CONTROL

Being the inhabitants of multi-caste villages, they come under the jurisdiction of the traditional village Panchayat headed by the powerful and influential village chief called Gaontia belonging to the dominant caste of the villages in western Odisha. At the regional level they have their own informal community council which prescribes and administers the customary code of conduct and punishes the offenders by way of fine and social boycott. Marriage and sexual intimacy among persons of prohibited category and the acceptance of cooked food and water from the members of the Scheduled Castes like Dom, Ghasi, etc. are treated as serious offences for which the offender is socially boycotted and he is allowed time to pay the penalty in form of cash, kinds, food and liquor so as to be readmitted in to the society.



DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

As a numerically small tribe the Kol-Loharas lived a life undisturbed in remote area with their age old traditional subsistence economy in the past with little change and development. But, after independence, changes have occurred in their way of life as the democratic State and its government has launched many welfare and development programmes for uplifting their socio-economic conditions. Implementation of various income generating and infrastructures development schemes for the benefit of the tribal people has helped their exposure to the modern world and also influenced their outlook to accept the modernity for self development. With the passage of the time, they have accepted many new cultural elements from the neighbouring communities.

In the post-independence era, the State Government, in its pursuit to bring about the socio-economic development of the tribal communities, have launched several special policies and programmes which include legal aids, rehabilitation of victims of exploitation and atrocities, health care, housing and drinking water facilities, establishment of special employment exchanges, reservation in employment, economic development, establishment of residential schools and hostels etc.

In present time, developmental programmes initiated by Government and non-government agencies have some impact on socio-economic life of the Kol-Lohra. Now they send their children to schools. They are trying to modernize their profession by availing bank loans and subsidies. They are also coming forward to adopt birth control measures and accept modern health-care services instead of relying on their traditional magico-religious methods. Yet they remain relatively socio-economically backward.

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 and kept intact their cultural identity which distinguish them from other ethnic groups.

Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series-60
KOL-LOHARAS @SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar



**Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes
Research and Training Institute**

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar - 751003

Website : scstrti.in, Email-scstrti@yahoo.co.in, Telephone : 0674-2563649/251635

Photography :
Suman Vision, Bhubaneswar
Layout, Design & Printing : Capital Business Service
& Consultancy, Bhubaneswar

ISBN : 978-93-80705-71-2