

BHUYAN



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

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar-751003

PREFACE

The Bhuyan is one of the important and numerically major tribes of Odisha. The tribe is in various stages of socio-economic development from the almost primitive Pauri Bhuyans of Keonjhar, Bonai and Pallahara to the Hinduized Khandayat Bhuyan families of Sundergarh district. They are largely concentrated in the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Bargarh and Sundargarh. Though the tribe has several endogamous sections territorially, it is dichotomized into two sections. The Bhuyans living in the plain area are called Plain Bhuyan and those living in hilly area are known as Hill Bhuyan or Pauri Bhuyan. They have a number of clans playing an important role in regulating their marital alliances.

The term Bhuyan is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Bhumi' meaning 'land'. They consider themselves to be children and the owners of the land and hence are known as Bhuyans. They are more or less an acculturated tribe as a whole and have adopted the languages of the regions they inhabit. They speak Oriya.

The most important characteristic feature of the Bhuyan society is that like that of their brother tribe Juang, they have their traditional organization of youth dormitory centered around the multi-faceted traditional community institution of Mandaghar found in each and every Bhuyan and more particularly in Paudi Bhuyan villages especially in Keonjhar and Anugul districts. Unmarried boys and girls of the village become the members of this organization not only to sleep in their respective dormitories in night but also to learn the facts of life under the guidance of their seniors and strict supervision of elders. Now this age old organization is breaking down under the impact of modernity.

Another important characteristic feature of the Bhuyan is that like the Juang, in every Bhuyan village there is a traditional panchayat which meets at the *darbar* or *mandaghar*. The village headman - pradhan presides over the *panchayat*. A group of villages form a confederation called a *pirha*. The *panchayat* at this level is called the *pirha panchayat*, and the traditional headman who presides over it is called the *sardar*.

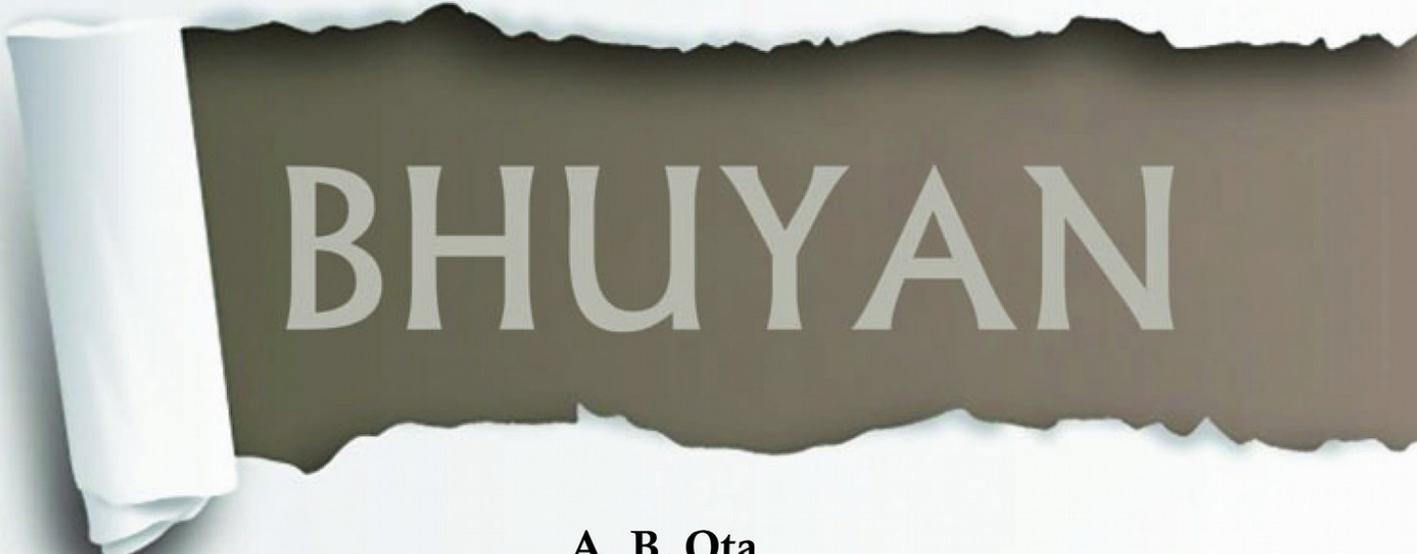
The economic life of the Bhuyans mainly centers around shifting cultivation, which is the primary source of their livelihood. To a large extent this is supplemented by wet and dry cultivation, collection of minor forest produce, hunting, fishing and wage-earning. Being a backward tribal community, the Bhuyans are facing a lot of difficulties in the economic front. Due to the ban imposed on shifting cultivation, the scarcity of wet land in the valley bottom for paddy cultivation and the rapid extinction of forest wealth, the people are forced to become wage earners and indebted in the absence of alternative means of livelihood.

Although various anti-poverty and income-generating schemes are now being implemented for the socio-economic development of the Bhuyans through agencies like the block, DRDA and ITDA as well as micro projects for Pauri Bhuyans it is still felt necessary that for the Paudi Bhuyans, the most primitive section of the tribes, at least two micro-projects, one each at Bhuyan Pirh of Keonjhar District and the other at Koida block of Sundargarh District, should be established to look after their development exclusively.

Sri S.C. Mohanty, former Joint Director who is now working as a Consultant and Shri Smruti Ranjan Patra, Statistical Assistant of SCSTRTI who have painstakingly provided inputs for this colourful Photo Hand Book deserve my thanks. My special thanks are due to Shri B. K. Paikaray, former Research Assistant of this institute who has rendered assistance. I hope learned readers will find this book interesting and useful.

Prof. (Dr). A.B. Ota

Advisor-cum-Director & Special Secretary



BHUYAN

**A. B. Ota
S.C. Mohanty
Smruti Ranjan Patra**

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

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar -751003

2020



IDENTITY

The word Bhuyan or Bhuinya is derived from the Sanskrit word "BHUMI" which means land or earth for which they claim themselves as the offshoot and owner of land. They are living in the State of Odisha, Jharkhand and West Bengal. In Odisha they are mainly concentrated in the northern and western parts in the districts of Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Sambalpur, Bargarh and Sundargarh. Territorially, the tribe is dichotomized into two sections. The Bhuyans living in the plain area are called Plain Bhuyan whereas those living in hilly area are known as Hill Bhuyan or Pauri Bhuyan.

The Bhuyan's complexion is invariably light brown. They have dolichocephalic head, broad nose depressed at the root, thick lips, facial prognathism with projected cheeks and jaw bones that makes their face appear square shaped.

According to census 2011, the total population of Bhuyan in Odisha is 3 06 129, out of which 1 51 479 (49.5%) are males and 1 54 650 (50.5%) are females. Their Sex ratio is 1021 and decadal growth rate is 10.35%. Their literacy rate is 63.14% (Males-74.95% and Females-51.60%). They are largely concentrated in Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts of Odisha.



Language:

Bhuyan do not possess any tribal language of their own. They use Odia an Indo-Aryan language having affinity with southern Odia branch as their mother tongue and speak Odia with local accent fluently.



Dress and Ornaments

Their pattern of dress and ornaments has resemblances with their neighbouring non-tribal peasants. Bhuyan men wear *Dhoti*, *Banians* and *Shirts* whereas the women wear *Saree* with under garments on special occasions. The ornaments of Bhuyan women are simple and lighter. Well-to-do females like to wear bangles, armbands, anklets, necklaces, ear rings and nose rings made of gold. They cover their neck and chest with bunches of multi-coloured bead necklaces and decorate their buns with wild flowers and hair pins with pendants. The children go naked or tie a small piece of rag around their waist covering their genitals.



SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING



The Bhuyan settlements are located either on the table land at the hill-top or the hill slopes or in the valleys surrounded by hills and forests in close proximity with the perennial hill streams from where they can fetch drinking water for their daily use throughout the year. The village is surrounded by thick forest. The village deity Gramsiri represented by a piece of big stone is installed in the center of the village in front of the community center - Darbar or Mandaghar.

Each family owns a courtyard around which the huts are built. The front of the hut faces towards the courtyard. The huts are made according to the size of the family. The cattle shed is constructed at one side of the courtyard keeping distance from the living quarters.

The typical Bhuyan hut is rectangular in shape and is about twenty feet in length and ten feet in width with grass thatched gobble shaped roof. The roof is supported by wooden poles. The walls are made of vertical wooden logs and plastered with mud and cow dung. The house have no windows to provide light and ventilation inside the room. It is constructed by the male members whereas the walls are plastered regularly with coloured soil by the females. The doors are made of split bamboo and plastered with mud but the well-to-do Bhuyans have wooden doors. A piece of rope is used to close the bamboo door and an iron chain is used for wooden ones. The bigger room is used as their living room and to store to keep their food grains. They keep their chickens and goats under a wooden platform. The smaller room is used as their kitchen. In its north eastern corner they install their household deity and the place is regarded as a sacred place and entry of outsiders into that room is strictly prohibited.





The Bhuyans have dormitory organization centered around their traditional community center named *Darbar* or *Mundaghar* exclusively separated both for the bachelor boys and young unmarried girls. At the age of seven to eight years boys and girls are admitted into the dormitory organization. The dormitory house located in a central place of the village provides them sleeping accommodation for night. It also serves as a community center, a guest house and a sitting place for their traditional village council (Barabhai).



LIVELIHOOD



The Bhuyans are primarily cultivators. They pursue shifting and settled cultivation depending upon their place of residence. Both men and women work together to earn for the family. In most cases the women are more labourious than men. According to the traditional norms the men and women perform their exclusive works according to division of labour. The small children in the age group of six to ten years take care of their younger brothers or sisters when their parents engage themselves in livelihood activities.



The Bhuyans do their agricultural work themselves. In the operations of shifting/settled cultivation like cutting trees, weeding and harvesting they requisition outside labour due to insufficient man power in the family. Kinship plays an important role in this matter. Kin members help each other on cooperative basis and exchange of labour by mutual arrangement. Unmarried boys and girls are hired as working team and often unmarried girls from the related villages are invited for this purposes.

The main source of income for livelihood is shifting cultivation (Kamani) and settled cultivation. As the yield is not sufficient to meet the consumption need for the whole year they engage themselves in forest collection, hunting, fishing, basket making, wage earning, and other economic pursuits to supplement their subsistence.





Each Bhuyan village has a definite area demarcated by boundary line since the time of feudatory chiefs and Bhuyans were allowed to fell trees from the demarcated patch for shifting cultivation and hunt within their respective territory. Patches of podu land on the hills are distributed among individual family heads every year after the ritual called Magh Punei in the month of January -February. The secular head and village priest distribute the lands for shifting cultivation. The village priest puts some marks on a tree to separate the boundary of a plot from the adjoining ones. If the villagers want to cultivate some land on communal basis to increase the village common stocks of grain, a plot may be earmarked for the purpose and members of each family contribute their labour for cutting trees and clearing forest and growing and harvesting of the crops in that patch of land. Both men and women work jointly and the yield is stored in a common grain bank of the village that makes the village fund utilized for communal purposes.





The Bhuyans rear livestock like cows, bullocks, buffaloes, goats, sheep and poultry birds for agricultural and nonagricultural purposes. The goats, sheep and poultry birds are sacrificed during rituals, festivals and ceremonies to appease the deities and slaughtered on social occasions to entertain their guests and relatives. These are also sold in market for cash. Cows and buffalos are used as agricultural draught animals and for supply of manure. They never milch their cows as they believe that cow's milk is meant for the calf.



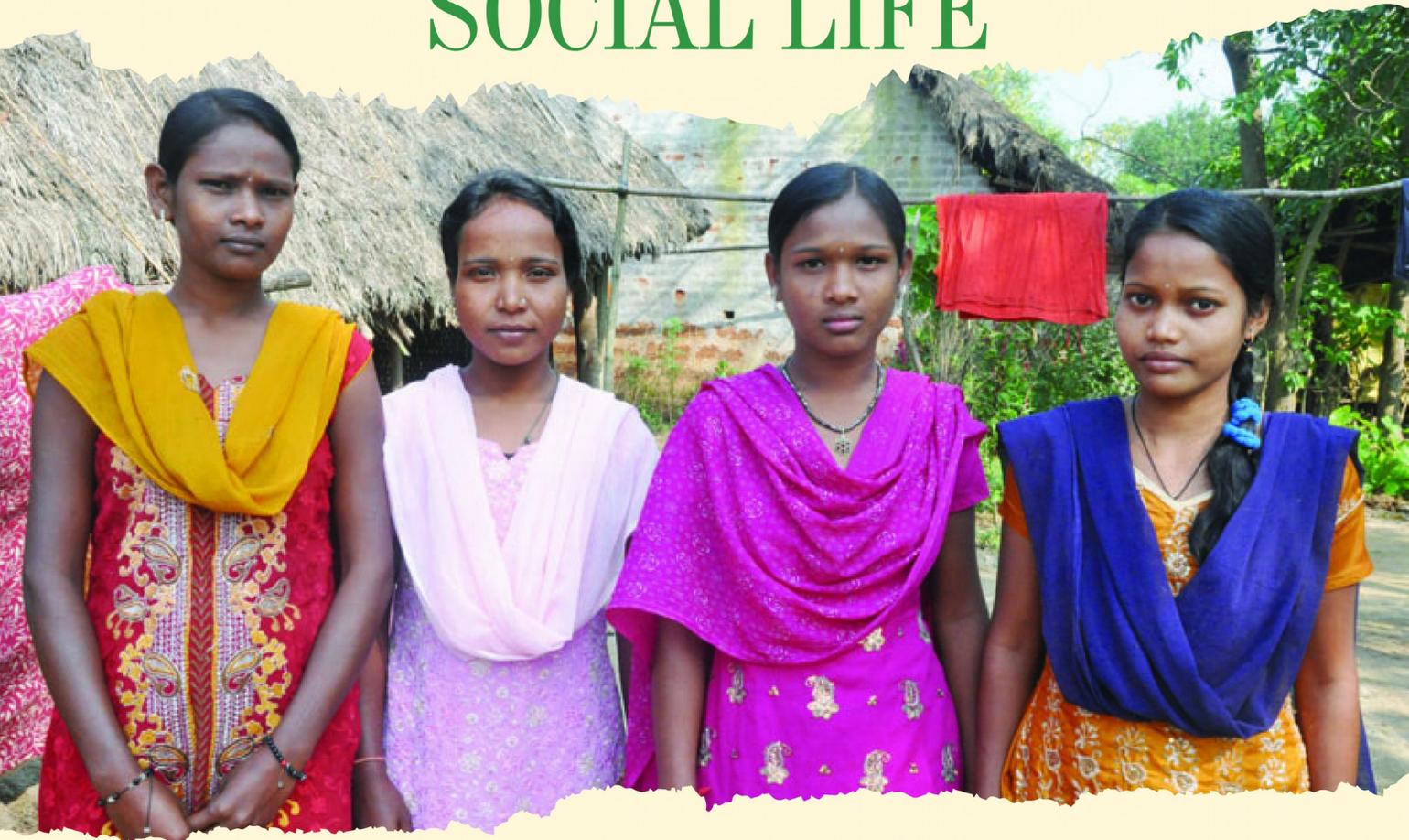


Food Habits

Bhuyans are non-vegetarians. Rice and *ragi* are their staple cereal. They also take mutton, chicken, fish, dry fish, pork and eggs but not beef as they think it as unclean food. They eat dal, green leaves with rice. Rice is often replaced with millets, fruits, roots and tubers as per the availability. Adults take their food twice in a day whereas the children eat as per their requirement. They eat meat during festive occasions but never take cow's milk. Rice beer and *mahua* liquor are their favorite drinks and both males and females are addicted to alcoholic drinks for relaxation after hard labour. They chew and smoke tobacco.



SOCIAL LIFE



The Bhuiyan is an endogamous community which is divided into various sections and nomenclature. Some of these sections indicate their mythological origin. These sections are Des Bhuiya, Mal Bhuiya, Paraja Bhuiya, Rautali Bhuiya, Bathudi Bhuiya, Santali Bhuiya, Dandasena Bhuiya, Rajkuli Bhuiya or Bar Bhuiya, Ake Bhuiya, Dake Bhuiya, Raichisan Bhuiya, Mushar Bhuiya, Ghatwar Bhuiya, Khandayat Bhuiya/Pawanbans Bhuiya, Kati Bhuiya, Naksiya Bhuiya, Rakhiasan Bhuiya etc. Each section is again subdivided into a number of exogamous units or clans such as :- Batagain, Chaodi, Kadakali, Kasiri, Losal, Raekuti, Raisuin, Sareikuli, Sarkhondi etc. They put Naik, Pradhan, Behera, Dehuri, Julundi and Sardar after their first name as their surname to establish their identity.



Bhuyan family is mostly nuclear and patrilineal. Existence of extended family is rare. Father acts as the head of the family. Inheritance of ancestral property follows the rule of equigeniture in the male line only and if the family have no male successors the married daughters may inherit the parental property and issueless family may adopt a male child from the nearest patrilineage who might inherit the ancestral property along with the adoptee father's office.



Life Cycle

The life cycle a person begins with birth and passes through successive stages of early childhood, adolescence, adulthood, marriage, old age and ends in death. When a person reaches adulthood he takes a lot of responsibility and after marriage sets up a family.

Birth

The Bhuyan married women who are blessed with children enjoy prestige in their society. Birth is always welcomed in Bhuyan society but the married couple prefer to have a male child than a female. From the time of conception to childbirth and afterwards the family observes a number of rites and rituals. The parents are prohibited to eat curd and meat of ritually sacrificed animals. They are also not allowed to go to the place of worship. During the time of eclipse, the pregnant mother is confined inside the house.



They construct a separate shed for use as the lying in chamber for childbirth. On this occasion the village priest worships Gaisiri and sacrifices a fowl to the deity for easy delivery of the baby. The head of the family also prays to the family ancestors at Bhitari with a pot-full of water for smooth delivery and promises to sacrifice of a goat or sheep.

They engage an elderly and experienced woman from other community as midwife (Dhai) to assist the pregnant woman for easy and safe delivery of the child. If any obstruction in delivery is detected, steps are taken for remedy and quick delivery with no pain. After childbirth, the naval cord is cut by the mother or the father of the new born child. If a male child is born then the naval cord is cut by a sharpened arrowhead and if a female child takes birth the naval cord is cut by a bamboo split and thrown away.



The birth pollution continues for two months which is cleared phase by phase. The name giving ceremony is held on the fifth or seventh day of child birth and on the same day both the mother and the child take their first purificatory bath and after that the washer man takes all polluted clothes for wash. The mother wears a new cotton cloth smeared with turmeric powder around her own neck and that of baby. She is prohibited to enter into the kitchen to cook food for the family until the final purificatory rites are performed. The natal hair of the child is shaved by the mother's brother and thrown into the stream.



Marriage

For marital alliances their society strictly adheres to their traditional norm of community endogamy and clan exogamy. According to the rule of clan exogamy a person cannot marry within the same clan and violation of the rule result in excommunication from the society and marriage outside the tribe is strictly prohibited. As the Bhuyan settlements are mostly uniclans they always practice village exogamy.

Child marriage is a past tradition not practiced now-a-days. The minimum marriageable age of boy and girl is twenty and eighteen respectively. A girl can marry only after she is fully grown up and enjoy freedom to make courtship. The modes of marriage in Bhuyans society are marriage by negotiation (Mangi Biha), by elopement (Dharipala), by capture (Ghicha), by love (Phulkhusi/ Amlesare/ Kadalesare) and widow or widower remarriage (Randi Biha).

Marriage by negotiation (Mangi Biha) is very common and considered prestigious. It involves an elaborate and expensive process in which the boy's parents take the initiative to select the bride and negotiate with the girl's parents and kinsfolk to settle the bride price and fix up the wedding date in consultation with the astrologer. The wedding proceedings involve observance of various rites on the marriage day like Phulhandi, Telhaldi, Diamangula, Bilajau, Gururpani, Jualipani, Asabika, Salabidha, Kadalata, Dubduba, Handisara, Kanyasamapna, Gindichaul and Mandchheli etc.



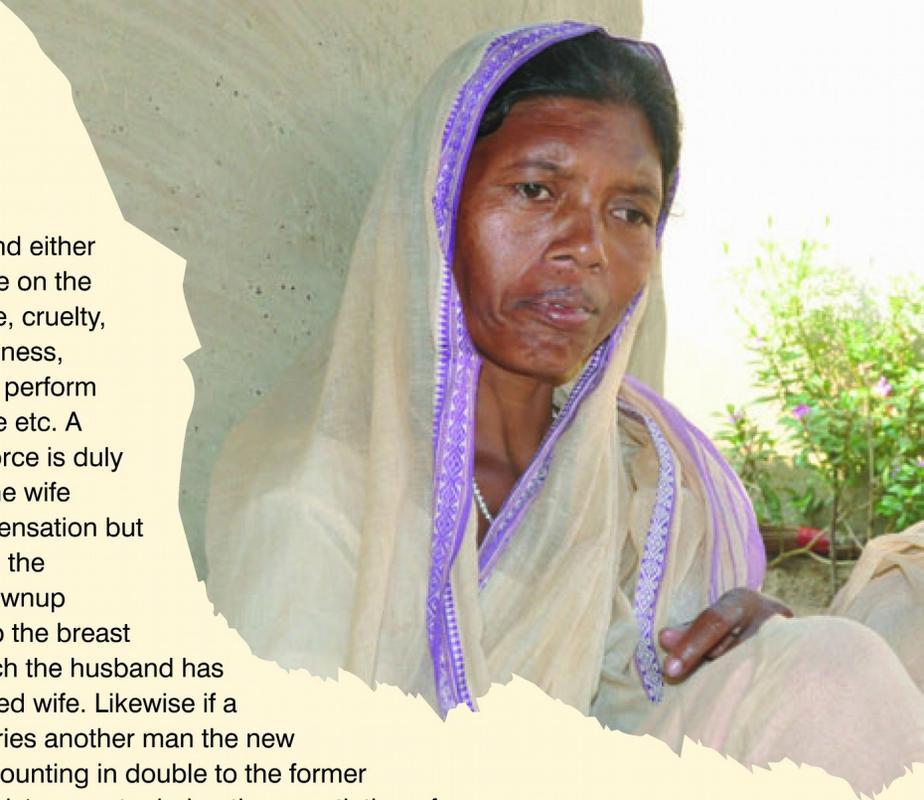


In their society payment of bride price is obligatory which is paid in cash and kind to the bride's parents by the groom's parents before the marriage ceremony. Bride price is fixed differently according to the form of marriage. In *Mangi Bibha* the minimum obligation consists of one cow for bride's mother, one bullock each for bride's father and maternal uncle, two goats, five pieces of clothes of fourteen cubits long which is given for bride's mother, mother's sister, father's sister, elder sister, younger brother and some amount of cash towards the cost of mother's milk which the bride suckled in her infancy. In *Ghicha* form of marriage the customary bride price consists of three oxen, five *khandis* of unhusked rice or its cash value and one or two pieces of cloth. Now dowry system has entered into their society.

In Bhuyan society, Marriage is monogamous but polygyny occurs when the first wife is found to be dead, barren or do not give birth to a male child or suffering from contagious disease or physically deformed. In such cases the man is allowed to remarry. After the death of first wife a man can marry only once. Junior levirate and junior sororate type of marriages are past traditions and are found in rare cases practiced after the death of the first wife. In their society remarriage of widows and widowers are allowed.

Divorce

In Bhuyan community divorce is permitted in certain extreme situations and either party is allowed to divorce his/her spouse on the grounds of maladjustment in conjugal life, cruelty, adultery, extramarital relationship, barrenness, impotency, misbehavior, disinclination to perform household chores and poor maintenance etc. A divorced wife may re-marry after her divorce is duly approved by the community council. If the wife divorces her husband she gets no compensation but if the husband divorces his wife he bears the responsibility of maintenance of their grownup children. The wife is only allowed to keep the breast feeding children for nourishment for which the husband has to pay some compensation to the divorced wife. Likewise if a woman deserts her husband and re-marries another man the new husband has to repay the bride price amounting in double to the former husband as he has paid earlier to the bride's parents during the negotiation of their marriage.



Death

The Bhuyans believe that death is a natural phenomenon and inevitable for every life. They consider that a natural death is caused by the sins committed in previous life, wrath of supernatural agencies, deities, evil spirits or influence of black magic. They practice both burial and cremation to dispose of their dead. When one dies the death news is communicated soon to villagers and kinsmen by a special messenger and all of them after receiving the news congregate and lament loudly for the dead. It is believed that if the family members and kinsmen do not cry on death, the dead feels offended.



The pall bearers carry the dead to the burial ground by a bier made with *sal* poles. At the burial ground a burial pit of about seven feet long and five feet deep is dug and the pall bearers place the corpse in the pit in sleeping position keeping its head towards north and face upwards. All the personal materials of the dead such as his cloth, umbrella, tobacco container, mat, pitcher or gourd, axe, bow and arrow etc. are thrown into the pit. Then the pall bearers fill the pit by clay and cover the top with stone and thorny branches to protect from the wild animals like jackal and wolf and pray "Now you are leaving the earth and going to *yama*, please tell him ' Oh my lord, there is no living persons left in the world". Then all of them go to the nearest hill stream, take purificatory bath and return to the house of the deceased.

When a pregnant woman dies they draw seven lines on the womb of the dead woman before burial of the corpse. They also bury such dead body in a separate burial ground in a distant forest, as they believe that her soul might become an evil spirit or a witch might practice black magic by that corpse. Likewise for persons killed by wild animals like bears, tigers, etc. before burying the corpse, they perform a special rite by engaging their traditional witch doctor *Raulia* to prevent the dead soul from transforming into a tiger or bear and kill the villagers.

The death pollution is observed for three days. During this period relishing on non-vegetarian foods, observance of rituals and festivals, visiting sacred places, worshipping deities, giving alms to beggars by the family members of the deceased are prohibited. On the third day the family and lineage members cut their hairs, shave the beards, pair off their nails and take purificatory bath. In the evening the bereaved family hosts a non-vegetarian feast with country liquor (*mohuli*) for their relatives, guests and villagers.

Youth Organization

Bhuyan have their traditional youth organization for their unmarried boys and girls separately. The dormitory-cum-community house known as Darbar or Mandaghar is preferably constructed in central position of the village. The whole group of boys and girls are referred to as *Sundarphul*. The boys sleep at the Mandaghar at night whereas a separate hut serves as the girl's dormitory. In some villages the girls sleep in different houses of widows as per their convenience.

Boys take the responsibility of thatching and repairing of the dormitories whereas girls help in cleaning, plastering walls and floors and sweeping it regularly and more particularly during important occasions like celebration of marriage and village festivals. Young boys and girls jointly cultivate patches of land and store its yield inside the dormitory as common fund for utilization for common purpose.

A fire is kept burning throughout day and night at the center of the Mandaghar for which fuel woods are collected from the forest by the boys. The musical instruments are kept hanging on the dormitory walls and dance is performed in front of it on an open ground.

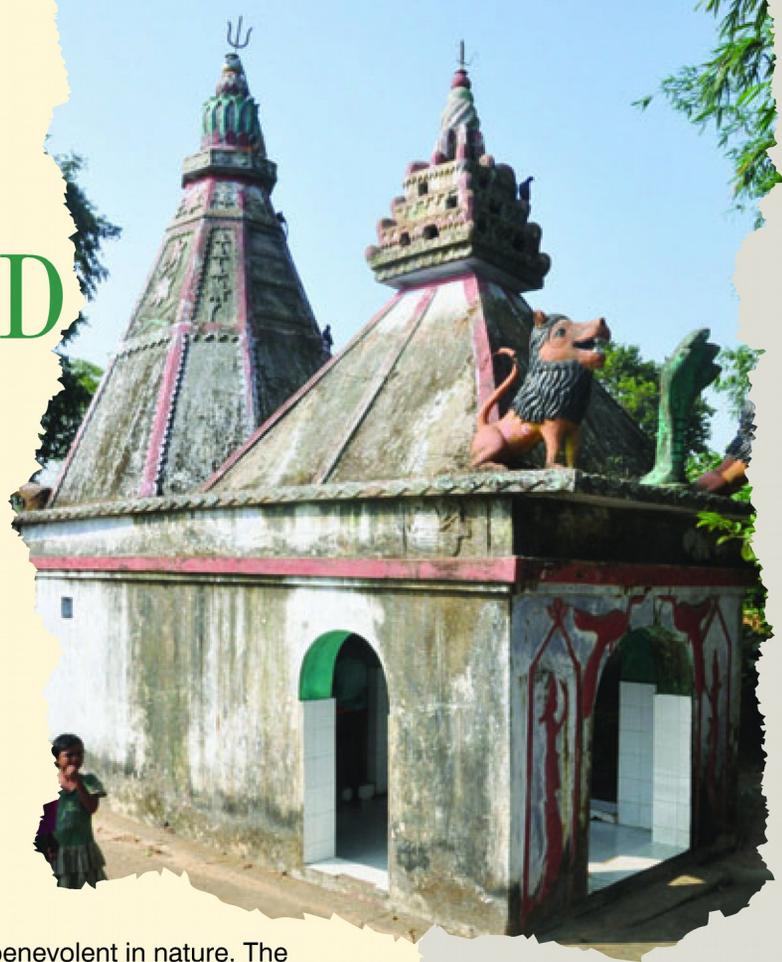


RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Bhuyans profess animism with admixture of elements of Hinduism. They believe on divine beings who control the universe and influence the existence of man and his achievements, success, failure, health and death etc. Their Gods and spirits may be broadly classified as supreme deities, general tribal Gods, nature deities, regional deities, village deities and family deities including ancestral spirits. According to their belief *Dharam Devta*, (Sun God) and his spouse *Basukimata* (Earth Goddess) are their supreme deities and they are benevolent in nature. The Dharam Devta shining high above the sky sustains life on the earth by giving light and *Basukimata* - the earth provides food and shelter for all.

Pat Devta (Hill God) is the tutelary deity of the region. *Boram*, *Birda* and *Kanto Kuanri* are worshipped by Bhuyan. *Boram* is considered to be the most powerful one. Birda is a male God with no great significance, but *Kanto Kuanri* is a powerful deity.

Gaisiri and *Thakurani* are their important tutelary village deities. *Gaisiri* is represented by a wooden pillar fixed on the ground near the *darbar* or *mandaghar*. The seat of *Thakurani* lies at the outskirts of the village. They believe that *Gaisiri* takes care and protect their village for which while establishing their settlement in a new site they first install *Gaisiri* in the central place and then construct the *mandaghar* and individual houses. At the time of emergency like spread of epidemics the village priest - Dehuri prays and offers food and animal sacrifices to propitiate the *Gaisiri*.





When any visitor stays in the village, the boys take care of him by supplying firewood and water for cooking his meals and during the visit of any *bandhu* village girls to their village it is the responsibility of boys to make arrangements of food for the girls during their stay in the village. Alternatively, during the visit of any *bandhu* village boys to their village the unmarried girls of the village happily bear the responsibility for arrangement of food for them.

The unmarried boys and girls may be hired by any villager to work in the field on payment of cash or kind which they deposit in the common fund of their youth organization to be utilized for common purposes. Boys and girls also contribute a goat for feast during performance of *Changu* dance by both boys and girls of the *bandhu* village.

Membership of both boys and girls terminates from their respective dormitories after their marriage. When the marriage proposal is finalized and before commencement of marriage the members of the dormitory collect grains and other necessities from among themselves and provide a hearty feast to the departing members and wish good luck and happy returns in their life. After marriage when a girl departs from the village with his husband the unmarried girls accompany the bride to the groom's village singing their marriage folk song.

Dormitory house acts as a meeting place for the elders to discuss and settle matters of the village, and a place for sleeping and gossiping during their recreational hours and for building togetherness that strengthens their social integrity and solidarity. The dormitory institution acts as a school for the youth to learn about the facts of life and their society.

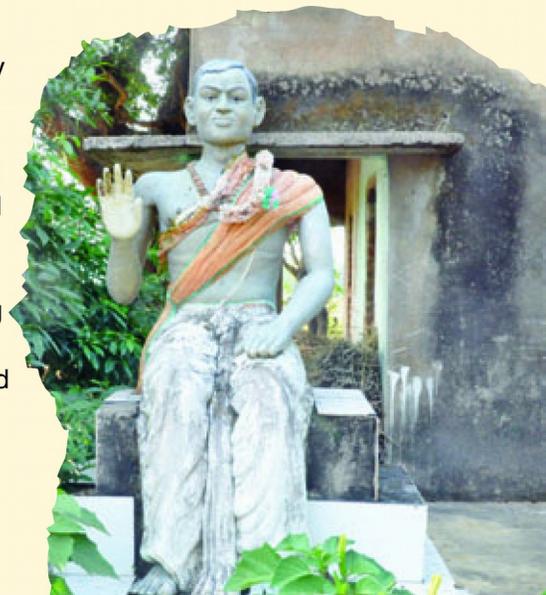


Thakurani also called as Mangala is installed by the side of *Gaisiri* which is close to the Darbar or at the village outskirts. The new terracotta image of Thakurani is supplied every year by a local potter to replace the old one. The deity is worshipped in the month of *Margasira*. The family ancestors called Pitruki are worshipped by the family head on certain festive occasions. In addition to the indigenous Gods, spirits and ghosts Bhuyans have incorporated into their pantheon many Hindu Gods, Goddesses like Shiva, Laxmi, Durga, Radha, Krishna etc. as benevolent deities whom they worship during festive occasions.

The procedure, equipment, materials and personnel involved in the observance of rituals vary in every occasion. The materials used in the rituals include turmeric powder, vermilion, husked arua rice, incense sticks, wicks, milk, molasses, leaf cups and the animals used for sacrificial purpose are goat, sheep and fowl etc. An axe or knife is used for slaughtering the animals. The traditional village priest Dehury conducts the rituals in different occasions.

Festivals

Bhuyan observe *Magha Pandoi* festival during January - February for three days when the year's harvest is over. The first day of the festival is called as *Khiri Katala*, the second day as *Podu* (lit, burning) and the third day as *Pitha Khiani* (lit, eating cakes). This festival is observed to bid farewell to the last year and to pray the deities to bless for a bountiful and prosperous new year and it also marks the beginning of the new agricultural year. During this month they also observe *Am Nua* festival when the mango trees blossom. Before observance of this festival, eating of raw mangoes or manuring the crop fields are prohibited. *Katha Jatra* is another festival they observe in this month before they begin slashing and burning in their *Podu* fields. They do not consume Mohua flowers before observance of this festival.

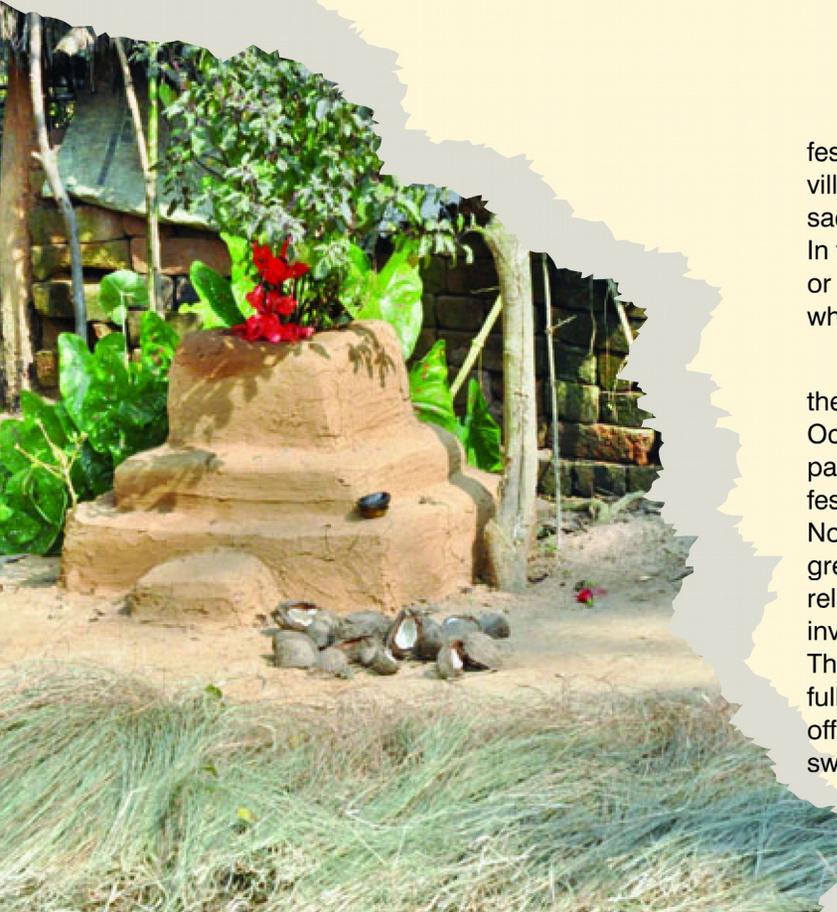


Gilori Jatra follows *Kath Jatra* in the month of March to collect the blossoms of *Gilori* flowers which the Bhuyan females gather from forest. The women are prohibited to collect it in the stage of their pregnancy or during their menses. Before the collection they collect a handful of paddy from every households and give it to Dehuri's wife. After observances of this festival they collect and eat *Gilori* blossoms. In this month they observe *Akhani Paridhi* festival before going for communal hunting to propitiate the forest deity to bless them with success in their hunting expedition and be safe from the fatal attack of the predators of the forest.

In March-April they worship the deity Boram Devata in their *podu* land for extinguishing fire in Biringa field and to sow upland paddy and *Gulji*. During the third day of the lunar fortnight in the month of Baisakh they observe the *Akhaya Trititya* festival for first sowing of paddy.

In the month of August they observe *Asadi* festival to ensure good rain fall by worshipping their village deity Gaisiri through the priest Dehury by sacrifice of a goat or fowl alternatively every year. In this month they also observe the *Pirh Jatal Puja* or *Gamha* festival with a group of villages after which they eat the new maize crop.

Nua Khia is their important festival which they observe during the month of September-October after reaping of the early variety Guda paddy for new eating of rice. *Karama* is their major festival which they observe in the month of November-December after harvest of paddy with great rejoicing and feasting along with all their relatives and guests assembled in their house by invitation to take part in the festivities with them. They observe the Hindu festival *Makar Jatra* on the full moon day of *Paus* (December-January) by offering coconuts, ripe bananas, fried paddy and sweets to the deity.



SOCIAL CONTROL

The Bhuyan have their own traditional community council both at their village level and regional level to deal with their customary matters. The village council is presided over by their secular head Naik/Gountia/Pradhan assisted by the Dehuri - the sacerdotal head, Roulia the shaman, Ghadai - the messenger and Bhal Bhai - a small group of village elites. It adjudicate cases pertaining to family conflicts, partition of paternal property, theft, rape, adultery, extramarital affairs, misbehavior, divorce, incest, premarital pregnancy, homicide, witchcraft, breach of taboo and intra-village disputes. Each case, after being thoroughly discussed among the council members in the open council held at the Darbar are decided upon unanimous opinion after which the Naek delivers his verdict which is final. The violation of the verdict is a serious offence for which the culprit may be ostracized from the society.

Inter village disputes and unresolved cases of incest, divorce etc are referred to the regional council for adjudication. The regional council is headed by a Pirha Naik or Jati Behera or Sardar who is assisted by a Dal Behera - the treasurer, Ghadai - the messenger and Bhal Bhai - the elite delegates from constituent villages.





The post of *Naik* is hereditary. As their society is patriarchal the office descends to the eldest son of the *Naik*. When a new *Naik* assumes his office, the villagers tie a turban on his head, bow down with folded hands and pray for his good health and request him to look after administration of the village. As a secular head of the village the *Naek* plays an important role in the public affairs of the village. He acts as chief spokesperson of the settlement and negotiates with the *Bandhus* on marriage proposals and hands over the bride price on behalf of the groom's parents to the bride's parents. One member from each family in the village renders free labour in his agricultural field as a token of respect.

Dehuri is the sacerdotal head of the village. His post is also hereditary. He acts as a link between the supernatural agencies and the living beings. Being the religious head he is respected by every one of the village and enjoys certain privileges like availing free labour for a day by each family of the village. Office bearers of their community council are highly respected persons in their society.



DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

By introduction of planned development efforts and exposure to other developed societies the Bhuyan are influenced to change and adopt new way of life. During the last six decades, the socio-economic development programmes launched by government and non-government agencies have brought immense changes in their cultural pattern and life style. The ITDAs, DRDAs and Micro Projects for Paudi Bhuyans has initiated various welfare and development schemes to bring about their sustainable socio-economic development.



The State Government is attempting to make significant development intervention to raise their standard of living and quality of life by multifarious development schemes in the sectors of health and sanitation, education, conservation, infrastructure etc. Introduction of modern agriculture, multiple cropping using high yielding variety seeds, provision of irrigation facility, input assistance, market facilities etc. have brought visible changes in their life style and minimized their dependence on their traditional slash and burn type of cultivation. They have now gradually adopted improved agricultural practices, using high yielding seeds, fertilizers and pesticides and some of them taken up horticulture or cultivation of cash crops to earn more. Now young men and women work in road construction works under the contractors and some of them have taken up small business and trading.





Now the Bhuyans are passing through a phase of transition. The political change, election system, adult franchise and local self-government have triggered off various political processes and generated new leadership among them. The impact of planned change and modernization is visible in their way of life. On the other side, their traditional dormitory and kinship organizations are weakening. They need the development *in situ* and attainment of sustainability through optimum utilisation of resources so that they do not become victims of negative impact of change and live with the pride of their cultural identity.

ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ-କମଳା, ମନ୍ତ୍ରଣା ଚକ୍ର
ଭାବ - ବ୍ରତୀନୀ
ମେମ୍ବର ସଂଖ୍ୟା - ୧୦
ସ୍ତ୍ରୀ-୦୪୧୦ ୨୦୦୪



Photo Handbook on Tribes of Odisha, Series-57

BHUYAN @SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar



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

CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar - 751003

Website : scstrti.in, Email-scstrti@yahoo.co.in, Telephone : 0674-2563849/251635

Photography :

Suman Vision, Bhubaneswar

Layout, Design & Printing : Capital Business Service

& Consultancy, Bhubaneswar

ISBN : 978-93-80705-70-5

