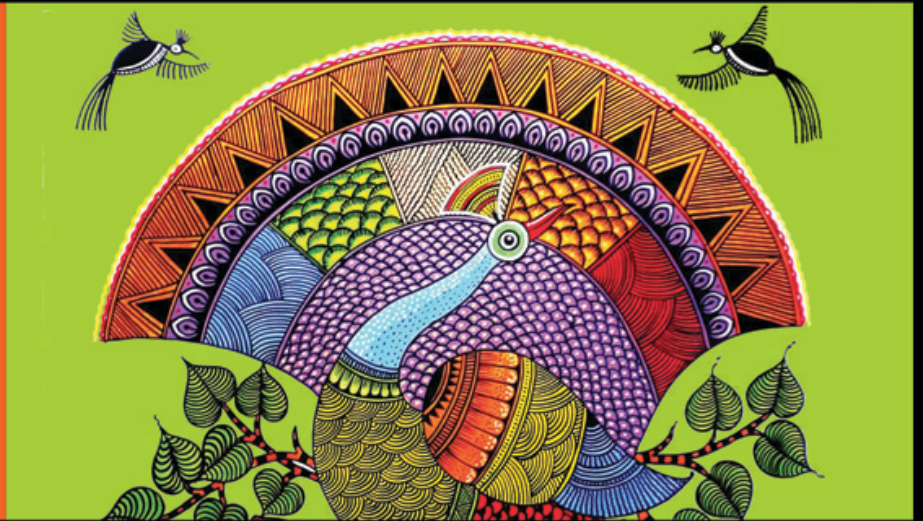


Encyclopedia of Tribes in Odisha

VOLUME
IV



Edited by
A.B. Ota
S.C. Mohanty

**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research
and Training Institute**
ST & SC Development Department,
Government of Odisha

Supported by
Ministry of Tribal Affairs
Government of India

**Encyclopedia
of
Tribes in Odisha**

Volume IV

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Editors

A. B. Ota

S. C. Mohanty

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

***Supported by*
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Encyclopedia of Tribes in Odisha

Volume IV

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FOREWORD

Odisha holds an important position as the home of the largest number (62) of notified Scheduled Tribes, including many Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. Naturally, the spectrum of tribal culture, livelihood and development in the State is very wide. It is essential for the country to preserve this heritage of tribal culture and knowledge, so as to facilitate further analysis for formulating more effective policies and programmes for socio-economic development and cultural preservation of the tribal communities.

The Schedule Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) of Odisha has been doing exemplary work in the field of ethnographic research and documentation of various aspects of tribal life and culture. This vast work of compiling relevant details in 'Encyclopedia of Tribes of Odisha' will be a treasure of knowledge for researchers and policy-makers.

Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India deeply appreciates the dedicated work done by Prof. (Dr.) A.B. Ota, Director, Sri S.C. Mohanty, Consultant and the team of SCSTRTI, Odisha for compiling, editing and presenting hundreds of meaningful articles in these five volumes. It is expected that this will inspire a new generation of students and researchers, and will also motivate those working in the fields of public policy.



Anil Kumar Jha

Secretary
Ministry of Tribal Affairs
Government of India

PREFACE

The motley crowd of tribal communities living in the hills and plains of Odisha has enriched the cultural heritage of the state by their ethno-cultural diversities. Officially they have been enlisted as Scheduled Tribes (STs) numbering 62 including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). As per the 2011 census, they number 95, 90, 756 persons accounting for 22.85 percent of the total population of the State. In terms both Scheduled Tribe communities and PVTGs, Odisha has the highest number amongst all the States, in the entire Country.

Each tribe possesses its distinct identity in terms of social organization, culture, and language. They pursue their own distinctive life styles different from each other which help them to preserve their cultural identity that is defined and redefined from time to time. They represent a type of society in the scheme of social evolution. As a structural as well as cultural concept, tribe encompasses features of simple societies. The major and smaller tribal groups have separate ethnic identities including historical and cultural heritage.

By and large, tribal communities are relatively encysted, deprived, economically backward, but their heritage, tradition and culture make their society tenacious to survive amidst upheavals and downfalls. In a nutshell, tribal communities are closed societies with open mind. In spite of certain socio-cultural changes taking place in their age old way of life under the present pressing circumstances of planned change and intervention, many of them have still kept their distinct ethnic identity intact. In this context, the inadequacy of in depth anthropological research and documentation on the colourful life style of the tribals has to be taken in to due consideration.

In this regard many works have been done by the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) of Odisha - the premier and oldest tribal research institute (TRI) of the country established since 1952. The main objective of setting up of the Institute was to conduct studies on the society, culture and development problems of the tribal communities of Odisha and to serve as a centre for providing data and advisory services to Government. Publication of books, reports and research journal is one of the important activities of the Institute for dissemination of information on various aspects of STs. So far it

has published 126 books comprising monographs and popular literature, photo hand books, development handbooks, action plans and information brochures etc. on SCs and STs. These publications are based on research works undertaken by the Institute.

In addition to that the Institute publishes bi-annual News Letters on the activities of the Institute and a half-yearly research journal, ADIVASI published in June and December containing articles on various aspects of STs and SCs. Published since 1955, ADIVASI has earned the distinction of being the oldest anthropological research journal of Odisha. The journal aims to publish original unpublished research papers on tribal centric issues to highlight those aspects hitherto unexplored. The corpus of the journal though is largely anthropological in nature; its scope is broadened to make it multidisciplinary to cope with the changing times. It endeavours to provide a forum to eminent scholars as well as young researchers to exchange innovative ideas and speculations.

Marching with the time the ADIVASI journal has gloriously entered into its 61st year of publication. Within the treasure of its published articles there are many precious articles including many old ones of the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties as well as the recent ones of the 21st Century depicting various aspects of the life and culture of the Tribal Groups of Odisha. Considering the rapidly changing scenario of the present times in which many ethnic groups are undergoing transformation towards modernity the institute felt it necessary to compile, re-edit and republish the articles on the 62 Tribes of Odisha published in its Adivasi journal and some more brought from its other published and unpublished documents to bring out their past and present in to limelight in order to show their "then" and "now". This compilation containing 418 articles is organized into five edited volumes. It is a huge task deserving commendation.

I must acknowledge the contributions of all the eminent scholars whose articles have found place in these volumes. Many of them who were active in the past century have taken great pains and faced immense hardships to go to the remote tribal areas, collect empirical data and prepare these articles. The phenomenon of time coupled with fate and destiny has taken its toll and many of these great souls are no more with us. But they will live with us through their works. Publication of these volumes is a tribute to them.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the painstaking efforts of Prof. A. B. Ota, Director and Editor and Shri S. C. Mohanty, Associate Editor of Adivasi and Consultant, SCSTRTI for their relentless effort, dedication and engrossing involvement to conceptualize the project, collect,

select, compile and re-edit such large number of articles and to accomplish all other tasks required to produce these huge volumes. Both of them deserve my heartiest thanks.

It is hoped that these five volumes will serve as a reference literature on the Tribes of Odisha which will be of immense help to the researchers, development practitioners, academicians and general readers interested in conducting research and acquiring knowledge in tribal society, culture as well as their development.



Ranjana Chopra, IAS
Principal Secretary
ST & SC Development Department
Govt. of Odisha

EDITOR'S NOTE

In the aftermath of independence and adoption of Indian Constitution incorporating special provisions for the protection, welfare and development of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) of Odisha took its birth in Bhubaneswar, the capital city of Odisha way back in 1952 christened as Tribal Research Bureau (TRB), in pursuance of the constitutional goals and objectives. Now rechristened as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), this institute not only has the distinction of being the premier and oldest Tribal Research Institute (TRI) of the Country, but it is also credited with the publication of a nationally reputed as well as the oldest Anthropological Research Journal of Odisha titled "Adivasi" incorporating the research articles of reputed anthropologists, sociologists, development practitioners and researchers who have worked and gained knowledge and experience in the field of tribal and non-tribal societies and cultures. Being published since 1955, almost uninterruptedly, this veteran research journal of Odisha which is nearly 61 years old, has come up with its 61st volume in the year 2021.

Over these years, the journal has endeavored to publish valuable research articles on various aspects of the society, culture and problems of Odishan tribes and castes and marching with the time it has gloriously entered into its 66th year of publication. Within the treasure of its published articles there are many precious articles including many old ones of the fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties and nineties as well as the recent ones of the 21st Century depicting various aspects of the life and culture of the colourful tribes including 13 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs), previously called as Primitive Tribal Groups (PTGs) of Odisha - a distinct and fascinating ethnic category among the tribes many of whom are known the world over for their pristine culture. Considering the rapidly changing scenario of the present times in which these ethnic groups are undergoing transformation towards modernity it was felt necessary to compile the selected articles on the Tribes of the State published in our Adivasi journal as well as our other research reports and publications to bring their past and present in to limelight in order to show their "then" and "now".

Prior to this, our institute also published 13 colourful Photo Hand Books on the 13 PVTGs of Odisha which has gained popularity among the Indian and foreign readers. Consequently, some of these have to be reprinted as they became out of stock. Considering the popular demand for the publications relating to PVTGs, it was decided to compile the selected articles published in our Adivasi journal from the nineteen fifties to the present and publish it in three volumes in the name of "PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE TRIBAL GROUPS OF ODISHA". In these three volumes one hundred and fifty five articles find place classified as related to (1) Ethnography (vol. 1), (2) Change & Development (vol. 2) and (3) Anthropology of Health and Medicine (vol. 3). These three volumes have been published during 2015.

While putting our priorities on bringing out publications on our PVTGs, we have never forgotten other tribes given the fact that the State of Odisha is the homeland of 62 Scheduled Tribes. Indeed, by the end of the last century we have published 10 monographs on 06 tribes of Odisha namely, 1. BHUNJIA, 2. BONDO (2), 3. JUANG (2), 4. KANDHA (2), 5. KOYA (2), and 6. SAORA. Besides a book containing ethnographic articles on 43 important tribes have been published in the name of "TRIBES OF ORISSA". For their popular demand the stocks of books on BONDO, KONDH, SAORA, JUANG and the TRIBES OF ORISSA have been exhausted and revised editions of books on KANDHA, KOYA and TRIBES OF ORISSA have been brought out in the mean time.

In addition to that we have published colourful Photo Hand Books on total 62 Scheduled Tribes of the State. These books have also become popular for which some of it have to be reprinted to meet the demand. We also have made several publications covering different socio-cultural and development aspects of different tribes of Odisha.

The present task of collection and compilation of research articles on Tribes of Odisha from our Adivasi journal and other sources is not an easy task. Most of the articles and especially those of the past century were prepared and printed when computer was either not in our dreams or in our distant dreams. Hence, those have to be computer typed again, corrected, edited, if so required, and formatted to make these ready for reprinting. To accomplish the task, we did not have the luxury of time. This has to be done in a short span of time within a busy and hectic schedule of many other pressing engagements.

This is our 4th Volume containing 52 articles on 13 tribes. In this compilation, the names of the tribes on which articles have been presented have been arranged

in ascending alphabetical order as notified in the list of Scheduled Tribes of the State starting from the alphabet 'L' (LODHA) and ending at 'R' (RAJUAR).

The picture of the past life style of the tribes that the illustrious anthropologists of past century have presented in their articles may not be found in these days except in the memory of the still living old guards. To the present generation of the tribes it may appear strange and outdated. But as a matter of fact, change is inevitable. Due to the powerful impact of planned change and modernization many of the old life ways of the tribes have become obsolete and lost in antiquity while some others are on the verge of decline. But one has to march with time but with reference to his past that gives him his cultural identity. Moreover, everything that one need to know about the Tribes of Odisha may not be found in this book but it can certainly help open a window to the picturesque tribal world of Odisha and guide the readers to deepen their understanding of these distinguished and colourful ethnic groups who exhibit our diverse tribal cultural panorama.

Commitment of errors and omissions have become part our lives. This work is no exception. In spite of our sincere efforts, these lapses may be there. We apologize for that and request our kind and learned readers to bring those to our notice along with their constructive suggestions for improvement in order to enable us not only to correct our mistakes but also to learn from our mistakes.

We owe a deep debt of gratitude to all the eminent scholars whose articles have found place in this volume. Many of them belonged to us and few still belong to this Institute. Many of them who were active in the past century have taken great pains and faced immense hardships to go to the remote and Dark Continent of the tribes, collect empirical data and prepare these articles. The phenomenon of time coupled with fate and destiny has taken its toll and many of these great souls are no more with us. But they will live with us through their works. Publication of this volume is a tribute to them.

I will be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the help and cooperation of all who have typed, read, compared and corrected the typed articles as well as the printer without whom this book would not have seen the light of the day. Of all, my special thanks are due to my co-editor, Shri S.C. Mohanty, the former Joint Director of SCSTRTI and now working with us Consultant (Research & Publications) for his singular relentless effort, dedication and engrossing involvement to conceptualize the project, collect, select, compile, edit and format

the articles and to accomplish all other tasks to produce the book in spite of his multifarious pressing engagements. This work would have remained in our dreams without him.

This book is unique of its kind as in it a humble attempt has been made to amass and streamline the fragmented data about the Tribes of Odisha of the past and present times. I hope this book would be of enormous help as a ready reference for the tribal lovers and researchers alike and all those who are interested in the subject matter of Odishan tribes.

20th August, 2021
Bhubaneswar



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

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LODHA*

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

The Lodha are an ex-criminal Scheduled Tribe of Orissa. They are famous for their aggressiveness and criminal activities for which their neighbours have always held them in contempt. The jungle-clad hilly terrains of the Chotanagpur plateau running across the Bengal-Orissa-Bihar border including Mayurbhanj District in Orissa, Singhbhum District in Bihar, and Midnapur District in West Bengal form the homeland of the Lodha. Midnapur and Singhbhum have large concentrations of the tribe. In Orissa the Lodha population is small and mostly confined to two blocks, i.e. Morada and Suliapada in the Sadar sub-division of Mayurbhanj District. The Lodha population in Orissa was 5100 at the 1981 census, increasing to 7458 with a decennial growth rate of 46.24 per cent by the 1991 census. Their level of literacy, 8.40 per cent in 1981, went up to 17.22 per cent by 1991. This reflects the backwardness of this vulnerable community.

The origin and historical background of the tribe are obscure. According to Bhowmik, who is an authority on this tribe, 'the term Lodha is derived from "Lubdhaka" meaning a trapper or flower. There is a land-holding caste in Madhya Pradesh named Lodha or Lodhi who are immigrants from the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) and who originally lived in Ludhiana District in the Punjab. But the present ethnographic data do not indicate any relationship between the Lodha of Bengal, Bihar or Orissa and the Lodha of Madhya Pradesh and Utter Pradesh.'

Like many other forest-dwelling communities, the Lodha trace their descent from the famous Savaras described in the Hindu *puranas* and great epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Their legendary origin tells us that they are the descendants of the mythical Savara king of Nilanchal and the legendary hero Vishwavasud. He was the first worshipper of the idol of Lord Nilamadhav, which was later stolen by Vidyapati, the Brahman Minister of King Indradyumna of Puri and installed in Puri as Lord Jagannath. As such the Lodha identify themselves with the Vishwavasud group of Savaras and regard the Vyadh, Kirta and Jara groups of Savara as their kins. Hence, the Lodha call themselves the Lodha Savara.

* Published in Tribes of Orissa, Revised Edn. SCSTRTI, 2004, pp. 217-23

¹ Research Officer, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

Their legendary origin places them within the tribe-caste continuum. Eminent anthropologists like Dr. N.K. Bose believe that the Lodha were exclusively a jungle tribe thriving on hunting and food-gathering like the Savaras as described in the Hindu *puranas* and epics. They seem to have belonged to the Mundari group. In course of time their prolonged interaction with Hindu castes has accelerated their Hinduization. Now they live with tribal and non-tribal communities like the Santal, Oraon, Bathudi, Munda, Mahali, Bhumij, Kora, Bagdi, Sadgop, Mahato, Karan, Brahman, Khandait, Raju, Teli, Mahishya, Vaishya, Gudia, Kamar, Kayastha, Vaidya, Namasudra, Napita, Bauri, Dom, Puran, Tanti, Gola, Kaivarta, etc. But the Lodha claim a social status superior to those of the neighbouring Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities.

The Lodha were originally a Mundari-speaking tribe. Now they speak a dialect composed of distorted Bengali, Oriya and Mundari. This indicates their assimilation to the regional Oriya and Bengali cultures. As regards their physical affinities, they belong to the Vedid racial group. In this respect they are very close to the Hill Kharia, Malers of Rajmahal and Chenchu of the Krishna basin. These communities share a common pre-agricultural, forest-dwelling, hunting and food-gathering economic background.

The Lodha live in small and large villages belonging exclusively to them and sometimes together with other communities. As with other tribal settlements the settlement pattern is irregular, with houses scattered here and there. They have small straw-thatched huts with a rectangular ground plan and mud walls. The majority of huts have all-purpose single rooms with a raised platform near the hearth called *isan* or the seat of ancestral spirits. This is a trait borrowed from the caste Hindus. Goats and cattle are kept on the side verandah. Well-to-do cultivators have larger multi-roomed houses with spacious courtyards and kitchen gardens fenced with vertical bamboo poles. Their household belongings are scanty.

The Lodha are economically backward. Most of them are at the pre-agricultural stage of the economy. Their occupational pattern varies according to the local environment. The Lodha who live in the forest areas stick to their age-old pursuits like hunting, food-gathering, the collection of minor forest produces, tusser cultivation, etc. These days, they also work for the forest department and forest contractors in plantation programmes and timber operations. Apart from the collection of edible fruits, roots and tubers for their own consumption, they collect *kendu* leaves to roll *bidi*, *sal* and *siali* leaves to make leaf cups and plates, *sabai* grass to make ropes and also tusser cocoons, honey, *lac*, resin, *sal* seeds, *mohua*, firewood, etc., all of which they sell in the neighbourhood to earn their livelihood. They hunt with the traditional bow and arrow and use different kinds of traps and snares to catch animals. With the arrival of rapid deforestation and the prohibitory forest laws they have been deprived of their forest-based subsistence. Some Lodha have therefore resorted to unfair means and clandestine activities to keep their body and soul together.

The Lodha living in the plains mainly thrive on wage-earning as agricultural labourers and construction workers. Very few own cultivable lands, the produce of which is insufficient to meet their household consumption needs. Most of the Lodhas are landless or marginal farmers. Some Lodha have taken up share-cropping.

Unlike their Hindu caste neighbours, the Lodha do not attach any social stigma to any kind of occupation. They never hesitate to take up any kind of vocation available to them irrespective of their socio-economic status. Hence they earn and supplement their livelihood from a variety of occupations like petty trades, rearing of livestock, carpentry, weaving, mat-making, rope-making, and the like. Fishing and the catching of reptiles such as snakes, lizards, tortoise and alligators from ponds and streams, are their favourite pastime as well as a subsidiary occupation. Fish and tortoises are eaten. They also earn money by selling the skins of reptiles, which are in great demand for making musical instruments, shoes and fashionable articles.

The Lodha are endowed with a strong physique and are capable of doing hard work. But they are bit lazy. They prefer to idle away their time indulging in gossip and catching fish rather than doing any strenuous work. The Lodha women are comparatively more active and industrious than the men. As well as their major traditional role of housekeeping and child-rearing, they take part in all economic pursuits with the men except ploughing, thatching, and catching snakes and reptiles, which are forbidden to them. Children lend a helping hand to their superiors in these activities.

Rice is the staple food of the Lodha and is supplemented by pulses, seasonal fruits, roots and tubers and non-vegetarian items like meat, chicken, eggs, fish, etc. depending upon the family budget and their availability. They usually eat boiled rice soaked with water and its gruel. Vegetable items are either boiled or roasted. They normally eat food twice daily, i.e. in the morning and evening. If food is available they go for a third meal at noon or in the afternoon. At the time of scarcity of food they manage with one meal or starve for days together. The Lodha are addicted to alcoholic drinks and narcotics like country liquor and tobacco. They are particularly fond of *handia* (rice beer), *biri* (country-made cigarettes,) and *gudakhu* (tobacco paste), which they use regularly.

The Lodha wear cheap and coarse type of clothes. Men use *dhotis*, *chaders*, napkins, *banyans* and shirts. Women wear saris and blouses. Small children up to five years of age usually go naked. Grown-up boys wear a thin piece of loin cloth fastened to string around the waist. Girls wear frocks and skirts. Due to their poverty, they manage with just a few items of clothing and cannot afford to keep it clean. Women adorn themselves with necklaces and bangles made of aluminium, silver, brass and glass. They also tattoo their upper arms and chest with floral designs.

The Lodha have few household articles. For cooking and serving food they have husking levers, earthenware pots, iron pans, aluminium vessels and plates. Well-to-do families keep brass utensils, which are mortgaged for loan or sold in times of need. These implements for hunting, fishing, agriculture and food-gathering consist of bows, arrows, crowbars, axes, billhooks, scythes, ploughs, knives, spades, mattocks, etc. These are generally purchased from the local blacksmith or weekly market.

The Lodha do not have a very cordial relationship with neighbouring communities as the latter hold them in contempt for their criminal activities. They are always suspected of involvement in all the crimes committed in the neighbourhood, for which they are harassed by their neighbours, government officials and the local police. Thus they have to struggle hard to earn their living, as their neighbours hesitate to employ them. The social stigma and social isolation, hostile inter-community relationships, poverty, starvation and psycho-emotional stress originating from these attitudes sometimes become unbearable for the Lodha. Often they react violently against their unjust neighbours and become even more notorious. As a result violence and aggression occur between Lodha and their neighbours.

The Lodha social system is characterised by its clan organization. They have nine clan groups which they refer as *gotras*. These clans are exogamous and patrilineal in nature. Each individual by his or her birth belongs to a particular clan. While clan identity remains unchanged throughout life for men, it changes for women after marriage. Each clan has a totemic origin and the totemic objects are considered to be very sacred. Certain taboos are observed by clan members in order to pay respect to their respective totemic objects. A list of clan names together with their totemic objects is given below.

Clan Names

Totemic Objects

1. Bugta, Bhukta, Bhakta	Chirka Alu (a kind of yarn available in the forest)
2. Mallik	Makar (a kind of mythical sea monster or shark or <i>sal</i> fish)
3. Kotal	Moon or Grasshopper
4. Laik, Layak, Nayak	<i>Sal</i> fish
5. Digar	Tortoise
6. Parmanik	A bird called <i>manik</i>
7. Dandapat or Bag	Bagh (Tiger)
8. Ari, Ahari	<i>Chanda</i> fish
9. Bhuiya, Bhunia	<i>Sal</i> fish.

The family is the smallest basic social unit in the Lodha society. Most Lodha families are elementary or nuclear in type and consist of the married couple and their unmarried children. Some examples of joint and extended families, which

include old and dependent parents, unmarried married and / or divorced brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, are also found. Through conjugal infidelity, there are instances of divorce and remarriage of either of the spouses. In such cases children born in previous marriages may stay with their stepfather or stepmother. Polygyny, or a man having more than one wife, is permitted. The Lodha family is patrilineal and patriarchal in nature. Social status and family property are inherited in the male line. The father or senior male is regarded as the family head. In their hard struggle for survival, the family members act as a close-knit group helping each other and contributing their share of their day-to-day life for the well-being of the family. Children are well cared for and are brought up with love and fondness. The best food items are served to the children first. Growing children assist their parents in domestic and outdoor activities.

Junior family members always respect their superiors. Like the Hindu kinship system, joking and avoidance relationships are found among certain categories of kin. A joking relationship exists between grandparents and grandchildren, younger brother and elder brother's wife, husband and wife's sister. Therefore instances of the levirate, i.e. the younger brother marrying the widow of his deceased elder brother, and the sororate, i.e. a widower marrying the younger sister of his deceased wife, are also found. Strict avoidance is observed between an elder brother and his younger brother's wife. There is a taboo on married couples addressing each other by name, so they call each other as 'father of so and so' or 'mother of so and so'. Sometimes, the Lodha extend the sphere of relationship to friends and associates of their own community and other communities by forging ritual kinship bonds. These are based on a socio-economic relationship of give and take.

From birth to death, the life of a Lodha passes through a series of rituals at different phases of life. Ceasing of menstruation is regarded as an indication of pregnancy. A pregnant woman observes a number of taboos regarding her food, sex life and movements. Goat and fowl are sacrificed and fruits offered to the local deities to bring about a smooth delivery and the well-being of mother and child. The help of a local *dhai* or midwife is sought for facilitating the child birth. Birth pollution is observed for 21 days, during which the mother and baby remain in confinement and certain precautionary taboos and practices are observed. On the 21st day, a purificatory ritual called *ekusia* is performed. The baby is breast-fed by the mother till he or she is six months old or more. After six months the hair-cutting and rice-feeding ceremonies are held on a Tuesday, which the Lodha consider an auspicious day.

Marriage is the most significant social event in a Lodha's life. Adult marriage and marriage by negotiation are commonly practised. Marriage negotiations between the boy's side and girl's side are carried on with the help of a go-between and settled with the payment of a bride price in cash and kind.

However, the consent of the boy and girl is required before finalizing the marriage proposal.

Besides arranged marriages, instances of other types of marriages, such as child marriage, love marriage, marriage by service, marriage by exchange of sisters, *gharjamain* type of marriage, levirate, sororate, and the remarriage of widows and divorcees are also found. In case of child marriage a second marriage ceremony is performed when the girl attains puberty and then she is allowed to sleep with her husband. Levirate, sororate and widow remarriages are called *sanga* and involve no payment of bride price. However, such marriages are finalized after payment of a royalty in cash called *gram manya* to the groom's village *panchayat*, and then formal permission from the village headman is obtained. The bride in a *sanga* marriage is called *sangalibou* and her social status is inferior to that of a bride acquired in a regular arranged marriage. Lodha society allows a man to divorce his wife for reasons of infidelity, indolence and incompatibility. A woman cannot divorce her husband formally, but she can compel him to divorce her by deserting him and going to stay with her parents or lover. No ritual formalities are observed when people divorce.

The Lodha observe elaborate death rituals following Hindu traditions. The dead body is either buried or cremated. Mourning and death pollution are observed for ten days. On the tenth and eleventh days purificatory rituals are performed. The relatives and co-villagers are entertained with a feast. The annual Sradha ceremony is performed every year on the last day of the month of Chaitra to appease the ancestral spirits.

The Lodha have their own traditional village *panchayat* called *desh*. All adult male persons are members of the *panchayat*, which decides offences relating to the violation of tribal customs, norms and taboos. It can impose fines on and ostracize the offender and grant permission for *sanga* marriages. The village headman, called *mukhia* or *sardar*, presides over its meetings and gives his verdict in consultation with senior members. Everyone has to obey his verdict. The *mukhia* or *sardar* is assisted by the village messenger, the *dakua* or *athgharia*, who always comes from the Kotalclan. There are many magico-religious functionaries viz. *deheri* - the village priest, *talia* or *chharidar* - the assistant to the *deheri*, *hantakar* - the ritual sacrificer, *gunni* - the medicine man and *byakra* - the shaman in Lodha villages. The *deheri* conducts the worship of the village gods and deities and conducts all the communal rituals in the village. His post is hereditary.

The Lodha strongly believe in the unseen supernatural world. The benevolent beings are Bhagwan - the Supreme Being, Dharm Devta - the God of Righteousness, Basumata - the mother earth, Sitala - the village deity and Goddess of Epidemics and Baram or Garam - the Jungle Deity. The Tutelary Deity of the Lodha - Chandi and Yogini are worshipped as the dreaded deities. There are also various types of ghosts and evil spirits called Kundra, Chirguni, Pretasini, Daini, Kal Purus, Baghia, Gomuha, Janka, Kath, etc.

The Lodha observe a number of magico-religious rituals and festivals throughout the year to propitiate the supernatural beings to prevent misfortune. Important festivals like Sitala Puja and Chandi Puja in the month of Baisakh, Mansa Puja in Jaistha, Jathel in Sraban, Asthani Puja in Aswin, Bandana in Kartik, Laxmi Puja in Agrahayan, Natun Hanri i.e. the annual Sradha ceremony and ancestor worship in Chaitra are observed by the Lodha.

The intensity of criminality among the Lodha has been a matter of grave concern to the custodians of law and order. However, Lodha criminality is not hereditary. Their social system is very strong and has endured the test of time. There is nothing in the system to teach them criminality. During British rule an unfortunate turn took place in the history of their struggles: some changes were made under the environment of colonial administration that took some of them towards criminal activities in order to vent their frustrations and also to earn an easy livelihood. The evident cause is poverty, social neglect and maladjustment. This was the outcome of the disintegration of their social and economic moorings and prolonged exploitation, following.

Instances of organized highway robbery, murder, theft and burglary, committed by Lodha gangs mostly in the West Bengal-Orissa border areas, have made them infamous. The problem of Lodha criminality is of a psycho-emotional nature. After independence, the welfare government showed some concern to bring the Lodha into the mainstream of the population. Attempts have been made to rehabilitate them socio-economically in rehabilitation colonies. They have been provided with land, houses, agricultural inputs and alternative or subsidiary vocations to improve their lot. A micro-project called the Lodha Development Agency (LDA), which comes under the ST & SC development Department, founded in 1986, and has implemented various welfare schemes for the socio-economic development of the Lodha in Mayurbhanj District. Lodha rehabilitation colonies have been set up at Morada and Suliapada Blocks in the district. All these efforts to draw the Lodha away from their criminal activities have yet to produce satisfactory results.

THE LODHA : THEIR LIFE AND PROBLEM *

*P. K. Bhowmick*¹

Introduction

The Lodhas are considered as one of the denotified tribes of West Bengal since the revocation of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952. Prior to that, they were treated as a Criminal Tribe as they indulged in frequent crimes and as such, were clamped by a set of rigid penal rules and regulations for maintenance of law and order by the Colonial Administration. Even now, in the areas inhabited by them, all sorts of antisocial activities are generally attributed to them and in fact, some of them are still involved in crime and predatory conduct. This stigma of criminality has made them 'social isolates' which has prevented them all along to merge with the societies around. Even they are not classed in the same category with other tribal or non-tribal depressed communities of the area though they share with them the same pattern of life of below-subsistence economy. All their neighbours, including the other tribal groups hate, avoid and harass them in various ways. Thus the Lodhas constitute a distinct neglected unit of population having hydra-headed problems of life including a great deal of psycho-emotional stress originating from these.

These together have resulted into occasional inter-ethnic tensions and clashes in the past and broke down law and order altogether in this area causing much anxiety and problem to the administration. The feeling of antipathy and distrust prevailing against them among the other neighboring castes have created irreconcilable class hatred and antagonism. As a result, they

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were withdrawing themselves into a narrower shell and drifting away from the larger society around.

Though they have many traits of tribal life, these are in the process of transition now. As a matter of fact, being a problem and affected population they would naturally attract special interest of the academicians and anthropologists and provide them an interesting field of study.

In 1957, however, the Lodhas were declared as 'Scheduled Tribe' on the basis of recommendation made by the Backward Classes Commission. So in any scheme that may be drawn up for the welfare of these backward people by the State, special attention has to be given to their special and typical problems and the plans need to be made according to their needs and implemented with their participation and co-operation to obtain optimum results.

Habitat

The Western part of West Bengal is a contiguous part of Chotanagpur plateau. It spreads out along the Western border of Midnapur where the majority of the Lodhas live. Mayurbhanj district of Orissa and Singbhum district of Bihar run along the western border of the State of West Bengal. Here in the blissful environment of nature, in the midst of groves of mango, *Mahua* (*Madhuka latifolia*), the dwarf *Sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *Asan* (*Terminalia tomentosa*) trees on the wide expanse of red brittle soil of undulating rolling ridges, girdled by a chain of streams and rivulets which remain dry in summer and overflow their banks during the rains, live the Lodha a tribal group who are the subject matter of this discussion.

The jungle-covered rugged terrain of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa border is now the homeland of the Lodhas. In spite of deforestation by felling of trees over the years which has affected their tribal economy, most of the Lodhas still cling to this ecology and environment. Over population, interethnic tensions, better opportunity of employment elsewhere with an assured livelihood however have tempted some of the Lodhas to migrate into more eastward parts of the district where the landholding communities generally face acute shortage of seasonal agricultural labour and need them. Such migration, in course of time, has divided the tribe into two distinct segments, Jungle-Lodha and more or less acculturated Lodha on the basis of techno-eco system.

In the jungle area, the major ethnic group is the Santal. Along with them there are Munda, Bhumij, Kora and the Kudumi-Mahato - an aboriginal derivative and a few Orissan castes like, Karan (scribe), Khandait (warrior), Raju (cultivator), Teli (oil man) etc. In course of time, when they settled more or less permanently in the eastern region where they migrated as seasonal labourer, we find them living together with the Santal, Munda, Kora,

Mahaliand Bagel (aboriginal derivative), Bagdi, Sadgop (land holder) and the Mahishya (landholding agriculturist) and Brahman (priest) castes. A sort of feeble temporary articulation through economic symbiosis is quite discernable in the regional socio-economic structure in the places where they have settled.

Historical Background

The term 'Lodha' is derived from 'Lubdhaka' – meaning a 'trapper' or 'fowler'. There is a landholding caste in Madhya Pradesh (Russel & Hiralal : 1916) named 'Lodha' or 'Ludhi' – immigrants from the United Provinces (Uttar Pradesh) and originally belonged to Ludhiana district of the Punjab. But the present ethnographic data do not support any relationship of the Lodhas of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa region and the Lodhas of Madhya Pradesh or Uttar Pradesh. They speak a corrupt Bengali, i.e., an Indo-Aryan language (Dasgupta : 1978) so far as the phonological and morphological structures of Lodha dialect are concerned. This clearly indicates that the group has been completely assimilated into the regional Bengali culture so far as their language is concerned.

Physical affinities of the Lodhas reveal that they belong to Veddid racial group (Bhowmick : 1956) having more affinity with the wild Kharia of Dhalbhum (Roy & Roy : 1937), the Malers of Rajmahal and the Chinch of Krishna (Starker, 1954). Though this indicates some sort of common jungle-living, pre-agricultural economic background of all these communities, yet it is very difficult to assess in the present context how far it was possible for this ethnic group to migrate eastward during the proto-historical period.

Lodhas assert themselves as "Savara" a generic forest dwelling community mentioned in the Puranas and epic literature like the Ramayana. A good number of forest dwelling communities in India also feel pride in asserting them as 'Savaras'. According to the tradition of origin, the Lodhas say that they are the descendants of King Vishwabasu who once reigned over the jungle tract of the Savara country of Nilachal in Orissa. This tribal king originally possessed the idol of Lord Jagannath now installed in the famous temple at Puri. Once the king of Puri - Indradyumna was ordained in his dream by Lord Jagannath that He wanted to come from his Jungle abode and stay at Puri. Then the king sent his trusted minister – Vidyapati who was a Brahman by caste, to the jungle to bring the image of the Lord. That astute Brahman very tactfully entered into Nilachal - the Savara Country, developed love affairs with Lalita - the endearing and beautiful daughter of the Savara King-Viswabasu and with her help came to know the location of abode of the Lord. Later on, he successfully implemented the plan of stealthily taking away this image of the Lord to Puri. This is a story of the process of Brahmanization in the remote past. It is said that the Lodhas since then do not pay respect to the Brahman - but in fact they still do it. This legend has helped the Lodhas to place them in

between the tribe-caste continuum. Again, the Savaras (including the Lodhas) of this area are divided socially into four distinct groups like-

- (i) Lodha-Viswabasu group,
- (ii) Chirmar – Vyadha– Kirata-Kalaketu group,
- (iii) Sapuria- Snake charmer Savara – Jara Savara group; and
- (iv) Paniabhanga-comb manufacturer Savara group in the model of Varnashram

But no marital relation prevails among them.

From legendary sources and other evidences it becomes very clear that this tribal group has come in contact with the dominating Hindu castes from an early period. This prolonged interaction has circumstantially made them to accept many regional Hindu traits -accelerating their process of Hinduization.

Population

The Lodhas are distributed mainly in Midnapur and Hoogly districts of West Bengal, Mayurbhanj of Orissa and Singhbhum of Bihar. The 1951 census records their total population as 8,346 in West Bengal of whom 6,040 live in Midnapur and 2,066 in Hoogly. But in subsequent census reports separate enumeration of the tribe has been omitted. The authorities for the purpose of enumeration mixed up the Lodhas with the Kharia / Kheria since 1961. As a result, we get a total population of 45,096 in 1971 census. But according to the estimate of the present writer it can be said that total population of the Lodhas in the district of Midnapur alone will be around 20,000. Police Station wise the distribution of the Lodhas have been estimated by the writer in Table I. In Hoogly district of West Bengal it is about 4,000 and in Orissa their population is around 2,000 and in Bihar it is below 1,000. It is important to note here that Lodhas living in the district of Hoogly have no relationship with the Lodhas living in the Bengal-Bihar-Orissa belt. Possibly the Lodhas of Hoogly had migrated to Hoogly along with other ethnic groups as migratory agricultural labourers and subsequently settled down there permanently. On enquiry it was found that some of them went to these places to catch snakes and lizards to earn a living.

Recording of lesser population of the Lodhas during 1951 census is due to the fact that some of them identified themselves as Savaras.

There are a few Lodha concentrated villages in the district. Most of them live along with other tribes and castes in the periphery of the villages. The total Lodha families studied by the author long ago (1963) revealed that in 408 families, there are altogether 1,040 males and 967 females.

TABLE I
Approximate Lodha Population in Midnapur (Police Station wise)

Subdivision	Police-Station	Population	Total
1. Jhargram (Jungle areas)	Jhargram	5,500	10,500
	Jamboni	700	
	Binpur	800	
	Sankrail	800	
	Gopiballavpur	500	
	Nayagram	2,200	
2. Midnapur (Sadar)	Kesiari	3,000	9,500
	Narayangarh	3,200	
	Dantan	500	
	Sabang	800	
	Kharagpur	1,000	
	Kotowali	1,000	
	Keshpur		
	Pingla		
			20,000

Education

Lodhas are neither interested nor in a position to avail of the present educational facilities. As per report of the State Government, 3.3 per cent of Lodhas are literates (Das and Mukherjee: 1977). There is only one graduate and 4 persons have passed Madhyamik (Secondary) standard of whom one is reading in a college.

TABLE 2
Items of expenditure in Ashram Hostel Unit (20 Heads) per year

1. Meal charges	Per head p/m. 70/-	16,800/-
2. Misc. (Hair cutting, Kerosene, Soap etc)	Per head p/m 0.84/-	200/-
3. Sports and Games		100/-
4. Clothing	Per head (yearly)40/-	800/-
5. Medicine		100/-
6. Agricultural training		200/-
7. Cook (one)	Per month 50/-	600/-
8. Helper	Per month 30/-	360/-
9. Hostel Superintendent	Per month 100/-	1200/-

Since 1964 several Ashram Hostels meant for the education of the Lodha children attached to Basic Schools have been established of which Bidisa hostels are considered as promising. From Bidisa two boys passed Madhyamik Examination last year. In each unit of the Ashram Hostel there is provision for 20 seats, but at Bidisa in one unit there are 30 seats. In Ashram the Lodha children get various facilities at the following rates.

The Lodha children are basically reluctant to attend the schools. This is due to the less encouragement being given to them by their parents. The Lodha children roam in the jungles in search of wild fruits, small games, fishes and mollusca which they consume. Some time, a grown up boy is employed as cowboy by a caste people to look after their cattle at a nominal wage. Naturally the Lodha children are reluctant to go to schools without any encouragement from outside. The Tribal Welfare Department provided some Ashram hostels as stated above but there is no provision for purchase of papers, books and other things meant for the students reading in these schools. Even the Left Front Ministry of the State of West Bengal of which the Minister-in-Charge of Tribal Welfare is a tribe by origin, has overlooked many problems of the hostels. The Lodha children being extremely backward mainly required sympathetic encouragement and supervision of different nature along with non-formal or life-centered type of education. These are ignored by the Department of Tribal Welfare who is entrusted to do this type of work among them and as such, in most of the Ashram Hostels the authorities face tremendous difficulties to run the hostels. So results are not satisfactory. Grants are released very irregularly and always in delay. The Department never sanctioned any amount for repairing or white-washing of the Ashram hostel building to create a good environment. Even they do not provide money for periodical expenditure incurred in connection with boarding, utensils and equipment necessary for the hostel. In such a situation the organisers have to bear the expenses according to their means. So the work of education is done half-heartedly.

Samaj Sevak Sangha (Bidisa) - 2 for boys and 1 for girls

Badalpur Basic School (Sabong)-2 for boys

Bharat Sevashram Sangha (Jhargram)-1 for boys

Lodha Sevak Samaj Sangha (Chaksahapur)-1 for boys & 1 for girls (proposed)

A sum of Rs. 1,21,000 has been sanctioned for the proposed girls' hostel at Chaksahapur. But it has not yet been started. For other Ashram Hostels a sum of Rs. 20,000 per hostel for building construction has been granted.

The Lodha children have many problems. A thorough psycho-emotional adjustment is necessary to make them adjust with the changed environment and special attention should be given to their uplift and

socialisation. They sometimes flee from the hostels and it is very difficult to bring them back again. They need to be made more disciplined. But any disciplinary measure taken by the Ashram authority is strongly resented by the local guardians. It is suggested that Ashram Hostel has to accommodate and maintain the children as 75 per cent of them come from distant villages. It has been found that the Lodha children are generally in the habit of taking away of hostel properties including the rugs, utensils, shirts, clothing, etc.

At Bidisa two Balwadi Schools meant for the children belonging to age group 2-6 have been established by the West Bengal Council of Child Welfare. It has been noticed at these Balwadis, which are almost of pre-basic standard, the children are being gradually associated with the social norms and values. It is expected that these children will be able to overcome difficulties in future so far as their higher education is concerned.

Occupational Pattern

Occupation of the Lodhas varies from place to place. It has been stated earlier that the Lodhas are even now in a pre-agricultural stage of economy. In the Jungle areas they are engaged in collection of Jungle products like.

- (i) *Sal* leaves for preparing dining plates stitching these by thorns.
- (ii) *Kendu* leaves for preparing *bidi* or country cigar
- (iii) Edible roots and tubers for household consumption
- (iv) Catching of snake, lizard (Bengal monitor or *Godhi*). The Hyde is sold for cash. Snake catching is a very favourite pastime of the Lodhas.
- (v) Catching tortoise and fish from the paddy fields and silted tanks. Most of these are sold in the locality and only a little is consumed by them.
- (vi) Some of them are engaged by the Forest Department for constructing nursery beds for plants, etc.
- (vii) Earlier most of the jungle Lodhas were engaged in *tusser* cocoon rearing, but now-a-days they cannot do it due to Prohibitory Forest Laws.
- (viii) Other Lodhas collect firewood for fuel and sell these in the market.

In non-forest areas Lodhas are found to be engaged in road construction and agricultural activities on wage. But very few of them have become successful cultivators even after continuous encouragement and help from the Government or the voluntary organizations working for this tribe. Even the land given to them have not been fully cultivated. These are either sold out or given to others to cultivate and the Lodhas get 1/3rd of the output as per the share-cropping system prevailing in the locality. Through growth-centers a good number of Lodhas are found to change their occupation accepting new profession like weaving, tailoring, carpentry and mat-making (Bhowmick : 1968).

Most of the Lodhas are involved in anti-social activities like theft, burglary, dacoity, robbery, etc. In this respect they act in collusion with non-Lodha people. There are a good number of stolen property receivers who encourage them to undertake such activities. Crime records in the Police Department also corroborate the involvement of the Lodhas in such anti-social activities. It has been observed that out of a total number of 1,600 active criminals of this district, the Lodhas constitute 1/3rd. This indicates the preponderance of the Lodha criminals among the offenders.

Land Use and Ownership Pattern

It has been stated that a good number of Lodhas are landless. Only a few have cultivable land. Those who have land are also not in a position to produce other crops or vegetables except paddy. This is due to the fact that they have no bullock or agricultural implements. It has been also observed that they are not serious cultivators. They are so poor that during the agricultural operations in their own field they cannot maintain themselves on their own resources. Naturally, the alternative for them is to work as day labourer in the field of others on wage.

Very recently a few rehabilitation centers have been started for the Lodhas in which provisions have been made for purchase of land, supply of bullocks and good seeds as well as necessary agricultural implements. But these projects are not getting adequate response. In all the cases it has been observed that a typical callous mentality is prevailing among the Lodhas - they expect everything readymade. They are basically lazy and dishonest and reluctant to do any hard work. The bullocks given to them were sold out, even in many places the house-building materials, especially wooden planks and tiles, corrugated iron-sheets, etc. had been sold to outsiders for cash or kind.

For a few years especially during and after the Emergency, a good number of *Khas* (Government vested) lands have been distributed to the Lodhas including other landless people. The Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal in some places is supplying pump sets, sanctioning money for reclamation of land and purchase of other agricultural implements for the economic rehabilitation of these people in a more cautious way to ameliorate their economic problems. But the result is not satisfactory.

Social Organisation

Family is the smallest social unit among the Lodhas. A survey conducted among them revealed that out of 408 families, 278 (68.14 per cent) is of simple or elementary type in which parents and unmarried children live together. Parents with old father or divorced daughter without children numbered only 9 families i.e., 2.2 per cent. Among the Lodhas conjugal

infidelity is observed. Parents with the children of previous marriage are found and there are 18 such families i.e., 4.41 per cent. There are altogether 17 polygynous families in which two wives with their respective children live in a common house. Joint or extended type of families are 86 i.e., 21.08 per cent. Here the old father with some of his married sons along with their children lives in a common house.

So far as family size is concerned the 408 families surveyed are classified as follows:

TABLE 3
Family Size

SI No	Category of Family by Size	Number	Percentage
1.	Small sized families having 3 members or less	101	24.75
2.	Medium sized families having 4-6 members	228	55.88
3.	Large sized families having 7-9 members	63	5.44
4.	Very large families having 10 or more members	16	3.92
	Total	408	100

The Lodhasociety is patriarchal. Due to prolonged interaction with the local Hindus, they have been greatly influenced by the regional Hindu customs. Sometimes the Lodhas proclaim their own identity by calling the local castes as *Bengali Babus i.e.,* Bengali gentlemen whereas, the other tribals are considered by them as *Adibasio* aboriginals. Naturally they perceive their social position is in between the castes and the tribes. The Lodhas have a clan organisation which is known as *Gotra*. This is a patrilineal unit. A man born in a particular *Gotra* will remain its member till he dies. Girls after marriage change their clans and they are known by the clans of their husbands. After divorce a woman again reverts to her father's clan till she remarries. Table 4 gives the details of clan characteristics as well as distribution of families by clans. Marriage in the same clan is strictly prohibited. There are a few taboos and restrictions in respect of food habit and other conventional observation in respect of some clans.

The totemic objects are respected and never consumed by the clan members in Lodha society even if it constitutes an unavoidable food item. But a detailed analysis of Lodha clan names tells different story. Most of the Lodhas especially in acculturated zones use their clan names as surnames, whereas the Lodhas in the jungle areas use "Savar" or "Sabar" to express their personal identity without mentioning their clan names as surnames. A few clan names have special significance identifying them with the greater regional setting. These are Kotal, Digar, Dandapat, Nayek or Layek etc. associating the group with a specific type of work or assignment.

TABLE 4

Distribution of Clans (Head of the family has been considered)

Clan name	Totemic objects	No. of families	Percentage
1. Bhugta, Bhakta	Chirka Alu, a kind of yam available in the jungle.	120	29.41
2. Mallik	Maker, a kind of mythological shark or sea-monster or <i>sal</i> fish.	78	19.11
3. Kotal	Moon or grass-hopper	68	16.66
4. Layek, Laik, Nayek	Sal fish (<i>Ophicaphalus marulius</i>)	67	16.41
5. Digar	Porpoise	21	5.14
6. Paramanik	A kind of bird named Manik	20	4.95
7. Dandapat or Bag	Bagh or tiger	10	2.45
8. Ari or Ahari	Chanda-Fish (<i>Ambasisis range</i>)	19	4.65
9. Bhuiya or	Sal fish (<i>Ophicaphalus marulius</i>)	3	4.00

Marriage by payment of bride-price is the general rule among the Lodhas. The bridegroom has to pay a sum of Rs. 7 (seven) only at the time of marriage to the parents of the bride along with some clothes for the bride and her parents. When a girl is married in her 'teen age' a second marriage ceremony is performed in such cases. The chief conductor of marriage is termed as Sambar. No Brahmin priest participates in Lodha marriage ceremony. Mother Earth (Basumati), the God of Righteousness (Dharam Devata) are also worshipped at the time of wedding. A wedding feast is given on the day of marriage to which all the traditional village officials including the relatives are invited. Remarriage of widows and divorced women is in vogue and this is known as *Sanga*. In such marriage no bride-price is paid. Only a sum of Rs.1.25 paise is given to the guardian of the widow or the divorced woman by the prospective groom.

Though they are Hinduised to a large extent, they still worship some of their traditional deities like the Baram (village tutelary deity), Chandi and Sitala. Animals like goat, sheep, and cock are sacrificed to appease them by the village priest (Deheri) or his assistant (Talia). No Brahmin priest participates in their religious ceremonies.

Political Organization

The Lodhas have their traditional tribal council known as Panchayat or Desh. The head of the council is called *Mukhia* who in all the tribal customary affairs gives his verdict which everybody has to obey without demur. There is a village messenger called *Atghoria* or *Dakua*. His main duty is to intimate the villagers about the decisions and directives of the village Panchayat. In this traditional council, personal disputes of the village and the general problems of the village administrations including the annual worships and celebrations are discussed. The religious head of the community is known as *Deheri* and the Assistant priest is known as *Talia* who sacrifices the animal. There are also other important persons in the village who are members of the tribal councils.

After the introduction of the Panchayat Raj a good number of the Lodhas are being gradually associated with village administration. A few of them have affiliated themselves with some political parties of the locality and contested the last election in which the CPI and CPI (M) candidates won. Naturally, this gave them the opportunity of mixing with other sections of the people, thus bridging up the hiatus prevailing so long among these communities. Such political involvements have created more tension and factions in a few villages on the basis of party ideologies. Thus in many cases the village or tribal solidarity or communal integrity has been threatened.

Social Problems

The problems of the Lodhas are strikingly different from those of other tribes and castes. They are commonly stigmatised with the commission of dacoity, burglary, pilferage and theft. Active Lodha criminals constitute one-third of the active criminals in the Midnapur district. This clearly indicates the nature of criminal propensity of the Lodhas. There was no scientific attempt on the part of the administration to ascertain why the Lodhas became criminal-minded and what are the socio-economic factors that dragged them to the path of criminality. Even after the repeal of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1952 and some welfare attempts made by the Government to improve their living condition, the Lodhas have not responded adequately. Naturally, we have to probe into the causes and explain the realistic situations more critically and scientifically that have generated such aversion.

To do this, we have to go back 200 years when the Lodhas used to live in the jungle with their jungle based food gathering, self content economy. They were not threatened by population explosion nor did the other communities encroach into their homeland with a different economy - the economy of agriculture, causing more crises by denuding the forest. At the same time, the ownership of the forest was changed. The East India Company took over the administration of Midnapur as well as the *Jungle-Muhal*, the

habitat of the Lodhas. With this they faced an intriguing situation.

Of course, all over the world, different groups of aboriginals are facing some sort of crisis or other because of changes in the broader ecological and socio-cultural systems. The question of integrating these groups with the wider community life now confronts the more advanced and privileged groups of people and administration in every country. However, at that time nobody thought of the problems of the Lodhas sympathetically and scientifically. When permanent land settlement was introduced in Bengal, the Zamindars or Kings became the Lord of the jungle—the home of the Lodhas where they used to get their food, shelter and other things. They were prevented to enter into the forest or touse it indiscriminately for their livelihood. On the other hand, the agricultural communities like the Santals, the Mundas, the Bhumijas, and the Mahatos, gradually encroached into the forests and brought the lands under cultivation although any sort of entrance into such forests was declared punishable offence by the Colonial Administration.

By a trick of law they were dispossessed of their forest abodes and deprived of their hold and dependency on the forest. Thus, the economically displaced Lodhas could not adapt themselves to the changing situations immediately and some of them began to migrate to different parts of the district in search of jobs and employments for survival. The growing needs of the expanding families could not be met with a hewer's income. Faced with this compelling situation, the Lodhas had to accept the challenge of survival and resorted to anti-social activities as a convenient means of livelihood.

"The economic and territorial displacement under a new setting with the impact of scheming communities all around, affected very seriously their traditional patterns of economic life and ultimately upset the equilibrium of the whole society. Probably under such circumstances, pilfering, petty theft, lifting of articles from the houses of the neighbours and clandestine sale of jungle produce were first resorted individually which, in course of time, developed into group activities. Amidst poverty, unsympathetic attitude of the neighbours and stoic apathy of the then Government, criminality cut a deep gorge into their society in which the people had to roll down helplessly". (Bhowmick, 1963).

Mr. Stephen, the then Member of Law and Order of British India introduced the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871. His remarks in this connection are very significant. He recorded; "The special feature of India is the caste system. As trade goes by caste, a family of carpenters will be carpenters, a century or five centuries hence, if they last so long. Keeping this in mind the meaning of professional criminal is clear. It means that a tribe whose ancestors were criminals from times immemorial, who are themselves destined by the usages of caste to commit crimes and whose descendants will be offenders against law

until the whole tribe is exterminated or accounted for the manner of the Thugs. When a man tells you that he is an offender against law, he has been so from the beginning and will be so to the end, reform is impossible for it is his trade, his caste. I may almost say, his religion is to commit crime".

This view was also shared by many Indians. Ultimately, the Criminal Tribes Act was passed for suppression of such crimes and applied all over British India. As a result, more than 300 communities were declared as Criminal Tribes.

Gradually the Lodhas faced many other social and economic problems with the march of time. They were affected very seriously. Their problems were of the following nature : –

- (i) Economic and territorial displacements i.e. loss of livelihood which caused loss of self-confidence.
- (ii) Being not specialized in any profession, they could not fit themselves into the existing greater economic structure.
- (iii) Stigma of criminality lowered their social status and prestige in society.
- (iv) Subsequent Police oppression, punishment and torture completely loosened their group cohesion and solidarity.
- (v) Arrest and confinement in jail, completely shattered familial bondage and relations, generating atomized or individualistic mentality.
- (vi) Poverty exposed them to exploitation by others and made them surrender to many undesirable situations.
- (vii) Being compelled to sell the stolen properties to others at a nominal price and thus being cheated, they came to think that the non-Lodha people are dishonest and tyrannical. This made them suspicious and revengeful.
- (viii) Infants reared without care and less affection from the parents became hostile to others when they attained maturity. This generated certain peculiar bendings and angularities in their mind, retarded socialisation and made them indisciplined,
- (ix) Chronic poverty and low aspiration level in the zeal and enthusiasm of these people and developed constraints in their culture, making them lazy and lethargic. This also made them unresponsive to any sort of change or innovation.
- (x) Constant police torture and exploitation by the neighbours made them migratory, their homes being less attractive to them. Thus they began to lose the sense of belongingness.

These made them isolated and recoil into the shell of their old traditions. Also these developed in them coyness, timidity and imbued their mind with fear and distrust. Thus circumstanced, the Lodhas having no rudimentary education, no skill in crafts or arts, no land in their possession and

no fixed employment were compelled to live below the poverty line and indulged in spurts of anti-social activities whenever hunger provoked them to go against the society and the law of the land.

It is observed from the patterns of human living that every group or community has its own intrinsic problems. The problems vary from place to place and time to time on the basis of the nature of their exposure to the external situations and interactions. Naturally, to pin-point these problems we have to consider the ecology of the area, as well as their ethnic identity and culture. The problems of a community having pre-agricultural stage of economy, rather very rudimentary agrarian economy, pose different problems to the administrations and the social scientists who are interested and engaged in the schemes of development and welfare of the down trodden communities. So an omnibus blue-print for welfare for all the tribal communities cannot be made and cannot be applicable in all cases.

Though attempts were made by the Government along with a few voluntary organisations for the welfare of these communities for sometimes past, yet from experience it can be said that these have either totally failed or have not produced satisfactory results. The basic problems of the Lodhas, according to close observation by the author are the following and have to be solved for their proper uplift: -

1. Problem people – Besides having the common acute problems of living, they have a bunch of psycho-emotional problems. Chronic social neglect by the greater society has dwarfed their mind and abilities. Laziness, reluctance to do any hard labour and restlessness have made them a typical parasitic stock. Through rehabilitation, they demand and dream of immediate solution of all their problems like the 'shock therapy'. As these are beyond reality, being a long-term process they have become restive and frustrated and go on campaigning against the organisations or the Government attempting their rehabilitation. So due to this psychological freak, these problematic people should have to be treated very carefully. Otherwise they will become antagonistic and non-co-operative and the work of their rehabilitation will become more difficult.

2. Problem neighbour – Their neighbours are also very problematic. A good number of the people of the locality have forged clandestine economic deals with them and buy from them the stolen articles at very cheap rates, and also employ them for agricultural work on minimum wages. Thus exploiting them in various ways, they derive a good deal of benefit. But strangely enough the Lodhas, on the other hand, consider this relationship as friendly and desirable. The former group does not want rehabilitation of the Lodhas as it will deprive them from making huge profits by sale of the stolen goods which they buy at

very nominal costs, as also in that case, they will not get cheap labour by the usual tactics of threatening them of divulging their crime and getting them arrested by the police. Naturally, the neighbours who get cheap labour from them are not at all interested in their proper rehabilitation. They tell the Lodhas that the real motive of these Welfare Schemes is an attempt to break their tradition and economy and make them subservient to the Government, so they become suspicious of the welfare agencies and the Government which implements such schemes. Besides, as only a few people are getting the benefit of these schemes, the rest feel naturally deprived and discontented and keep apart. To get their full co-operation, therefore, this false notion has to be dispelled and the rehabilitation schemes should have larger coverage.

3. Problem Administration – The administration sometimes creates more problems either by failing to understand the situation in reality or to implement the schemes meaningfully to cater to their needs. Even in many cases the basic problems are not properly understood by the officials. Most of the Welfare Projects undertaken so far have failed due to such misunderstanding. For example, the State Government spent a sum of Rs. 1, 23,840.00 for assisting the Lodhas of Narayangarh and Nayagram by giving them plough cattle and mud-built residential huts during 1970-71 and 1971-72. This has failed due to lack of proper planning and supervision. The bullocks and the house building materials were sold out by them. Similarly, though a huge sum has been spent for the Lodha project, it has also turned into a failure for the same reasons. So the administrative machinery implementing the Tribal Welfare Schemes should be very careful, cautious and active in future. It has been found that the local authorities regularly send 'Utilisation Certificates' for proper use of the money sanctioned for such schemes to the government. But the benefits that accrued to the people were quite nominal and disproportionate. It indicates that there had been a good deal of misspending and bad planning. These lapses have to be guarded against, in future.

Major Economic Potentials of the Region

The physio-geography of the region especially where the Lodhas live is significant. Two regions can be well demarcated in this expansive tract. One is forest or jungle covered rugged terrain with less communication facilities and another more or less acculturated region where the Lodhas live in a comparatively dispersed as well as isolated condition. Mainly the ecological conditions and their allied contributions are responsible for the unexpected backwardness of the tribal people and the region. The local techno-eco system is interlaced with the life style of these people.

It has been stated earlier that the land of the Lodhas are a continuity of the Chotanagpur plateau. The climate here is hot with long severe summer and draught is the main feature of this area. The average annual rainfall is within

65 inches. The soil is mostly sandy-loam and reddish brown with occasional lateritic outcrops here and there. Due to undulations, a patch of land between two table lands generally happens to be fertile, but such lands are not under the possession of any tribal group. The table-land known as *Dahi* or high-land is completely unfit for agricultural operations. Besides, in the jungle area, these are covered with trees of various types like *Sal*, *Mahua*, *Asan* etc. Strikingly the Lodhas in deforested areas have the advantage of better topography and irrigational facilities. But the Lodhas, in almost all the regions are landless. Very little land is found to be under their possession. A few Lodhas had however their own lands earlier. But in course of time these lands have been alienated to others. Though through rehabilitation projects and by distributing *Khas* land to the landless tribals during these days, some of them have been provided a piece of lands, but it cannot be utilised by them properly as they do not know the good techniques of cultivation. Besides, the other causes are :—

(i) Bad location of the land which lacks irrigation facilities.

(ii) They have no aptitude for agriculture. Agriculture requires a constant watch and hard labour from start to finish and agricultural cycle requires sufficient time to yield the crops. These people cannot wait so long without earning otherwise due to their extremely impoverished condition. So they leave their lands uncultivated and prefer to work as day labourers by which they can earn every day. So agricultural incentive given to them is not found fruitful at all.

(iii) Lack of plough, cattle and other implements - This being the case, man-power seems to be the only resources which has to be properly utilized for uplift and gainful employment of the Lodhas. This can be done in the following manner:

In the jungle areas a few plans specially forest based projects should be introduced by the Government for collection of *tussar* cocoon, poultry farming, goat-rearing, road construction etc., in which Lodhas will be self-employed and earn their living. The primary investment, in all cases will have to be made by the Government.

Problems of Development

During the Second Plan Period, a few model colonies have been set up by the Government in the Lodha and tribal inhabited areas. These include:

(1) Auligeria-Jharamrun under the supervision of Harijan Sevak Sangha. The Gandhian leader late Prof. P. R. Seri took charge of this scheme along with some social workers. Though this project is maintained by the Education Department by sanctioning annual grant to the schools there (Pre-Basic to Senior Basic i.e., Class VII), but no hostel has been provided for the tribal

students. The economic development of the project is almost a failure.

(2) Dholkat-Pukuria (Jhargram) Rehabilitation Colony under the supervision of Bharat Sevashram Sangha—a religious institution is however, doing very sincere work. They are also running school up to Class VIII standard and have constructed one Ashram Hostel for the Lodha boys. The project is not progressing well mainly for lack of funds though very sincere attempts are being made by the organisers. Up till now no student has attained the Madhyamik Standard, but a few Lodha young men of this centre are getting training through Block Office in carpentry and fitting.

(3) The Harijan Seva Kendra at Kukai (Kesiari P.S.) under the supervision of a Sarvodaya worker has however flourished. A grain *gola* has been established there for serving the Lodhas as well as other tribals. This is giving good service. The then Director of Tribal Welfare Department suggested personal allocation of land under individual title from the purchased land of the Government. By this they received some land. But the Lodhas are not in a position to cultivate their own land both for lack of money and training. Though they have not sold out these lands but some have been left uncultivated and some made over to others for cultivation for an agreed share of crops or a little money. Thus the scheme is not functioning well now. There is a primary school near the village. But up till now not a single boy of this village has passed the Madhyamik standard. With the departure of the social worker on other assignment, local politics and factions among the villagers have spoiled the whole project.

(4) Dhansole (Lalgarh) Rehabilitation Project - It is a jungle-based village. Sufficient quantity of agricultural land has been purchased and distributed to the Lodhas and these are now cultivated by them. A model colony has also been set up there. But due to flood and cyclone it is now in a ramshackle condition. But the Lodhas here are getting employment from the Forest Department and regularly cultivating their lands. But no school has been set up here to educate the Lodhas.

(5) Daharpur Lodha Rehabilitation Project or Bidisa Project: (Narayangarh) P. S.—For this scheme initially Rs. 1,500/- per family was spent for the rehabilitation of 39 families. More emphasis was given on land purchase, and not on construction of houses. Every beneficiary family got about an acre of good cultivable land. The plough and cattle were given to the Lodhas. Even the co-operative which was started for them is now defunct. The incorrigible criminal Lodhas are in league with the local interested persons and are attempting to flounder this development project. To counter their heinous plan, the organizer has started immediately Ashram Hostels where the Lodha children have been brought to a different surrounding to isolate them from the

criminals-where they now stay in a quite different and healthy environment along with many other tribal and caste children. The children are given vocational training in agriculture, bee-keeping, pisciculture, dairy, carpentry, weaving and tailoring. Thus an arrangement has been made to transplant a middleclass norm which may attract others. Even dropouts are employed in a Press and Printing Project (Training-cum-Production) set up here and thus they are gradually being acculturated with the general social norms and greater economic spectrum.

(6) The Debra-Chaksahapur Lodha Rehabilitation Project under the initiative of a Lodha young man encouraged by some anthropologists and Government officials was started with enthusiasm. But local politics and lack of experience have stunted its growth and it is almost in a decaying condition now. A case has already been instituted by the Government against the organiser directing him to handover the charge as well as the assets. He has done so in the meantime. There is one Ashram Hostel for the boys here. Funds have been sanctioned for construction of another Ashram Hostel for the girls here. But it has yet to be established.

(7) Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology started one economic rehabilitation centre at Chhotojhaur under the police station of Gopiballavpur. No Government Grant has been sanctioned for the same.

For a few successive years tension between the Lodha and non-Lodha communities in this area is continuing. In 1959 there was a riot at Dhansol between the Mahatos and the Lodhas. Again in 1960 Santals, Mahatos and others declared '*gira*'—traditional attack on the Lodhas when a few of them were killed and a good number of Lodha villages were set on fire. Again in September 1969 the Santals declared '*gira*' by tying a knot on the bark of a branch of a Sal tree giving intimation of the date and time of attack to the Lodhas. The other caste groups also declared *gira* against them by beating of drum - making attack on a large-scale. As a result more than twenty persons were killed in broad day light. Thus a tension was created and it is yet to be resolved. The Government immediately sanctioned more than Rs. 6 lakhs for their relief and resettlement but no work has yet been started except the relief.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion it can be said that the attempts made for rehabilitation of the Lodhas during these years by the Government either directly or through the voluntary organisations are not at all satisfactory and the schemes have flopped due to bad planning. Naturally, a thorough probe into this matter is necessary and the opinion of the experts should be taken. The hostility created so long between the Lodha and the non-Lodha communities has widened so much that the administration has to take serious steps in this

matter to maintain law and order in the area. Periodical breakout of these riots could not be checked simply by sanctioning money for the projects meant for the Lodhas or by providing them relief after the riots without removing the causes of tension. The way how these groups are interlaced with the particular ethno-ecological system should be examined more carefully to find out their basic problems and remedies thereof. We would then perhaps find out the clue to the riddle why these groups fail to respond quickly and favourably to the facilities of integrating themselves with the wider social life, which may appear to us to be 'obviously advantageous' for them.

"We should try to examine the impact of the efforts at changing their ways of life as made through the rehabilitation schemes and welfare activities for these groups. We shall then and then only be able to locate where the shoe pinches. Here in lies the role of the applied anthropologists and action anthropologists. Being free from prejudice which affects the laymen and sometimes the administrators, we should view the case from a scientific angle which should be at the same time humane. (Bhowmick: 1976).

We must note the nature of relationship among three segments of the society: the neglected communities or ethnic groups, the advanced ethnic groups and the government administration for the sake of proper estimate and planning.

It has been observed that no follow-up scheme in any case is pursued by the Government which is very essential for achieving the desired results. Once money has been spent the authorities in most cases try to wind up the project without proper assessment of the whole situation. By experience everybody can learn. Even the Government does not pay attention to the thinking and suggestions of the experts. All the time, political views are reflected through Welfare Projects which, in most of the cases, are not rational or scientific at all. It is the duty of the Government therefore to make an endeavour to bridge up the mutual gap between one ethnic group and another. "But the task of promotion of inter-ethnic harmony can never be accomplished by the Government alone. The wider society must be aware of the necessity of such harmony. The advanced ethnic groups must free themselves from the prejudices and angularities they have developed towards the backward communities. For this reason a scientific outlook must be developed which would emerge from more intensive work of the applied anthropologists and action anthropologists for the tribal-folk in future. This however necessitates greater co-ordination between the planners and the action anthropologists and the follow-up measures to assess the working programmes." (Bhowmick: 1976).

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LODHA *

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Introduction

The Lodha, an identified Primitive Tribal Group of Orissa, were a denotified tribal community, who claim their ancestry to the Savar tribe of the state. Notorious for their criminal propensity, this tribe was formerly notified as a criminal tribe during British regime. History indicates that because of their anti-social behavior and unacceptable profession, they were persecuted and looked down with suspicion and aversion in their respective areas of habitation.

In fact, the background of the Lodha being identified as felony prone dates back to British era when under a Govt. Notification. No- 7022-23, dated 20th May, 1916, Calcutta the tribe was declared as Criminal Tribe. Accordingly, on 8th Sept 1916 a crime register was opened to make an entry of crimes committed by the Lodha. By a further amendment it was applied to whole of British India in 1924. Later on in another notification 'Memo No-1560-61, dated 16th March, 1928 it was laid down that, "any Lodha on his first conviction under non-bailable offences and under section 109/110 of the Criminal Procedure Code, should be treated as a registered member under the Criminal Tribes Act."

This incriminatory law was eventually repealed in 1952, and as per a new law in independent India the Lodha become equal with every other citizen of India. Nonetheless, the stigma remained as the people, administration as well as the police had their doubts about this tribal group. Even today, one-time procedures adopted by the Britishers that "once a criminal, always a criminal" holds strong and the perception on the tribe as law-breakers is deeply set in the minds of the people.

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It is unfortunate that social distancing and suspicious eyes of neighbouring ethno-cultural groups have led to the Lodha being pushed into helpless conditions. Of course attempts have been made by the government to redress the situation by declaring them as a Primitive Tribal Group. A micro project has been set up for their socio-economic development and welfare. Attempts have been made at different fora to provide them with adequate means for making them acceptable to others. Further, efforts have also been made to develop inter-community relationship between the Lodha and other close groups with a view to integrate them into the general fabric.

In terms of numbers, population of Lodha in Orissa as per 2001 census is 7458 (3650 Males and 3808 Females). Their main hamlets are in Sulipada and Morada C. D. Blocks. Others regions having the Lodha population are in Baripada, Bada Sahi, Khunta, Udala and Kaptipada C.D. Blocks of Mayurbhanj district. Outside the state Lodha are also found in West Bengal and Jharkhand.

In Orissa the Lodha live with other tribal communities, such as the Santal, Munda, Bhumij, Kolha, Mahali, Bathudi, Mankidia, Khadia, and other caste groups like Brahman, Khandayat, Teli, Gudia, Kamar, Dhoba, Tanti, Mahato, Gauda etc.

In general, their settlements are very close to forests having adequate supply of water throughout the year. It is observed that the Lodha do not mind living in multi-caste and multi-tribal villages yet they mostly end up setting abode amongst their own in isolation from other communities. Thus, it is not unusual to see the Lodha hamlets inside dense forests in inaccessible areas.

The Lodha speak a mixture of corrupt Oriya, Mundari and Bengali. Their physique is very strong, robust and torso, muscular. The skin colour is brown to light brown and height is medium. The main perennial rivers in their area are the Khaira, Mahanti, Jambhira and Bhudhabalanga. Rivulets like Pal and Gumphra are the most popular. Their forest is very rich in Sal, Mahul, Piasala, Kendu, Asana, Harida, Char, Bamboo and varieties of herbal plants which are most useful in one way or other in their day to day life.

Settlements Pattern and House type

The Lodha prefer to construct their homes in villages inhabited by own men. Their settlements have got no definite ground plan. The hamlets located in plain areas are found to have some access to infrastructural facilities like dug-wells, tube-wells, schools, G.P. Headquarters, Police Station, P.H.C. and the like. However, In case of villages in forest and hilly belts, these are largely devoid of any amenities and infrastructure is at a very low level.

In every village there are community level landmarks, where their deities Chandi and Sitala are enshrined under a tree located a little away from

the main habitat. This tree is usually in a virgin grove, or sometimes it is a huge one with extensive branches, situated very close to the village.

High in the social hierarchy of the Lodha is the “Dehuri”, a religious head with magical powers. The “Dehuri” has the honour of conducting rituals for community level festivals and ceremonies. He is privileged with a very small pavilion in the back-side of his house that is encircled by bamboo splits. A thatched hut is also constructed beside this structure where, Gunias impart training to their disciples in the matter relating to gods and goddesses, benevolent and malevolent deities and spirits. At the end of the village are installed earthen horse and elephant representing important village deities. The villagers organize their traditional council meetings underneath a tree or a grove according to its feasibility.

All the Lodhas irrespective of their socio-economic status go to the forest in different seasons to collect varieties of edibles and minor forest produce. Every village has a suitable place for dance on different occasions and a playground boys and girls. The cremation ground is earmarked in a bushy jungle area located a little away from the village settlements.

The houses in a typical Lodha settlement are clustered in two rows in an irregular fashion. Houses in all traditional villages are situated in a dispersed manner. Thatched with mud walls they are made of locally available materials. The living area is usually constructed in a rectangular ground plan. The walls are made of tree branches or bamboo poles placed vertically and plastered with a mixture of mud and cow-dung. They use Sal poles as pillars and frame work of the house roof is made by wooden poles and bamboo splits. Houses are usually thatched with straw but lately the preference is for ‘Khappar’, a type of locally made burnt clay tile.

Traditionally Lodha homes have no window. Door openings are narrow, although they have bamboo shutters that can be closed. Each house has just a single room that is used for all purposes. In other words, for domestic purposes - from birth of a child, propitiation of the ancestral spirits, cooking or sleeping to storing household materials etc. Lately trends have changed so houses have more than two rooms. Rooms are sufficiently wide having windows, doors and shutters. The families have an attached kitchen garden including a small courtyard, fenced with bamboo poles.

As for livestock, previously there were no sheds for cattle and goats rather; they were kept in one side verandah. Mostly costly items are kept inside the house and the agricultural implements are kept in front verandah. The verandah is spacious at times where different activities of the family are carried on. The women remain busy in the courtyard for preparing leaf cups and leaf plates and ropes out of *sabai* grass.

Old houses of the Lodha require periodical maintenance. They change or repair thatched roof each year. Sometimes it may be done in the following year unfaithfully. They also replace bamboo and wooden beams and poles according to necessity. Similarly, the mud walls are patched and plastered with cow-dung and earth to keep it strong and durable.

The government has also been providing houses to the Lodha, that are fire proof and having facility of windows for ventilation. These are Khappar thatched, safe and durable. Some of the Lodha are skilled in carpentry. They make beautifully carved shutters which attract attention of outsiders.

Economic Life

In the recent past settled cultivation was said to be their main source of livelihood and they also depended on forest produce. But, depletion of forest and alienation of land have compelled the Lodha to involve themselves in all sorts of anti-social activities. They are allegedly involved in robbery, theft and dacoity. Whenever any case of robbery is reported to the police, many of them are suspected, harassed and arrested without considering their real involvement.

A few Lodhas practice cultivation in their own land and in the lands of their neighbours. But wage earning is limited to the requirement of the local cultivators who need the help of more outsiders as labourers at the time of transplanting and weeding. Sometimes, they work as labourers in developmental works of the government.

They usually make Sabai ropes which have a good market. Collection of *tassar* cocoons and sale of firewood is also another avenue of supplementing their meager income. At present, the main occupation of the majority of the households is cultivation and forest collection which are occasionally supplemented by wage earning.

Lodha females are more hard working than their male counterparts. Males generally take care of their children, collect fuel-wood, graze the cattle, harvest paddy, sometimes cook food and collect *tassar* cocoons, plough fields and work as labourers in road construction. They also do carpentry as well as perform agricultural operations such as transplantation, weeding, harvesting, carrying, threshing; stacking etc. Females perform almost all the works stated above except ploughing.

Sale of fuel wood is one of their important economic pursuit. They have bows and arrows and different varieties of traps and snares for catching and hunting game animals. Catching fish is their hobby and they use basket traps and hand nets for fishing. Catching of tortoise is another important and interesting pursuit.

Previously the Lodha were practicing shifting cultivation but they have abandoned it in favour of settled agriculture. Some of the Lodha have wet lands for paddy cultivation and few of them practice share cropping. It is noticed that some of the neighbouring non-Lodhas have forcibly occupied the land belonging to the Lodhas. Paddy is the main item of production but the cultivation of Sabai grass is found to be the most profitable. The Lodha have great fascination for cattle wealth and domestication of animals. Usually they domesticate cows, bullocks, goats and raise poultry. These animals are mainly kept for ceremonial sacrifices and for their own consumption.

Since time immemorial Lodha were associated with breeding and collection of tassar cocoons. But at present, due to deforestation they are deprived of this profitable occupation. Now-a-days *tassar* cocoons are collected only by a few Lodha families who rear the cocoons in small forest patches and sell the cocoons to the traders. Generally the virgin forest of Asan (*Terminalia tomentosa*) and Sal (*Shorea robusta*) trees are preferred for multiplication and rearing of *tassar* cocoons. During summer a patch of jungle is cleared and a watch hut is built with twigs or branches of a particular tree (*Semicarpus anacardium*). According to the Lodha this particular tree is believed to have some magical powers to counteract the evil eyes of a Sorcerer, who may destroy *tassar* moths at its embryonic stage. In the hut a new earthen ware pot is kept for storing cocoons. Generally in the month of June, *tassar* moths come out of the cocoon and mate with each other. Then they lay eggs which are spread profusely on Asan and Sal trees. Later the eggs hatch into cocoons on the leaves of nursery trees. These cocoons are collected and boiled in order to kill the insect inside it. It is then sold to the traders. According to the people, this particular economic pursuit is a paying enterprise but the Lodha being ignorant of the value of the trees are indiscriminately cutting and felling trees thereby losing much. They are also interested in carpentry.

Though physically robust and healthy, the Lodha are not very industrious and painstaking. So unemployment among the youths is one of the major factors which stimulate their involvement in anti-social activities and to practice dacoity, robbery and theft.

Their economic pursuit is directly linked with their forest economy, agricultural cycle and various other sources like wage earning, leaf, plate making and preparation of Sabai-grass ropes. In the harvest season Lodha get adequate food materials because of sufficient availability and cheaper rates. Many of them are also employed in harvesting operations. They get their wages both in cash and kind. During the summer months they collect jungle produce and catch tortoise and snakes which are available in plenty at that time. Autumn is a lean period when they depend mainly on forest for their day to day livelihood.

Major part of their earnings is spent towards purchase of daily food items followed by dress and ornaments and house maintenance. Very often they

manage with the minimum quantity of food. Their standard of living and the nature of food consumed by them vary from family to family. Edible roots and tubers are gathered in sufficient quantities and consumed as supplementary food. Major part of their cash earnings are spent in purchasing rice beer (*handia*).

Their food mainly consists of rice, pulses, potatoes, brinjal, fish, meat, eggs, tubers, roots, and leaves. During summer their food is supplemented with mango, Mahua and tamarind. Generally the Lodha take two meals a day. Seasonal variations in food habits are markedly noticed and August, September and October which are said to be lean months.

As regards their clothing males use *dhotis*, vests and shirts and females wear sarees, blouses and skirts. Young boys and girls up to about seven years of age go without any dress. Old Lodhas are dressed with a small piece of loin cloth tied to a cord around the waist at both the ends. All the cloths are purchased from the local markets. They cannot afford to purchase winter clothing and small wooden logs are kept burning inside the hut during the winter.

Expenditure on education is found to be very low. Their cooking implements mainly consist of a few earthen ware vessels, iron pans, aluminum utensils and plates. Their musical instruments consist of "Changu" (tambourine) and 'Madal'. These instruments are regarded as property of the individual family. Women folk use bangles or necklace made of glass beads. Gold and silver ornaments are rarely used.

Social Life

The clan organization is an important feature of Lodha society. Each clan or 'gotra' is patrilineal having a totem and the totemic animals/objects associated are held to be sacred. Marriage within the same clan is prohibited. After marriage girls are initiated into their husband's clan. There are nine clans among the Lodha viz: (1) Bugta, Bhukta, (2) Mallik, (3) Kotal, (4) Nayak or Laik or Layam, (5) Digar, (6) Parmanik, (7) Dandapat, (8) Aris Ahari, (9) Bhuya or Bhunia. Bugta, Bhukta or Bag clan names are found in almost all the villages. Members of this clan believe that 'Chirka Alu' - a kind of wild yam is their totem. Members of this clan do not consume or collect this particular variety of yam. The clan is divided into two sub-clans and within which marriage is prohibited. Malliks are distributed in almost all the villages except a few. The clan members have adopted Makar, a kind of shark as their totem. People belonging to Kotal clan have adopted moon or grasshopper as their totem. When the moon disappears during 'Amabasya', members of the Kotal clan go into ceremonial pollution. Kotals enjoy higher status in the Lodha society.

Nayak literally means leaders, connotes a country soldier. Members belonging to Nayak clan consider Sal fish as their totem. Parmanik clan has chosen 'Manik - and a kind of large bird as their totem. The members of the

Digar clan have adopted tortoise as their totem. They never touch or injure a tortoise. Dandapata clan considers tiger as their totem. The members of the Ahiri gotra have a kind of fish as their totem which is flat and circular in shape and silvery white in colour known as Chanda fish. Bhuiya clan people consider Sal fish as their totem.

According to the size of the family and their economic cooperation Lodha families may be grouped into two types i.e. nuclear and extended. Lodha families are patrilineal, partilocal and patriarchal. Father is the head of the family who manages the family affairs. He allots specific duties and responsibilities to the individual member in consultation with all grown up members. After death of the father, the mother or the eldest brother manages the family affairs. The paternal uncle is respected and his advices are sought in many social and economic matters. In case of death, near and distant relatives are informed. Co-villagers also participate in the funeral rites but only blood relatives attend the purificatory ceremony.

Grown up boys and girls help their parents in domestic as well as outdoor works. A son is usually preferred to a daughter. The mother keeps constant watch over the movements and chastity of her daughter. Role of females is relatively more important than the males in domestic affairs. Lodha wives are expert in disposing of the theft materials. They go for wages to support the household economy. Wives strongly support even the misdeeds of their husbands. In the absence of the husband for a longer period especially when they are in jail, the wives generally take responsibility to manage the household.

Village is regarded as an important social unit with territorial boundary. The families of different clans extend mutual help in different socio-religious and economic activities. Lodha boys marry usually at the age of 20 to 25 years and girls marry between the ages of 16 to 20 years. Role of the mediator in marriage negotiation is found to be very important. The bride price usually consists of three cloths, a saree for the mother of the bride, a *dhoti* for the maternal uncle and a *dhoti* for the eldest brother-in-law. Apart from these items, some cash is also paid as bride price. The bride price is received by the mother of the bride. The wedding ceremony consists of a series of rituals. Unfaithful, idle and barren wives are usually divorced. Divorce is freely practiced. A widower can remarry without any problem.

Magico-religious Life

Magico-religious life of the Lodha is associated with several ceremonies. The Dehuri is the priest of the village. He presides over all ritual functions held in common by the people of the village. The post of Dehuri is hereditary. The Chhatia is also an important religious functionary who assists the Dehuri.

The Lodha believe in innumerable malevolent and benevolent gods and goddesses. They also believe in the existence of "Bhagaban", the Supreme God. "Basumata" or mother earth is another goddess who is worshipped.

"Sitala" is considered to be the chief deity and worshipped very carefully because of her unlimited powers. "Sitala" is worshipped more than once in a year. Whenever there is out-break of epidemics, like cholera, small-pox etc. the people worship this deity with a special sacrifice.

Apart from "Sitala", "Chandi" is also considered as very powerful deity. She has been referred to as to Goddess worshipped by the Lodha at the time of hunting. The seat of this deity is marked by some large earthen ware elephants. "Chandi" is worshipped in Makar Sankranti and on the last day of Pausa. She is also evoked occasionally as well as in Chait Sankranti. Generally earthen ware horses are offered in her name and sacrifices are made to appease her.

The Lodha also believe in malevolent spirits. Conception about heaven, soul, and unseen power are in vogue. The faith in witches and their evil influences are also widely prevalent. As a safeguard against witchcraft, the placenta of a new born baby is buried inside the room to avoid evil eye. Certain magico-religious activities are performed to cure some diseases.

A large number of festivals are observed by the Lodha. Some of the festivals are held on some fixed dates while others are observed according to socio-economic convenience. A number of festive occasions are connected with economic-life of the Lodha in the month of October and November just before the collection of *tassar* cocoons. Generally these festive occasions are celebrated with much pomp and ceremony.

Political Life

The traditional village council of Lodha has currently lost its importance, especially after establishment of rehabilitation colonies. But in the traditional villages its importance is felt very seriously. Administration of justice, settlement of disputes among individuals, families and villages are some of the important functions of traditional village council. Even now, the maintenance of peace and promotion of social welfare activities are managed by the same council. The setup of the traditional council is more or less same in every village and receives popular appreciation. The office bearers or the prominent councilors enjoy special prestige and privilege. Permission for marriages, to attend other's religious ceremony, impositions of fine or to boycott someone for his mischievous action is some of the judicial powers of the traditional council. Elderly and experienced persons are usually taken as the members of the traditional council. Women and children are not allowed to be its members. Adultery, illicit love, sorcery and breach of taboos are generally dealt with and punishments are awarded.

Each Lodha village has a secular headman known as “Pradhan” and his assistant is called “Chhatia” or “Dakua”. Pradhan acts as the head of the traditional village council and adjudicator of all cases which are referred to the council.

Recently there have been changes in the composition and activities of the traditional councils of different villages. The rehabilitation colonies are under the absolute control of their respective Sardar, who has been selected by the district administration. Moreover, some Ward-Members are also conducting some development works for the betterment of the villagers. Previously the traditional councils were very strong and were the final authority for all decisions. Now-a-days there is a growing tendency to seek help from the police. This is a sign of disintegration of the traditional political organization which shows that the fabric of traditional council is changing very fast with the passage of time and under economic and administrative impact.

Life-cycle Rituals

From birth to death a Lodha passes through a series of rituals which entails heavy expenditure. For an easy delivery local deities are offered fowl sacrifice. At the time of delivery an experienced woman is asked to serve as midwife. After the child birth the midwife cuts the umbilical cord by a sharp bamboo split and the placenta is buried inside the house premises.

In the early childhood the child is brought up with much care and affection. But, on growing up children are put to work. Lodha boys are comparatively more free, independent and dynamic whereas the girls are sober, hard working and submissive. Marriage by negotiation is the most common practice. Monogamy is the general rule. Payment of bride-price both in cash and kind is in vogue. Some of the ceremonies like tying of turban, wearing of the iron bangle by the bridegroom, return of the bride on the 8th day are the characteristic features of a Lodha marriage.

Marrying a widow or a divorced woman known as “Sango” is in vogue among the Lodha. This marriage ceremony is less expensive than the usual one. When one’s wife dies or becomes barren, a second wife is needed. There is no ritual associated with keeping a concubine.

Life after marriage is an important phase of the Lodha life because it is in this stage they are re-socialized and develop altogether a new personality which stimulates them to get involved in anti-social activities.

When a man dies, his kin kinsmen are informed and the corpse is disposed of. There are two traditional ways of disposing of the corpse. One is cremation and the other is burial. On the tenth day the purification ceremony takes place. In the evening a special feast is given to persons who had helped in cremation. The cooked food is first offered to the spirit of the deceased and then

the food is served to other members. Offerings to the ancestors are made annually on the last date of Chaitra. On the whole, the death rites of the Lodha are associated with a number of ceremonies invocations and feasts.

Development and Change

The Lodha suffer from abject poverty, illiteracy and unemployment. Since development and change are inevitable, the Lodha are no exception to it. Basically all inhabitants of one village once upon a time were like members of one family, but it is gradually disappearing. The attitude towards community behavior and group personality is changing. The poor Lodha wish to take up jobs as wage earners but they are denied at times of these opportunities. There is an urge for small business, vending shops and petty contracts but they hardly provided with this opportunity.

The changes in the traditional political council have been fast. The traditional council of village elders is more or less defunct. They have accepted the new Panchayatiraj system. People now prefer to go to court of law for adjudication of disputes. Local persons are lodging complaints against them in the police stations. They have been exploited by officials of police department, forest department and revenue department for centuries.

They have derived economic benefits but at the same time looked down upon by the neighbouring communities. Even today poverty and backwardness compel them to revive the old habits, even if suitable avenues and better means for survival are open to them.

The Lodha are in a state of transition. The results of decades of special endeavor of the Central and State Governments are to be realized. Development agencies are trying to provide them greater and better protective measures and develop awareness for new ways of life. Special care of the L.D.A. administration and spread of education and economic development have led them to foresee a better quality life. One can witness visible changes in their dress and living standard. But there is a loosening of the strong tribal ties even among the villagers, clansmen, lineage and family members. The old custom of reciprocal help without towards moral values and personal ethics is changing in negative direction. Everybody is forgetting his responsibility rather claims rights over the forest land and community property.

The socio-economic development activities have brought immense changes in their cultural pattern and lifestyle. The state Government is trying to focus on their holistic development to raise their standard of living and quality of life. Multifarious development programmes relating to health and sanitation, education, environment, infrastructure development, individual benefit schemes etc. have to some extent transformed their outlook. Introduction of modern agriculture, multiple cropping, use of high yielding variety of seeds, provision of

irrigation facility, input assistance, market assurance for their hand made products etc. have brought quite visible changes in their life pattern.

Since its inception in the year 1986, the Micro Project, known as the Lodha Development Agency (LDA), Morada in Mayurbhanj district has undertaken a number of socio-economic development programmes for their sustainable development. The agency has spent money in horticulture, agriculture, communication, irrigation etc. The residential school close to the Lodha area has attracted the attention of a number of students of the area. Non-formal education centre popularly known as Gyan Mandir are having good contribution for development of children. Government has done a lot of good works through multiple ways to protect them and bring their holistic development. Enormous efforts have been made for improvement of their quality of life and to increase their per capita income. Sincere attempts have been made to effect planned change while preserving their cultural growth and positive values. Attempts have been made to ensure connectivity and substantial achievements relating provision of safe drinking water facilities through tube wells and provisions of tap water supply. The most alluring and successful programme among the Lodha is fire proof house roofing to needy families. Construction of check dams, mini irrigation projects, cross bunds, irrigation tanks and provision of dug well etc. are some of the eye catching achievements. The most important activities, like spread of education, special health care provisions, provision of fair price shops for their commodities are some of the outstanding achievements that deserve special mention.

The development organization and welfare institutions like primary health centre, police check post, office of the agricultural extension officer, veterinary hospitals, post office and weekly market, big shops, establishment of banks, LAMPs and several others in their area have contributed to the changing life of the Lodha.

MADIA *

A. B. Ota ¹

S. C. Mohanty ²

Abhijeeta Das ³

IDENTITY

The state of Odisha is the home land of 62 categories of Scheduled Tribes. From the time immemorial, these tribes are living in the forest area with distinct ethnic characteristics in terms of social organization, culture and language. Madia is one among them. The tribe has been considered to be a section of the main tribe Koya with some distinct features. Besides Odisha, this tribal community is found in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli district of Maharashtra and Bastar division of Chattisgarh also.

Concentration

Madia is numerically a small tribe in Odisha found in some small concentrations. They reside mainly in the hilly terrains of Balasore, Jharsuguda and Mayurbhanj districts of Odisha. They identify themselves as MADIA and call the area of their domicile as *Madia Desh*. In other states like Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra they like the Koya tribe are listed as a sub-tribe of the Gond tribe and they are divided into two groups such as *Bada Madia* and *Chhota Madia*, which is based on their place of domicile. In Odisha, this tribe is similar to the Koya tribe and resembles many of their socio-cultural characteristics.

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Population & Literacy:

As per the 2011 Census data the total population of the tribe in Odisha is 2243, out of which 1106 are males and 1137 are females. The sex ratio is 1028 which is in favour of the female population. There is fluctuation in their decennial population growth rates over successive censuses from 1991 – 2001 to 2001-2011 showing positive and negative trends respectively.

According to Census 2011, the total literacy rate of Madia tribe is 48.36 per cent. For the males it is 61.91 percent and for the females it is 35.43 percent.

Language:

The mother tongue of the Madia tribe called Madia belongs to Dravidian family of languages that is closely akin to “Gondi” – the language of the Gond and Koya tribes. Since, the vocabulary of the Madia language is very limited, they usually depend on the major lingua franca of the region where they live. Hence, in Odisha most of the Madia people have acquired proficiency in Odia language for inter-community communication.

Dress and Ornaments:

Unlike some other primitive tribes, the Madias, who reside in Odisha, do not have any significant dressing pattern to distinguish themselves from others. Their dressing pattern resembles to the simple dresses (both for male and female) used by the other tribal communities. Some male members also wear Dhoti, Banyan, Shirt or Pajama. The women folk usually wear saree, petticoat and blouse. Most of the Madia women wear few ornaments made of silver and other cheap metals. The old women like to make various types of tattoos on their arms and on the feet. Now-a-days, tattooing has gone out of fashion.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING PATTERN

In general, the Madia tribe likes to stay in the hilly tracks or hilly terrains adjacent to the plain areas of the districts indicated above. They prefer to live in uni-ethnic villages, but now-a-days they have also settled down in multiethnic villages. The area of their habitation has moderate climate with humidity and medium rainfall.

As found in most of the tribal settlements, they prefer to live in separate hamlets in multiethnic villages maintaining their socio-cultural identity. The Madia villages are mostly connected with narrow footpaths to the main roads. The villages do not have a specific boundary and the houses are built in a scattered manner.

Like that of the Koya tribe, the settlement pattern of the Madia does not follow a specific design throughout the locality. Typical palisade bamboo fencing

all around is a distinguishing feature of their settlements. Very close to their settlements one notices stone pillars and wooden posts erected in memory of their dead ancestors.

Each Madia house consists of one or two small huts, which are used as sleeping rooms. The walls of a house are made of tree branches and bamboo, which are thickly plastered with mud. The gable shaped roofs are thatched with a type of jungle grass locally known as *Sindi* that they collect from nearby forest. In the modern days bricks are used for making walls by some people.

Mostly, the houses have a rectangular shape and do not have any windows for passage of light and air. The hearth is built in one corner of the house. Each house is enclosed by a boundary wall made of neatly woven bamboo splits. In addition to the living space for the human beings each house also has small sheds for sheltering pigs, goats and fowls. There is a small kitchen garden within the boundary wall.

Household Articles:

Like most of the tribal communities, the household asset possessions of the Madias are very few and reflect a poor picture of their economy. The household articles normally constitute utensils made of earth or aluminum and plates of different sizes for their daily use. They keep bamboo baskets of various sizes for storing food grains. They also have stone implements like the grinding stone (*sila*). Further, their household belongings include plough, leveler, yoke, spade (*kodi*) and crowbar (*gauti*) for digging and bamboo basket (*dola*) and carrying pole (*bhara*). To undertake fishing and hunting activities they also keep different types fishing and hunting implements such as of fishing traps, bird traps, rabbit traps and nets, bow and arrows, etc.

SOCIAL LIFE

As has been described earlier the Madia tribe is socially divided into two groups such as Bada Madia and Sana Madia. The former group asserts social superiority over the latter. The tribe as well as its two groups are endogamous who are further subdivided into a number of exogamous totemic clans (Bansas) namely Maria, Madakam and Madiam etc. The clan names are used as surnames by the concerned clan members.

Family

The family in Madia society is patriarchal and patrilineal in nature where father is the head of the family and descent, inheritance and succession goes along the male line. Property of the family is equally divided among the sons but the eldest son gets an extra share (Jesta Bhag). Though daughters do not usually get any share from paternal property, they usually get some shares from

mother's ornaments. Father is regarded as the authority of the family and after his death, the elder son succeeds him.

Status of Women

Though, women are allowed to participate in various social, economic and religious activities, their participation in decision making and political activities is limited. However, the husband consults his wife in all important family matters. Women keep themselves engaged in all sorts of household chores like fetching water, cooking for the family, cleaning the house and cowshed and entertaining guests etc. Apart from these activities, they also collect firewood, look after the domestic animals, help the male members in the agricultural operations. Beyond this, if required they also supplement the family income by working as daily wage labourers. In real practice, the Madia women control their family expenditures.

Interestingly, in comparison to some of the tribes and backward castes, the status of women in Madia community is better. A Madia girl has the freedom to have premarital intimacy with her lover and to choose her husband. As a married woman, she has also been given freedom to divorce her husband for ill treatment and impotency. She is free to spend her own earnings. A husband normally does not have the right to interfere in her legitimate affairs.

Life Cycle Rituals:

Pregnancy and Child Birth

Pregnancy is an important part of life of every woman and the Madia women are no exception to it. But some pre and post delivery restrictions in their diet and movement are strictly imposed on them by their society. A pregnant woman is not allowed to visit the cremation ground and come out of the house during eclipses. She is also forbidden to enter into the shrine during an advanced stage of pregnancy. Restriction is also imposed on taking dry fish.

During delivery a professional midwife called *dhai* is called for facilitating the child birth. A bonded of sign twigs are hanged at the entrance door of the house to indicate birth pollution.

After birth of a child, pollution is observed for a period of 21 days for the whole family. Pollution is partly eradicated on the seventh day which is known as *uthiari*, when the mother and baby are shifted to another room. The delivery room is cleansed with a plaster of cow dung and old earthen pots are replaced by new ones.

The final purificatory rite is observed on the 21st day. Their traditional priest (*Perma*) is invited to perform the ritual and name giving ceremony. He selects a name for the baby in consultation with the parents, maternal uncle and

other kinsmen. After the ritual, the invited kinsmen are entertained with special dishes like *khiri* (rice porridge), *pitha* (locally prepared cake) etc.

Puberty Rite

The puberty rite of a girl is observed like other tribal communities as soon as the girl attains her puberty (*etarta*). She is kept confined in a room for seven days so that no male members can see her face. In the early morning of the seventh day the girl takes full bath after anointing her body with turmeric paste and puts on new cloths. No village or family feast is hosted in this occasion.

Marriage

The Madias prefer adult marriage and monogamy. But second marriage is allowed in case of barrenness of the first wife. But in such cases the consent of the first wife and the approval of the community council are mandatory. In such a situation the husband is also allowed to marry the younger sister of his wife (sorrorate). The married women use vermilion on the forehead and lac bangles or shell as the symbols of their marital status. Well-to-do Madia males, who could afford the cost of marriage, are allowed to have more than one wife.

In the past the bride price in cash or kind was very much in vogue in their society as a social custom. But nowadays, this system has been reduced to a symbolic gesture. Also, due to the increased cultural contact with the neighbouring caste societies, the custom of bride-price is slowly giving way to the system of dowry nowadays.

Marriage is one of the major social functions performed in the Madia community. The marriageable age has been fixed by the community, which for boys varies from the age of twenty to twenty five and for girls from eighteen to twenty five years. The consanguinal marriage with maternal uncle's daughter is accepted and allowed by the community. The types of marriages prevalent in the Madia tribe, in general, are marriage by (a) negotiation, (b) mutual consent, (c) elopement and (d) service. In case of marriage by negotiation, the traditional council plays a vital role and the concerned family is required to take the concurrence of the traditional council.

The marriage ceremony known as *pendul* is an important social function, without which a man or woman lose their identity in the society. They accept marriage as a necessity in their community as they have to continue the line of reproduction to their next generations. In the Madia society, wife is the indispensable partner in all spheres. An observation and analysis of the daily work culture of the Madia men indicates to the fact that a Madia man cannot do anything without the help of a wife in his ordinary daily works of life. The criteria for an ideal wife are her sound health and ability to undertake arduous labour in economic as well as social activities. The criteria for a good husband lie

in the fact that the male is physically tall and healthy. Also, his capability to support the family is seen as a major criterion.

A divorce is allowed on the grounds of marital incompatibility and maladjustment with the approval of the traditional council headed by Pedda, the village head man.

Death

The Madia practise burial for disposal of the dead. The eldest son, who throws soil into the pit, first, becomes the chief mourner. The mortuary rites in the Madia community are strictly observed by all the concerned members. The death pollution is observed up to the eleventh day. Normally the ritual starts from the fourth day. During this ritual, the house of the deceased is smeared with cow dung water and all the old earthen pots are replaced by new ones and cloths are washed. All the male members of the family get shaved and women get their nails pared. Perma, the traditional village priest is called for to perform the purificatory ritual on the tenth day. On the eleventh day a community level ritual is performed and the community members are entertained with a feast. Very close to their settlements one notices stone pillars and wooden posts erected in memory of their dead ancestors.

LIVELIHOOD

The Madias are primarily settled cultivators and wherever there is the scope, they practice shifting cultivation to certain extent. It is supplemented by animal husbandry and seasonal forest collections. They domesticate fowls, cows, goats and pigs to cater to their protein dietary requirements, to sacrifice in their rituals and to entertain their guests with non-veg dishes.

They collect and sale various types of seasonal forest produce like honey, tamarind, Kendu leaves (used in manufacturing of a kind of cigarette), the Sal leaves and Siali leaves used in making leaf plates (*khali*), a particular kind of grass used in making broom sticks and the forest fruits like mango, tamarind, Kendu, Char, Mango, Jackfruit, Amla etc., which are generally sold in the open market. They also gather palm fruit, the whitish juicy kernels of which is a popular food during summer and even many non tribal people like to consume them to beat the heat.

As petty traders they usually market their own surplus produce or carry the produce of others from their community or neighbouring communities for sell in the local weekly markets. Some of them also are artisans who are experts in various bamboo crafts including mats for fencing, dust bins and baskets.

Under the changing circumstances of the present times, slowly the Madias have started using some modern methods of cultivation like the use of

high yielding variety of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides. They are also using some of the modern agricultural tools like power sprays and electric motors to irrigate their lands. But their population growth puts a pressure on the land available to them for cultivation. Hence, their land holdings are getting smaller and smaller day by day and most of the Madias have become small and marginal farmers. Their occupational pattern has changed over the years from the agriculturists to other avocations like small trading, wage earning and service.

Food Habit:

They usually grow Paddy, Maize, Jowar, Ragi, Bajra and other kinds of millets in their fields which constitute their cereal food items. Tubers and roots such as *tella chenna gadda*, *kirismatilu* and edible green leaves such as *clencheli*, *doggali*, *gumuru*, *thotakura*, *boddukura* are also consumed. As usual they are very fond of eating various seasonal fruits available in the forest. In festive occasions they prepare *khiri* (rice porridge) and *pitha* (local cake) etc. Consumption of pulses, vegetables and fruits has increased and in recent times some Madia families are also taking *chapattis* (wheat bread) at night instead of rice.

In addition to these foods, mostly the Madiamen like to take *handia* (rice beer), *kushno modo* (Mahua liquor) and Todi (Palm wine) as their drinks. They grow "Salap" (sago palm) trees. They extract from the tree a whitish sap that is known as 'kallu' which is a popular intoxicant consumed by them. Besides, they take tea, smoke tobacco and chew betel. Both men and women use 'gurakhu' (tobacco paste) for cleaning their teeth.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

The Madia believes in animism and polytheism. Over period of time some elements of Hinduism have entered into their belief system and as a result they have incorporated some Hindu Gods and Goddesses into their pantheon. Mostly the deities called *Bura* and *Buri* are revered as family deities. They worship Mother Earth as their village deity.

Their important festivals are Bija Pandu, Kurum Pandu, Dusshera, Itt Pandu, Ikk Pandu, Sikul Pandu, Bimud Pandu, Karta Pandu etc which are observed with full devotion by them. On these festive occasions, their houses are cleaned and walls and courtyards are decorated with *ikon / jhoti* (design drawn with pounded rice solution). Special delicious dishes are prepared and offered to the deities on these occasions. The *Perma* (village priest) is invited to perform the ritual. They offer sacrifices of eggs, pigeons, pigs, fowls, goats and buffaloes to appease their deities and spirits and solicit their blessings.

Now, they have accepted certain changes in their religious domain. They participate in local fairs and festivals like Rathajatra, Dassara and Dolajatra etc.

Dance:

Folk dance and music in general is the expression of the ethos of the tribal communities. The Maida tribe has imbibed the same trend. For them dance is one of the most accepted and practiced form of amusement and they are very fond of this art. They have some specific traditional folk songs for different festive occasions and marriage ceremony. Their traditional form of folk dance is performed both by men and women.

They dance usually with a Gondi chorus and the villagers dance round a fire in some open space near the hamlet usually in the night. Their most favorite dance is performed with a peculiar rippling step forward with the foot dragged. The dance does not look so graceful when done by a single individual, but when performed in unison by the dancers in a circle singing a're-la', 're-la', chorus to which the step match, the dance looks simply marvelous. In some villages, where the headman is an enthusiast for the pastime, a trained band performs weird and wonderful step dances to the sound of the drum. At a big dance, the trained band occupies the inner ring round the fire, while the common folk, men and maids in separate rings move round in great circles in opposite ways. All are dressed for the occasion in their best, bearing in their hands weird ornaments of wicker work, with garlands of flowers on their necks and in their hair. Also, feather ornaments are humorously or coquettishly worn. Usually, men and women dance in separate circles but in some specific dance occasions where the young men choose their brides, both the boys and girls dance in couples.

Now-a-days, Sankirtan, a popular pastime devotional musical performance staged in the villages during evening by the castes people, has been adopted by this community and they also participate in this event freely with their caste neighbours in the village. Musical instruments like *kholo* (Murdang) *madal* (Big drum), *gini* and *bansi* (flute) etc are used for Sankirtan.

SOCIAL CONTROL

In the Madia society, the mechanism of social control operates through a two-tier system, one at the village level and another at the regional level. At the village level, the Pedda is the head of the *Jati Sabha* (Traditional Village Council) who is assisted by the Dakua - the messenger. Elderly persons of the village act as the council members. The main function of the council is to regulate marriage and other matters concerning the village and to settle disputes arising there in.

The relatively modern regional council known as Mahasabha is headed by office bearers having modern designations like *Sabhapati* (President), *Sampadak* (Secretary) and Treasurer who handles the financial matters of the council. The posts of the traditional village headmen and messengers of different villages are hereditary where as the offices of regional council are filled up through an electoral process, mainly by voice vote.

Severe punishment is imposed on the offenders by these forums in cases of adultery, incest, breach of norms and customs, killing of cows and for disobedience to the authority of caste council etc. The offenders in such cases are punished with heavy cash fine and or *jatibahar* (social boycott). With the introduction Gram Panchayat system by the Government after independence, the importance of the traditional council is gradually declining.

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

After independence, the Government has also taken various measures for overall development of the Madia community. The core economic programmes implemented by the government and Non-Government agencies are development of land, agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, irrigation and education. The Madias have been benefitted by these programmes. The overall strategy of these programmes focuses on empowering the Madias and enabling them to improve their living conditions along with food security. Emphasis is being given to increase their level of income and improve their overall quality of life through more efficient natural resource management.

The programmes for the development of the Madia tribe also gives emphasis on the possibility of exploring the existing scope in addressing the broader issues of sustainable livelihoods including savings and credit, access to common property resources, off-farm/non-farm activities, issues related to non-timber forest products and community infrastructure of the community.

Under horticulture development programme, the Madias have taken up plantation of economic species in hill slopes as well as backyard plantations of guava plants, banana suckers in their courtyards supplied free of cost.

Under the composite land based scheme, small irrigation projects, water harvesting structures, lift irrigation points have been constructed for providing irrigation along with the provisions for land development, land shaping and agricultural inputs for improving the farm output. Besides, they are being encouraged to use high yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides and practice rotation of crops, mixed and doubles cropping by adopting modern techniques of cultivation.

The programmes for development of education, health and sanitation, communication, provision of safe drinking water, housing and electricity etc. has made positive impact in their way of life. The recent development interventions through the SHGs of men and women have brought significant changes in the socio economic life of the Madia families.

MAHALI*

S. C. Mohanty¹

Mahali is numerically a small artisan tribal community found mainly in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh and districts of Odisha. They are also known in the different localities as 'Maheli' or 'Mahili.' They are generally known for their expertise in bamboo craft. They have migrated from Bihar and Bengal.

Their population as per 2011 census is 18625 including 9182 males and 9443 females that brings their sex ratio favourably to 1028. Between 2001 and 2011 their population has recorded a growth rate of 8.72 per cent only. In 1981 their literacy was very low at 10.70 % which rose impressively to 21.68%, 37.96% and 51.24% in successive censuses of 1991, 2001 and 2011 respectively. As per 2011 census their male literacy is 62.83percent and female literacy is 40.14 percent. They speak Mahali – a Munda language along with Santali and Oriya.

Mahali men usually wear *dhoti* or napkin and the women wear sari. The Mahali women put on silver ornaments and are fond of tattooing on their forehead, arms, chin and ankles.

Mahalies live in multi-ethnic villages but in separate hamlets maintaining their cultural identity. Like the Mundari tribes of the region, they have their traditional place of worship in a sacred *sal* groove called *Jahirthan* situated at the village outskirts where their supreme deity- *Marang Buru* and few other important deities reside.

Their houses consist of two to three rooms including a cowshed. The larger room is partitioned by a mud wall; one portion of it is used as kitchen and another, as a bedroom and storeroom. The houses are mud walled and have straw thatched or *naria* tiled roofs.

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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Their main occupation is bamboo work that is supplemented by cultivation and wage earning. They collect bamboo from the forest, prepare various utility items and sell these in the local markets. A few of them have taken up cultivation. Mahalis take non-vegetarian food prepared out of mutton, fish, snails, crabs, termites and drink *handia* (rice beer).

There are five sections among them. They are: *Boasphor*, bamboo workers, *Patar*, basket makers and cultivators, *Sulunkhi*, cultivators and labourers, *Tanti*, palanquin bearers and *Mahali Munda*, a sub-group of the Munda tribe. They are divided into a number of exogamous and totemic clans.

Both child and adult marriages are practised in their society. Bride price is in vogue. Levirate, sororate and divorce are allowed. They follow the rule of community endogamy and clan exogamy. In addition to that, the rule of village exogamy is also followed.

They generally bury the dead. But now they are going for cremation. They observe birth pollution for ten days. The eldest son of the deceased performs the mortuary rites.

Like the Santal they worship *Marang Buru*, their supreme deity, *Bana Kuanri*, *Maneiko Tureiko*, *Babaji*, *Bada Chandi* and *Rangachandi*. They appease the deities to be free from disease and misfortunes.

They love to sing and dance in every festive occasion. They observe festivals like *Baha*, *Saharai*, *Bandana* and *Ma-Mane*, which are generally observed in February-March and October-November respectively and the rituals are performed by the village priest, *Naya*. The Mahali village council is composed of *Naya*, the priest, *Majhi*, the secular headman, *Gadeat*, the messenger and a few elders. The village council adjudicates their customary disputes.

There are cultural similarities between the Mahali, the Santal and the Munda tribes. The Mahalis have been ascribed a lower status among the neighbouring tribes.

MAHALI *

*Bhagirathi Choudhury*¹

The Mahalis whom Risely believed to be a branch of the Santal tribe, are distributed in most of the districts of Orissa. From the table given below it will be seen that they concentrate more in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts.

Sl. No.	Name of the district	Total Population	Male	Female
1.	Kalahandi	182	79	103
2.	Koraput	947	464	483
3.	Sambalpur	221	134	87
4.	Boudh-Kondhamal	28	14	14
5.	Sundargarh	1,474	690	784
6.	Bolangir	24	16	08
7.	Dhenkanal	30	13	17
8.	Keonjhar	177	73	104
9.	Mayurbhanj	3,891	1,981	1,910
10.	Balasore	42	27	15
Total		7,016	3,491	3,525

They speak their own language, which is very akin to Santali. Sir Edward A. Gait holds that Mahali language is a variant of the Santali. But they are rapidly adopting Oriya. The Mahalis of Mayurbhanj about whom this article is written live side by side with the Santals, Bhumij, Bhuiyan and caste Hindus. They occupy separate wards where tiny mud-houses with straw thatched roofs, are scattered without having any regular streets.

Clan Organization and Marriage

The Mahalis are divided into a number of exogamous clans known as Kili. It is not possible to ascertain the total number of Mahali Kili at present and the informants of village Bisoi in Mayurbhanj district could only supply the following list which is, no doubt an incomplete one:-

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1. Hemurm
2. Mardi
3. Baske
4. Muram
5. Tudu
6. Hansda
7. Soven
8. Besra
9. Isku

The Kili names appear to be totemistic but it cannot be definitely stated at present. These names indicate the Kili and nothing more. They have forgotten the literal import of the terms. Similar names of clans are also found among the Santal and Bhumij tribes who live with them. The Kili is a strictly exogamous unit and its members cannot inter-marry as such a relation is regarded as incestuous and abhorrent. The Kili is a partilineal group which descends from father to children. It has no religious or economic function of its own.

Marriage is usually adult, being arranged by the parents in most cases. Marriage by service and also marriage by capture are not uncommon. The young man captures the woman of his fancy and smears her forehead with vermilion. If he succeeds in doing this, the marriage is believed to be valid. Widow-remarriage is allowed, and younger brothers can marry the deceased brother's wife. A man can marry his deceased wife's younger sisters. Divorce is allowed and if the wife is found guilty, the bride price is returned back to the husband.

In case of arranged marriage, the initiative is always taken by the boy's parents. When they see a girl they first consult with the Ganek (astrologer) to find out whether the match would be a favourable one. If he declares in its favour, they employ a *Raibar* or go-between. A clever man either from the own village or from the village of the girl is generally appointed as a *Raibar* to negotiate for the marriage. When both parties agree, the bride-price is generally fixed. It consists of Rs.10. 00 to Rs.20.00 in cash, a bullock and a cow, a saree about 20 cubits in length for the girl's mother, two sarees ten cubits in length for the grandmother and the girl's father's elder brother's wife and dhotis and sarees for the members in the girl's family. Before the marriage proper the boy's parents pay the bride-price. A group of men accompanied by the young boys and girls take these articles to the girl's house. The payment of the bride-price is marked by dancing and singing by the boys and girls of both the villages. Those who carry the bride price are only fed by the girl's family, while the rest take food grains with them for their meals.

On the appointed day the girls and boys with their musical band go to bring the bride for the marriage rite to be observed in the house of bridegroom. When they reach the girl's village they are welcomed with dance and music and

are entertained with festive meals. Whole night is spent in dancing and singing. Next day the bride accompanied by the boys and girls of the village proceeds to the boy's village with presentations. When they reach there they are similarly welcomed with dance and music. They are allotted a place (*dera*) for resting. In the afternoon the marriage rite is performed. The bridegroom's father's sister carries the bride on her shoulder while the bridegroom sits on the shoulder of his father's sister's husband. The bride and the groom face each other. A cloth is held in between them by two persons. They are carried three times around the cloth while both of them throwing rice grains to each other. Then the bridegroom puts vermilion marks on the forehead of the bride for three times. Thus they become husband and wife. Then they are conducted to the house where they are anointed with turmeric and oil. The marriage is always concluded with feasting, dancing, singing and drinking which continue for three days.

Birth Rites

Birth pollution continues for nine days during which eating of non-veg food is prohibited and the family members do not take part in any religious activities..After the period houses are cleaned and clothes are washed by the family concerned. On the 9th day, the mother takes a ceremonial bath and washes her cloth. The baby and the male members of the family get themselves shaved. Kinsmen are invited to a feast. A name for the baby is selected by rice divination.. While uttering the names of the ancestors or any suitable names one after another, rice grains is dropped in the pot where another grain is made to float earlier. When these two rice grains join, that name is selected for the baby.

Death Rites

They practice both burial and cremation. If the bereaved family can afford and arrange woods, dead excluding those who die from cholera and smallpox are cremated. Death pollution continues for 10 days. On the ninth day known as *Na Pag*, the houses are cleaned and clothes are washed. All the male members of the deceased family are shaved. During the period of pollution they abstain from eating fish and flesh and cannot participate in any religious functions. On the tenth day the shade of the deceased is invited and offered food to eat. On this day the kinsmen are invited to a feast. Sometimes bones of the deceased are collected for throwing in the river after Maker Samkranti.

Important Festivals

Mahali religious festivals are mostly communal in nature. Individual worship only occurs on the occasion of *Sakrat* festivals in the month of January, when the householder offers food and sacrifice to his gods. The village *Naya* or the priest officiates in the village festivals. A *Naya* generally belongs to Santal tribe. Where Santal and Mahali live in the same village, they jointly celebrate the festivals. The collection of subscription and management of the whole affairs rest with the *Naya* while the villagers are required to participate in the performances

as passive observers. The following annual festivals are observed by the Mahalis and the Santals of the village Biosi in Mayurbhanj district:-

- (a) **Baha Festival**- On any day in the month of Fagun (February-March) the *Naya* worships the village deities installed in the village-*pirha* for the general welfare of the village. Every household provides a fowl and rice for the worship. All the male members of the Santal and the Mahali tribes would be present there and arrange a feast with the sacrificial animals and rice. After this the young boys and girls spend the night with special dance of *Baha* and take liquor or rice-beer.
- (b) **Saharae and Bandna**- This falls on the day before the *amavasya* in the month of Kartik (October-November). At the village outskirts, the *naya* performs a Puja and sacrifices a fowl. In the meantime the villagers collect all the bullocks and cows of the village at the place of worship. The cow or bullock which eats the offering materials from the temporary altar is caught. Next year the owner of the cow or bullock is required to supply a pot full of rice-beer to the villagers at the time of Saharae.

In the afternoon most of the householders decorate their bullocks with flower and vermilion and tie with the poles planted in front of their houses. A batch of young boys with musical instruments sings song and go from house to house, drink liquor and make bullocks dance.

If the *naya* likes, he arranges a contest of aim in releasing arrows. The inner shoot of a plantain tree about 4 feet high is planted at a distance of 200 yards. All present there, even persons from the neighbouring villages are asked to strike it by an arrow. When anybody becomes successful, he is carried to the *Naya's* house, where his feet are washed. He and his followers are given flat-rice and rice-beer to take. He is also presented with one *anna* in cash for his success.

- (c) **Ma Mane**- This is an agricultural ritual observed before reaping the rice-crops from the wetland in the month of October. The *naya* officiate in worship to the deities of the village-*pirha* similar to one done at the time of *baha* festival. This is concluded with communal dancing and singing.
- (d) **Magh festival**- On the last day of the month of Magha (January-February) a Puja is performed by the *naya* at the outskirt of the village before collecting jungle products such as fruits, leaves, wood and wild grass for their use in building house. This is also celebrated with dance and music.

On the occasion of Sakrat festival, if the *naya* so likes, plants a bamboo pole about 40 to 50 feet height. At the top of the bamboo pole he keeps any amount he can afford. The bamboo-pole is polished with oil. Some extra oil is poured on the top of the bamboo and is allowed to flow down along the pole. All

who are present are asked to bring the money from the top of the pole. The person who brings the money takes it.

Dance and Music

Every festival is marked by communal dancing and music. They have separate dances and songs for separate occasions. Both male and female dance joining their hands, to the accompaniment of the musical instruments beaten by the males. In every Saturday evening and if possible, twice in a week, they sing and dance till late in night. In their dance they join with the Santals.

Occupation

The primary occupation of the Mahalis is basket making from bamboo. A few of them who have land practice agriculture as their main economic pursuit, but for the rest it is a subsidiary source of income. All families know basket-making. They do not grow bamboo, but purchase it from the locality. They can prepare baskets worth six rupees from a piece of bamboo costing two rupees. In this craft women are more proficient than the men who devote much of their time in agriculture and wage earning. The scope for wage is limited to the demands of the local cultivators and also of the contractors of construction work. They sell their baskets to the neighbouring population for cash or food grains. Boys above eight to nine years of age are required to earn by tending cattle. Girls of this age-group are trained in the craft of basket-making. Collection of jungle products such as fruits, green leaves, roots and tubers supplement their diet. Hunting and fishing as economic pursuits are very rarely resorted to at leisure time or when opportunity comes.

Food and Intoxicants

Rice which grown or purchased is their staple food and is taken twice a day. Occasionally vegetables grown in their kitchen gardens and green leaves constitute the side-dish. They take beef, pork and fowl. Rice-beer and *mohua* liquor are their common drinks. They offer liquor to their deities and ancestors. Every festival is marked by consumption of a huge quantity of rice-beer or *mohua* liquor. For their food habits they are still considered untouchable.

Dress and Ornaments

As regards dress, they follow the neighbouring Santal and Bhumij tribes. Their economic condition does not allow them to wear modern dresses. Men wear short cloth while women wear mill-made saree as common dress. Well-to-do Mahalis put on shirt, banion and short. Women wear very few ornaments in their nose, ear, neck and wrist.

MAHALI *

*A. Mall*¹

Of 62 tribes in Orissa the Mahali are numerically a small group found mainly in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh Districts in Orissa. Early writers have described them as bamboo workers. S.C. Roy (1915), referring to various tribal communities and castes occupying the Chhotanagpur plateau, has mentioned that the Mahali and several other occupational castes like the Lohars (blacksmiths), Kumbhars (potters), Chik Baraiks (weavers), Ahirs (cattle grazers) and Goraites or Ghasi (drummers) were living side by side with the Oraon and other tribal communities and castes to provide traditional services. Risley (1891) has described the Mahali as a Dravidian caste of labourers, palanquin bearers and workers in bamboo found in Chhotanagpur and West Bengal.

However, the Mahali seem to be emigrants from Bihar and Bengal, who came to live near the Orissa border and then spread to other districts of the state. Risley (1891) gives the names of five sections of the tribe, such as (1) Boasphor Mahali who make baskets and do all kinds of bamboo work, (2) Patar Mahali, basket-makers and cultivators, (3) Sulunkhi Mahali, cultivators and labourers, (4) Tante Mahali who carry palanquins and (5) Mahali Munda, a small outlying sub-caste confined to Lohardaga.

There are many similarities among the Mahali, Santal and Munda tribes which may be due to their long association among themselves. Some hold the view that the Boasphor, Sulunkhi and Tante Mahali are merely branches of the Santal tribe. Similarly the Mahali Munda have separated from the original Munda tribe. Separation from the main tribe is due to their acceptance of a lower occupation like palanquin-bearing and basket-making, which is regarded as a standing slur on their character. The entire sub-caste regards the pig as their totem and thus consider it wrong to eat pork. The Patar Mahali employs Brahmans as priests and do not eat beef. However, the Mahali claim to be the original group of the parent tribe. The Mahali, like the Munda, are divided into a number of clans which are exogamous in nature and are also totemistic. These are Charbar (a tree), Duagri

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(wild pig), Kathargach (jack tree), Kerketta (a kind of bird), Murumar (*nilgai*), Topowar (a bird), Tirki (bull), etc. The members of a clan are forbidden to kill or cause harm to the totemic plant or animal. The totems may not be killed or eaten. Marriage is also contracted outside the totemic clan.

The Mahali population in Orissa, which was 11767 in 1981, went up to 13,585 in 1991. The bulk of the population is found in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh Districts. The growth rate was 15.45 per cent during the period 1981-91 and the sex ratio as per 1991 census was 1015 females per 1000 males. The literacy percentage improved from 4.2 in 1961 to 7.2 in 1971, 10.7 in 1981 and 21.68 in 1991. The Mahali have their own language, which is classified with the Mundari group. Now most of them have taken to Santali, but they can speak and understand Oriya.

Like some other tribal communities, the Mahali live in multi-caste and multi-tribal villages. Here they live in separate hamlets exclusively. Before selecting a site for the construction of a house they follow a method of divination, putting some rice, paddy, cow-dung and vermilion on the new site at night. Next morning they examine the items. If they find any loss in the quantity of cow dung, they consider it an ill-omen for the cattle wealth. Loss in the quantity of rice signifies a low yield from land. If all the items are found intact they consider the site to be auspicious and construct the house there. They worship their dead ancestors before entering the new house.

The housing condition of the Mahali is as good as that of the neighbouring tribes. A typical Mahali hut measures about 16' in length and 7' to 8' in width with a height of 7'. The houses in the hamlet where they live are usually situated on both sides of the lane. Each family usually has two or three rooms. The larger one is usually partitioned by a mud wall, one portion of which is used as a kitchen and the other as a bedroom and storeroom. One room is used as cowshed. The houses are commonly mud-walled with a straw-thatched or *naria*-tiled roof. But well-to-do families construct more spacious houses.

The dress of a woman consists of a sari about 8 to 10 cubits long either hand-woven or mill made and for a man a short *dhoti* or napkin about 5 to 7 cubits in length. The dress worn by those who go to schools or colleges is the same as that used by other advanced communities. Mahali women usually tie their hairs into a knob on the right above the neck. This is called *sud*. Small girls like to leave the plait dangling at the back, which is called *galaon* in their language. Mahali women rarely use gold ornaments. But use of silver ornament is common. They wear glass bangles called *churi* and metal bangles called *bala* on their wrists. They also wear silver *baju* on their arms and metal or bead necklaces around their necks. They wear earrings and toe-rings. Gold ornaments, if used at all, are placed on the nose in the shape of rings and tops. The women are fond of tattooing, which they do on the forehead, arms, chin and ankles, like some other tribes in the state.

The Mahali are non-vegetarian and eat pork, mutton, fowl, fish, etc. But eating beef is gradually becoming unpopular. Rice is their staple food. They use mustard and *mahua*-seed oil for cooking. They prepared *handia* (rice beer), which is their traditional drink. They offer this drink to their deities and to the manes or dead ancestors. *Handia* is usually drunk on special occasions like religious ceremonies, marriage and death rites. Snails, crabs and termites are also eaten whenever available. They are not fond of milk or milk products. Nowadays they drink tea as a popular beverage. Many of them also take food in leaf cups and plates, which they make at home.

Stringed charpoy, bell metal and aluminium utensils and a few earthenware pots are their main material pieces of equipment, which they purchase from the nearby market. Although the Mahali are not as clean as the Santal, they keep their houses, streets and lanes fairly neat and clean. On festive occasions they plaster the floor and walls with clay mixed with fresh cow dung. Drinking water is fetched from the wells and sometimes from the nearby streams. Now tube-wells have been set up by the government in most villages. They bathe regularly and clean their clothes with soap.

Like other tribal communities the Mahali believe that diseases are mostly caused by the displeasure of a deity or ancestral spirit. Therefore they try to appease these supernatural beings through worship by the shaman. On such occasions they sacrifice fowls or goats.

The economic activity of the Mahali, like the Doms of the plains of Dhenkanal, is primarily based on bamboo working. They weave baskets of various sizes and shapes. They usually make the *theka* (big basket), *chala*, *frail* screens (*tati*), *kula* (winnowing fan) *doli* (grain bin) and *pachhi* (net basket). Apart from these they also make fences, fish traps and broomsticks. The tools and implements they use in making these articles consist of the *katus* (small knife), *tangia* (axe), *katuri* (hand axe) and *bharbadise*, a long wooden support which is placed on the ground to form a 30° angle at one end, the other end being supported by two small bamboo rods, crossing each other.

The Mahali usually take their bamboo products to the local market or to nearby towns for sale. They dispose of their products for cash or kind, which usually consists of food grains. This traditional occupation, which has been their main source of livelihood, provides them with a meager income because of the decreasing demand for their products in the locality. Though basket-making is the mainstay of most of the population, a few Mahali who possess small amount of land grow paddy on this land using traditional techniques.

Like other tribes of the locality the Mahali engage to some extent in forest collection, hunting, and fishing to supplement their income. The pursuits of hunting and fishing are rare and irregular in nature. The headman of the Mahali community takes a leading role in hunting expeditions and others follow him with

their weapons. Those who cannot cope with their traditional occupation and do not possess land take up wage-earning wherever there is scope to do so.

The life of a Mahali begins in the mother's womb and comes to an end at the cremation ground. After marriage the couple expects a child, preferably a male one. Cessation of menses and a feeling of nausea indicate pregnancy. This makes a woman feel proud, as she will become a mother. During pregnancy a woman has to observe certain taboos and restrictions. She is not allowed to remain alone. If alone, she has to carry some iron implements such as a knife with her to avoid the evil influence of malevolent spirits. At delivery an experienced old woman, either from the mother's own community or from a local Scheduled Caste community, assists the expectant mother soon after the delivery pains begin. Immediately after the baby is born, the female assistant cuts the umbilical cord with either a bamboo split or an iron knife, this being buried outside the house. Then the baby is given a bath and the mother is washed. Thereafter for eight days the mother and the baby are kept confined in a room under strict observation of pollution. From delivery to the end of the pollution period no adult males are allowed to come into contact with the mother, and the eating of meat or fish is restricted. On the ninth day the mother, accompanied by the female relatives, goes to take a purificatory bath by anointing turmeric paste and oil. The baby and the male members of the family are shaved and take a bath. On this day the name-giving ceremony for the newborn baby may also take place, the kith and kin being invited to a feast. The female attendant is given food and rice beer and remuneration in cash for her services. The baby's name is selected by the grain method of divination.

Both child and adult marriages are practised, although the former is practised more than the latter. Boys at 18 and above and girls at 14 and above become fit for marriage. Marriage outside the own tribe is not allowed. Those who violate this rule are punished with excommunication. An incestuous relationship between members of the same clan is strictly prohibited. A boy and his family members generally select a good-looking girl with expertise in household chores. Similarly a girl prefers to marry a handsome and industrious boy. In the case of an arranged marriage, the initiative is always taken by the boy's side. They first consult the astrologer to find out whether the match will be a suitable one. If he declares in its favour, they send a *raibar* (go-between) to start the negotiations. He visits the girl's family and makes the proposal. If he receives a favourable reply a date for the visit of the boy's side is fixed. On the appointed day the boy's father, along with his relatives, goes to the house of the prospective bride. On arrival they are received and served with drinks. During this visit the brideprice is settled and the date of the wedding is fixed. The father of the boy gives the prospective bride a bead necklace and some cash as a mark that the negotiations have been finalized.

On the day of the wedding, the invited kith and kin are served with food and drink. Then the bridegroom is taken to the bride's house in a procession accompanied by dancing and music. Before the marriage rites are performed, the

groom's party has to pay the brideprice, which comprises two saris, one *dhoti*, two cows and Rs.100/- in cash. The *naya* acts as the priest of the ceremony. On reaching the house of the bride, the party is greeted and mats and charpoys are provided for them to sit down. The bride and bridegroom sit on a plank in one room of the house. Then the bridegroom puts a vermilion mark on the bride's forehead about five times. After this, the party is served cooked food and rice beer. Finally the occasion is celebrated with dancing and singing. Then the bridegroom returns to his village with the bride. The *raibar* receives a *dhoti* after the marriage. Levirate and sororate types of marriage are also prevalent. Marriage by service and marriage by capture are now rare. Divorce is allowed with the prior approval of the tribal panchayat. When a husband divorces his wife, he gives her one rupee and takes away the iron armlet that was given to her during the wedding.

They either bury or cremate the dead, although the former practice is more common at present. The dead body is carried on a bier made in the form of a ladder-like frame with six bamboo poles. Relatives and other Mahali carry the corpse and no one belonging to other castes or tribes is allowed to touch it. Usually the eldest son of the deceased leads the funeral procession. On the way to the burial ground the bier is lowered and kept over the ground at a crossroads. A pit is dug and the eldest son brings a pitcherful of water from the nearest stream, with which the corpse is washed after being anointed with turmeric paste and oil. A new piece of cloth is wrapped around the body, after which the eldest son puts a mark of vermilion over the deceased's forehead. The body is then lowered into the pit and positioned with its head pointing towards the north and its face upward. The eldest son first throws a handful of earth into the pit. The process is repeated by the pallbearers and others present at the ground. All those attending the burial then take a purificatory bath and return to the house of the deceased, where they are fed rice along with salt and onion. Death pollution is observed for a period of ten days. On the tenth day the kith and kin and the members of the deceased's family are shaved and take a bath after offering food and alcohol to the departed soul. Then a feast is arranged for the relatives by the deceased family. Nowadays, they practise cremation more and more through coming into contact with the neighbouring caste Hindus.

In the case of cremation, a piece of bone is collected from the cremation ground and is kept in turmeric water. Some throw it into a river or rivulet in the vicinity. Those who bury the dead also collect a piece of bone from the ground six to eight months after the burial. The bone is then kept in the turmeric water, and a little quantity of rice beer is offered to the deceased.

The family is the smallest social unit in Mahali society. The family is mostly nuclear and composed of the married couple and their unmarried offspring. After marriage a son lives separately with his wife and a girl leaves her father's residence and lives with her husband. Sometimes even married sons share the same house or live with their parents. The family is patrilineal and the male

child inherits the property of his father. The girls have no right to property but have a right to their maintenance until they are married. Formerly the eldest son received an extra share (*jeth-ang*) with the partition of the family property. But with the passage of time, this system is no longer working. Now they prefer to divide the entire property equally among all the sons, though the division usually takes place only after the death of the father. A group of individuals having a consanguineal relationship among themselves form a *killi* (clan), which is exogamous. Activities among *killi* members are based on mutual co-operation and help, and ceremonial exchanges strengthen ties and maintain a relationship which has more of cordiality than strain in it.

The Mahali, like other tribes of the area, have their own political organization consisting of the village panchayat, which exercises control over their community members in the village as a whole. The panchayat consists of the Naya (the priest), the Majhi (the secular headman), the Gadeat (the messenger) and a few adult members to protect the tribesmen and their society. In settling cases relating to a serious violation of the norms and values of the society and other intra-village disputes, Mahali prefer the village panchayat to the local court. The traditional panchayat has an exclusive power to excommunicate persons from the society and also to permit the re-admission of expelled members. All the decisions of the village council are binding upon villagers. Individuals found guilty are invariably punished with a fine, which varies from fifteen to fifty rupees and sometimes an equivalent amount to meet the expenses of a feast to the villagers. The amount of fine imposed depends on the severity and nature of the crime.

Like the Santal, the Mahali worship Marang Buru as their supreme deity and few other deities who reside in a *sal* grove called *jahirthan* situated not far from the village. They also worship Bana Kuanri before proceeding on hunting expeditions, Maneiko Tureiko for a bumper crop, Babaji for the welfare and prosperity of the community, and the goddesses Bada Chandi and Ranga Chandi to ward off epidemics. At home, they offer food and drink ritually to the spirits of the dead ancestors on all festive occasions. They also worship Lord Mahadev, Ahira and Garaya, whose images are specially constructed for worship.

The religious festivals of the Mahali are mostly communal in nature. They celebrate the following festivals in different months of the year.

(a) Baha

The Mahali celebrate this festival on any day in the month of Fagun (February-March). Every household provides a fowl and some rice for the ritual. The Naya or village priest, who generally belongs to the Santal tribe, worships the village deities in the village Pirha for the general welfare of the village. All the male Santal and Mahali present there arrange a feast. After this the young boys and girls spend the night dancing and singing.

(b) Saharae and Bandana

This is observed in the month of Kartika (October-November). On this occasion the Naya performs a *puja* and sacrifices a fowl on the edge of the village. In the meantime all the villagers must collect all the bullocks and cows in the village and drive them towards the place where the Naya performs the *puja*. Any cow or bullock which eats the offering at the *puja* is caught. Next year the owner of the cow or bullock will supply a pot of rice beer to the villagers at the time of Saharae. That afternoon most households decorate their bullocks with flowers and vermilion and keep them tied to the poles in front of the house. A group of young boys with musical instruments sing songs and go from house to house, drinking liquor and making the bullocks dance.

(c) Ma-Mane

This ritual is observed during the harvest season, particularly before the harvesting of paddy in October. The Naya performs the *puja* in the *jahirastan*, and the occasion is celebrated with communal dancing and singing. On the last day of the month of Magh (January-February) the Naya performs a *puja* on the edge of the village before collecting jungle products such as fruits, leaves, wood and wild grass for use in house building. This is celebrated with dance and music. On the occasion of the Sakrat (which is same as Makar Sankranti) festival in January, the household offers food and sacrifices to their ancestral spirits. The village Naya or priest officiates at the village festivals. In villages where the Mahali live side by side with the Santal, the festival is observed jointly.

Music and dancing form an important part of their lives, without which they feel dull and lifeless. All festivals and occasions like weddings and the death rites are accompanied by specific dances and music. All able-bodied persons, irrespective of sex and age, participate in dancing and singing and relax. The sound of drums and the sweet songs attract the participation of young boys and girls in particular, who suspend any works in hand.

The Mahali are ranked low in the society. They accept water from the Bathudi, Bhuyan, Santal, Bhumij and Munda, but not from the Dom, Pan, Tanti or Karua. The Santal must purchase at least those baskets that are used on ceremonial occasions from the Mahali. However, no castes or tribes accept water from them.

Although the Mahali are considered to be migrants, their close association with neighbouring tribes and castes, coupled with various welfare measures taken up by government for their uplift, has brought some changes in their life. Yet they need government aid for their betterment, with a view to bringing them up at par with other advanced groups of their locality.

MAHALI*

*P. Panda*¹

*A. Mall*²

INTRODUCTION

Mahali is a Scheduled Tribe of Odisha. The Mahali people live in different states like Bihar, Odisha and West Bengal of India. Out of 62 Scheduled Tribes of Odisha, Mahali is a numerically a small group. They are mainly found in Mayurbhanj and Sundargarh districts of Odisha. They are also known in the different localities as 'Maheli' or 'Mahili.' The name, Mahali, has been derived from the Santal word '*mat*' meaning bamboo. They belong to Dravidian groups. They are the native of Chhotnagpur and West Bengal states, who usually work as labourers, palanquin bearers and bamboo workers and said to have migrated into the state of Odisha.

The Mahali are divided into five endogamous sections, like Boasphor Mahali, Patar Mahali, Sulunkhi Mahali, Tante Mahali and Mahali Munda. Each group has several totemic clans who trace their origin to some animate or inanimate object. Socio-culturally, the Mahalis have resemblances with the Santal and Munda tribes. It is assumed that the Boasphor, Sulunkhi and Tante sections of Mahali tribe are branches of Santal tribe. Similarly, the Mahali Munda is an offshoot of the original Munda tribe. It is believed that their division from the main tribe is due to their acceptance of lower occupation like palanquin bearing and basket making.

As per 2001 Census, the Mahali population in Odisha is 17,131. Their growth rate is 26.10 per cent and the sex ratio is 1014 females per 1000 males. The literacy rate shows an increasing trend from 20.68 per cent in 1991 to 37.96 per cent in 2001. They have their own language, which is classified with the Mundari group. They are also well conversant with the Indo-Aryan languages such as Bengali, Hindi and Odia. Now, most of them are bilingual and can speak and understand Odia and Santali languages.

* Published in the Photo Handbook on Mahali, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2013

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Dress and Ornaments:

The Mahali women wear either hand woven or mill made sarees and the men use short dhotis or napkins. The young boys and girls put on dresses that they procure from market. Mahali women are not very fond of wearing gold ornaments; however, use of silver ornaments is common among them. They wear both glass and metal bangles, beads or metal necklaces, ear rings, toe rings and armlets (*baju*) on the arms. Mahali women tie their hairs into a knob on the right above the neck. They are fond of tattooing, which they do on the forehead, arm, chin and on ankles.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Mahali people are mostly reside in multi-ethnic villages. But they live in separate hamlets. The house in the hamlet usually situated on both sides of the lane. They keep their houses, streets and lanes fairly neat and clean. There is a sacred *sal* groove called *Jahirthan* situated at the village outskirts where their supreme deity- *Marang Buru* and few other important deities reside.

Site selection for house construction starts with divination and rituals which are akin to those of the Santals. They put some rice, paddy, cow dung and vermilion on the new site at night and observe in the next morning. If the grains are found undamaged, they consider the site auspicious for house construction. On the contrary, if the grains are damaged or disturbed, they abandon the place considering it inauspicious. After completion of the construction of a new house, the family members venerate their ancestors before entering into it.

Usually a typical Mahali house has two to three rooms. It is commonly mud walled and its roof is thatched with straw or *naria* tiles. The larger room is partitioned by mud wall, one portion of it is used as kitchen and another, as a bedroom and storeroom. They have separate cow sheds. On festive occasions they plaster the floor and walls with clay mixed with fresh cow dung. Drinking water is fetched from the wells and sometimes from the nearby streams.

Stringed charpoy, bell metal, aluminum utensils and a few earthen pots are their main household appliances which they purchase from the nearby market. They make bamboo baskets and other household materials for their own use. Now, with development of modern technology, some of them possess Radio, Watch, TV, Fans, Two Wheelers, Cell Phones, etc.

LIVELIHOOD

Their main occupation is bamboo work. It is supplemented by cultivation and wage earning. They collect bamboo from the forest. They weave basket of various sizes and shapes using small knife, axe and hand-axe with a long wooden stump support. Apart from these, they also make wattle fences, fish traps and broom sticks and other usable items and articles out of bamboo.

A few Mahalis are small land holders and grow paddy using traditional methods and techniques. Mahalis also pursue forest collection, hunting, fishing, and wage earning to supplement their income. Presently, the part-time avocations like hunting and fishing have declined significantly. Those who cannot cope with their traditional occupation and are landless, take up wage-earning wherever there is scope to do so.

Bamboo Crafts

Art is an integral part of most tribes and it reflects in every aspect of their lifestyle. Though the Mahalis are not trained artisans and rely on natural talent and skill, they create magnificent pieces of bamboo crafts to earn their livelihood. They prepare the baskets varying from very small size to very large size for different uses which have heavy demand in their locality as well as in the outside. Both men and women are expert in preparing the bamboo basket. They prepare small sticks of different size from a big bamboo either brought from the forest or bought from the locality with the help of knife and give them different shapes. The cost of a bamboo purchased from the local market vary from Rs.50 /- to Rs.80/-. Most of the tribal and non tribal community in the area depends on this tribe for their requirements of baskets and other bamboo products. Besides preparation of baskets, they also show their artistic skill in preparation of flower vase of the different sizes, fences, fish traps, broom sticks and other usable items and articles out of bamboo.

To promote them, every year, the Mahail artisans are invited to participate in the Live Demonstration Programmes organized at the Tribal Museum of SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar show their artistic skills in bamboo crafts.

Food and Drinks:

Rice is the staple food of Mahali. They are generally non-vegetarian and eat mutton, fowl, fish etc. The beef eating practice has been abandoned. They use mustard and *mohua* seed and oil for cooking. In the Mahali society, the totems are worshipped and respected and not killed or eaten. As for example, the Mahali regards pig as their totem and thus, as a social taboo they do not eat pork.

Traditionally, rice beer (*handia*) is their favorite drink. They brew *handia* for their personal use and offer the popular drink to their deities, ancestral spirits and guests and relatives. *Handia* is taken to enjoy on special occasions, like religious ceremonies, birth, marriage and death rites. In the past, they did not consume milk and its products. But, now- a- days they have developed the habit of taking tea prepared with milk. Now, the milk-flavored tea is a popular drink among them. Previously, many of them used to take food in home-made leaf-cups and plates prepared by them. At present they use to serve food and drinks in aluminum or steel utensils such as bowls, plates and tumblers.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

In Mahali society, nuclear family is the smallest social unit composed of married couple and their legitimate unmarried children. They have patrilineal descent, patrilocal residence and patriarchal family. The rule of inheritance of property is patrilineal. In the Mahali society the property of a deceased person is equally shared among his sons and if he is issueless, the property goes to the nearest paternal kin as decided by the tribal council. The right of ancestor worship is conferred upon the eldest son. The Mahalis maintain social relations in the village community and ritual kinship bonds with their neighboring communities. All public places including temples and crematoria in the locality and beyond are shared by them with others.

The Mahali, are divided into a number of totemistic clans called *killi* which are exogamous in nature. These are Charbar (a tree), Duagri (wild pig), Kathargach (jack tree), Kerketta (a kind of bird), Murumar (Nilgai), Topowar (a bird), Tirki (bull), etc. The members of a clan are forbidden to kill or cause harm to the totemic plant or animal. The totems may not be killed or eaten. Marriage is also contracted outside the totemic clan. Activities among *killi* members are based on mutual co-operation and help, and ceremonial exchanges strengthen ties and maintain a cordial and reciprocal relationship among themselves.

Life Cycle

Pregnancy, Child Birth & Post Birth Rituals

Mahali believe that the life of a person begins in the mother's womb and ends at the cremation ground. After marriage the couple expects a child. Cessation of menses and a feeling of nausea indicate pregnancy. This makes a woman feel proud, as she will become a mother. During pregnancy, a woman has to observe certain taboos and restrictions for the safety and well-being of herself and her infant. A Pregnant woman is not allowed to remain alone and if she is alone, she has to carry an iron implement such as knife to avoid the evil influence of malevolent spirits.

At the time of delivery, an experienced old woman of the community or from neighbouring scheduled castes assists in the process of delivery. Immediately after the baby is born, the female assistant cuts the umbilical cord either with a bamboo split or an iron knife and, buries it outside the house. Then the baby is given a bath and the mother is washed with warm water.

After the birth of a child, the Mahali observe a 9-day pollution period. For eight days the mother and the baby are kept confined in a room under strict observation of pollution. From delivery to the end of the pollution period no adult males are allowed to come in contact with the mother. Consumption of meat or fish is totally restricted in the house during this period. The purificatory rites as well as the **name giving ceremony** take place on the 9th day. On this day the mother, accompanied by the female relatives, goes to take a purificatory bath

by anointing turmeric paste and oil. The baby and the male members of the family are shaved and take a bath.

The baby's name is selected through grain divination method and *Naya*, the traditional priest performs the rite. The kith and kin are entertained with a feast. The female attendant is given food and rice beer and remuneration in cash for her services.

Marriage

The Mahali tribe is endogamous and their clans are exogamous. Infringement of this customary rule is viewed seriously in their society and their traditional tribal council punishes the offenders which lead to heavy punishment like ex-communication from the tribe.

Both child and adult marriage are practiced in their society. In selection of spouse, the Mahali follow the rule of community endogamy and clan exogamy. In addition, the rule of village exogamy is also followed.

In the case of an arranged marriage, the initiative is always taken by the boy's side. While selecting a bride, the boy and his family members look for a beautiful girl having expertise in household works. Similarly, the girl prefers to marry a handsome and industrious boy who can support her in life. The boy's side first consults the astrologer to find out whether the match will be a suitable one. If he declares in its favour, they send a *raibar* (go-between) to start the negotiations with the girl's side. He pays a visit to the girl's family and put forth the proposal. If he receives a positive reply a date for the visit of the boy's side is fixed. On the appointed day the boy's father, along with his relatives, goes to the prospective bride's house. On arrival they are received and served with drinks. During this visit the bride price is settled and the date of the wedding is fixed.

On the day of the wedding, the invited kith and kin are served with food and drink. Then the bridegroom is taken to the bride's house in a procession accompanied by dance and music. On reaching the house of the bride, the party is greeted and mats and charpoys are provided for them to sit down. The bride and bridegroom sit on a plank in one room of the house. Then the bridegroom puts a vermilion mark on the bride's forehead about five times. After this, the party is served cooked food and rice beer. Finally the occasion is celebrated with dancing and singing.

Before marriage rites are performed, the groom's party has to pay the bride price which comprises two *sarees*, one dhoti, two cows and Rs. 100/- in cash. The *Naya*, traditional priest of the village officiates in the marriage ceremony. On the day of wedding, the invited kin members are served with a feast including delicious food and home brewed liquor. After marriage the bridegroom returns to his village along with the bride. The *raibar* is presented a *dhoti* after the marriage.

In Mahali society Monogamy is common though polygyny is allowed in rare cases if the first wife is barren. Levirate and sororate types of marriages are also vogue. Now, marriage by service and marriage by capture are obsolete.

Termination of marital bond is allowed in the Mahali society and divorce is permitted on special grounds like extra-marital relationship, quarrelsome nature of either of the spouses etc. with prior permission of the traditional tribal council. In case a husband wishes to divorce his wife, he, as per the norms, is bound to give her some rupees and then he is permitted to take away the iron armlet that was presented to her during the wedding ceremony.

Death Rite

The custom of disposal of the dead is almost similar to that of the neighboring Hindus. Mahalis either bury or cremate their dead. Generally, the deceased adults are cremated, but the babies and children are buried.

The dead body is carried on a bier. Relatives and neighbours carry the corpse and no one of other castes or tribes is allowed to touch it. Usually the eldest son of the deceased leads the funeral procession. On the way to the funeral ground the bier is laid down for a while at a crossroad. In case of burial, a pit is dug and the eldest son brings a pitcherful of water from the nearest stream, with which the corpse is washed after being anointed with turmeric paste and oil. A new piece of cloth is wrapped around the body, after which the eldest son puts a vermilion mark on the deceased's forehead. The body is then lowered into the pit and laid with its head pointing towards the north and its face upward. The eldest son first throws a handful of earth into the pit. The process is repeated by the pallbearers and others present there. All those attending the funeral then take a purificatory bath and return to the house of the deceased, where they are fed rice along with salt and onion.

The death pollution is observed for a period of ten days. On the tenth day the kith and kin and the members of the deceased's family are shaved and take a bath after offering food and alcohol to the departed soul. Then a feast is arranged for the relatives by the deceased's family.

In case of cremation, a piece of bone is collected from the cremation ground, kept in turmeric water. In case of burial of the dead body, a piece of bone is collected from the ground after six to eight months of burial and kept in turmeric water. In both the cases performance of certain rites are followed. The family members arrange to offer small quantity of rice bear and then the bone of the deceased person is thrown into the nearby river.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

The Mahalis believe that supernatural powers control their life and fate. They worship *Marang Buru* as their supreme deity and few other deities who reside in the sacred sal groove called *Jahirthan* situated at the village outskirts.

Besides, they worship Bana Kuanri before proceeding on hunting expeditions, Maneiko Tureiko for bumper crop and Goddess Bada Chandi and Ranga Chandi to ward off epidemics.

They also worship Hindu deities like Lord Mahadev, Ahira and Garaya for welfare and prosperity of their family and observe certain Hindu rituals and festivals like Holi, Sri Ram Navami, Rathajatra, Laxmipuja etc. They offer homemade food and drink to the spirits of the dead ancestors on different festive occasions and new eating ceremonies for their appeasement as they are believed to give them protection from different diseases and mishaps.

They believe that witches, sorcerers and malevolent spirits cause diseases, sufferings and other misfortunes. The traditional method of treatment through magico-religious practices is still in vogue among them in which the spiritual specialists are called upon to diagnose and treat. The educated Mahalis prefer to go to hospital for treatment.

Fair and Festivals:

The religious festivals of Mahali are mostly communal in nature. They celebrate Baha Parab, Saharae, Bandana, Ma-Mane for general welfare and prosperity of the village. The Naya (the village Priest) who generally belongs to Santal tribe, worships the village deity and officiates at village festivals.

Most of the festive occasions are celebrated with communal dancing and singing as it forms an important part of their lives, without which they feel dull and lifeless. All able-bodied persons, irrespective of sex and age, participate in the dancing and singing and relax. The sound of drums and the sweet songs attract the young boys and girls in particular, who suspend their activities and participate in the event. In villages where the Mahali live side by side with the Santal, they observe the festivals jointly.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The Mahalis have their traditional tribal council, which exercises social control over the members of the community at the village level. The council is constituted of Naya (the Priest), the Majhi (the Secular Headman), Gadeat (the Messenger) and the village elders for handling the customary matters and settling the cases of disputes relating to serious violation of the norms, values, customs and traditions of the society, and other intra village disputes.

The traditional *panchayat* has exclusive power to excommunicate persons from the society for grave offences like incest and also to grant permission for the readmission of expelled members. The decision of the village council is final and the offenders are invariably punished with a fine in cash and kinds. The amount of fine imposed depends on the severity and nature of offence.

DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

The close association of Mahali with neighbouring tribes and castes, coupled with various welfare measures taken up by government for their upliftment, has brought noticeable changes in their way of life. After Independence, the State Government, in its pursuit to bring about socio-economic development of the ST communities, have launched special programmes, which include legal aid, rehabilitation of victims, housing facilities, establishment of special employment exchanges, reservation in employment, establishment of residential schools and hostels etc.

The establishment of schools by the ST & SC Development Department and School & Mass Education of the State Government for tribal students in their area and implementation of Right to Education Act (2010) are noble interventions for desired transformation of Mahali tribe in the social sector. Development of infrastructure facilities and socio-economic support through different development agencies ranging from construction of Anganwadi Centers, PDS Centers and provision of houses under IAY, safe drinking water, Mobile Health Unit along with subsidy linked loan, vocational and orientation training to the tribe has brought an immense changes in the life of the tribe. Most of them are engaged in organized or non organized sectors to earn their livelihood.

The Mahali women have been roped into SHGs and getting financial assistance from ITDA and DRDA which has opened new arena of economic opportunity for better livelihood. Besides, financial assistance to individual entrepreneurs has expanded the scope for individual as well as community development. 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.

Conservation of Culture:

The ST and SC Development Department with support from Ministry of Tribal Affairs has set-up a Museum of Tribal Arts & Crafts in the premises of SC and ST Research and Training Institute, Bhubaneswar for preservation of material culture of different tribes including the Mahali. The ornaments, personal belongings, hunting weapons, fishing implements, and musical instruments of Mahali tribe have been exhibited in the different show cases in this Museum reflect their inherent talents, skills and ingenuity in bamboo crafts.

Besides, the live performance of Mahali dance in National Tribal Dance Festival, Bhubaneswar and in the open air pendal of Annual State Level Adivasi Exhibition every year, the replica of Mahali house in the ITDA stall and live demonstration programme on Tribal Arts and Crafts organized by SCSTRTI, aims at conservation and promotion of their material and non-material culture.

MATYA *

S. C. Mohanty ¹

Matya is numerically a small tribe. In the Madras Census report of 1901 Matyas have been found mentioned as a sub-division of the Gond tribe of the Central Provinces.

They are found sparsely distributed in most parts of Odisha. Their population in 2011 census is 30169 comprising 15 149 males and 15 020 females. Their sex ratio is 991 and their literacy rate, 51.05 percent that is 63.89 percent for males and 38.16 percent for females. They are largely concentrated in the districts of Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Malkangiri

The Matya put on sacred thread, a privilege given to them by the ex-ruler of Jeypore Ex-State. They speak *Desiya*, a corrupted form of Oriya but can understand Telugu.

They live in multi-ethnic villages. They along with other ethnic groups of the village worship village deities. There the village priest called *Pujari* and the astrologer called *Disari* are the main functionaries. Their village goddess, *Gramdebi* installed in a grove gets sacrifices of fowl and pig on *Pus Punei* and *Chait Parab*. In addition to these they visit local Hindu shrines of *Siva*, *Durga* and *Jagannath*.

The Matyas in undivided Koraput area are settled cultivators and do not work as earth digger as seen in other parts of the State. They grow rice and *ragi* as the main crops and these are their staple food. In addition to these they grow pulses and oil seeds like *niger* and mustard which they sell for cash. Maize and vegetables are also grown in rainy season. Previously they were dependent on collection of minor forest produce to a large extent.

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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The Desiya speaking Matyas of undivided Koraput form an endogamous group and do not intermarry with the Telenga Matyas or other ethnic groups like Munda Matias and Sabara Matia found elsewhere in Orissa. They have four exogamous totemic clans, like *Bagh*, tiger, *Nag*, cobra, *Cheli*, goat and *Kachima*, tortoise. They have the common surnames like *Kape*, *Naek*, *Pujari* and *Prema*.

They practise adult marriage. In addition to arranged marriage in which parents play vital role, marriage by elopement, by capture and by service are also allowed. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred. Payment of bride price both in cash and kind is prevalent. A husband seeks divorce from his wife when the latter runs away with another man. In that case, the first husband gets compensation known as *sogarta*.

They observe birth pollution for seven days in case of a female child and nine days for a male child. After bath the mother is given a new cloth to put on. When the child becomes one month old, the astrologer, *Disari*, suggests a name. Normally the child is named after the day of its birth or after some ancestor's name. They cremate and bury the dead. Death pollution is observed for three days. On the fourth day all male members of the household cut their hair, wash their clothes and take bath to purify them. After a year, they observe the death rites called *buda*. On this occasion kinsmen are invited to a feast.

The headman of the village is called *Naek* who along with *Pujari* and *Disari* and assisted by *Challan* and *Barik* look after their community matters relating to breach of their customs, marriage rules, disputes and partition of property.

They have their traditional dances and songs that form part of the celebration of the festive occasions. The most popular dance called *Dhemsanach* is performed by girls. They observe first eating of new rice in the month of *Bhadrab* (August-September) and *Dular Dei Puja* in the month of *Aswina* (September-October) for first eating of beans.

The Matya are gradually becoming Hinduised. They do not accept water and food from their neighbours like, the Bondo, Didayi and the Koya. Boys put on sacred thread at the time of marriage and elders wear beads of sacred basil.

MATYA *

*Gopinath Satpathy*¹

The Matyas of Orissa claim to be the autochthons and nothing is heard of their migration to this province. They use a sacred thread because this privilege was conferred on them by the former Rajas. They owe their name from their association with soil and land. Today, they prefer to designate them as Mati Bhumias instead of Matyas.

They are distributed in ten districts of Orissa and their total population is 5,711 of which 5,572 live in rural areas and 139 constitute urban population. The district wise population is given below:

Sl. No.	Name of the district	Male	Female	Total
1.	Sundargarh	1,331	1,174	2,505
2.	Koraput	567	552	1,119
3.	Keonjhar	296	273	569
4.	Ganjam	188	198	386
5.	Balasore	221	146	364
6.	Phulbani	98	124	222
7.	Puri	100	95	195
8.	Cuttack	100	90	190
9.	Sambalpur	11	86	97
10.	Mayurbhanj	49	15	64
Total		2,961	2,750	5,711

They are mainly distributed in a continuous belt in the North of Malkangiri subdivision in Koraput district and the preset note is based on the observation in this area. They speak Oriya language but it is mixed with Loria.

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¹ Research Assistant, Tribal Research Bureau (TRB), Bhubaneswar

The Matyas have their settlements on the plains. The settlements are small and the forests surround these. The houses are very small and low. The houses have only one or two rooms. The roofs are thatched with straw and the walls are made of wattles and mud. The walls are coloured red but not painted.

They have gourds to carry water, earthen vessels, leaf containers, tobacco and snuff cases, combs, bifurcated axes, rope cots and oil and rupee containers of bamboo, earthenware lamps as household equipments. They use hand pound Kutuni in their houses.

The agricultural implements consist of plough, ploughshare, Kodal, spade, digging stick and axe.

They use bow and arrow, axe, knife, as hunting implements. Fishing traps and small nets are rarely seen.

The musical instruments consist of flute, *ding dinga*, dancing stick, *changu* and drum.

They dress themselves like the neighbouring tribal folk. Ordinarily, the men wear *lenguti* but while going to market place, they wear cloths and the well-to-do wear cloth, banian and shirt even. The napkin and *chaddar* are worn by all. The females wear coloured sarees, woven by Doms and Gandas. They do not know the use of blouse. The ornaments like those of the neighbouring communities consist of anklets on legs, bangles on wrist, bead necklaces in the neck, various types of rings in the ear and nose, rings on fingers and toes. They do not use as much bead necklaces as the Bandos or Koyas do.

The Bhumias and Matyas consider themselves as two sections of one tribe, namely Gond. The internal structures of the two tribes are identical. They have four exogamous totemistic clans such as Bagh, Nag, Cheli and Kachhimo. The members of different clans have different surnames, like Kape, Prema, Pujari, Naek, Chalan, Putia, Dora etc. The members of one sept consider themselves as brothers and sisters and hence marriage is prohibited among them.

The family is nuclear and is the main social unit. The sons get separated as soon as they are married and live in separate hamlet. The family is patrilineal, patrilocal, and patrilocal. Both husband, wife and children work as a unit and peruse the economic pursuits with the common aim. The father worships the ancestor, for the sake of all the members of the house.

Village is the next larger unit. The secular headman is known as *Naek*, the religious head is *Pujari*, the village attendant is *Barik* and the attendant of the visitors is *Challan*. At present, the role of *Naek* as tax-collector is gone, yet he remains as a prominent figure for his roles in social functions. The *Naek* decides the disputes and imposes the fines. The *Barik* is a man from Scheduled Caste and he acts on the order of *Naek*. The fine is distributed among the *Naek*, *Barik* and

Challan. The *Pujari* does all religious worships and gets the major share of the sacrifices. There is one *Disari* in a village, who is expected to forecast the annual crop, auspicious days. He is respected whatever may be his caste. The village has one *Guru*, who comes once a year. He gives *Tulasimal* to the aged persons and threads at the time of marriage. He is given rice, cloth, money for his activity. The villagers join together in the hunting and festival of the village.

Cross cousin marriage is the rule. In case of refusal the female is entitled to compensation from the boy who marries her. Bride price is paid. When a married woman goes out with another man, the first husband gets some compensation, known as *Sagarta*. The four forms of marriage such as *Jhiamaga* (arranged), marriage by elopement, marriage by capture and marriage by service are adopted. In the first form the initiative is taken by the parents of the boy to select the bride. They put up the proposal before the girl's father. If it is accepted a pot of liquor is presented. At a later date, they go with another pot of liquor, rice and fix up the bride price. The date is fixed in consultation with *Disari*. The liquor is distributed among the villagers who accept it and thereby indicate their consent to the transfer of the girl to the man. On the previous day of marriage, the girl accompanied by a number of girls of her village is brought to the bridegroom's village in a procession with a *Dom* acting as musician. A *pandal* is erected in front of the bridegroom's house. The couple takes their seat on this platform. They are bathed in turmeric water and are given new clothes to wear. Their hands are joined together. They then go round the *Mahul* branch, planted on the ground for seven times and enter the bridegroom's house. The relatives of the boy stand on their way and make them admit two things namely (i) that they will be faithful for the entire life to each other (ii) that they will behave properly towards their kith and kin. A feast follows. The night is spent in dancing and drinking. Next day the bride's parents return with their *Jhola*, which is usually a pair of cow or bullocks. At present cash is being paid instead of cows and bullocks by the well-to-do and advanced families.

Sometimes, both boy and girl who have previously agreed elope to a relative's house at distant village. There they live as husband and wife. Later on, a feast is given to the villagers. Some amount of bride price is paid and they get the recognition as a couple.

On certain occasions, the boy snatches away her sweet heart from the river side, forest, or market place. After a mock fight and quarrel with the girl's parents, they are married. Bride price is paid and feast is given.

In certain cases, a poor man cannot afford to pay bride price. He decides to take up a job under a man for a stipulated period. He is only given food and cloth for this period towards his labour. At the end of this period, he marries the daughter or sister of the employer. He may settle up in the same village or may go to his own village.

The widow and divorced woman are allowed to remarry. The *Gharjuai* system is also prevalent. Monogamy is the rule.

The dead are buried or cremated. The men of outstanding position are cremated whereas; the common folk are buried in sleeping posture with salt and planks around, below and above. Death pollution is observed for 3 days. On this day, they are purified and they join in a feast. In case of cremation, on the 4th day, the cremated spot is cleared up; milk is poured on and a small hut like structure is raised at the spot. At certain places instead of hut like structures, a bamboo pole or wooden pole is set up and the dead man's rage is attached to it. The utensils are broken and are thrown there. After a year they perform yearly death rite (*buda*) for which they invite all relatives, and arrange a feast. They offer rice, meat, beer, etc., to the deceased, who is considered a *Duma*, and erect a *gudum* in his name.

The birth pollution in case of a girl issue extends over seven days and in case of a boy extends over 9 days. On the day following the period of pollution, the mother and the baby are cleaned with turmeric. If the household can afford, the mother is given a new cloth to wear. The child is given a name by *Disari*, who selects it by divination. They are usually named after the day of their birth, or after an ancestor's name. A feast is given to all on this occasion.

The Matyas consider the village Goddess as supreme deity. They worship ancestors and a number of spirits. The village deity is represented by her carriers (*Bahans*) like elephant, horse, etc. The Pujari worships her and offers sacrifices of fowl, goats, and pigs on various occasions.

Their main festivals are (*Dhan nuakhia*) -new rice eating ceremony in the month of Bhadrap, *Dual Dei Puja* in Asin, new *Simb* and *Saru* eating ceremony and *Pusa Punia* in Pusa, new mango eating ceremony and *Chaitra Parab* in Chaitra and Baisakh. They offer all new fruits to Gods, Goddesses, ancestors, before they eat, sell or deal with them. The days for observing the new eating ceremonies are decided by the *Naek* and *Disari* of the village and all observe them on that day.

During Asin (October), the village deity called Dular Dei is worshipped for 3 days namely Saturday, Sunday and Monday of the 2nd week. The *Disari* fixes up the time. Sacrifices are made to Goddess. The *Disari* gets the heads. The rest is divided into four parts. One part is taken by *Disari* as his share, one part by the headman of the village and the rest is distributed among the villagers.

They are very fond of dance and music. The *Dhemesa Nach* is one of their important dances. They have different types of songs befitting to the occasion.

The main occupation of the community is settled agriculture. Most of them cultivate their own land. They produce paddy, maize, *suan*, pulse and tobacco. They cultivate various types of vegetables. Forest products are collected

and fishing is resorted to at times. Some of them have taken up jobs. They are expert in earth work and are employed in it by the contractors.

They take paddy for a part of the year. They manage with edible roots of the forest, mango kernel, maize-flour and *suan*, etc. for 4 to 6 months in a year. Liquor of various types like rice beer, *salop*, *mohua* liquor, date palm juice, etc., are their favourite drinks. They do not take beef. They have given up the taking of pork.

The Matyas treat the Scheduled Castes like Dom, Pan, as untouchables. They take food from none. Similarly the Bondos, Koyas are regarded low in status by them for their crude and uncivilized way of life. They consider them to be on par with the Ronas, Sundhi, and Bhumia.

The barber and washer man do not serve them. The Brahmin does not attend their rituals.

Education is yet to spread among them. It is hoped that, with the expansion of road ways in their area they will improve.

MATYA *

A. B. Ota ¹

N. Kanhar ²

A. Kodamasingh ³

IDENTITY

Among the 62 Scheduled Tribe communities of Odisha, Matya is a minor tribe. The name 'Matya' comes from the fact that they are expert earth (*mati*) diggers and more often employed by the neighbouring communities for earth work. The tribe is also known as Mati-Bhumiya. The name Mati Bhumiya is derived from two words such as 'Mati' meaning 'soil' and 'Bhu' meaning 'earth' which denotes their long association with the land and soil. They have close cultural affinities with the Mirdha, Kisan and Oraon tribes. They mainly inhabit the Dhenkanal, Ganjam and Malkangiri districts of Odisha. Small sections of them are also found in other districts like Sundargarh, Balasore and Cuttack.

Being expert earth diggers they are mostly engaged in earth works. They speak Odia, Telugu and Laria languages depending upon their place of residence. So far as their physical characteristics are concerned, they are of medium to tall stature, dark complexion having broad and flat faces with a broad nose and thick lips. They possess wavy hair.

Population & Literacy:

According to 2011 census the total population of Matyas in Odisha is 30,169 (males 15149 and females 15020). Their sex ratio is 991 females per 1000 males. Their rate of literacy is 51.05 % (63.89 % for the males and 38.16 % for

* Published in the Photo Handbook on Matya, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2015

¹ Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

² Museum Guide, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

³ Museum Guide, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

females). The decadal population growth rate among the Matya during the period from 1991 to 2011 is 71.91 percent.

Dress & Ornaments:

The traditional pattern of dress and ornaments is very simple and similar to those of Mirdha, Kisan and Oraon tribes. Generally, the Matya men wear a narrow strip of white loin cloth known as 'Lenguti' and the women wear coloured *sarees*, hand woven by the neighbouring Scheduled Caste community known as 'Dom'. But at present due to their frequent contact and migrations to cities, their dress patterns have changed. Matya men now prefer to wear banyan, shirt with napkin and *chadar* available in local market and women in addition to *saree* prefer to use petticoat and blouse. Their women also like to adorn with various traditional ornaments made of silver, brass and aluminum.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The Matyas usually live in multi-ethnic villages with other communities including Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes but in separate hamlets maintaining their distinct cultural identity. Their villages are located in hill bottoms, forests and plains close to hill streams for water supply. In these days, sanitary wells and tube wells have been provided by the government in their habitations for supply of safe and potable drinking water.

The houses in the village are randomly distributed. They usually construct a new house in the months of February and March. For selection of a new site they observe some ritual. The head of the house with other male members go to the chosen site carrying some grains of rice (*arua chaula*) and turmeric. At the four corner of the selected site, the head of the house keeps some rice mixed with turmeric. These are covered with *sal* leaf and left there overnight. On the next morning, they go to the site to observe whether the grains are disturbed or not. If they find the rice remaining intact, the site is considered to be auspicious and suitable to construct a new house.

The typical Matya house is built upon a rectangular ground plan. These houses are small in size. Each house consists of two rooms. One room is used as sleeping-cum-store room and the other, as the kitchen. The cowshed is located at the back side of the house. A narrow verandah is attached to the house where they keep their agricultural implements. In their kitchen they keep the utensils and make one or two mortar holes embedded on the ground for husking food grains. The walls of the house are made of wattle frames plastered with mud and the outer walls of the house are plastered with red earth for looking beautiful. The gable shaped roof is thatched with straw.

For their use in day to day life, the Matya keep a number of household articles. They usually keep earthen vessels, gourd containers and leaf containers

for storing purpose, utensils, husking levers (*kutuni*) etc. in their kitchen. They keep earth digging implements and agricultural implements in their house.

Recently, some of the Matya people have constructed Pacca houses under Indira Awas Yojana and Mo Kudia Yojana.

SOCIAL LIFE

The Matya community is divided into several exogamous totemic clans such as Bagh (tiger), Nag (cobra), Chili (goat) and Kochimo (tortoise). The members of each clan believe to have been descended from a common ancestor and they have some mystic ties with their totem. A strong sense of reciprocity and co-operation exists among all the members of each clan as they consider themselves as brothers and sisters. The clans are further subdivided into lineages such as Galapalli, Kondipilli, Naka, Majhi etc. The members of different clans have different surnames like Kape, Prema, Pujari, Naek, Chalan, Putia, Dora etc.

Family is the smallest and an important social unit in their society. They prefer to live in nuclear family. Joint family is rarely found. As soon as a boy gets married, he builds a new house of his own and stays separately from his parents.

Matya families are patrilineal, partilocal and patriarchal. Father is the head of the family. He receives the highest respect and exercises his authority in all the affairs of his family. The role of mother is also very important in all domestic matters. Ancestral property is inherited equally by the sons but, the eldest son who succeeds to the authority of his father after the latter's death gets a little extra.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS:

Pregnancy and Child Birth

Pregnancy and child birth are important land marks in the life cycle of Matya. The Matya family rejoices at the birth of a child. They believe that one of their ancestors will take birth in their family. The pregnant mother becomes happy for her motherhood. They prefer the birth of son as he will continue their family line.

During pregnancy the woman observes some taboos and restrictions. She is prohibited to go to the cremation ground, to come out of the house during lunar and solar eclipses, to attend any rituals and festivals and eat the meat of any ritually sacrificed animal.

Usually the birth of the child takes place in a separate room and an experienced woman of the family or community helps in the delivery of the child. After the delivery of the child, she cuts the umbilical cord with a knife and buries it with the placenta in a pit in the backyard of the house. The mother and child are kept warm by the nuptial fire in the laying in room.

Birth pollution is observed for seven days but, in case of the birth of a male child, the pollution period extends to nine days. On the seventh day, the purificatory rite is observed. On this day, the mother pares her nails and after taking a complete bath, she takes *tulsi* (*osmium sanctum*) leaves with water for her purification. The child is also given a bath.

On the 21st day, the name giving ceremony is held. The name is usually chosen by the 'Disari' (traditional astrologer) who selects the name through the rice divination. He drops two grains of rice into turmeric water while uttering the names of the ancestors. If both the grains float and meet each other, the name being uttered at that time is given to the child. Alternatively, the child is named according to name of the day of birth. If the household can afford, a feast is hosted to all the kith and kin on that day and the mother and child is given new clothes to wear on this occasion.

Puberty:

Generally in Matya society, adolescent girls observe puberty rite for seven days on the onset of their first menstruation. During this period of menstrual pollution, the menstruating girl stays separately in an isolated room. In that time she has to observe some taboos like, to avoid to see and talk to male members, to attend any rituals and festivals, to attend to any indoor or outdoor works. On the 7th day she takes purificatory bath in the nearby stream or river by anointing turmeric paste mixed with oil and wears new clothes. Her family hosts a mini feast to the kith and kin on that day.

Marriage:

Marriage is an important event in the life cycle of Matyas. Mostly they practise adult marriage and monogamy. Polygyny is permitted in specific cases of barrenness or perpetual sickness of the first wife. Sororal and non-sororal polygyny is also prevalent in their society. Marriages arranged by negotiation (*jhia maga*) are most common, prestigious and popular form of marriage. Besides, other forms of marriage like marriage by elopement, marriage by capture, marriage by service and cross-cousin marriage are also practiced among them. Marriage with their mother's brother's daughter, father's sister's daughter or the elder sister's daughter is preferred. Payment of bride price (*jhola*) is obligatory in all regular kinds of marriages.

In the negotiation marriage, the initiative is taken by the groom's parents to select the bride. They put forth the marriage proposal before the parents of their chosen bride. If the proposal is accepted, a pot of liquor is presented to the bride's parents. At a later date, they go with another pot of liquor and rice to the bride's house and fix the amount of the bride price and the date of marriage in consultation with the Disari. The liquor is distributed among the bride's family members and villagers. If they accept the drink, it indicates their consent to the matrimonial alliance.

On the preceding day of marriage, the bride accompanied by a number of villagers, relatives and girls of her village is brought to the groom's village in a procession with music played by "Dom" musicians. They are greeted warmly, entertained with food and liquor and accommodated in a separate house by the groom's family.

A raised platform i.e., "pandal" is erected in front of the groom's house for conducting the wedding rites. On the wedding day, both the bride and groom take bath in turmeric water, wear new clothes and take their seats on this platform. The Disari usually conducts the wedding ritual. The hands of both the couple are joined together and then they move around the branch of a *mahul* tree planted on the ground near the wedding altar for seven times and enter into the groom's house. At the time of entry into the house, the relatives of the groom stand on their way and make them promise two things- that they will remain faithful to each other for the entire life and that they will behave properly with their kith and kin. After that the groom's family hosts a grand feast for all invited guests, villagers and all kith and kin.

The wedding night is enjoyed by all by singing, dancing, merry making and drinking. On the next morning, the bride's party returns home with the *jhola* (bride price) which usually consists of a pair of cows or bullocks. At present, cash is being paid instead of animals by the well-to-do and advanced families.

The remarriage of widow, widower and divorcee are allowed in the Matya society. When a married woman goes out with another man, her new husband has to pay some compensation known as *sagarta* to her first husband.

Divorce:

Divorce is permissible in Matya society on the grounds of adultery, maladjustment and cruelty. Either husband or wife can seek divorce. Divorce compensation is paid to the aggrieved party and children usually live with their father. The cases of divorce are finalized by their traditional community council in presence of both the parties.

Death :

The Matyas believe death as a natural phenomenon. Both burial and cremation is adopted by them for the disposal of the dead. The corpses of men of outstanding position are cremated whereas those of the commoners are buried in sleeping posture with salt and flank thrown around, below and above.

Death pollution is observed for 3 days. On the third day, the purificatory rite is observed. The clothes, utensils and other household articles are washed and the house and its surrounding are cleaned and smeared with a mixture of cow dung and water. All the bereaved family members cut hair and nails and take a purificatory bath. Then a feast is hosted for all the kith and kin. In case of

cremation, on the 4th day, the cremation spot is cleared up, milk is poured on and a small hut like structure is raised at the spot. In certain places instead of hut like structure, a bamboo pole or wooden pole is set up and the dead man's rags is attached to it. The earthen wares are broken and thrown there. They conduct ancestor worship on the twelfth day of death.

After a year, they perform annual death rite (*buda*) for which they invite all relatives and host a feast. They offer rice, meat beer etc. to the deceased, who is considered as Duma and erect a Gudum in his name.

LIVELIHOOD

The Matya's main occupation is agriculture. They are settled agriculturists. They cultivate paddy, maize, *suan*, pulses, tobacco and various types of vegetables in their lands. Like other tribal communities they have fascination to domesticate cows, bullocks, buffaloes for agricultural work and transportation as well as goats, chicken, sheep for ceremonial sacrifice, domestic consumption and often, for sale in the market. Traditionally being skilled in earth works, they go for digging tanks, ponds, canals, house foundations on contractual or daily wage as and when called for.

From the nearby forest they collect fodder, firewood and the seasonal minor forest produce such as edible fruits, roots, leaves, tubers, resin, *sal* and *siali* leaves and seeds, *mahua* flowers and fruits, herbs etc. for consumption and sale. Occasionally, they go for hunting of animals and birds to the forest and take up fishing in the nearby ponds, streams and rivers.

Now due to impact of urbanization and industrialization, many of them have migrated to the cities and live in slums. They are employed as daily wage labourers in different construction works and factories and some of them are also employed in private and government sectors.

Food & Drinks:

The Matyas are non-vegetarians. Rice is their staple food. Usually they take meals thrice in a day. In the early morning, they take watered rice with salt, green chili and fried green leaves and vegetables and in their lunch and dinner they take boiled rice along with the dishes of pulses, vegetables, green leaves, edible roots, tubers and mushrooms collected from the nearby forests seasonally. Like other tribal communities they also prefer to eat non-vegetarian foods like chicken, mutton, eggs and fishes. They prepare and take some special type of food items like cakes and sweetmeats of different type and non-veg dishes on the occasions of ceremonies, festivals and rituals.

The Matya men usually consume alcoholic drinks which are often homemade or sometimes, bought from the local market. Besides drinking they also smoke cigar (*pika*), *beedi* and chew betel leaves and tobacco.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Like other tribal communities, the Matya believe in existence of different god and goddess. They regard their village deity “called Dulari Devi” or “Thakurani” as their patron deity. She is represented by her carriers (*bahans*) like elephants, horses etc. They also worship a number of ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits are worshipped by the elder male member of the house for the well-being of the family members.

Pujari is the religious head of the village who officiate in all the rituals and festivals and worships the village deity regularly. He is assisted by Disari – the astrologer, who is expected to forecast the annual crops and auspicious days.

The Matyas still believe in their traditional magico-religious practices to cure diseases. Few of them are aware of modern systems of health care and they go to hospitals for treatment of diseases. But majority of them still go to the village shaman for indigenous treatment. For his services the shaman is paid in terms of both cash and kind. To appease god and goddess and thereby cure the diseases, they sacrifice different animals and birds.

Festivals :

The Matyas observe a number of festivals in a year. Their main festival is Dhan-nuakhai i.e., the new rice eating ceremony that is observed in the month of August-September (*Bhadra*). They observe Dulari Dei *puja* in October (*Asen*), new *simb* and *sara* eating ceremony and *pusa punia* in the month of Pusa (December-January), new mango eating ceremony and *chait parab* in the months of *chaitra* and *baisakh* (April and May). They offer all new fruits to gods and ancestors and before that they don’t eat and sell them.

During the month of Aswin (September-October), the village deity - ‘Dulari Devi is worshipped for 3 days from Saturday to Monday in the 2nd week. The Disari fixes up the time of worship. Different types of animals and birds are sacrificed to appease the deity. The Disari gets the heads of sacrificed animals and the rest is divided into four parts. One part is taken by Disari as his share, one by the headman of the village, one by the Pujari and the remaining part is distributed among the villagers.

They also participate in the local festivals of Dasara, Rathajatra and Trinath Mela.

They have special dances and music on the occasions of different festivals and rituals but Dhemsas dance is one of their importance dances.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Matyas have simple political organization constituted by their traditional leaders like Naek, Barik and Challan. The secular headman is known as 'Naek'. The post of Naek is hereditary. His responsibility is to maintain peace and order in the community. All the cases of disputes, conflicts, theft, violation of customary rules, witchcraft and sorcery, partition of property, sale and mortgage of land, marriage, bride price, divorce, adultery and the like are settled in the traditional village council meetings. Naek as the secular headman presides over the meetings and gives his final decision in consultation with other elderly members of the village who are present in the meetings. Punishment is given to the culprit according to the gravity of the offence. The culprit is imposed to pay fine in shape of cash and kind and also sometimes the culprit is excommunicated for serious offences. The 'Naek' is assisted by 'Barik' who belong to a Scheduled Caste. He acts as the village messenger and the assistant to Naek. There is another assistant called 'Challan' who also assists the Naek in organizing and conducting the meetings. At the end of the meeting the fine which is collected from the culprit is distributed among Naek, Barik and Challan.

Due to the impact of planned change and modernization, their traditional political organization is gradually declining and they now follow the statutory three tier Panchayat Raj system.

DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

Trends of modernization and introduction of planned development intervention by the Government and Non-Government agencies have brought notable changes in the life style of the Matya. Development in the fields of health and sanitation, education, poverty eradication, communication, agriculture and infrastructure has taken place. Now they have adopted modern agricultural practices, by using of high yielding varieties of seeds, chemical fertilizers and better irrigation facilities. Some of them have adopted poultry, goat and fishery schemes for their livelihood enhancement.

Since education is the most important input for the socio- economic development, the STs and SCs Development Department have run a number of educational institutions like EMRS (Ekalavya Model Residential Schools), Higher Secondary Schools (Science and Commerce), High Schools, Girls High Schools, Residential and Non- Residential Ashram and Sevashram Schools in their area. It has brought noticeable changes in their life style, dress pattern and belief system. Under various socio-economic development schemes the Matya women now form SHGs which have also played a major role for the upliftment of their economic and social life.

MIRDHA *

*Uma Charan Mohanty*¹

The Mirdha is a small Dravidian tribe which is commonly referred as *Koda* in the district of Sambalpur and Bolangir. The traditional occupation of the tribe is the digging and carrying of earth and hence they are known as *Koda*. The term *Mirdha* means head coolie. Previously these people used to serve as earth workers not individually on the basis of daily wages but worked in groups on contract basis. The headman of such group is called *Mirdha*. Thus the so called *Kodas* have adopted the honourable term *Mirdha* instead of the derogatory term *Koda* which means earth working labourers.

The Mirdhas identify themselves as '*Kunhar*' in their mother tongue and speak '*Kun Boli*' the language of the *Kisans*. Not only in language, but in social customs, religious rites and political organization the *Mirdhas* have greater similarities with the *Kisans*. Indeed the so called Mirdhas are none else but a section of the *Kisan* tribe.

At present the tribe has only two divisions -the '*Bad Kuda*' or '*Kunhar*' and '*San Kuda*' or '*San Kunhar*'. The *Bad Kuda* have retained many of the original *Kisan* customs while the *San Kuda* section seems more Oriyaised. The main difference between the two sections is that while the *Sana Kuda* bridegroom goes to the bride's house in accompaniment of drums, the *Bad Kuda* bride only comes to the groom's house and no drum is beaten save traditional musical instruments which are played by their own community members only.

As *Kisans*, the Mirdhas do not touch food cooked by outsiders including Brahmins. The population of the Mirdhas in the 1961 Census is given below:-

Sl. No	Name of the District	Total Population	Male	Female
1.	Sambalpur	16,491	8,195,	8,296
2.	Bolangir	4,946	2,469	2,477
3.	Dhenkanal	2,094	1,104	990
4.	Kalahandi	1,268	662	606
5.	Koraput	732	343	389
6.	Boudh-Phulbani	593	293	300
7.	Keonjhar	172	105	67
8.	Puri	144	70	74
9.	Cuttack	181	79	102
Total		26,621	13,320	13,301

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¹ Research Scholar, Tribal Research Bureau (TRB), Bhubaneswar

MIRDHA *

*S. Routray*¹

The tribe Mirdha are classed as a Scheduled Tribe of Orissa and Bihar. The word 'Mirdha' implies head coolie. According to U.C. Mohanty, the Mirdha are a small Dravidian tribe who are known as Koda in the districts of Sambalpur and Bolangir in Orissa. Due to their previous occupation of digging and carrying earth they are also known as Koda, which means earth-digging labourers. But in course of time they have adopted the more honourable name of Mirdha in place of the derogatory term 'Koda'. As regards their physical characteristics, they are of medium to tall stature. They have oval to squarish faces with a broad nose, thick lips, a well-developed zygomatic bone and dolicocephalic heads. Their chins are narrow but there is little prognathism. They have a dark complexion with straight or wavy hair.

The Mirdha are found distributed in most of the districts of the state, but their main concentration is in the districts of Sambalpur and Bolangir. Their total population in the state was 28,177 in 1981, which increased to 30,853 by 1991, a rate of growth of 9.50 per cent over a period of ten years. According to the 1991 Census they constitute 0.44 per cent of the total tribal population of the state. The sex ratio was 930 females per 1000 males. The literacy percentage was 16.50 in 1981, increasing to 26.99 by 1991. A considerable section of the Mirdha population is bilingual. Besides their own Mirdha language they speak Oriya as a second language.

The Mirdha are expert earth workers. The men do the digging and the women assist them. The implements used are simple and crude. These are the *kodi* and *gounti* for digging and the *dola* or *bhara* for carrying the earth. Most of them also work as agriculturists and field labourers. They also collect roots, fruits, fuel, tooth sticks and leaves from the nearby forests. The leaves are collected to make leaf cups and plates.

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The arrangement of houses in a Mirdha settlement follows no fixed pattern. The houses are mostly scattered in an irregular fashion, either clustered or neatly arranged on either side of the road. The pattern of housing is also not the same throughout the locality. Houses usually have two rooms, with walls of bamboo mats or dried twigs thickly plastered with mud and thatched with straw. Pucca tile-roofed houses are rare. Of the two rooms, which have no windows, one is used as a kitchen and the other as a bed-cum-store room. Usually a small shed is constructed for the cattle and fowl. All rubbish, cow dung and refuse is heaped up in the backyard.

The Mirdha either live exclusively with their kith and kin or with other tribes and castes in heterogeneous villages. In choosing a new site to construct houses, they carry out certain rituals as practised by their neighbouring tribes. They put seven grains of rice, together with turmeric, into pits at the four corners of the site. The heaps are examined the next day. If these are found intact the site is considered auspicious. Before erecting the first pole the Mirdha dig a pit, place dub grass, rice and turmeric into it and then put up a pillar in the name of the goddess Matimaa. They consider Wednesday to be an auspicious day to enter a new house. On the date of entry, a feast is arranged in which cooked food is first offered to the ancestors and then a few kin and friends are fed.

According to U.C. Mohanty, the Mirdha identify themselves as Kunhar and speak Kun Boli, the language of the Kisans. Not only in language but also in social customs, the religious rites and political organization the Mirdha have a great affinity with those of the Kisans. In fact the so-called Mirdha are none other but a section of the Kisan tribe. There are only two divisions in the tribe, the Bad Kunhar and the San Kunhar. The former have retained many of their original Kisan customs, while the latter are more Oriyaised in their customs.

The Mirdhas have small size families of from two to four individuals, and they are patrilineal and patriarchal. Very rarely, joint families are encountered. Usually after marriage the son leads a separate family life with his newly married wife. They have a clan organization which is exogamous in nature. The clans are generally named after the plants and animals to which the clan members ascribe their origin. Primarily, the exogamous nature of the clan is established at the time of marital contacts. Authority in a family is vested in the father. He receives the highest respect and exercises power in all family affairs. He is of major ritual importance at the time of the marriage and other ritual ceremonies. The mother plays an important role in the process of socialization and is the main economic asset. All major decisions pertaining to marriage and rituals are made in consultation with the wife. The children usually respect their parents, though there are exceptions, which are few and far between.

The Mirdha live below the poverty line. Their few household possessions present a poor picture of their economy. The household articles include utensils such as pots, plates of various sizes made of earth or aluminium.

They keep baskets of various sizes, usually made of bamboo, for storing food grains. They also have stone implements like the grinding stone and *sila*. The other household appliances are different varieties of agricultural implements, fishing traps, weapons for hunting, and musical instruments like drums of different sizes.

A small coarse *dhoti* or sari, usually hand woven by the neighbouring Gandas, is their usual dress. Women wear saris, placing the *anchal* over the right shoulder. Even grown-up children wear loin cloths called *kaupin* or *lenguti*. Those with some education in the schools wear shirts and pants. The women wear gold and aluminium ornaments in the ear and nose in the form of nose-rings, nose tips, earrings and ear-tops. The ornaments for the ear are the *ganthia* and *jhalka*, for the nose the *guna* and *nakaputki*, for the neck the *khagala* and *gunjamali*, for the wrist the *bandria*, *chudi*, *baha-suta* and *tade*, and for the ankle the *paijhal*. Not much care is taken over dressing the hair. The usual pattern is to keep long hairs uncombed and irregularly tied into a knot at the back of the head on the right. Women apply *aleta*, a strip of red paint, to their feet. Most women tattoo their limbs, particularly before marriage. The arms, hands and legs are tattooed with various floral designs.

The food habits of the Mirdha are very irregular. They have no fixed time for eating. They eat whenever food is available. But three meals a day is the common practice. Early in the morning they take rice cooked the previous night and moistened in water. This is repeated at midday but with a side dish of some edible leaves to which some salt and chilly are added. Some families occasionally take dal or some vegetable curry, which are luxury items for the poor. Besides these general items they also take special items such as rice beer, *mahua* liquor, etc. Chewing and smoking tobacco are a common habit. Rice is their staple food, but their chief millet is *gulzi*. Cereals and pulses of other varieties are also eaten along with edible forest roots and fruits. They relish *tole* oil and *sargi* oil, which are extracted from *mahua* and *sal* seeds respectively.

The Mirdha rejoice at the birth of a child, as it adds a new member to the family. Barrenness is regarded as unfortunate. Mostly, they welcome the birth of a son, as he will continue the line. No separate room is prepared for the delivery and birth generally takes place in a corner of the living room. In hard cases the parturient woman is sent to the nearby hospital. An experienced woman assists the woman in confinement. She cuts the umbilical cord with a knife and buries it with the placenta in a pit in the backyard. The mother is kept to a restricted diet which chiefly consists of vegetable soup and boiled rice. Normally the *antudi* fire is not lit except when either the mother or the child catches severe cold or pneumonia. Pollution lasts for a week. On expiry of this period, the house and its surroundings are cleaned with cowdung water. Kinsmen and relatives are fed in a small feast. It is the father or grandfather who names the child. Two grains of rice are dropped into turmeric water while uttering the names of dead ancestors

one by one. If both grains float and meet, the name being uttered at that time is accepted for the child. After naming the child both the grains of rice and the naval cord that has already been cut are buried together in the doorway to the bedroom. Some *kusuma* or rice beer is also mixed with it. On the 21st day after the delivery the final purification ceremony is held, when a final cleaning of the house, clothes and utensils is done. A small feast is arranged in order to entertain the tribesmen.

When a girl attains puberty no restriction is imposed on her, nor is any isolation observed during subsequent menstruations. The whole affair goes unnoticed and there is no formal recognition of such an important critical stage of the life cycle.

Marriage is of great importance in the life cycle of a Mirdha. The tribe is divided into a number of exogamous clans called *gotras*, which have names such as Macha, Majhi, Bagha and Kau. The only title they invariably use is Mirdha. They mostly prefer adult marriage. Divorce is socially approved and divorced women can remarry. Although marriage by capture (*jhinka*), elopement (*udulia*) and service are socially approved of, marriage by negotiation is the common feature. Sororate and levirate marriages are practised to some extent. In particular, girls and boys are given freedom in selecting their spouses.

Marriage by negotiation is the most common form. Marriages are negotiated and finalized by mediators called *kanihara*, on whom they depend to finalize all the details of the marriage until it is completed. They consider the month of Magh to be the most suitable month for marriage, and the days that are considered auspicious are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The brideprice is paid in both kind and cash and varies from Rs.4/- to Rs.6/-. Payment in kind includes a pair of *dhotis* and two pairs of saris. The parents of the groom usually hand the entire responsibility for the marriage to an elderly and experienced kinsman, who is vested with full authority to organize the function. The different occasions of the marriage are enjoyed with dancing, singing and feasting in the village. Meat and *kusuma* liquor are lavishly served on these occasions. A few days after the marriage, the married son is separated from his parents and establishes a residence in the same village.

They bury corpses. The corpse is anointed with turmeric paste, and after being adorned with a new piece of cloth is carried to the cremation ground on a cot by the tribesmen. Usually a pit 6' x 3' in size and about 4' deep is dug and the body is placed inside it with the head pointing south. The eldest son, who officiates as the chief mourner, throws the first handful of earth to fill up the pit, and others follow him. They place ten to twelve stone slabs over the pit in order to ward off jackals and other cadaver-eaters. Pollution continues for eleven days. It ends on the twelfth day, when the eldest son goes to the burial ground with a small earthenware pot filled with water. He cleans the ground, prepares a small earthenware toy, which he brings home in the pot, and buries it in his own house.

on the tenth day of Kartik in the succeeding year. The kinsmen and relatives show sympathy to the bereaved family. Finally, they are treated with a small feast in which rice and meat are served.

The Mirdha celebrate their life by rejoicing with the famous *dhal khai* dance, which is celebrated during Phalguna and Chaitra. All dancers, young and old, dance in a semicircular movement. During the dance two dancing groups converse with one another in song. To accompany the dancing they mainly use drums, the *tamaka* and *mahuri*. Bodily movements and exposure are of great importance in this dance, which is based on the love episode of Radha and Krishna, the legends of Ramayana and many other folk tales.

The Mirdha still practise their traditional magico-religious treatment to cure diseases. Very few are aware of modern systems of treatment like the ayurvedic, homeopathic or allopathic. They still call the village shaman to provide them with traditional treatment for diseases.

The Mirdha profess Hinduism and worship many Hindu gods and goddesses. Though Siva, Vishnu and Durga are revered the most, Mangala Thakurani and Budha Devata are also worshipped. Besides, they greatly venerate their ancestors. They fervently enjoy some festivals with their kith and kin, particularly when their granaries are full. Various religious ceremonies are observed in honour of different gods and goddesses round the year. On festive occasions special foods like cakes and mutton are eaten, and they enjoy themselves in dance and music. They dance to songs in which both men and women, young and old participate and it continues day and night without a break. Among the festivals Nuakhia is the most important festival observed for a day in the month of Bhadrab (August-September). On this occasion, new rice is taken for the first time. The *pitru-pita* or souls of the dead are worshipped along with their *ista-devata* or presiding deity. Another festival called Amba-Gundi is observed on the full-moon day of Falguna, when mango, *mahua*, *chara* and *kendu* are eaten for the first time. During most of these ceremonies unmarried girls and boys have an opportunity to choose their life partners.

The low level of literacy among the Mirdha shows that these people are educationally very backward. As education is the key factor in any type of development, it is necessary to strengthen their educational base by providing an adequate number of ashram schools in their area. In addition, a supply of safe drinking water under the minimum needs programme is essential for this area, as the people are in the habit of drinking water from unhygienic springs, rivers and ponds. In addition, land alienation and indebtedness continue to be serious problems for this tribal people.

MIRDHA *

A. B. Ota ¹

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B. K. Chinara ³

IDENTITY

Out of 62 Scheduled Tribe communities of Odisha, Mirdha is one. Etymologically, the term 'Mirdha' implies "head collie". The Mirdha people are expert earth workers. Mostly they are engaged in the work of digging and carrying earth for which they are known as Koda or Kuda in Sambalpur and Bolangir districts but in Sundergarh district they are known as Mirdha. Some researchers are of the opinion that Mirdha is a section of Kisan tribe and Mirdha, Kisan, Koda/Kuda are offshoots of a common ethnic stock.

Population and Concentration:

The Mirdhas are largely distributed in Anugul, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Bolangir, Keonjhar and Sonepur districts of Odisha. According to 2011 census the total population of Mirdhas in Odisha is 75,940 including 37,757 males and 38,183 females registering a favourable sex ratio of 1011 females per 1000 males. Between 1991 and 2001 censuses, their population has registered a growth rate of 4.62% and between 2001 and 2011 the growth rate is phenomenal i.e., 135.26%. This has happened due to enumeration of a large number of people of the tribe who are known as Koda or Kuda after their inclusion in ST list of Odisha in 2002-03 as synonym of Mirdhas.

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Literacy

Their literacy rate in 2001 was 51.17 % and it has risen to 62.31 % in 2001. The male and female literacy that was leveled at 67.70% and 34.49 %, respectively in 2001 has increased to 73.53% and 51.27% respectively indicating a substantial rise in female literacy- a positive indication of development.

Language:

The Mirdha people identify themselves as 'Kunhar' and speak "Kun Boli", the language of Kisan. Not only in language but also in their socio-cultural traits, they show a greater similarity with the Kisan. Besides their "Kun Boli" language, now most of them are conversant with the regional language Odia.

Physical Characteristics

They are of medium to tall stature having oval to square-shaped faces with a broad nose, thick lip, well developed zygomatic bones and dolichocephalic head. They also possess straight or wavy hair with a dark complexion. Their chins are narrow with a little prognathism.

Dress and Ornaments:

In dress pattern the Mirdhas are very simple and similar to those of Kisan, Matya and Oraon tribes. The women usually wear traditional costumes like small coarse sarees and the male folk use "dhoti" hand woven by the neighbouring weaving community known as "Ganda". But at present the Mirdha men use modern dresses like trousers, shirts and banyans and women use sarees with petticoat and blouse. The Mirdha women also adorn themselves with various ornaments like earrings (Gunthia, Jhala), nose ring (Guna, Naka Putkti), neckband, bead necklace (Khagla, Gunjamali) etc.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Mirdhas live in multi-ethnic villages where they dwell in separate hamlets maintaining their socio-cultural identity. The arrangement of houses in a Mirdha settlement follows no fixed pattern. In some settlements the houses are arranged in a linear fashion but in some other settlements the houses are clustered together or sparsely distributed in an irregular fashion. The pattern of housing is also not the same throughout the locality.

For selection of a new site for making new houses, they perform a ritual. At the selected site they keep seven grains of rice (*arua chaula*) covered with a *pippal* leaf. In the following morning it is observed whether the grains are disturbed or remained the same as are kept. If it is found to be disturbed, the site is considered to be inauspicious and if it is found undisturbed, the site is considered to be suitable for construction of a new house.

Houses are made on a rectangular ground plan. Each house consists of two rooms; one is used as bed room- cum- store room where in one side of the room they keep their agricultural produce and the other one is kitchen room. Besides these two rooms, usually a small shed is constructed for the cattle and fowl at the backside of the house. They also have a small kitchen garden where they grow a variety of fruits and vegetables for domestic consumption.

The walls of the house are made of bamboo mats or dried twigs thickly plastered with mud. The roof of the house is thatched with straw or Naria tiles known as *jhikar*. RCC roofed houses are very rare. The rooms of the houses are attached with one door and windows are conspicuously absent in the house but small windows are also found in few houses.

Household Articles:

The household possessions of the Mirdhas are very few and reflect their economic backwardness. Being expert earth workers, they in almost all houses, keep spade (*kodi*) and crowbar (*gauti*) for digging and bamboo basket (*dola*) and carrying pole (*bhara*) for carrying the earth. Besides these, they keep utensils made of clay or aluminum pots, plates of different sizes for their use at home and hearth. They keep bamboo baskets of various sizes for storing food grains. They also have stone implements like the grinding stone (*sila*). The other household implements are different agricultural implements like plough, yoke, leveler, sickle, etc. They also have different types of fishing and hunting implements such as bird traps, rabbit traps and nets, fishing traps and nets, bow & arrow etc. The other household articles are ropes, string cots, wooden cots, broom sticks, winnowing fans etc.

LIVELIHOOD

The traditional occupation of the Mirdhas is to work as earth diggers as they are expert in this work. The men do digging work and women assist in carrying soils. Side by side, they also depend upon agriculture as their secondary source of livelihood. Mirdha land owners grow rice, millets and other cereals and pulses on their own land while the landless people are employed as agricultural labourer. The Mirdhas grow different types of vegetables in their kitchen garden for their own consumption and sell the surplus in nearby markets. Usually, they grow pumpkin, brinjal, green pea, tomato, onion etc in their kitchen gardens.

Like other tribal communities the Mirdhas prefer to domesticate cows, bullocks, buffaloes for agricultural work and transportation. They also raise poultry, goats and sheep for sacrificial purpose in rituals and festivals and also for their own consumption.

To supplement their food basket and earn extra income, they go to the forest to collect minor forest produce like edible roots and tubers, *sal* leaves and seeds, *mahua* flowers, fruits etc as well as fire wood. They also make leaf cups

and plates from the *sal* leaf and sell those in nearby market. Occasionally they also go for hunting and fishing to supplement their food. Now-a-days, a little change is also marked in their occupation. Some of them are employed in private and government sectors and some are engaged in small business.

Food Habits:

Rice is their staple food which is supplemented by the dish of vegetables, green leaves, edible roots and tubers, mushrooms collected from nearby forest. They cook food with *tole* oil and *sargi* oil which are extracted from *mahua* and *sal* seeds respectively. Usually, they take meals thrice a day. In the early morning they take watered rice with salt, green chili and fried green leaves and vegetables and in lunch and dinner they take boiled rice with a side dish of *dal*, green leaves or vegetables. Like other tribal communities they also prefer to eat non-vegetarian foods prepared out of chicken, mutton, eggs and fishes. Besides their daily intake of food, they also prepare and enjoy special foods like cakes of different types and different non vegetarian items on festive occasions.

The Mirdha male folk enjoy drinking the country liquor like rice beer, *mahua* liquor and date palm juice (*tadi*). Besides, they also prefer to smoke and chew tobacco.

SOCIAL LIFE

Mirdha tribe is divided into different exogamous clans like Minj, Matia, Wada, Panna, Bahala, Lakada, and Kinda etc. Each clan has a totem of man and animals to whom the clan members ascribe their origin. Marital ties between families of the same clan members are strictly prohibited as they believe that they are related to each other as brothers and sisters. There exists a strong sense of reciprocity among all the members of each clan.

The family in Mirdha community is an important social unit. It is small in size and composed of two to four members. Their family type is mostly nuclear, patrilocal, patrilineal and monogamous. Few cases of extended and polygynous families are also found. Usually after marriage, the son leads a separate family life with his wife. Father is the main authority of a family. He receives the highest respect and exercises power in all family affairs. The mother plays an important role in the process of socialization and is regarded as the main economic asset of the family. All major decisions pertaining to marriage and other rituals are made in a joint consultation of wife and husband.

Life Cycle Rituals:

Pregnancy and Child Birth:

The birth of the child in a Mirdha family brings an immense pleasure among the family members. The Mirdha society prefers the birth of son as he will continue their family line. During the pregnancy period the care of the mother is

taken by the family members. She observes some taboos and restrictions regarding her food and movements.

Usually, the child birth takes place in a corner of the living room and an experienced Mirdha woman assists in the delivery. After the birth of the child, she cuts the umbilical cord with a knife and buries it along with the placenta in a pit in the backyard of the house. During the post delivery period, the mother observes restrictions in her diet and takes vegetable soup and boiled rice.

Birth pollution is observed for seven days by the family members. On the seventh day, the purificatory rite is observed. On this day the house and its surroundings are cleaned and smeared with a mixture of cow dung and water. On the 21st day of the child birth the final purificatory rite is performed when a final cleaning of the house, clothes and utensil is done. The mother cuts her nails, takes a complete bath and takes *tulsi* (*Osimum Sanctum*) leaves with water for her purification. The child is also given a bath.

On this day, the name giving ritual is celebrated in which the child is given a name by the father or grandfather. The name is selected through the process of rice divination. At the time of name giving two grains of rice are dropped into turmeric water with uttering of the names of dead ancestors, from paternal and maternal sides. When both the grains float and meet each other, the name being uttered at that time is given to the child. After naming, both the grains of rice and the naval cord that has already been cut are buried together under the doorway to the bedroom. Some *kusuna* (rice beer) is also mixed with it. On the eve of the name giving ritual all the kith and kin are invited and a mini feast is hosted by the child's family.

Puberty:

In Mirdha society when a girl attains puberty no restriction is imposed on her. Even no seclusion taboos are observed during subsequent menstruations. The whole affair goes unnoticed and there is no formal recognition of such an important critical stage of the life cycle.

Marriage:

Marriage is an important event in the life cycle of the Mirdhas. Mostly, they prefer adult marriage and monogamy. Several forms of marriage are practiced in Mirdha society like marriage by negotiation, marriage by capture (*jhinka*), marriage by elopement (*udulia*) and marriage by service. Besides these, sorrorate and levirate marriages are also in vogue to some extent. The girls and boys in Mirdha society enjoy due freedom in selecting their spouses.

Out of the above forms of marriage, marriage by negotiation is the most common and prestigious form of marriage. This form of marriage is negotiated and finalized by mediators locally known as '*kanihra*' on whom both the bride

and grooms party depend to finalize all the details of the marriage until it is finished.

The custom of bride price is also prevalent and it is finalized through negotiation by the mediator. It is paid both in kind and cash. Payment in cash varies from Rs.4/- to Rs.6/- and the payment in kind includes a pair of dhotis and two pair of *sarees*. But now-a-days, the amount of cash has increased. The month of Magha (February) is believed to be the suitable month and the days considered auspicious to conduct marriage are Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

The parents of the groom usually take the whole responsibility to organize the wedding ritual. The different events of the marriage are enjoyed with dancing, singing and feasting in the village. Meat and *kusuma* liquor are lavishly served to guests, friends, relatives and villagers on these occasions. A few days after the marriage, the married son is separated from his parents and establishes a new residence in the same village.

Divorce:

The practice of divorce for marital incompatibility and mal-adjustment is also socially approved. Divorce takes place on the grounds of adultery, mal-adjustment, impotency, sterility and cruelty. The cases of divorces are finalized in their 'Jati Samaj'. Remarriage of divorcees is also socially permitted.

Death:

The Mirdhas practice both burial and cremation for the disposal of the corpses depending upon the socio-economic status of the family of the deceased. After the death of an individual, the news is disseminated to all kinsmen to assemble in the house of the deceased. The corpse is anointed with turmeric paste and covered with a new white cloth. Then it is carried to the cremation/burial ground on a cot by the kinsmen. Usually a pit in the size of 6' x 3' and about 4' deep is dug and the body is placed in south and north direction. Then the eldest son of the dead person throws first hand full of earth to fill up the pit and others follows him. Then ten to twelve stone-slabs are laid over the pit in order to ward off Jackals and other carnivores. In case of cremation, the eldest son of the deceased lights the fire which comes from the hearth of the deceased.

Then pollution period is observed for nine days. They perform the purificatory rite in two stages in case of corpses disposed of by cremation. In the 1st stage, they observe the preliminary cleansing rite on the 3rd day of occurrence of death. On this occasion all the kin members go to the cremation ground and collect the ash of the dead person offering country liquor and rice to the spirit of the deceased. They throw all the personal belongings of the deceased into the nearby river or stream. After that all the family members take bath and return

home. They prepare dry fish curry to offer to the deceased near the cremation ground and also host a feast to all the kith and kin.

On the tenth or twelfth day of death the second and final stage of purificatory rite both for cremation and burial cases is conducted. The eldest son goes to the cremation/burial ground with a small earthen pot filled with water. He cleans the ground, makes a small clay image and brings it home in a pot and buries it in his own house. Later, on the tenth day of Kartika (October-November) in the succeeding year of the death, the dead person's house is cleaned with cow dung and all the clothes and utensils used by the family members are washed. Then all the relatives cut hair and nails and take purificatory bath. Then a small feast is hosted by the family of the deceased for all the kith and kin.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Like other tribal communities the Mirdha religion is mostly based on ancestor worship and they also believe in existence of different gods and goddesses. Maa Mangala Thakurani and Budha Devata are worshipped as their village deities. 'Kalo' is the sacerdotal head of the village, who officiates in the observance of all rituals and festivals. The post of Kalo is hereditary.

Today, because of prolonged culture contact with their caste neighbours, the Mirdhas have adopted some elements of Hinduism and worship all major Hindu gods and goddesses like Radha Krishna, Shiva, Parvati, Hanuman, Ram, Maa Durga, Kali and others. Following the Hindu neighbours they are celebrating the Hindu festivals like Kalipuja, Janmastami, Holi, Dussera etc.

The Mirdhas still rely on their traditional magico - religious mode of treatment to cure diseases. When they suffer from any disease, they contact their traditional village shaman locally known as *kukuluku* for diagnosis and treatment. The shaman treats the patients by administering some herbal medicines combined with performance of some magico-religious practices. However, now-a-days, they are gradually going for modern health care in serious cases.

Festivals:

The Mirdhas, like other tribal communities, observe different festivals in the honour of different gods and goddesses. Most of their festivals revolve around the agricultural operations like sowing of seeds, harvesting of crops and eating of new rice and fruits. Some of the most important festivals observed by them are Akhaya Trutiya, Nuakhia, Dussera, Amba Nua Khia etc.

In the month of Baisakha (April - May), they observe the festival of Akhaya Trutiya. On this day they first sow seeds in their agricultural field. The main objective of this festival is to bring rain in proper times for better harvest.

The next most important festival celebrated by the Mirdhas is the Nua Khia in the month of Bhadrab (August – September). On this occasion newly harvested rice is taken by them for the first time after offering it to the village gods, goddesses and ancestors. All the kith and kin are invited to have a get-together and all share the dish of the newly harvested rice.

Like the Hindus, they also celebrate Dussera festival in the month of September-October. Another festival called Amba – Gundi or Amba Nua Khia is observed on the full moon day of Falguna (March-April). Before this festival they do not eat mangoes. On all the new eating ceremonies, they first offer the new food to appease their gods and ancestors and then they start eating.

The Mirdhas observe and enjoy all the festivals amidst their kith and kin. On these occasions they also sacrifice goat and fowl before gods and goddesses and prepare special dishes like different types of cakes, mutton and chicken that they enjoy along with country liquor. All these festivals are celebrated in accompaniment of their traditional form of dance and music.

Dance and Music:

The traditional dance and music are the main source of recreation of the Mirdhas. Their most colourful and popular dance is Dal-Khai dance. In this dance all the members of their community irrespective of age and sex can participate. They perform this dance in a semi-circular movement. During the dance two dance groups converse with one another singing the Dal-Khai song. They perform dance with the tune of musical instruments like drums, *tamaka* and *mahuri*. Bodily movements and exposure are of great importance in this dance which is based on the love episodes of the Hindu deities, Radha and Krishna. This dance continues day and night uninterruptedly. In this dance the unmarried girls and boys get the opportunity of choosing their life partners.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Mirdha socio-political structure is always democratic in spirit and the leaders are mostly traditional in nature. The traditional political council in Mirdha society is known as “Jati Samaj”. The main function of this council is to enforce social control to maintain peace and order in the society. The “Jati Samaj” (traditional village council) is constituted of its chief called Sardar or Kotwar or Murda and other elderly members of the village. The post of Murda is hereditary. He presides over all the meetings in “Jati Samaj”. While delivering justice and taking a decision in any dispute, he is assisted by other elderly members of the village. The decision of “Jati Samaj” at the village level is final and thus respected and obeyed by all Mirdha people.

The disputes like partition of family property, sale and mortgage of land, violation of customary marriage rules, divorce cases, violation of taboos,

suspected cases of witch craft, and other kinds of sexual offences, physical assault and theft are settled in the “Jati Samaj”.

Punishment given to the culprits also varies according to the gravity of the offences. Often the culprit is asked to bear the expenses of hosting a communal feast as penalty and sometimes the offenders who are found guilty of serious violations of customary rules are ex-communicated. But now-a-days with the introduction of Panchayati Raj system and modern judiciary system, the effectiveness of the “Jati Samaj” is slowly fading. As such, the Mirdhas are approaching the police and court of law for settlement of disputes.

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

With the passage of time as well as their frequent contact with other castes and tribes, the Mirdhas have accepted new cultural elements and changed their way of life to a great extent. After independence the Mirdhas are listed as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) under the provisions of Constitution of India and enjoy all the protective, promotional and welfare benefits being provided by the Government for their all round development.

Now, they also enjoy various facilities like reservation in the public services, admission in the educational institutions, the public representation in the Parliament, Assembly and Panchayat Raj Institutions like Gram Panchayat (G.P.), Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad.

For their welfare as a tribal community, Government has been implementing various developmental programmes through different agencies like ITDA, DRDA, MADA, Cluster Approach Programmes, OSFDC and NGOs etc. These schemes and programmes have effected development in their education, agriculture, irrigation, horticulture, communication, health & sanitation, drinking water supply, electrification etc. Initiatives have been taken at G.P., Block and District levels to create awareness among them about different developmental schemes and programmes of the Government. Changes have been clearly marked in the occupational pattern, living pattern, food habits and dress pattern of the Mirdhas.

Mirdha Women SHGs have played a major role in uplifting their economic and social life. At the same time, these activities have also helped them to protect themselves from the exploitation of the unscrupulous Sahukars. Change in political backdrop, election system and introduction of local self government have ultimately helped them to emerge and promote new leadership among them. The impact of change is visible in all aspects of their life.

PALMAR MAIN LINES AMONG THE MIRDHA TRIBE OF SAMBALPUR DISTRICT, ORISSA *

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During the past century, wise and humble attempts have been made to describe the human variations among different sections and communities of India. A lot of efforts have been made in Palmar and finger dermatoglyphics to throw some light on population differences. References may be made to a number of studies by Galton (1896), Henry (1937), Wilder (1904), Pons (1959), Holt (1949), Cummins and Midlo (1934,61), Sharma (1957, 62, 63), Malhotra (1984), Usha Deka et al (1990), Roy Choudhury (1962,67) and many others. This paper is an attempt to see the incidence of palmar main-lines among Mirdhas. The Mirhdas are a small endogamous tribe of Sambalpur district of Orissa. They are generally referred to as 'Kuda'- meaning an earth digger. The present work has been compared with those of some other tribes of Orissa.

Materials and Methods

Bilateral palm prints of 124 unrelated male samples were collected from Meghpal and Badsahir villages under Jujumora block of Sambalpur district of Orissa. The method of printing, analyzing, formulating and interpreting were described by Cummins and Midlo (1961). Chi-square test has been made in between Mirdha and other populations of Orissa to show the closeness and statistical differences.

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Results and Discussion

Table-1 shows the per cent frequencies of termination of palmar main lines in 124 male Mirdhas. Line-D has high percentage of termination in the position 9 ((31.51 %) followed by 11 (31.05 %) and 7 (24.19 %). Ending in position 10 constitute only 7.66 per cent of the total. The ending in the position 7 is more 30.64 in left palms where as that of in the position 11 is more 44.35 per cent in right palms, Triadius and line-D are absent in one right palm (0.81 %) and in one left palm (0.81 %).

Line-C ends frequently in positions 9, 7 and 5 in both the hands and the percentages are 28:23, 19:36 and 10:48 respectively. High percentages of termination of C line are seen in the position 9 (39.52 %) in right palms, in the position 7 (21.77 %) in left palms and in position 5 (12.90 %) in left palms. Abortive types is X and X types are seen more frequent 15.32 % in left hands and 11.29 % in right hands respectively. X shows high (9.68 %) incidence in total than X (8.46 %). O condition or complete absent type makes 4.43 per cent which is high in right palms (8.06 %).

Termination of line-B is more in the position 7 (31.04 %) followed by the positions 5' (30.24 %) and 4 (20.97 %). In the right palms line-B ends in 41.93 % per cent cases in position 7. In position 5' and 4' the line-B ends in 31.45 per cent and 26.61 per cent cases in left palms respectively. Line-B is not seen in one left palm which is a rare case (0.81 %). A line ends in position 4 in 50.81 per cent cases followed by position 3 (31.86 %). Right palms show more termination (62.10 %) in position 4 than the left (39.51 %). Line A termination is seen less 2.01 percent (4.03 %) in right palms in position 1. Only in one case A-line ending is seen in position 7.

The percentages of dissimilarity in main line formulae (MLF) are shown in table 2. 64 different types of MLF are occurring in right and 69 are in the left palms. Certain common formulae (MLF) are seen in both the hands. They are 25 in number. This number is deducted from the total of right and left number of MLF. Therefore, in both the palms the different types of MLF are seen to be 108 ($64+69=133-25=108$). The percentages of dissimilarity in MLF in right, left and in both the palms are 51.61, 55.64 and 43.55 respectively. This percentage is much higher than that of percentage of dissimilarity calculated 4.25 by Cummins and Midlo (1943, 61) in 4000 palms. It is obvious that if the sample size is more than the number of combination of MLF will be more.

The main line formula (MLF) is no doubt indicative of the slant of ridges in the distal position of the palm but the most convenient and useful quantitative expression of the degree of transversality is the integral value known as main line index (Roy Choudhury, 1957, 62). A great value of which reflects a greater degree of transversality of the ridges. The MLF among Mirdhas are calculated to

be 8.20 in right and 6.98 in left palm. The average value (R+L) is seen to be 7.59 and the extent of transverslity (R/L ratio) is 117.48.

Table-3 shows the frequencies of palmar main lines on the basis of Wilder's three main lines formula. It is found that 11.9:7-formula appears to be more common in the right hands (28.23 per cent) than in the right. While 9:7:5-formula occurs more frequently in the left (10.48) Per cent) than in the right 7.5:5- is seen to have occurred in equal frequencies in both right and left palms. 11.97- is seen more (29.84 per cent) followed by 9.75- (7.66 per cent) and 7.5:5- (5.65 per cent) when right and left hands are taken together.

Table-4 shows the comparison of frequency distribution of Wilder's three PMLF in different tribal population of Orissa. Mirdha tribe exhibit higher percentage (29.84) for 11.9:7-modal type followed by Bodo Gadaba (29.52), 9.7:5 is seen more (30.00 per cent) among Paroja and Parenga whereas 7.5:5- is seen more frequent (18.70 per cent) among Ollaro Gadaba. Mirdhas exhibit lowest percentage 15.32 and 11.29 for 9.7:5- and 7.5:5-respectively.

Table-5 displays the chi-square values computed between Mirdha and other tribal populations of Orissa studied by Mahapatra for Wilder's three MLF. In all the cases the X^2 values are found to be insignificant at 5 per cent level with 2 degrees of freedom and Mirdhas show a closer affinity with these tribe when the palmar main lines are taken into consideration.

TABLE No - 1
Per cent frequencies of termination of Palmar Mainlines

Position (1)	Line-D			Line-C			Line-B			Line-A		
	R. (2)	L. (3)	Total (4)	R. (5)	L. (6)	Total (7)	R. (8)	L. (9)	Total (10)	R. (11)	L. (12)	Total (13)
0	0.81	0.81	0.81	8.06	0.81	4.43	..	0.81	0.42	..	..	..
1	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	4.03	2.01
2	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.61	3.23	2.42
3	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	0.81	0.42	21.77	41.94	31.86
3h	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	1.61	0.81	4.03	7.26	5.64
4	..	..	..	0.81	8.06	4.43	15.32	26.61	20.97	000	39.51	50.81
5'	..	..	..	8.06	12.90	10.48	29.03	31.45	30.24	000	4.03	6.45
5"	..	..	..	4.03	2.42	3.23	3.23	7.26	5.24	0.81	..	0.42
6	..	..	..	4.03	1.62	2.83	4.03	10.48	7.26	..	..	..
7	17.74	30.64	24.19	16.94	21.77	19.36	41.93	20.16	31.04	0.81	..	0.42
8	7.26	1.61	4.43	..	..	..	3.23	0.81	2.02	..	..	..
9	23.39	39.52	31.51	39.52	16.94	28.23	3.23	..	1.62	..	..	..
10	5.64	9.68	7.66	4.03	0.81	2.92	..	..	..	..	..	..
11	44.35	17.74	31.05	1.62	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
12	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
13	0.81	..	0.42	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
X	..	..	..	1.61	15.32	8.46	..	..	..	..	..	..
X	..	..	..	11.29	8.06	9.68	..	..	..	..	..	..

TABLE - 2
Percentage of dissimilarity in main line Formulae

Sides (1)	Total number of palms (2)	No. of different formula (3)	Percentage of dissimilarities (4)
Right	12.59	64	51.61
	124	69	55.64
	248	108	43.55

TABLE-3
Per cent frequencies of Palmar Main Line Formulae (Wilder's three MLF)

MLF (1)	Right		Left		Total (R+L)	
	No. (2)	Per cent (3)	No. (4)	Per cent (5)	No. (6)	Per cent (7)
11.9.7	53	28.23	2	1.61	37	29.84
9.7.5	6	4.84	13	10.48	19	15.32
7.5.5	7	5.65	7	5.65	14	11.22

TABLE-4
Frequency distribution of Wilder's three MLF in different tribal population of Orissa

Tribes (1)	No. (2)	11.9.7- (3)	9.7.5- (4)	7.5.5- (5)
Bodo Gadaba	101	29.52	26.19	14.96
Ollaro Gadaba	105	27.10	22.80	18.70
Didayi	84	24.30	28.60	17.30
Bhumia	86	25.00	29.10	18.00
Paroja	100	126.00	30.00	14.00
Parenga	100	25.00	30.00	14.00
Mirdha	124	29.84	15.32	11.29

TABLE-5
X² values between Mirdha and other tribal population

Population (1)	X ² - values (2)		
Bodo Gadaba	1.83	2	Insignificant
Ollaro Gadaba	1.43	2	Insignificant
Didayi	4.77	2	Insignificant
Bhumia	4.66	2	Insignificant
Paroja	2.63	2	Insignificant
Parenga	4.80	2	Insignificant

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some villages, dominant clans own land. The clan elders mediate in fixing marriage and bride price.

Among them the common mode of acquiring mate is through negotiation. Other approved modes are by mutual consent, elopement, service, intrusion and exchange. Junior levirate and sororate are permitted in their society.

They practise both burial and cremation. Death pollution lasts for ten days and ends after performance of purificatory rituals and feast.

Sing Bonga, the sun god otherwise called Dharam Debta is their supreme god. Other deities are Basukimata - the earth goddess, Dessuali, Marang Bonga, Karam Bonga, Laxmi, etc. Their priest, Pahan worships the deities on festive occasions at Sarna, the sacred grove located at the village outskirts. Their important festivals are Sarhul, Karma, Jitia, Diwali, Dussera, Sohrai and Sivaratri. A good number of them have embraced Christianity.

MUNDA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

MUNDA is a major tribe of Odisha, with a total population of 5 58 691 (including 2 79 211 males and 2 79 480 females) according to 2011 census. Their sex ratio is 1001. In 1981 their rate of literacy was 16.20 %. It has risen to 54.92 percent in 2011 census. They are largely concentrated in the districts of western Odisha namely, Sundargarh and Sambalpur. They are also known as Horo-hon or Mura meaning the village headman. They believe that they are the descendants of Sing Bonga - the supreme god and the Creator. The Munda along with the Kol, the Kol-lohara, the Ho and the Mundari have originated from the same ancestral stock who have migrated to surrounding regions of Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Tripura from their original habitat in the Kolhan region of Singbhum district, Bihar. In Mayurbhanj they are known as Kol, Kolha and Ho. They are called Kol in Bihar. Apart from their mother tongue, Mundari, they also speak Sadri and Oriya.

Traditionally the Munda are an agrarian community. They are recognized as the first settlers (Khunt-Katidars) who cleared forests and established villages. In these days they have taken up mining and industrial labour, agricultural and construction labour, small business, white-collar jobs, besides animal husbandry and forestry

In Odisha they are divided into four sections, Santhali, Nagpuria, Kolhani and Tamadia. They have a hierarchy of clans. Clusters of clans maintain group solidarity and regulate marriage and socio-economic relationships. In

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MUNDAS AND THEIR WAYS OF LIVING IN WEST-BENGAL *

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Attempts have been made in this paper to show in brief, how the Mundas make their living and how they have gradually adjusted themselves with changing socio-economic situations in West-Bengal, after their migration from their homeland centuries ago.

They are an autochthonous community living mainly in Chotanagpur plateau and in other adjoining places. Once they lived in the sylvan jungles, having agriculture as their main economy, supplemented, at times, by hunting and other pursuits. Earlier accounts of Dalton² (1872), Risley³ (1891) and later works of Roy (1912) throw some light on their manners and customs and these accounts may be considered as the baseline of their cultural patterns. They also noticed, at that time, some sort of cross-groups, having commensal and connubial relations with other neighbouring communities. This had resulted in the birth of hybrid stocks like, Munda-Kharia, Mundha-Lohar, Munda-Mahali, Munda-Manjhi, Munda-Oraon, etc. This proves beyond argument that the community, under circumstantial set-up and compelling situations, had to assimilate and absorb the local cultural traits. These persisting forces are at play even at present, which can be noticed easily, and have contributed largely towards their gradual Hinduisation.

The western jungle covered tract of Midnapur is physically a continuation of the Chotanagpur plateau, and naturally it could be surmised that the Mundas have migrated gradually from their homeland there in search of

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¹ Anthropologist of West Bengal

² Dalton, E. T. (Calcutta, 1872) - Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal

³ Risley, H. H. (Calcutta, 1891) - Tribes and Castes of Bengal

better employment and economic security. The forest-clad region of West-Midnapur possibly attracted these people much, without least disturbing their psychological and sentimental get-up. Hence migration to this tract was popular, easy and continuous.

Total number of Munda population in this district is 5,030 according to 1951 census, though their distribution in the State of West Bengal is 82,923.

The Mundas speak a distinctive dialect of their own, which indirectly helped keeping intact their tribal traits, so far. To note the gradual process of assimilation, the writer has studied two Munda villages in this district. Though this sample survey is considered insufficient for making a generalized assessment, yet the findings have thrown considerable light on the social changes, and the tendencies prompting them.

One of these villages is Telkand, situated in Sankrail police-station, in Jhargram Subdivision, whereas the other is Daharpur under Narayanganj Police-station, in the Sadar South Subdivision of Midnapur. It is to be noted that the village Telkand is exclusively a Munda village, inhabited by 46 families and with a total population of 242 (121 males and 121 females). Very recently one Raju family has constructed a hut in the village periphery and has been living there.

Geo-physically, this village is situated on the northern bank of the river Subarnarekha. On the southern bank of it the continuous growth of the jungle of Nayagram is still present. This is geographically a continuation of the jungle of Mayurbhanj of Orissa. According to the oldest headman of this village, this village site was selected and cleared up for habitation by the fore-fathers of the present-day Mundas, about 150 years ago. At that time, the forest was dense, and jungle resources were available in plenty, and the river side lands were very fertile. As such, the Mundas considered this place as most congenial for their habitation. The ancestors of the present-day Mundas of this village had originally migrated from the remote western tracts of Chotanagpur plateau, but none of the present villagers could trace or ascertain any direct relationship with them.

At present, they have no connubial or commensal relationship with their kinsmen living in the Chotanagpur plateau.

Due to growth of population and other factors, or for prospects of better employment, the Mundas of this village are found to have already migrated further east. The Mundas generally migrate in batches, comprising of their kinsmen and agnate groups. The Mundas generally migrate in batches, comprising of their kinsmen and agnate groups. The Mundas of this particular village have their relations in many neighbouring villages, situated westwards, as well as, east wards. Some unreclaimed regions of this district have gradually been populated by the rapid migration of these people. As a result, the Mundas are found to live side by side with other neighbouring caste groups. They are

sincere, peaceful and hard-working agriculturists. Their sincerity and simplicity had made them friendly with all local caste and community groups.

On the other hand, village Daharpur has been selected, as it is the easternmost village, where the Munda migration flow has practically stopped now. This village is situated under Narayangarh Police-Station, very near to the Railway Station. It is to be noted here that this particular village is inhabited by multi-ethnic groups.

The Mundas of this village are found to live in six hamlets, and the total Munda population has been recorded as follow:-

Table -1
Munda population and hamlets

Sl. No.	Hamlets	Number of families	Population		
			Total	Male	Female
1.	Shamatarangi	19	123	66	57
2.	Jalapaddi	7	50	26	24
3.	Karageria	16	94	42	52
4.	Pichhabani	30	167	77	90
5.	Debpukria	4	23	12	11
6.	Tulia	8	29	14	15
Total		84	486	237	249

A good number of villages including Daharpur in the Police-Station like Kesiari, Sabang, Pingla and Debra, etc., in the Sadar South subdivision of Midnapur, were depopulated gradually for various cases, mainly natural and economic, and were in such a condition till the First Great World War. Factors responsible for this gradual depopulation, according to the statements, were epidemic diseases like cholera, influenza, malaria etc. As a result, most of this tract lay almost barren and uncultivated for a long time, and became covered with thick bushes and jungle. Village Daharpur was affected similarly, which as a number of large silted tanks, the banks of which are covered with thorny bushes and jungles. The Lodhas, a denotified community of this village, is also settled near the banks of these old silted tanks, which they call Masak, Tiorgeria etc. The Mundas began to migrate to this village sometimes about 35 years ago, that is about 1929, for the first time, with a small kin-group, in search of good cultivable land for their livelihood.

At first, they selected Shamtarangi, a silted tank, and later other silted tanks called Jalapaddi, Karageria, Pichhavani, Debpukuria and Tulia. They constructed their small huts, clearing the jungles and gradually brought the lands under cultivation. The local zemindars and other agricultural communities were, at that time, in urgent need of some good agricultural labourers, and the Mundas who came here, met their requirement conveniently. As a result, the

Mundas got immediate employment, which attracted fresh immigrants for settling here. By this time, some of the Mundas purchased some uncultivated land from the zemindars, who gave these to them on convenient and liberal terms of settlement. Due to their sincere and industrious habit, within a very short time, they were able to establish themselves here, on a firm footing.

Migration to village Telkand has stopped for a pretty long time, but migration to Daharpur continued up till 1959. Even a few families have migrated here from village Telkand. A total of 84 Munda families living in 6 hamlets, have migrated from 24 villages of Midnapur since 1929. Most of these villages are situated in Jhargram Sub-division. The others are Kesiari and Khargpur Police-Stations in Midnapur Sadar South Subdivision. On enquiry it has revealed that relatives of kinsmen of these migrants also came with them.

Village Telkand is inhabited exclusively by the Mundas, and it is an older settlement than village Daharpur, which is a multi-caste village. Telkand is surrounded by a big canal known as 'Bansi Khal', which becomes inaccessible during the rainy season. The settlements of other villages are not far away from this village. The distances vary from 1 ½ miles to 3 ½ miles. But in the case of Daharpur, the Munda settlements are, more or less, isolated.

In respect of set-up and distribution of the huts in Telkand, it is found that the main road runs through the middle of the village and the huts are rectangular, mud-built, four-slopped, with fenced compounds, arranged at one side of the village. There is an *akhra* or dancing ground in this village. There are a few public places like, shrines, where important village deities like, Kenduaburi (worshipped during agricultural operations) Manasa (goddess of Serpents), Sitala (goddess of Smallpox) and Baram (village Tutelary Deity), etc. are regularly worshipped and a few virgin trees had been kept intact, at the time of clearing jungles, for setting up the shrines or places of worship of these deities.

The bank of the *Bansi* canal is used as *Sasan* or the cremation ground, but no memorial stones were found here. There is also no *Gitior* or dormitory for the bachelors. But at present, a free-primary school has been established here, with two teachers, run by the District School Board, and an Ashram for welfare-work, organized by the enthusiastic youths of this village. Recently, the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of West Bengal has established a grainkola for the villagers to supply grains on credit on easy terms to the villagers.

As the Munda hamlets of village Daharpur have been established recently, so there is no traditional pattern of common village places. The huts have mud-built walls, without any definite plan for them. The Mundas of this particular village are not better off than those of Telkand. In Shamtarangi (first settlement in this village), there is a school, the premises of which are sometimes used for recreational or festive purposes like, worship of Karam, etc. possibly these hamlets might be temporary shelters.

II

Agriculture is the main economy of the Mundas and the people of these two villages are found to be mostly engaged in agricultural works, sometimes in their own fields and sometimes in the fields of others. The Mundas of village Telkand have got better types of cultivable lands where they cultivate sugarcane for manufacture of molasses or country-sugar, which fetch them good cash money. But at Daharpur, they are found to be engaged in laying and repairing of railway tracks or construction and repair of roads, etc. Most of the Mundas of these two villages are found to be employed as seasonal or whole time domestic servants, mainly performing agricultural works and other domestic chores. Thus, these people frequently come in contact with the neighbouring Hindus. A good number of the Mundas of both the villages are landless.

Age-group distribution of the Mundas of the two villages also depicts that due to financial difficulties and economic disadvantages, tender-aged boys and girls and even very old people (age 0-14 and 60-up) are found to participate in many economic pursuits. Thus the working force of the total population outnumbers the labour force, due to participation for circumstantial exigencies.

Table - 2

Age-group distribution (Labour and non-Labour force)

Sl. No	Village	No. of family	Non-labour (Age-group) 0-4		Non-labour (Age-group) 5-14		Labour force (Age-group) 15-60		Non-labour (Age-group) 61-up	
			M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1	Telkand	46	28	19	24	35	64	60	5	7
2	Daharpur with six hamlets	84	38	58	55	55	134	128	10	8
Total		130								

For agricultural purposes, in the fields of others, or in their own paddy fields, they have all the requisite implements like, hoes, ploughs, sickles, etc. These are generally purchased from the local markets, and the black-smiths supply the plough shares, hoe-blades, etc. In village Daharpur, two persons know some carpentry work and they have few tools for this purpose. These persons generally help other villagers, at the time of construction of their huts. As the weekly market is located very near these two villages (Kukrahupi near village Telkand and Narayangarh, near village Daharpur), the Mundas in general, get their requisite commodities from there. They have both hunting and

fishing implements, which consist of bows and arrows, javelins and spears and a few valved and valveless basket traps. They are also found to possess various kinds of fishing nets. But hunting is more practiced by the Mundas of Telkand than others, as the southern bank of the river Subarnarekha is covered with dense forests, in which various hunting games abound.

Almost all the Mundas are found to cultivate agricultural fields, the owners of which are generally people of caste Hindu groups. This mode of contract is locally known as 'Barga Chas', i. e, share-cropping, in which the cultivator bears all the agricultural expenses, whereas the owner of the land pays the revenue, and gets half of the total production. As a result, the Mundas have solely to depend on the co-operation of their Hindu neighbours. Sometimes, a few money-lending communities of the village or of the locality, advance loans of cash money or paddy to them, for which the debtors have to pay interest, and the whole of the amount is to be repaid after the harvest.

The Munda of Telkand also ceremonially organize a few hunting excursions like, "Akhan Sendra", held on the last day of the Bengali year, i. e. , on the Chaitra Sankranti Day, in which Mundas of the neighbouring villages also participate. Prior to this expedition, the village Dehuri (priest) worships Baram or the tutelary village deity, when hunting implements are dumped together and placed on the floor of the shrine. Games killed on the occasion are brought to the village Akhra, and distributed amongst the participants. Two such hunting expeditions are generally organized by the villagers, and these are held during the month of Vaishak (April-May). It is to be noted here that the Mundas of Daharpur did not organize any hunting expedition, perhaps due to lack of interest. A few Mundas of this village, however, joined the expedition organized by the villagers, where they had originally settled.

The Mundas also observe a few festivals connected with agriculture. "Ashari Festival" is held before the first transplantation commences. This is believed to ensure trouble-free cultivation and profuse crops. The Mundas of Telkand and Daharpur observe this festival, with some variations in details of performance. Besides, they also worship "Dhulia Baram", during the month of Vaishak (April-May), which is believed to ensure better agricultural operation. Worship of "Dhulia Baram" is also done on a communal basis, by the Mundas of Daharpur. A few earthen terracotta elephants or horses are placed before the deity, as votive offerings, on which vermilion is smeared profusely by the priest of the village. Then a lengthy and winded incantation composed in Mundari language, is uttered by the village priest before the assembled participants. The incantation is as follows:-

"Bhagwan- the Supreme Being overhead-
And the Mother Earth underneath!
Thou art seeing the happenings on the earth
During the four Great Epochs.

We are worshipping Thee
 O! Dhulia Baram!
 As our ancestors did in olden days.
 We, all the villagers, are doing that
 In the same manner.
 Thou be merciful and protect us
 From all the diseases.

We may listen to your biddings-
 But may not see Thou in person:
 Beseech Thee! Remove this quandary;
 Let all the villagers, and the cattle-
 Live in peace and harmony."

Then a goat is sacrificed, and its blood sprinkled over the terracotta offerings. The flesh is cooked on the spot and the consecrated offering is distributed to the participants. They drink some rice beer then. After that, ceremonial sowing of paddy-grains is done.

"Ashari Festival" is held communally at the same place, where a fowl is sacrificed. After this festival, the ceremonial transplantation commences. They think this particular festival will protect the villagers from unforeseen dangers, especially from snake-bite.

In this particular region "Jathel Festival" is held, before the transplantation, which is conducted by a Brahman priest.

Another festival known as "Kusna" is held at the place of Baram, which is also associated with agriculture. This particular festival is, however, not held by the Mundas of Daharpur.

"Karam Festival" is also associated with agriculture, in which a few sprouting grains or seeds are required at the time of performance. The Mundas of both the villages, named above participate in it. "Soharia" or Gotbanga is a festival for cattle caressing, which is held only in two villages. Most of the songs sung during Karam and Soharai Festivals reflect some ingrained Hindu conceptions in them.

III

In respect of social structure of this tribe, it has been observed that quite a number of clans or septs are included in it. Each clan or sept has a distinctive totem. Table 3 below gives the details of a few of these.

Table-3
Clan names and Totems

Clan name	Totem
Nag	Serpent
Chandil	Meteor
Turkuri/Taray	Lotus
Sal	A kind of fish
Tao	A bird with blue colour
Saral	A black bird
Kuiya	A bird
Pencha	Owl
Kachhap	Tortoise
Joypakhi	A kind of bird
Sanka	Conch Shell

The clan members show respect to their totems and never kill or injure these. In respect of marriage, clan is not at all, an important factor, as has been observed by the writer. The Mundas affiliate themselves with a few patrilineal lineages or Banshas through a sub-lineage of Patabhai or Bansha or lineage, and marriage is strictly forbidden amongst the members of the sub-lineages of that particular lineage though they may belong to different clans.

Table-4
Lineage and sub-lineage alignment

Harat	(i) Teru Harat (II) Tenku Harat (III) Kheri Harat (iv) Muchri Harat (v) Saba Harat
Kudra	(i) Kudra proper (ii) Rela (iii) Sasa (iv) Churki (v) Kusaldi (vi) Khetridi (vii) Sarmali
Jagda	(i) Jagda (ii) Panre Jagda
Hazam	(i) Hazam proper (ii) Banata Hazam

Dulumi	(i) Dulumi proper (ii) Benga Dulumi (iii) Jege Dulumi (iv) Benga Ader Dulmi
Patra	(i) Amlesha Patra (ii) Aral Patra (iii) Uhuta Patra
Bukra	(i) Singu Bukru (ii) Loyda Bukru (iii) Sonahara Bukru (iv) Terang Bukru (v) Garha Bukru

All these sub-lineage groups are not found in these two villages. A few old persons of the villages can remember the sub-lineage alignments. Possibly the names of lineages have been coined from the name of mother and those of sub-lineages have been coined from the names of first father who established the family. Though at present, no genealogical relationship can be established with the present members of the sub-lineage descent, these seem to have occurred in the manner stated above.

It will be seen that the Harat lineage of the Mundas comprises sub-lineages like, (1) Teru Harat, (2) Tenku Harat, (3) Kheri Harat, (4) Muchri Harat and (5) Saba Harat. Out of these 5 sub-lineages, only 2 sub-lineages, e.g., Teru and Tenku are distributed in 2 hamlets of Shamtarangi and Pichhabani, only amongst 2 and 3 families, respectively. The Kheri sub-lineage is only found in Tulia hamlet. The other 2 sub-lineages are not observed to exist here.

In respect of origin of the sub-lineages or lineages, a few informants said that this was due to repeated remarriage of widows or divorcee, having children of earlier husbands. For example, suppose 'X' was married for the first time to 'A', who had a few children. They belonged to 'A's' clan, as the Mundas are a patriarchate society. After untimely death of 'A' or desertion, 'X' again remarried 'D' and had a few children belonging to 'D's' clan or affiliation. In this way, if 'X' goes on marrying others, say 'E', 'F' etc., and gets children, then these children will affiliate themselves with the clan of 'E', 'F', respectively.

All the children of 'X' have got different clan affiliation according to their respective fathers, but they do not intermarry. The name of the sub-lineage has been possibly coined from the first father. These sub-lineages ultimately form one group or lineage. This multiple lineages and sub-lineages of the present-day Mundas of Midnapur undoubtedly suggest a complex internal social structure of the community.

The members of the Chandil Clan now associate them with the Sandilya Gotra (clan) of the Caste Hindus. Such is the case of Kachhuya or Kachhap (Tortoise) Clan. Kachhap Clan members also claim to be affiliated with the Kashyapa Gorta of the Hindus, having same pronunciation. The gorta names of the Rishis or Saints, supposed to be the first religious preceptors of the particular social groups. Thus, the social groups generally identify themselves with the religious preceptors. The Mundas, being very close neighbours of the Hindus, have automatically adopted a few names, which are, more or less, similar in pronunciation. It is to be noted here that all the Mundas use 'Singh' as their surname. No totem or clan names are used by them as surname as is done by the Lodhas or the Santals.

In respect of the size of the family amongst the Mundas it has been observed that small-sized families predominate. Table 5 gives the details of the family sizes of two Munda villages.

TABLE-5
Size of family

Sl. No.	Size of the family	Villages		
		Telkand	Daharpur	Total
1.	Small-sized (1-3 members)	8	21	29
2.	Medium-sized (4-6 members)	24	38	62
3.	Large-sized (7-10 members)	11	16	27
4.	Very large-sized (10-above members)	1	9	10
Total		44	84	128

Medium-size family comprises of parents and unmarried children generally. In rare cases, old father or mother is found to stay with grown-up married sons. Very large-sized family is constituted by joint or extended types of families.

A girl is married now-days at the age of 13 to 15, when she attains puberty. The age of the bridegroom varies between 18 and 25. In rare cases infant marriage takes place. However, the orthodox type of getting wife in the Munda society is marriage by purchase, when a bride price has to be paid in cash to the parents of the bride. This orthodox type of marriage is known as 'Arndi' marriage. Besides, marriage by mutual consent, or love marriage, is also in vogue in the Munda society. In these two villages, most of the marriages were 'Arndi' type. Widow remarriage or marriage with a divorced man is also not uncommon. Divorce is easy, the intention for which has to be reported to the village panchayat, which formally approves this.

Life cycle of the individual in a Munda society consists of a good number of rituals and observances. Other persons are also involved in these. They have to participate and sometimes take an important role in these affairs. The Mundas observe a number of taboos and restrictions, at the time of pregnancy. When the woman is carrying for five months, the father of the pregnant woman performs a ceremony known as 'Sutamdarm', in which, Dharam Devata or 'God of Righteousness' is worshipped. At the time of delivery a midwife is called for. In many cases an elderly woman of the same tribe, or a professional midwife from the Hadi/Sweeper Caste, is requested to attend. She cuts the umbilical cord of the new-born baby by means of an iron arrowhead, and the placenta is buried inside the confining room, near the main door. If the expectant mother suffers from any pain or delivery troubles, then the village *Deona* or Sorcerer is called and requested to perform divination, to ascertain the causes. The washerman and the barber are also requested to attend on the 9th day, after delivery. This particular day is known as *Narta*, when the ceremonial birth pollution period terminates. The washerman has to wash the unclean cloths and the barber has to pare off the nails of the mother and the child. The midwife or foster-mother also attends during this ceremony. They are generally given their due remuneration, in cash or kind. On that day, the parents of the new-born take a bath, and a *Sal-leaf* cup filled with water, is brought home by the mother. A few sacred basis leaves are placed on it. This water is treated as holy water, and scattered over the persons attending the ceremony. Thus the birth pollution is over. At that time, a piece of new cloth is presented to the mother by her husband. Sometimes flattened rice is distributed to the participants, with molasses. Sometimes a good feast is given by the father of the baby to the villagers, in which, rice beer is consumed profusely.

On the 10th day of the child's birth, a name giving ceremony (Tuchauli) takes place, in which the females play an important part. The maternal-grand-mother or aunt or an elderly female, brings a brass pot filled with water, from which a cup-full of water is taken away. On this a *duba* grass stem and some husked paddy are placed, after applying vermilion marks on them in the name of Dharam Devata or god or Righteousness. They suggest a few names for the baby, one after another, and each keeps a cup of husked paddy for the name suggested by her. When three of them had suggested a common name, they stop suggesting any further names, and that common name is given to the baby.

The ceremonial boring of the ears of the baby is done. This is an elaborate ceremony. Another relative is invited to do this. A ceremonial friendship is instituted at that time, and the man or woman who wants to be the ceremonial friend, brings with him or her, a pullet, if the child is a girl, and a cockerel, if the child is a boy. Two piercing nails are also brought at that time. Rice cakes are prepared and distributed to the villagers on this occasion, who also present a seer of paddy each, as gift. Hence-forth, the child will bear another

name, i.e., the name of the ceremonial friend. Thus each Munda bears two names.

The nuptial ceremony of the Mundas is full of rituals. Generally they prefer the Arndi form of marriage, which is respected mode. A go-between or negotiator, who is known as 'Dutam' is requested to select a bride or a groom. The whole of the nuptial cycle has got a few phases. These are (a) preliminary enquiries, (b) ceremonial paying of bride price, or betrothal, (c) ceremony proper, and (d) post-nuptial ceremonies.

During preliminary enquiries the Munda follow the advice of an astrologer. The names of the prospective spouses are disclosed to him. After astrological calculations, he gives his findings, either in favour, or against the marriage proposal. He is paid some cash, when the finding is favourable. Then the negotiation is continued, and visits and return visits by the respective family members are made to finalize the marriage. Some questions, akin to riddles, are also put to each other by the negotiating parties, which have to be answered satisfactorily. After that, the date is generally fixed up and a portion of bride-price is paid. Marriage takes place generally in the months of Falgun (February-March) and Vaishak (April-May).

Thus betrothal is done and preparations for the marriage are made by the families of the bridegroom and the bride. This has a few other rituals like, ceremonial application of oil or turmeric paste, etc. At this time, a few ceremonial songs are sung at the bride's place.

Prior to the wedding day, sometimes three cocks are sacrificed by the village *Deona* or Sorcerer, after performance of some rituals. One white cock, in the name of Dharam Devata or God of Righteousness, one red cock, in the name of Garam, the tutelary village deity, and one pied-cock for the tiger-spirit, are generally sacrificed, on such occasions. This is meant to counteract the evil eyes of the supposed spirits, on this auspicious day.

On the wedding day a booth is prepared at the house of the bride. The barber attends for ceremonial service, on that day. The brother-in-law of the bridegroom performs the associated detailed rituals. In the marriage booth, the bride and the bridegroom sit facing each other. The bride-groom sits facing east. A brass plate, with certain articles on it, is placed there. Then the Brahman priest solemnizes the ceremony. The groom first puts vermilion marks on the forehead of the bridegroom. The Brahman then ceremonially ties the corners of their cloths with a knot. At that time, he utters some incantations and thereafter he opens the knot. A ceremonial fire-offering is made in the name of God. The nuptial ceremony is thus completed. The Brahman gets his due remuneration, in cash, and leaves the place.

After that a few minor rituals are performed by the women inmates, and a wedding feast is given to the groom's party and the villagers.

The Mundas attributed death to malice of other spirits. They practice both cremation and burial. The dead body is washed and turmeric paste is applied on it, in case of fully-grown adult. They have cremation grounds for this purpose. The male members take the dead body to the cremation ground. Ten days are considered an unclean days, after death, after which, a purificatory ceremony takes place when the barber attends for shaving and paring off nails, and the washer man washes the cloths of the members of the deceased's family.

The Brahman priest also attends the ceremony. He offers many articles to the spirits of the dead. At the time of rituals, the Brahman priest makes a fire-sacrifice or Homa, to terminate the death pollution. Generally it is done at the place where the death had occurred.

On the same night, they perform a ceremony, when the calling-back of the soul is done with sacrifice of a cock.

IV

The Mundas also believe in the existence of a good many deities and minor spirits, which they believe hover over their habitations and control their destiny. They appease these spirits with prayers, offerings and sacrifices. In the villages, they have a few important sacred places or shrines. The shrines or sacred places of Telkand are, however, somewhat different from those of Daharpur Munda hamlets. In Telkand they are found to worship Sitala, who is considered as the most powerful deity of the locality and supposed to control epidemic diseases like, cholera, smallpox, etc. She is not their traditional deity, in the month of Magh (February-March). Her worship is done and the villagers participate in it on a communal basis. Her worship is conducted by the village priest or Deheri. Worship of the tutelary village deity Baram or Garam, is also done by the village priest, on a communal basis. Earthen votive offerings lime, terracotta houses or elephants, smeared with vermilion marks and fowl, are sacrificed to appease these gods, who are generally believed to forestall all the calamities of the village.

Another spirit known as 'Ulian', supposed to be the maid of goddess Sitala, is also worshipped at the outskirts of the village, by the village priest, with sacrifice of a black fowl. During Falgun (March-April), Sarhul or Spring Festival is held with considerable pomp when the Sal trees begin to put forth new leaves. At that time, ancestral spirits are worshipped, and in each house, fowl is sacrificed at the Ading, or the sacred tabernacle, inside the house.

In the month of Vaishak (April-May), Dhulia Baram is worshipped at the sacred grove of Baram in the village. Thereafter, a same type of worship is also

arranged at the same place, on communal basis, which is known as Kusna. This worship is done to ensure a better and bumper crop. On the last day of Ashar (June-July), Ashari worship is done at the place of Baram. In the month of Sravan (July-August), Manasa, the deity of the serpents, is worshipped, on a communal basis, but by the Deona or the Medicine man and his apprentices. In the month of Bhadra (August-September) the Karam Festival is held, in which, most of the village maidens participate. In the month of Aswin (September-October), when the great Durga Puja or worship of Goddess Durga is held by the Bengalees of the locality, the Munda worship Dasai in the same manner, as they worship Sitala. In the month of Kartik (October-November), the Mudas worship Gotbonga on the pasture land, when 7 cocks of different colours are sacrificed in the names of Sing Bonga or the Supreme Being, Narang Buru or Buru Bonga, the Mountain God, Garam or Baram, and tow in the name of ancestral spirits and two for the presiding deity of cowshed. Besides these, the Mundas also observe the Tusu Festival, which is held on the last day of Paush (December-January).

The religious and festival life of the Mundas reveal gradual assimilation of local cultural traits. In respect of propitiation of their Gods and other spirits, their own priest performs these worships. Worship of Sitala is a regional festival, which has been gradually incorporated into their own pantheon. Specially amongst the Mundas of Daharpur and Telkand. Such is the case with worship of Goddess Manasa. This particular Serpent Goddess is worshipped in lower Bengal, where people are in general feel much afraid of snake-bites. Worship of Dasai, like Goddess Sitala, is done at the time of worship of Durga, and is a very important festival. Though they are unable to associate this Goddess with their own religious pantheon properly, as yet, they perform her worship, when worship of Durga is held in the locality. Besides, they also participate in Gajan festival, when Hindus of the locality worship Lord Mahadeva, on the last day of the Bengali year.

In Telkand, no Gajan festival is held. This is, however, held at Daharpur, in which the Mundas participate with other caste groups.

V

As the Mundas have come in close contact with the Hindus for long years, it is observed that due to this, a good number of regional cultural traits have already been incorporated into their cultural pattern. As the Mundas have migrated in stages, from Chotanagpur to this eastern tract, some of their original cultural traits have been lost, which occurs in the case of all migrations. Consequently, in their new economy, and habitats surrounded by new group's people, they have been compelled to accept new cultural attributes and characteristics. They have made great efforts to get the services of Brahman priests, for elevation of their status, but the Brahmans, who serve the Mundas now, are of lower ranks, belonging to Tiwari and Das groups. The Tiwari

possibly came to this tract from west at the time of Maratha invasion. They are not equal in status with the Brahmans of the locality, who generally belong to Utkal or Rath groups. A Das Brahman is available only at Pichhabani. But his actual status is not clear or determinable. According to the people of the locality, they belong to the Ramanuja group, and wear ceremonial sacred threads. Due to gradual migration of the Mundas further into this easternmost tract, the Tiwari Brahmans available at Telkand area were not available here. Hence the Brahmans of the Das or Ramanuja groups have accepted priesthood of the Mundas, but they serve, as such, only at the time of marriages and death purificatory ceremonies.

The Mundas now-a-days, are found to sing most of the Bengali festival songs, at the time of marriage ceremonies. They have also songs composed in Bengali, for Karam, Tusu and Bandana festivals, though songs composed in their own Mundari dialect are not un-common or few. Thus, the Mundas, as a tribal community, have been able to absorb a great deal of local cultures, and have blended these with their cultural patterns and outlook. This has been possible, as they have come into close contact with various other groups of people for quite a long period, and have assimilated their cultural patterns.

THE MUNDA *

N. K. Behura ¹

The Munda constitute one of the major tribes of India. They belong to the Austro-Asiatic language family. They are mainly concentrated in Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura; but their larger concentration is in the former three states. They are also found in the Assam tea garden areas.

There is a significant variation in the growth rate of Munda population in different states. While Madhya Pradesh has registered a growth rate of more than 25 per cent between 1961 and 1981 due to migration, Orissa shows a low growth rate, i.e. about 6 per cent in the corresponding decade. The reason being Orissa is one of their oldest habitat, next to Bihar. Moreover, migration of tribal population takes place in modern India for attraction of employment in industrial and mining sectors. Bhilai has attracted more labour than Rourkela in Orissa.

In Orissa, Munda population is spread out in a large number of districts. The undivided districts of Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Dhenkanal, Bolangir, Cuttack, Koraput and Mayurbhanj harbour more Munda population, because of its proximity to the State of Bihar. In Orissa, the Munda Tribe has been enumerated as a composite tribe in the census, for instance the Munda includes Munda, Lohara and Mundari.

Historical Background

According to Munda tradition and folklore, their original homeland lay in the northwest. Their entry into the present habitat of Chotanagpur, southern districts of West Bengal, north-western districts of Orissa and north-eastern district of Madhya Pradesh was within the last century. But this fact is not backed by any recorded evidence. It is reported that the Mundas, Oraons, Santals, and Mundari tribes led a pristine and archaic life in the Chhotanagpur plateau for centuries before the advent of the British in the area. The area was then under the administrative control of the Nagbanshi Maharaja of Chhotanagpur until 1765 A.D.

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Choudhury divides the history of Munda into four phases. In the first phase, they were in possession of the Chhotnagpur plateau for several centuries along with other tribes. The original Munda settlers established villages known as Khunt-kati villages which means they cut the first post to settle down there. These were patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal villages which formed the nucleus of a segmentary political system. A patri-clan with its ramifications in other adjacent villages formed a segment of the total political system.

In the second phase, the Mundas came under the suzerainty of the Nagbanshi kings of Chhotnagpur. They, along with other tribes of the region, probably came under the sway of this ruling family either by voluntary submission or by coercion. There was scanty evidence to indicate that the traditional Munda socio-economic polity was disturbed during the rule by the Nagabanshi kings.

Their third phase, beginning in the later part of the sixteenth century is perhaps the most crucial to the subsequent history of these people. It is around this time that the Nagabanshi king, Durian Shal, was subjugated by the Moghul emperor, Akbar. He was imprisoned for a short period and was poisoned by the Mughals after he agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Muslim governor of Bihar.

Within a period of about 100 years which extended up to the incident of British annexation of the territory in 1765 A.D; a new class of people of non-tribal origin had settled in various parts of Chhotnagpur among the Mundas and other tribes who are known as Diku or aliens. The Jagirdars or tenure-holders brought in Thikedars and mercenaries to extract taxes and free services from the tribal tenants. As a result, the original settlers lost their proprietorship over their villages and they were reduced to ordinary rent paying *raiya*s.

In the fourth phase of Mundari history during the British period, the feudalistic pattern of land administration continued unabated. The practice of granting Jagirs received a severe blow in the traditional Mundari agrarian structure. These petty landlords known as *pattidars*, usurped most of the original Khunt-kati villages and reduced the tribals to rent paying *raiya*s and also settled several Hindu and Muslim aliens in their territory. Thus, the colonial administration rather kept the feudalistic super structure in fact until it was abolished after independence.

Literacy and Education

Early impact of Christianity on this tribal community brought about an interesting phase of modern education among all tribes of Chhotnagpur region including the Munda. When we consider the problem of literacy and education among the Mundas we cannot afford to ignore the neighbouring Ho tribe. The Munda and Ho claim that they belong to one ethno-cultural stock. They do inter-marry on the basis of their clan segmentation. They are designated either as Ho or Munda according to the area they inhabit.

After Independence, the number of schools and colleges increased both in the government and private sectors and this helped in increasing the overall turnover of literates, general and professional educates. The Mundas living in West Bengal and Bihar registered higher percentage of literacy, both men and women, due to Christianity. Today educated persons right from Matriculation to University level are multiplied among the rank and file. This apart, technical and professional education has made a significant impact-among the members of the tribe.

Land-use and Ownership Pattern

Mundas are a settled agricultural tribe. They are very adept in both dry and wet cultivation. In Munda settlements, both low and upland are available for cultivation, apart from non-cultivable waste land and forest land. In the Munda area immigrant Hindu castes though are not numerically dominant, their per capita land holding is either comparable with Munda Pahans or more. As a matter of fact earlier the Munda had higher per capita ownership of good and fertile land.

At present the situation is that non-tribals are in possession of good cultivable land under their possession which they have acquired from other tribal owners. Consequently the per capita land held by the Mundas has become less.

Family and Kinship

The social structure of the Munda is based on the principle of unilineal descent and agnatic kin organization. The tribal society is characterized as kin-based. Among the Munda, close patrilineal kin association is formed on the basis of Munda sociopolitical structure. It determines the character and the authority structure of every type of kin group, namely, nuclear family, extended family, minimal lineage, maximal lineage, sub-clan, clan, sub-tribe and the tribe.

Rules of inheritance of property, counting of descent and succession to social positions are all determined on unequivocally by the principle of patriliney.

The Mundas are divided principally into two endogamous sub-tribes, such as, Kompat and Tamaria. Kompat Mundas are said to be the original Mundas of Ranchi. Each sub-tribe is divided into a large number of patrilineal endogamous Killis or clan. Each clan has a name of an animal, bird, plant or an object. Munda clans are exogamous, i.e.; marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited. Sexual relationship among the members of the clan is considered as incestuous and is severely dealt with by the inter-village council known as Parha Panchayat.

Munda lineage organization is based on division of clan or sub-clan into a number of corporate units. Each lineage is known by a traceable ancestor whereas the ancestor or founder of a clan is mythical. The lineage is a corporate body. Each lineage has a recognized senior household head, (the senior most male member of which is considered as the head of the lineage). His advice and guidance are sought in all socio-cultural matters. Every lineage has a tutelary deity, called Khunt-hanker-Bonga, worshipped by all members of the lineage on the occasion of life cycle rituals

and other important occasions.

The Munda family is usually nuclear in composition. A widowed mother, unmarried brothers, or sisters or a widower father are all part of the household. Structurally, household is unstable but family is relatively stable. The functions of household are economic, protectional, and upbringing and enculturation of children, whereas the functions of family are limited to socially recognized sex relationship between husband and wife and procreation of children.

Political Organization

The traditional socio-political organization of the Munda has two distinct corporate bodies, namely, the Panch of the village, the headman is known as Munda, and the other is, the inter-village organization, called Pahaa. The three recognized functionaries of the Panch are the Munda, Pahan and the Mahato or the messenger. All except Pahan are hereditary positions filled up by the principle of primogeniture. If such a candidate is unable to function, the office devolves on the next eldest male kin. The village priest called Pahan is selected from the Pahan lineage by the process of divination or *pagoiti*. In a Panch meeting all the adult males are eligible to take part in the discussions but the final decision rests with Munda who functions both democratically and autocratically as per the situation at hand.

The Munda are quite conscious about their ethno-political identity and individuality since long. They were one of the few tribal communities who had resisted the pressure of colonialism, and had revolted repeatedly over encroachment on their traditional rights and agrarian interests. The Tamar insurrection of 1919-20 marked their strong resistance against the disruption of their agrarian system and traditional rights over land in Chotanagpur. This was intensified in 1850, and later on took a new turn. The forty years of Sardar movement on Malkud Larai (movement for control over land) from 1858 onwards aimed at dislodging the zamindars in their area. They also agitated against forced labour. In this quest for establishing the Munda Raj for reforming their society to cope up with the challenges of colonial times, they launched the millennial movement under the patriotic leadership of Birsa Munda (1874-1901). The Munda were involved in several movements which aimed at securing autonomy for Chotanagpur from 1915 onwards. In fact they had laid the foundation for the creation of Jharkhand state.

Ideology

The Munda term their supernatural beliefs and practices as *Sarna Dharam*, which in the language of Anthropology is an admixture of animism, animatism and naturism. Nature worship occupies a central place in Munda religious idiom. Nature veers around their life from birth to death. Propitiation of nature and natural phenomena occupies the centre-stage in Munda religion. This signifies their prime dependence on the nature for survival. They both venerate and command natural phenomena. Shamanism and magical practices are an integral part of Munda religion. The Shaman or *Ojha* occupies an important social position almost equal to

that of the priest or Pahan. In the ranking order both of them occupy social positions next to the Munda or headman.

The Munda have an unflinching faith in the supernatural beings including the manes. They designate all their gods and goddesses as Bonga, who are highly respected, feared and propitiated. The Bonga are believed to be controlling human life, health, fate, livestock, crops and all the natural phenomena. They may ensure happy, peaceful and prosperous life, if pleased or may cause disaster and misery for erring humans. Since the Munda, like most other tribal communities, directly depend on the nature and natural phenomena for survival, they propitiate them as inveterate symbols of supernatural entities, whom they regard as Bonga or deities. There are both male and female deities. Although there is no definite hierarchical order in respect of the Bongas, yet by general consensus the Sing-Bonga or creator of the universe is regarded as the supreme deity. The abode of the Sing-Bonga and other benevolent deities is a sacred grove of *sal* (*shorea robusta*) trees located at the outskirts of almost every Munda village. Sacred grove is a regular feature of other Mundari group of tribes, such as Santal, Ho, Kol, etc. Sing-Bonga is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient and therefore, always accorded the primary of veneration. The next important deity to be propitiated is Basuki Thakurani, the Mother Earth, who is considered as the consort of Sing-Bonga or Dharam Debta (Sun God). She is adored on all-important festive occasions along with Sing-Bonga.

Gram Siri is the presiding deity of the village. He and his consort Kiasuni Thakurani, represented by two stone slabs bedecked with vermilion, are ensconced in the sacred grove of Jahera on Hondasal. They are the protectors of the village. They are worshipped on all festive occasions like *magh parab*, *baha parab*, *nuakhia*, *makar parab*, *ashadhi parab*, *gamba parab* etc.

Every clan among the Munda has a tutelary deity, called Narang Bonga, who is meticulously propitiated on all festive occasions to ward off sickness, crop failure and catastrophe in respect of the members of a clan. Another important deity of the Munda pantheon is Desauli Bonga, the goddess who controls epidemics and fatal diseases. Desauli Bonga is propitiated whenever the need arises to appease her. Similarly, Buddhipat or the goddess of rain is worshipped whenever there is need for rain-fall to protect their crops.

The Munda make both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings to their gods and goddesses invariably along with *handia* or home-made rice beer. Their best offering is the blood of goat or chicken. Apart from worshipping their gods, goddesses and presiding deities, the Munda also appease spirits, as and when needed. They believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits. As per their cognitive perception, every object-animate or inanimate-has spirit or life-force. They consider the souls or spirits of the dead (ancestors) as benevolent, who are to be remembered and offered food and beverages almost regularly. But malevolent spirits are appeased whenever they are believed to have inflicted adversity on a person, family or village.

All festive occasions are hilarious, mirthful, ecstatic and socially cohesive for the Munda. They indulge in revelry inebriation and leisure-time sports on festive occasions. On such occasions they also give free recourse to conspicuous consumption as kins exchange social visits. Material deprivation is no hindrance even for the asset-less ones. Religion is socially pervasive and has important social implications. It is a force for social cohesion as it provides social sanction for approved behaviours.

Impact of Modernization

With the process of modernisation in the country and development of mass media, both print media and electronic media have greatly helped the Mundas and other advanced tribes to catch up with non-tribal communities in the field of education, both general and technical. The spread of education among the women of Munda of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa is very significant. As the-system of communication has developed over the recent decades, Mundas have derived significant benefit to march ahead along with their neighbours. Both Munda men and women have taken to salaried jobs, both in government and non-government institutions and several of them are now holding professional and specialized positions which were not within their reach earlier. Measures of constitutional safeguards and protective discrimination have significantly benefited the Mundas and other tribes of the country to register progress, prosperity, and happiness. As they are availing of modern health care facilities, many epidemic and dreaded diseases have sharply declined amongst them.

Political modernisation among the Munda and other tribal communities has been achieved through the introduction of Statutory Panchayat. But it is not yet compatible with their traditional polity. It is not equipped to sort out issues relating to their traditional rights and breach of tribal customs. However, with the rise of the level of awareness of people and change in other factors many a problem could be eliminated.

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MUNDA *

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HISTORY & IDENTITY

Munda as a major tribe of Odisha is a classic representative of the great Kolarian race. The Munda along with Munda Lohara, Munda Mahali, Nagabanshi Munda and Oriya Munda finds place at the 50th Serial in the ST list of Odisha. According to Munda tribal tradition, they have migrated from the southern part of north India and entered Chhotnagpur plateau through modern Rohilakhand. Their ethnographic accounts indicate that they migrated to the eastern part of the country from central Asia in the pre-historic period. The long history of the Munda in their present habitat can be divided into four broad periods, (a) Primordial age in which the Munda were more or less isolated, (b) State formation and the onset of feudalism, (c) Colonial rule and (d) The post-independence period. They are now found in undivided Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura along with Odisha.

In Odisha, Munda folktales say that their ancestors had originally lived in the Mundar Mountains. Several sections of Munda later on dispersed in different directions like Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj etc forming sub-sections like Santhali Munda, Nagpuria Munda, Kolhani Munda and Tamadia Munda. They are also known as Horo-Hon or Mura, meaning the village head man. They consider themselves as the descendants of Sing Bonga, the Supreme Sun God. Mundari is their mother tongue which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language family. They are multi-lingual and are well conversant in local languages like Odia and Sadri for inter group communication.

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Population

Population/ Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	2 21 399	2 22 117	3 38 936	3 96 561	4 80 252	5 58 691
Male	1 10 227	1 12 107	1 70 885	2 00 389	2 42 266	2 79 211
Female	1 11 172	1 10 010	1 68 051	1 96 172	2 37 986	1 79 480

Literacy Rate

Literacy Rate	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Total	8.70	13.30	16.20	26.85	39.59	54.92
Male	14.26	19.65	24.15	38.64	51.56	64.66
Female	3.14	6.76	8.13	14.91	27.64	45.24

Sex Ratio (No of females per 1000 males)

Sex Ratio	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
	1009	981	983	979	982	1001

* Source: Census Reports and Profile of ST population in Orissa, SCSTRTI

Attire and Adornments

The attire of the Mundas is very simple, scanty and made of cotton. Their men ordinarily wear a loin cloth (*botoi*). On jovial occasions, young men and boys wear a longer *botoi*, two ends of which called *condoles* are allowed to hang gaily, before and behind, down to the feet. Young men also wear a sort of belt called *kardhani*. Very old men wear only a paltry piece of cloth about a yard long called *bagoa*. A small portion of the *bagoa* is allowed to hang in front. Besides loin cloth, the Mundas also use a piece of cloth as a wrapper for the upper part of their body. It is of two large and small varieties called *barkhi* and *pichowri*.

The Munda women generally put on a long piece of cloth (*paria*) round the waist, allowing a portion of it called *paila* to pass diagonally over the upper part of their body. Little girls wear shorter cloth (*khanria*), without the ornamental border of the *paria*. The old Munda men and women seldom use shoes. Wooden shoes (*katus*) are sometimes used. In rainy season, bamboo-umbrellas (*chatom*) and circular rain hats (*chakuri*) made of leaves of the *gangu* creeper are also used.

Young Munda women are keen on adorning their bodies with a large variety of brass ornaments. Ear rings (*tarkis*) made of silver or even of gold are occasionally used. Their ornaments include brass bracelets (*sakom*), lac bracelets (*lahti*), brass armlets (*tar*), Glass armlets (*churla*), brass necklace (*hasuli*), brass anklets (*andu*), finger rings (*mudams*), toe rings (*polas* and *jhutias*) etc. Young Munda women use a kind of hairpin made of iron or brass called *khongso* to hold together their bunch of black hair which is tied of in a knot or *chignon* with twists of false hair (*nacha*) at the back of the head. Necklace or *hisirs* made variously of

coral (*tiji hisir*), of *kasi* grass (*kare hisir*), of *birne* reed (*sirum hisir*) and of glass beads (*munga hisir*) are also worn by young women.

This penchant of personal adornments is to some extent shared by young men as well. The Munda young men and women are very fond of flowers. Garlands of flowers in the form of necklace (*baha hisir*) are also worn by them. The Mundas also like to tattoo their girls by way of ornamentation. A girl at the age of eight or nine years has her forehead prickled over with a needle, three parallel lines of prickling made and into these a kind of black vegetable dye is injected. The back, the arms, the hands and the feet are likewise tattooed. The process of tattooing is called *sanga*.

HABITAT, SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The rolling pictorial landscape is home to the tribal communities of Odisha. The Mundas are generally positioned in a habitat with spotted milieu. The splendour of their habitat inside the forest-clad hills is well marked for its incredible topographical outskirts. The Munda settlements are generally heterogeneous. They solely settle in separate wards maintaining safe social distance from other ethnic groups, keeping their own self-identity intact. The Munda settlements are found to be amalgamated together without any methodical arrangement. A thin road finds its zigzag way in and out of the village settlement. They generally prefer to reside near the foot hill area where murmuring music of the perennial hill streams are heard, where life drops i.e. drinking water is easily accessed.

Housing

Normally the Mundas own spacious houses. The residence of a well-off Munda family consists usually of three or four houses with a courtyard called *racha* in the middle and a compound called *bakri* at the back. The majority of Munda houses are made up of at least two huts. Of these one is called *giti-ora* (sleeping house) and the other is *mandi- ora* (eating house). The *giti ora* includes the *merom- ora* (goat-shed) while the *mandi- ora* includes the *ading* (sacred niche) where the spirits of departed ancestors are worshipped. *Ading* is separated from the *sare* or the rest of the *mandi- ora* by a low mud wall of about three feet high. A portion of the *sare* is recognized as the *Ju-a-la* (kitchen) in to which no man of other castes is allowed to enter. Well-to-do Mundas have *oaris* (verandahs) on one or all sides of the main house. These *oaris* are often enclosed entirely or partially with low mud-walls and are utilized sometimes as extra resting rooms.

The Munda houses are supported by wooden posts and often have tiled roofs. The poorer Mundas thatch their houses with a kind of grass called *saliri* with fibre of a wild creeper. The houses generally have heavy wooden doors. Their floor usually remains high above the ground. Attached to every Munda house, is a kitchen garden (*bakri piri*) in which maize (*jonhear*); chilli (*mirchi*),

brinjals (*toko*) pumpkin (*kakaru*) and other vegetables are grown. Every house has a compost pit (*sara-gare*) close to his home-stead to deposit cow dung, rotten vegetables and all kinds of waste materials to be used as manure in fields.

Household Articles

Utensils and Furniture

The household utensils and furniture used by the Mundas are neither various nor valuable. They have earthen pots (*chatu*), mud hearth (*chullahs*), bell metal cups (*dubris*) and dishes (*tharis*, *duvas*, and *chipnis*), stone plates and cups (*pathri*), wooden bowls (*katlas*), wooden spoons (*daru lundi*), earthen jars (*da chatu*) etc in their kitchen.

The Mundas often carry *tumba* or gourd vessels to fetch drinking water. Many types of bamboo baskets are used for storing household goods. Paddy is stored in *potoms*. A set of scales called *tula dandi* is kept in many well-to-do Munda houses. The lamp is made of a thin round wick placed in a small mud cap filled with oil. Brooms or *jonos* made of the *birni* grass are used by Munda women to sweep the floors. They have knives (*katu*) and meat cutters (*bainthi*). They use palm leaf mats as beds with a *ganda* (wooden or straw *pinri*) placed underneath the mat as pillows. Occasionally a piece of ragged cloth (*ledra lija*) is spread over the mat for comfort. They use *kamra* as blanket, *pichowri* or *barkhi* as wrappers in winter.

Agricultural, Musical and Other Implements

The Mundas are settled agriculturists and naturally keep a variety of agricultural implements at their disposal. They use a plough which consists of the wooden frame (*nayal*), an iron plough share (*pahal*) and a yoke. They employ harrow (*argom*), long earth mover (*karha*) made of wood and driven by cattle, hoe (*kulam*) and occasionally the crowbar (*sorobo*) with which stony soil is loosened. Sickle (*datrom*) is used for reaping crops and a sort of sling (*dhelkhusi*) is used in field watching. Three different kinds of husking instruments used by the Mundas are *darusehel* or wooden mortar, *dirisehel* or stone mortar and the ordinary wooden *dhenki*. The standard Mundari name for a net is *jalom*. The Mundas use a push-net (*pilni*), a drag net (*charguria*), a small circular prodding fish net (*gira*) and two kinds of bamboo fishing traps called *janjid* and *kumni*. Bow and arrow (*a-sar*), battle axe (*kapi*) and the spear (*balam*) are principally used in hunting. The shield (*phiri*) and two kinds of swords namely *khanda* and *tarwari* are now used only at *paiki* dances in marriage festivals. They hold small pincers (*chimta*) for extracting thorns from legs in forest pathways.

The Mundas are fond of music and use a gamut of musical instruments. The *dholki* (a small drum) and the *nagera* (a large drum) are quite popular among them. The name of other musical instruments used by Mundas are *dumang* (a kind of drum), *dhanpla* (tambourine), *karetal* (a cymbal), *saranga* (made of wood

and goat skin with strings of horse tail), *murli* (small flute) etc. On occasions like *paiki* dances, young Munda men love to wear ankle bells called *ghugura*.

SOCIAL PANORAMA

Social Structure

Family

The tribal families are basically of two types: matriarchal and patriarchal. Most of the tribes of Odisha including Munda are patriarchal. Family is the central and dominating unit of their social organization being mostly patri-lineal and patri-local. Besides the nuclear family which is very common in their society, vertically extended families and joint families are also found in few cases.

Clan

The tribe Munda is divided into 2 sub-groups- Kompat and Khangar and a number of exogamous clans, known as *kili /gotra*. In Odisha, they have 24 clans which regulate their marriage alliances. In clan hierarchy, the Barla clan enjoys the peak position while Topno, Horo, Kerketta, and Aind clans occupy inferior positions in that order. The Mundas are aware of the social hierarchy and place themselves in the upper caste echelon. Acceptance of food and drink is maintained as per their customary rule. They don't accept water and cooked food from the lower castes like Lohra and Ghasi.

Social Fabric

Descent and inheritance

With regard to descent and inheritance, the father is regarded as the head of family. Women have special rights over their ornaments. The partition of a family property follows the rule of equigeniture but the eldest son is entitled to have a little extra. The widow of the deceased, if not remarried, may hold a share for her maintenance till death only. In families having no male successor, the daughters inherit the paternal property. An issueless family may adopt a male child from the nearest lineages who later on inherits the property.

Status of Women

Tribal attitudes in most communities including Munda are tolerant towards their women. The Mundas have an age old tradition of revering the Mother Goddess. They have maintained one of the better sex ratios in the state. They welcome girl child and female infanticide is unknown in their society. Girls are not regarded as burden to their family. They have a unique system where men have to pay bride price to the girls' family. Divorces and remarriages by women are not undervalued and they are easily accepted back by their maternal relations. The women contribute substantially to family income and besides their household chores, they participate in cultivation, forest collection and wage earning. They also play important role in rituals and social functions.

Games and Sports

A wide range of games are found to be very popular among the Munda young mass. Their boys have created superb hockey teams and are further developing their national games and sports. The games of Mundas may be roughly divided into three classes, namely (1) Athletics like *podu, khati* (2) Popular juvenile pastimes like *chhur, til- guti, kouri- inu, dundu- khel, bhoura- inu, uku- inu* (3) Dramatic Games like *Kantar – inu, didi- inu etc.*

Health Care System

In place of merely treating with medicines, tribal health care system believes in a holistic approach to health. The tribal groups of Odisha including Munda treat the mind, body and soul of a patient simultaneously with combination of herbal medicines, prayers, sacrifices and good health care practices. They prefer to do daily physical labour which act as exercise for their brain and muscles. The Munda traditional healers conduct deliveries and treat common ailments very effectively by using local herbs. Their traditional knowledge of nutrition is also fair and balanced. They use only herbal fertilizers and pesticides instead of chemical preparations to cultivate crops and preserve their seeds and grains.

LIFE CHAIN

Pregnancy, Child Birth and Post-Birth Rituals

The first pregnancy is a matter of great excitement in a Munda family. Although a pregnant woman does her routine work as usual she is not allowed to eat flesh of sacrificial animal or sleep in isolated room. She is tabooed to go out during solar or lunar eclipse. Even she is forbidden to go to the burial ground or touch the corpse.

Delivery takes place at home assisted by a *dai* (mid-wife) of Ghasi or Lohara community. The Birth of a child is usually prearranged in a separate confined lying-in-room enclosed near the rear verandah. After delivery, *chhut* (pollution) continues for six to nine days until the dried up umbilical cord is detached from the baby. Then *chhatiari* or *chhati* rite is performed for purification. On that day *mundan* (tonsure rite) of the baby is also done. *Namakaran* (Name giving Ceremony) is done either on the day of *chhati* or on the next day by *aja* or *aji* (Grandparents). A baby is given two names, one of an ancestor by which the child is not called, the other is for addressing the child. The second name is given according to the day or month of the date of birth of the baby. From the next day after *chhati*, mother of the new born baby is allowed to cook food. On that day, she enters in to the *ora bhitar* and her husband sacrifices a coloured chicken and offers its blood to the ancestors. She cooks it and then she is allowed to cook for the family and ancestors.

One of the most important rituals for child is *kanbadhi* or *lutur tukai* (piercing of earlobe). It is performed when a child is 2 or 3 years old. It is generally done by the child's maternal uncle on Makar Sankranti or the day following it. Muhjutti (the first rice feeding) of a girl child is done in the fifth month and that of a male child, in the sixth month. Every child grows with warm affection and wary attention in a Munda family.

Puberty Rites

The puberty rite is observed for adolescent girl on attaining her first menarche. The girl remains isolated in a secluded room for a period of seven days. Within the pollution period she is tabooed to look or be looked at by any male person. On the dawn of the eighth day, she takes the cleansing bath in the nearby hill stream anointing turmeric paste and mustard oil. Then she wears new garments presented by her family and returns home accompanied by her mother. On reaching home she is offered with new attire and cosmetics by her maternal relatives. In the evening her family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to guests, kith and kin.

Youth Organisations & Other Social Institutions

The Mundas have a system of maintaining youth dormitory (*giti ora*) for both boys and girls separately. It serves as a socio-cultural platform for moral and social schooling of the young people of the community. After their evening meals, the young bachelors and maidens gather in their respective *giti oras*. Various types of riddles (*nutum-kahani*) are propounded and unlocked, folk-tales (*kaji-kahani*) and fables are narrated and remembered and songs are sung and learnt there until bed-time. *Giti oras* continue as institutions of vital weight in the socio-cultural life of the Munda community.

Besides these dormitories, the other traditional social institutions found in the Munda villages are the *sarna* (sacred grove), the *akhra* and the *sasan*.

Marriage

The Munda practise tribe endogamy and clan exogamy. Monogamy (*arandi*) is the common practice among them. Polygyny is found in exceptional cases. Marriage ceremony occupies a place of major prominence in a Munda life. They consider marriage arranged through negotiation as the prestigious means of acquiring a spouse. Other modes of acquiring mates are marriage by mutual consent, by elopement, by service, by intrusion (*dhuku*), by exchange (*gua badal*), by application of vermilion on bride's head in a public place (*sindurkarna*) etc. With rare exceptions, their marriages tend to occur predominantly within the same generation. The whole of the nuptial cycle mainly goes through four phases like preliminary enquiries, ceremonial paying of bride price, ceremony proper and post nuptial ceremony. They pay *dali-taka* (bride price) both in cash and kind. The norm of dwelling after marriage is patri-local. Proposal for marriage is

initiated by the bride groom's side through an *agua* (mediator) of their own community. Marriage is solemnized at the bride's house and the rituals are performed by a *pahan* (priest) and sometimes by a *gossain*. Sindur (vermilion) mark and *meren sakam* (an iron bangle worn on left arm) are the symbols of a married woman.

Remarriage (*sangai* or *sagai*) is also allowed in rare cases where the first wife is found to be a barren, mentally retarded or suffering from infectious diseases. Remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees as well as junior levirate and junior sororate are also permitted in their society.

Divorce

In Munda society, either party can divorce his/her spouse on the ground of misunderstanding in marital life, maladjustment, brutality, contagious diseases, poor maintenance, extra marital relationship and barrenness etc. When an issue of divorce emerges, a Panchayat is convened, attended by members from both the parties. The president of the council hands over a *sal* leaf to the offending party and the later tears the leaf as an indication of the breaking of the marriage. This ceremony is known as *sakam-chari* or *chutta chhutti*. The *lachar* (offender) has to pay a fine to the Panchayat. Children of a divorced couple are the sole liability of their father.

Death

The Mundas believe that death is inevitable. Their orthodox method of disposal of a corpse is to burn and to collect the bones which are ceremonially interred in the family *sasan* on the annual *jangtopa* (bone burying day) day. However at present they bury their dead. When a person dies he is carried to the burial ground and is laid facing north. Then the youngest son (in his absence, the eldest son) takes a new piece of cloth and makes two halves of it. Then one half is tied with a stem of *bel* tree and fire is set. The son holding it encircles the dead body thrice and throws it in north direction. Then he keeps handful of soil on the corpse thrice. Other persons attending the funeral also keep soil on the dead body. Post death *chhut* (pollution) continues up to nine days. On the 10th day death rituals are performed by the Pahan (priest) of their community.

During the pollution period, the bereaved family members take vegetarian food. Calling *mua* (soul of the deceased person having natural death) is one of their important rituals. *Mua* is invited and offered a place of permanence in the *ora bhitar*. But he who dies unnaturally is believed to become an evil spirit. The Munda groups belonging to distinct clans have separate burial grounds called *sasan* in the village. The burial stone, *sasan diri*, is erected in the clan *sasan* in memory of the deceased.

ECONOMIC EDIFICE

Agriculture, MFP and others

Tribal economy revolves around easy tools, scanty amount of funds and limited raw materials. Plain division of labour is the general rule in their society. Munda economy mostly relies on land and forest. They do not emphasize on organized efforts for formation of capital, increase of savings etc. Agriculture continues to be the principal activity of the Munda. They are settled agriculturists. They grow rice, pulses, tobacco etc. Rice is grown on *don* as well as on *donr* land. Upland rice is reaped in August and September and includes several varieties of coarse rice only. The upland crops are generally sown by rotation. There are two processes for the cultivation of low-land paddy, viz. the *buna* or sowing and the *ropa* or transplantation, followed by weeding, watching, threshing and harvesting. They also produce many kitchen vegetables in their *bakri piri* (kitchen garden).

They generally gather Minor Forest Produce from thick forests along with a variety of seasonal edible roots, fruits, tubers, flowers, leaves, mushrooms, honey etc. As subsidiary occupation they rely on livestock rearing, carpentry and bamboo basketry. Munda women contribute substantially in cultivation and wage earning in addition to their household chores. Many of the Mundas also serve as skilled and unskilled workers in both Government and private sectors. The growth of industry in Sundargarh district and its surrounding regions has opened up new economic opportunities for the Mundas.

Role of Tribal Haats

Tribal *haats* are regarded as the backbone of tribal economy. These are temporary weekly markets organized at regular intervals in designated places where the Munda people gather with their goods from their remote uphill settlements. Fishing, hunting and agricultural equipments along with food items and artful handicrafts, unique handmade earthen, metallic and wooden utensils and other products are easily available in these *haats*. The Mundas also take their materials collected from the jungle to these *haats* and sometimes exchange them for *bulum* (salt). Apart from selling their surplus produce and buying their necessities from the market, the Mundas get an opportunity for social interaction with their friends and relatives in this place.

Food and Drinks

Food security for a Munda household relies basically on soil, wood and nature. The Mundas are non-vegetarians. Fowls and goats are reared for food purpose. But they normally do not eat pork or beef. Boiled rice is their staple food. Occasionally instead of rice, they consume wheat, maize or *marua*. Among the pulses, *biri*, *kandul*, *moong* etc. are habitually eaten. They also include various types of edible jungle roots, fruits, tubers, mushrooms etc in their daily food chart. Among the vegetables, they eat onions, brinjals, tomatoes, pumpkins,

gourds, lady's fingers, beans etc. The corolla of the flowers like *mahua* is also consumed as food. They eat three times in a day- the *loari* or morning meal, the *tkin mandi* or mid-day meal, and the *ayub mandi* or evening meal. They cook curries and cakes using *sois* (mustard) or *surguja* (Niger) oil and eat salt with food. For condiments *haldi* (turmeric) and chilies are commonly used.

The favourite drink of the Mundas is rice beer or *ili*. Each family prepares its own *ili*. Besides they drink *mahua* liquor in festive occasions. Some Mundas use powdered tobacco rolled up in *sal* leaves in the form of cigarettes while some others use tobacco with lime. The Munda men drink almost regularly, women also drink but occasionally.

MAGICO-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

Animism and Supernaturalism:

The indigenous religion of the tribal groups in India is commonly characterized as "animistic". Animism is the dogma that inanimate objects as well as living beings like mountains, rocks, rivers, trees etc are believed to be inhabited by deities and spirits.

The Mundas strongly believe in deities and spirits and their relationship with supernaturalism are founded on respectful fear, dependence, self surrender and propitiation. Their spiritual union with these spirits is supposed to be accomplished concretely through supplications, rice beer offerings and animal sacrifices. The medium of contact between super natural powers and the Munda are the magico-religious functionaries known as the Pahan and the Sokha.

Religious Faith, Functions and Festivals:

Munda religion centers round the relationship between festivals and their annual agricultural cycle. The key festivals of the Mundas are Sarhul, Karma, Fagu, Sosobonga, Deothan, Mage, Hon-Ba, Batauli, Dasai, Kalam Singh Bonga, Jom Nawa, Ind Parab and Sohrai. They also observe Hindu festivals like Ramnavami, Dussehra, Dipavali and Shivaratri. All the festivals are associated with definite periods of the year and are celebrated accordingly. These occasions and events intensify the emotional and cultural appeal of Munda religion.

Leaving aside the Christian Mundas, the rest have their noticeable affinity with Hindu religion. Their ancestors are regarded as their family deities. They have added a number of popular Hindu deities into their own pantheon. Their birth, marriage and funeral ceremonies have a unique feature of pseudo-religious implications. They are also worshippers of nature. They revere mountain as Bonga Buru, sun as Sing Bonga, water as Ikri Bonga and jungle as Bir Bonga in their legacy. Banjhari Maa is adored as the mother of their jungle. They have faith in both benevolent and malevolent deities. Among the malevolent deities, ghost, *Dakin* is extremely familiar.

Christianity has played a pivotal role in the social transformation of the Mundas. It helps in enlarging their horizon of consciousness significantly.

Birsa Dharam

The last years of the 19th century registered the growth of an eclectic religion amongst the Mundas. Birsa Munda was the founder and the prophet of this religion which was a mixture of Hinduism and Christianity. The perpetual dogma of this *dharam* relies in one God, i.e. Birsa as the incarnation of God on earth. It also emphasizes on purity of character and transparency of soul. The followers of this *dharam* are small in number, known as “Birsait Munda” and observe certain taboos of their own. It was more like a socio-religious movement against oppression among the Kompat Mundas.

AESTHETIC KALEIDOSCOPE

Celebrations and festivities are integrally woven in to the basics of tribal life. Undoubtedly the Mundas are fond of dance, song and music. They perform Cherechera dance during Pus punei where both men and women participate. During marriage ceremony they perform Daunidarnat dance where only girls involve themselves. Their principal songs and dances include *mage* or *jarga*, *paika*, *domkoch*, *jadura*, *japi*, *lahsua* or *karam*, *gena*, *chhau* etc. These dances are classified by the Mundas into two classes according to their different physical postures while dancing namely the *tingu susun-ko* (standing dances) and the *ungud susun - ko* (stooping dances).

Songs and music are interwoven with their dances. They compose their own music and folk-songs. Folk songs are sung on almost all occasions but the themes are occupational or connected with festival and season change. They have a wealth of folk dances and songs, folk lore and folk tales closely mingled with their life-blood which throw light on their origin and evolution.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Mundas have their own Jati Panchayat for enforcing social control. It is called Jati Pancho in the village level, headed by a Marua or Sabhhapati. The Sabhhapati of each Pancho is a member of Parha Pancho – the regional council headed by a Raja (head man) who is elected from amongst the representatives of all constituent Panchos. In case of failure to solve disputes in Jati Pancho, the head man forwards the case to the Parha Pancho. Their traditional Panchayat is regarded as the guardian of their norms and traditions. It adjudicates cases relating to family matters, theft, rape, molestation, extra-marital relationship, illicit pregnancy, divorce, violation of customary laws etc and can impose fine to the offenders both in cash and kind. It is also empowered to outcast a family from the society on judging the graveness of the offence, the accused has

committed. All the office bearers of their Jati Panchayat are highly revered in their society. Women don't have any representation in their Jati Panchayat.

The Munda had evolved this polity suited to their needs since a long time. They however did not have absolute power but went by consensus expressed at Panchayat meetings. From time to time they have introduced changes in their form and functions to meet the modern challenges. Presently Ward Members, Sarapanchs and Chairman of Panchayat Samiti take care of the development activities. The Mundas also take part in political affairs of the nation including general elections for Lok Sabha and Vidhansabha.

SIGNS AND SCENES OF CHANGE

With the dawn of independence, the wind of change is blowing in the interior tribal pockets as well. The Munda people are now passing through a phase of transition. With the development of science and infrastructure, industrialization exerts profound impact on the various aspects of Munda society. With the emergence of Government offices in strategic places, land has come to be used for markets, churches, temples and educational institutions. With the spread of education, Munda young people have entered into the field of industrial economy and job market. With the change of political system the traditional roles of the functionaries have also changed. The importance of tribal religion in Munda life has also altered patently due to conversion to Christianity. Still their silent but solid grip on their core of the world continues unabated.

Scenes of change in the Munda habitation can be traced in the growing welfare institutions like Government Residential Schools, Colleges, Anganwadi Centres, Public Health Centres, Veterinary Hospitals, Police Posts and Industrial Establishments etc. We also find all weather roads, tube wells, IAY houses, fire proof houses, electrified villages and irrigated green fields in the Munda settlement area. Even supply of HYV seeds, introduction of multiple cropping, input assistance, market assurance, banking linkages etc have strengthened their foothold in agriculture. MGNREGA programme also plays a vital role in upholding their economy. Blooming execution of various individual benefit schemes and Bankable Income Generating Schemes for women SHGs by the Government illustrate the positive angle of their development. Organization of Live Demonstration Programmes of Arts and Craft of different tribes, Tribal Dance Festivals and *Adivasi Mela* by the Government from time to time undoubtedly provides a polite platform for the tribals to bloom and flourish in their own way. Implementation of PESA Rule in the tribal belts of Odisha also registers encouraging results.

THE MUNDA GODS *

*L. R. N. Srivastava*¹

The Mundas, it is generally believed, worship the malevolent spirits who are responsible for bringing evils in their life. They are said to be "animist" believers in supernatural beings as Tylor has defined it. In Munda religion an attitude of reverential fear is seen. To ward off the evils and calamities and to bring happiness the propitiation and conciliation of the gods of the pantheon are resorted to. The gods of the pantheon are immortal and impersonal and never have had been seen in any human or animal form. Prayers are said and sacrifices offered to establish harmonious relations with the gods.

If we penetrate deeply, we will find that there are several classes of gods with different status and function. We find Singbonga at the top of the list. He is the supreme Deity who has created all the earthly beings. A marked degree of reverence is shown to him. Hatubongas or the village-gods residing in the village come next. Hatubongas are the gods residing in the village and looking after the activities of villagers regarding agricultural occupations and hunting expeditions. Next come the Orabongas or the Household-gods. These Orabongas are none but the ancestors of the Mundas, who, after death, have occupied their seat in the Ading (a place in the corner of the room where the ancestor spirits are believed to reside). Occasions are there when sacrifices are offered and libation of Ili (rice beer) is made to them. Nature-gods are believed to reside on the various places in nature e.g. the river, the tree, the mountain etc. and are in most cases, named according to their places of residence.

Bonga is a word very widely used by the Mundas. It seems to have been derived from the word 'Bano' or 'Banoa' which means 'no'. So the word Bonga may stand for that which is not (seen, heard or perceived). By this word such spirits, as endowed with superhuman powers, may be conceived. This includes

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¹ Anthropologist

both benevolent and malevolent gods. Gods are named according to the place they reside or the duties they discharge. Malevolent spirits are, at times, named after the mischief they bring to the Munda life. They may change their name with the change of their profession, as for instance, Ikirbonga, Nasanbonga and Tunduhankar bonga are one and the same god, bringing different evils. The world inhabited by the Mundas is called “ne-otedisum” while that occupied by the gods is called, “Paromdisum”.

Singbonga is the Creator and Protector of this world. He has appointed all other *bongas* in different capacities to take care of the people. All the other *bongas* are directly answerable to Singbonga for their activities. It is believed in common parlance that Singbonga is the Sun-god. But the Mundas are not unanimous in identifying Singbonga with the sun. The nomenclature suggests that the daily rising and setting of the sun might have created a sense of reverence and awe in the minds of the Mundas and it might have been inferred that the Supreme Being would be as powerful as the sun. Chandor (perhaps the corrupt form of the Sanskrit word Chandra), the moon is said by a section of the people, to be the wife of Singbonga. Bradley Birt has also shared this opinion. In Asur legend also it is mentioned that Singbonga has a wife and a child, the tending of which is in the hands of the Skylark. But among the Mundas no evidence regarding his wife or son is available. As he has created this universe He has to take care of it. He protects all living creatures from the lowest worms to the biggest animals. He is believed to be natural as He inflicts no harm to the people. But this is not to be confused with that fact that no sacrifice or offering are given to Him. There is no question of reciprocity with Him. He is always propitiated especially at the time of crisis, epidemics and other calamities. White fowl or white goats are sacrificed in His name. Some villagers believe that He takes His seat on a big banyan tree and drops a leaf in favour of every individual on which his fate is inscribed. During the offering of the sacrifices at festivals and other religious ceremonies we notice that three heaps of pearl-rice are placed before the Pahan -the religious head of the village and sacrifices of fowls or goats and libation of rice-beer are made to these heaps, which, perhaps represent the three classes of gods. Singbonga individually, is believed to accept no offering though He is requested to accept all the offerings first on behalf of the gods and distribute them among the gods. Other classes of gods cannot accept the sacrifices offered to them unless Singbonga commands them to do so. Before all religious ceremonies and most of the festivals, the Pahan, or the person concerned utter long and intricate phrases in His praise. He is the amalgamation of all the gods, is the divine king, and most powerful personality ever conceived in this world. The Deonras (the witch-finders) and the Matis cannot dare to neglect His propitiation before they begin divination. Singbonga has become a part and parcel of Munda life. He cannot remain detached from Him even for a moment. He is here, there, everywhere bestowing His fatherly blessings to his children.

Chandibonga may conveniently be placed in the group of the Hatubongas. It seems that the word has been directly borrowed from the Hindus where goddess Durga or Kali are identified with Chandi. Opinions clash in ascertaining the sex of this *bonga*. But Mahadeochandi, the other modality of Chandibonga is decidedly a male deity. Chandibonga is believed to swell on the Sarna-the sacred grove of the village, while others say it is the village fields where the *bonga* resides. This *bonga* is more or less, a malevolent one and hence occupies no place in the ritual calendar of the village Pahan but is more or less a deity falling in the domain of the Sokha and the Mati.

Desaulibonga is still another *bonga* to be placed in the groups of the Hatubongas. He is also believed to reside on the Sarna. He is also a malevolent deity. When a Deonra finds in his divination that Desaulibonga is responsible for causing any disease he advises the family of the patient to offer sacrifices of fowl in the Sarna in the name of Desulibonga. The head of the family if he is conversant with the pros and cons of the sacrificial formula and if not the Pahan goes to the Sarna with all the family members of the patient. A fowl is beheaded there and drops of blood followed by roasted fowl is offered to Desaulibonga. The head of the family or the Pahan, as the case may be, takes the first morsel and then the other members present there participate in the sacrificial meal. After they finish they return with the hope that as Desaulibonga has been offered sacrifices, the disease of the patient will be cured.

Orabongas are the second group of *bongas*. It is believed in the Munda Eschatology that after the death the Jiva (the life substance) of deceased goes to Songbonga and loses its identity and is transformed into another individual, while the personality of the dead hovers round the house until specific rites of Umbul Ader are not preformed to make his entry possible into the world of the Orabongas. When he enters the world of the Orabongas he take his seat in the Ading. As long as a Munda is living he is a man but after his death he becomes a *bonga*. Now special attention is paid to him. He is introduced into the world of the Orabongas. As there are no Shamans among the Mundas who can bring news from the world of the *bongas*, we are not in a position to state clearly what kind of life do the Orabongs lead. But it is believed in common parlance that it is similar to the life led in this world. As these *bongas* are the ancestors they are not supposed to inflict any harm on their descendants. There are occasions when sacrifices are offered to them by the head of the family and not by the Pahan.

Ikirbonga is one of the most off quoted *bongas* falling in the class of Nature-gods. He is supposed to reside in the river, stream or pool. It is believed that in days of yore Ikirbonga resided in the depths of water and protected people from drowning but now with the increasing influence of the wizard and witches he has turned to be a notorious deity who can be infuriated at the slightest provocation. He is at the beck and call of the wizards and witches and they with his help inflict all sorts of harm on the people. He brings various kinds

of evils in different modalities. Tunduhankarbonga and Nasanbonga are the different modalities of Ikirbonga. He is the source of all evils and may be aroused or appeased only with an offering of a fowl.

As Marang means Great, Marangbonga is a Great-god. He dwells on the mountain and on the hill-tops. He is noted for his sobriety and kindness. Long time of promises rarely to be fulfilled are given to him. When the period of promise expires it is renewed by another promise by placing an inverted pitcher in the garden or in the courtyard of the house.

Barambonga is believed to reside on the mountain and hill-tops, on the trees, in the forest in the fields and the like. He is the bestower of all sorts of disease to men and animals. When there is an outbreak of epidemic in the village, the Pahan takes the initiative and collects money from door to door and offers sacrifices to Barambonga. In case of an epidemic among the animals the villagers assemble at the Akhar and one of them takes out the wooden bell hanging from the neck of the animal and hangs it in his own neck. Then he runs towards the east and halts at the boundary of the village believing that the disease has taken shelter in the wooden bell and that is now it has been driven to another village. Then a sacrifice is offered to Barambonga and the epidemic is gone.

In the ultimate analysis, we note that there are gods-numerous and varied in the Munda pantheon. Each god has his different status to assume and different role to perform. And the Mundas in their midst have been trying to lead a life-pure and simple, combating the evils of some and acknowledging the blessings of other gods.

MAGIC Vrs. MEDICINE IN A TRIBAL VILLAGE *

*Budhadeb Chaudhuri*¹

Introduction

Every culture irrespective of its simplicity and complexity has its own beliefs and practices concerning diseases. It does not work in a meaningless fashion. The system of medicine of a culture tries to treat the diseases in its own way. This treatment of disease varies from group to group depending on the nature of culture. Little work has been done on the interaction of primitive and modern medical practices in a rural setting. It is very interesting to study how the two apparently different approaches to heal a disease operate in a same setting. This paper represents an effort to discuss the concept and treatment of diseases and the interaction of primitive and modern medical practices in a Munda village, Telkand. This will show whether the villagers are accepting the modern medical practices or they are in favour of their traditional method. In this connection, the sanitation, water supply, public health and their concept of modern medical practices shall also be discussed.

In West Bengal, the Mundas are mainly concentrated in North Bengal, Sunderbans of 24 Parganas and the western and north-western parts of Midnapur. This latter region is physically contiguous to Chotonagpur plateau, their homeland. They have migrated to this region some 150 years ago in search of occupation and better economic security.

Telkand is a typical Munda concentrated village in Sankaril police-station of Jhargram subdivision in Midnapur district, West-Bengal. It consists of 46 Munda families. Recently, a Raju family has settled here and lives in the outskirts of the village. The total population is 242 which includes 121 (50 per cent) males and 121 (50 per cent) females. This village is far away from any urban center. Kharagpur is 30 miles away. The two nearest important villages are Rohini (3 Miles south-east) and Ragra (2 Miles west). There is a regular fair-weather bus service which plies from Jhargram to Rohini. The distance between Rohini and Telkand is generally covered on foot.

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The mud-built thatched houses of the Mundas are mostly situated in a linear fashion by the side of village main road. The houses are rectangular in ground-plan and none of this tribal people has any double storied building. In most cases there are 2/3 rooms depending on the economic condition and size of the household. However, in most cases, there is no window and in many cases, the kitchen is within the main hut. As such, the inside dwelling room, the *Giti-ora*, is very unhygienic. Besides, when there is any infectious disease, they cannot always segregate the patient from other members of the household. In all cases, a lavatory is absent, so also any drainage system. Then there are the manure-pits adjacent to the courtyard where the sweepings of the yard, the refuses of the cow-shed are thrown. This, though essentially necessary for cultivation, is very harmful to health. The main source of drinking water is well. Besides, there is the Banshi-canal, which they use for washing and bathing purposes. But as the water is not well protected, it can easily be polluted and contaminated. It is seen that at the time of childbirth they call an untrained *Dhai-ma* or midwife belonging to the low Hari caste. She cuts the umbilical cord with an iron arrow head. This traditional method, though unhygienic, is followed by all the villagers and they do not go to the health center.

Cultivation occupies a prominent place in their primary pursuits and may be regarded as the principal source of livelihood.

Before discussing anything about the concept and treatment of diseases of the Mundas of this region, something must be said, about the Mundas of Chotnagpur plateau, as has been pictured by S. C. Roy. "The Mundas are great believers in the power of evil-eye, and in cases of repeated sickness in a family or among the cattle of a family, a witch-finder- the *Sokha*, *Mati* or *Bhagai*- is appealed to for detecting the witch". (1912: 486). Thus it is seen that the Mundas has a doctrine concerning sickness and a functioning group of curers. The present-day Mundas of Midanpur also believe that this world is full of prying witches and other malevolent spirits, which are always seeking to do harm to human being and have much evil potentiality. (Bhowmick and Chadhuri 1996: 100-107).

In this village there are two Munda medicinemen or *Deonas*, who collect medicinal herbs or roots and prepare the medicines. They are Rameshwar Singh and Lalmohan Singh. It is said that the *Deonas* have to undergo an elaborate training under the guidance of a man who teaches the techniques of magic art and the methods of treatment of diseases and spirit-possession. The Mundas of this village can get the modern medical facilities from the nearby villages like Ragra and Rohini. There are also qualified medical practitioners (L. M. F.) and their dispensary-cum-medical shops in both the villages. Besides, there is a Homeopath at Itamandua village who treats minor ailments.

In order to understand how far their magico-religious beliefs and practices stand in relation to other ways of modern treatment and how far they have still clung to their traditional beliefs and practices about the concept and

treatment of diseases as reported by S. C. Roy (1912) a total number of 76 cases and methods of treatment causes and methods of treatment were studied. It covered cases of three years 1963-65. It is given below.

Personas consulted			Reported causes		Nature of treatment				
Total cases	Village Deonas	Doctors from outside	Natural cases	Spirit-possession Evil-eye & Sorcery	By the Deona			Modern treatment	
					Ayurvedic Medicine	Magical puffs	Promise to the Deity	Allopathy	Homeopathy
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
76	54	22	56	20	28	19	7	16	6

It has been observed during the study that during illness the villagers do not at first consult the doctors from outside. They call the local physician or *Deona*. He is supposed to assess the cause of illness by feeling the pulse and in acute cases by performing oil-divination (*Telkhari*)². The Mundas believe that a man becomes ill due to natural cause, Spirit-possession or influence of evil-eye and sorcery. They also attribute a few diseases to particular deity as for instance, epidemic diseases like Cholera, Smallpox, etc. are attributed to *Sitala*. Thus with and effort to avert the diseases, they annually worship the deity. Generally the Deonas first prescribe medicinal herbs or roots and in complicated cases, they apply magical puffs. One such interesting case is given. In 1963, Charimani Dasi fell ill. They called Lalmohan Singh. He came, touched the pulse and said that it was a case of spirit-possession (*Chamak-laga*). So some sort of magical treatment should be made. He then asked for mustard seeds, lamp and a clean piece of cloth. When those objects were supplied, he lighted the lamp in front of the patient and uttered incantations. Then he set fire to the cloth and threw mustard through the burning cloth uttering incantations. It was reported that then the patient moved, as it she was shocked (*Chamak*) and she was cured. It is seen that for the mustard seed which they believe has great magical potency to counteract evil-eye or spirit-possession.

In every acute case, they ask the patient to promise to offer fowl or goat to the deities as in the case of Kartick Chandra Singh, whom Rameshwar Singh could not cure by medicine or magical puffs. It was reported that after they offered a fowl to Manasa, the patient was cured.

Again, it is found that when the village medicine men fail to diagnose and treat a disease properly, the doctors from the nearby villages like Ragra, Rohini and Itmandua re consulted. Thus out of 22 cases where doctors from outside were consulted, six of them were Homeopaths and sixteen Allopaths.

² *Telkhari* – Charging mustard oil with special magical power with incantations and using the same for detection and/or treatment against spirit possession, evil eye or sorcery

Now, the nature of treatment for the natural cause and spirit-possession, evil-eye or sorcery is discussed here separately to indicate if there is any variation in the method of treatment.

The method of treatment of diseases for the natural causes is given below in a tabular way:

No. of cases	By the village Deona			By the Doctors from outside		
	Ayurvedic medicine	Magical puffs	Promise to the deity	Allopath	Homeopath	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
56	22	7	5	16	6	22

Thus, it is seen that for the natural causes, the village Deonas are inclined to use their Ayurvedic medicine more than other methods.

Now the method of treatment of diseases when the cause was reported as spirit-possession, evil-eye or sorcery is given below:

No. of cases	By the village Deona			By the Doctors from outside		
	Ayurvedic medicine	Magical puffs	Promise to the deity	Allopath	Homeopath	Total
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
20	6	12	2	X	X	X

Discussion:

The belief of the interference of supernatural agency in diseases, the attribution of some diseases to certain deities and the belief in evil-eye, spirit-possession or sorcery clearly indicate that still these Mundas have clung to their traditional modes of beliefs and practices. To avert the diseases, they annually worship the deity. They think that sudden and violent sicknesses are due to evil-eye, spirit-possession or sorcery. They believe that witches have evil-eye. Thus if they wish, if they only cast their look on a living being harm is sure to befall it. They strongly believe that then only a *Deona* can save them by his magical powers. It is seen that a *Deona* feels the pulse and tries to diagnose the illness first because specific type of illness has specific type of treatment. The variation in the nature of treatment where the reason is natural cause of spirit-possession, evil-eye and sorcery also indicates it. Now they also say that a person is suffering from Influenza, Peumonia, etc. This naming seems to be due to their contact with modern medical practices. It is also found that due to the facilities now available, a few villagers consult the doctors of nearby villages when the *Doena* fails to heal up the disease. Another interesting feature may be mentioned here. Many of the villagers were seen to have taken vaccinations. This practice shows that they are now becoming aware of the utility and usefulness of vaccinations against Small

pox. This indicates that their traditional concepts and methods of treatment are now changing and their traditional views about diseases are existing side by side with modern medical practices. However, modern medical practices have not influenced them to any appreciable extent. Illiteracy and poverty are great obstacles to proper health education. Besides, it is seen that, very few people would like to go to a clinic or hospital at the first instance. They only go when anything serious happens. So, in many cases, the patients do not get well and as such they begin to distrust the modern system. Marriott rightly has said that in a village the clinics serve all too frequently as the last resort (1955). The Munda traditional treatment may be unsuccessful in one case. But the failure of one treatment does not teach them that all their methods of treatment does not teach them that all their methods of treatment is bad or useless. The inadequate care and callous treatment in the clinics and hospitals also sometimes make them distrustful and fearful of the clinic and hospital. There are also a few other factors which are creating hindrance for the introduction of modern medical practices.

There is a great importance in understanding a community as a whole with its socio-cultural systems. This may avert the resistances in health programmes and other obstacles a doctor may face in a village. The Mundas have a doctrine concerning sickness and health. They take the help of untrained *Dhaima* or midwife belonging to low *Hari* caste at the time of birth. She cuts the umbilical cord with an iron arrow head where there is every chance of septic. But they do not want to change this traditional method all on a sudden and take the help of an expert midwife. So many such socio-cultural factors are creating hindrance for the introduction of modern medical practices. Its proper introduction is not an easy task and this can be done more easily if the new idea takes its root at the village level. In this particular village, it can be done with the help of the members of *Munda Sevak Samaj* and *Telkand Ashram*. They can understand more easily the modern concepts about germs, etc. and the merits of modern medical practices. In fact, it is not always for their economic condition but also for their traditional beliefs that they at first take the help of a village *Deona* and not a doctor from outside. According to their traditional belief, a few diseases are attributed to certain deities. So if the doctors from outside are consulted instead of appeasing the deity, the deity might well be offended. Again, they believe that if a person is ill due to evil-eye of a witch or due to spirit- possession, a doctor can not cure the patient for they are helpless against them. Some sort of magical treatment must be done by the *Deona*. The *Deona* informs them about the presence of that witch, whom they should avoid. But a doctor cannot do it. Again, according to their traditional belief they think that just like a *Deona*, a doctor should be able to diagnose the reason of illness by simply feeling the pulse. But a doctor cannot do it. He enquires many things and then he can prescribe the medicine. For this, their faith in modern medical practices is lessened. The villagers have to pay cash money at once to the doctors.

They pay in cash or kind or in both to the village *Deonas* on the *Dak Sankranti*, the last day of *Paush* (December-January) which is not at all a small amount. Besides, in many complicated cases, they have to pay money or buy objects which exceed the amount to be paid to a doctor. Marriott rightly has said, "In terms of number of patients, amount of expenditure and frequency of use, patronage of indigenous medicine surpasses that of western medicine on hundredfold" (1955-241).

The knowledge of what people believe about health and diseases can be helpful in a number of ways. The study of concepts of diseases of a particular community is interesting because it will show the views and ideas of the other spheres of their life. Thus, the magico-religious belief concerning diseases indicates that such a group cannot interpret agricultural innovations in a truly scientific spirit. If fact, it is seen that among the Mundas, the recognition of supernatural interferences is particularly strong in connection with disease and agriculture. So for the introduction of new practices the total world-view of the people should be changed. Again, if the new ideas want to influence the local people, there should not be a wide gulf separating the thinking, experience and idea of a doctor from that of their village patients. Because patients in all societies want that the doctor understands them. Among these Mundas, the doctor must not challenge or criticize their traditional beliefs openly. Because though there is a pragmatic bent in the attitude of the villagers, the authority of the *Deona* is still dominant in the village he is esteemed by the villagers. A doctor's advice may be followed and the gulf can be bridged by presenting the new modern methods in a way which may fit with their already existing cultural pattern.

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MUNDARI *

A. B. Ota ¹

S. C. Mohanty ²

Saumalini Mohanty ³

IDENTITY

The Mundari is a part of the larger Munda group. The Kol, Kol Lohara, Ho and Mundari - all belong to the same group as the Kolha, who are considered being part of the larger Munda group. Mostly Mundari people are found in Sundergarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts of Odisha. They speak a language called Mundari, which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic language family. Their major occupation is settled cultivation and industrial labour. Hinduism with admixture of animism is professed by the Mundari. Normally, the Mundari identify them as '*Hodoko*' which means "Human Beings". They have been living in the same region or place for quite a long time, treating it as their home land.

Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of the Mundaris are asserted by modern ethnologists to be of Dravidian type. The skin colour of the tribe in general is black to brown. The head of the person is found to be long (*dolico-cephalic*), the

* Published in the Photo Handbook on Mundari, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2016

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nose is thick and broad and sometimes depressed at the root, the lips are thick, the facial angle is comparatively low, the face is wide and fleshy and the features being irregular, the figure seems to be squat. The limbs of man or woman are sturdy and well formed and the stature is rather short. They possess a very strong muscular body, a good chest, powerful jaws and stomach and strong white teeth.

Population & Concentration

According to 2011 census, the total population of the Mundari tribe is 25,655 (male 12,725 and female 12,930). Their sex ratio is 1016 females per thousand males according to 2011 census. Their literacy rate is 59.89 % (71.54 % for the males and 48.55% for the females). The decadal population growth rates among the Mundari tribe during the period from 1961 to 1971, 1971 to 1981, 1981 to 1991, 1991 to 2001 and 2001 to 2011 are 0.71%, 38.48%, 26.27%, -23.48 % and 7.64% respectively.

Dress & Ornaments

The dress and ornaments of the Mundari people can be well characterized as very simple and scanty. Their men ordinarily wear a loin-cloth. This cloth is from six to nine cubits long and has colour borders but on the festive occasions, young men also wear a sort of belt around their waist. These are sometimes made of cocoon-silk. The dress of the Mundari women normally consists of a long piece of cloth. But due to modernization the men are wearing pants and shirts and the women are wearing polyester sarees with blouse.

Besides these, the Mundari women like to leave their head and feet usually uncovered. However while going to the markets or to the towns, some well-to-do Mundaris wear 'pagris'. The *pagri* is a long piece of cotton cloth which is woven round the head in coils. It serves as a symbol of prestige and provides a protective cover for their head. During rainy season, the Mundari people use bamboo-umbrella, cloth umbrella and a type of circular rain-hat made of leaves of a creeper for their daily use. The Mundari women, in particular, use elongated rain-hats which cover their head and back down to the feet.

Young women are fond of decorating themselves with a large variety of brass ornaments as jewellery other than brass is out of affordable limit for most of the Mundari families. Besides these, the ear-rings made of silver and even of cheaper gold, are, however occasionally used, mostly in some important functions and social gatherings by well-to-do families. As observation reveals, the ornaments ordinarily worn are for the arms, brass bracelets called *sakom* and *kakana*, and for the legs, brass anklets called *andu*, necklaces *hisir* and for the ears, ear ring *lutur*. Besides this, traditionally the women of older generation also use iron bracelets called *beras*.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING PATTERN

The Mundari usually live in multi-ethnic villages having their separate hamlets. They have linear pattern of settlement with two rows of houses facing each other along a common road or footpath. They generally build their houses in separate enclosures, each being a separate unit. Every house has its own spacious fence enclosing the house proper, cowshed, harvest ground and storage space for straw and firewood. Each Mundari village has a sacred grove called *sarna* that is the place of the village deity, located preferably in the village outskirts.

The residence of a well-to-do Mundari family usually consists of four or five dwelling units. But majority of houses consist each of at least two huts. They use one room as sleeping-room and the other as eating-room. In addition to this, *mandi ora*, the kitchen room includes the sacred tabernacle where the spirits of ancestors are worshipped. The houses of the well-to-do families are supported by wooden posts and have often tiled and asbestos roofs whereas the poorer Mundaris live in the thatched houses. Generally, the posts and rafters are made of *sal*-wood obtained from the local jungles. The walls of the houses are made of mud and small wooden bars or narrow bamboos.

Household Assets

A study of the assets of the Mundari household indicates that for cooking purposes, normally they use pots made of silver. To carry the water from the distant water sources, the women generally place the earthen jars (*gharas*) and aluminium jars on a small straw-pad (*binda*) over their head. It has also been documented that 'Purus' or cups made of *sal*-leaves are occasionally used to drink liquids, mainly liquors by the tribesmen.

An examination of the household utilities and decorations indicate that various types of bamboo-baskets are used as cup-boards by the tribal households for keeping and storing household goods. The main staple food paddy is stored in *potoms* which are made of bundles of straw-strings. The grain is carried and kept in big-baskets, locally named as *khanchis*. Moreover, a number of small sized baskets named as *tunkis* are used for carrying paddy-seeds to the fields, and to keep cereals, vegetables etc. The children of the families also use very small baskets, called *tupas*, to gather various edible leaves and roots. To light the house, a family uses hurricane lanterns and lamps. To sweep their house and courtyards, the Mundari women use brooms or *jonos* made of grasses.

The household furniture indicates that a stool with a wooden frame and *plastic* chairs are used. Wooden cots are mostly used by well-to-do Mundari families. But the poorer section of the society use palm-leaf mats for beds to sleep on the ground or floor of the house. Sometimes they also use some cloth over the mat for a more comfortable sleeping.

Material Culture

Examinations of the weapons used by the Mundaris indicate that the bow and arrow is their main weapon of offence and defence. In their own language, they call the bow, *a-a* and the latter, *sar*. The two weapons together are known as *a-sar*. A very close examination and verification of the weapon reveals that the handle of the arrow is called the *tuti*. They also use battle-axe (*kapi*) and the spear (*balam*) for hunting purposes. Moreover, the shield (*phiri*) and two kinds of swords, namely, the *khanda* and the *tarwari* are mostly used only at war dances in ceremonies like marriage, religious gatherings and other festivals.

Now-a-days, though the tribe has become an occasional fish-catcher. The varieties of fishing traps and nets they use point to a period when it appears that fishing and hunting were once their principal occupations. The local generic 'Mundari' name for a net is *jalom*, which almost sound the same as in Sanskrit. A very detailed study indicates that the tribe uses a push-net called *pilni*, a drag-net called *charguria*, a small circular prodding fish-net called *gira* fixed on three sticks and joined together in the form of a triangle, and bamboo fishing-traps called *janjid* and *kumni*. But these are removed by plastic nets now days.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Family

Family is the smallest social unit in Mundari tribe. Descent and inheritance are patrilineal and the residence is predominantly patri-local. The status of women is at par with that of men in all spheres of life.

Father is regarded as the head of the family. He is regarded as an authority over family property, income and expenditure and his role stands for discipline, control and cohesiveness in a family as a working unit. He is the chief provider of the family. It has been identified that within the lifetime of the father, the sons do not generally separate from him or from the family. Sons with their wives and children live under the paternal roof. They all join hands in cultivating the family's farm lands, share food from the common family kitchen and bring even their individual earnings, if any, to the common family fund. If a member of the joint family goes away temporarily for some other labour work to any other place, he does not lose his right to his proper share in the ancestral land in the event of a partition during his absence. At the time of partition of family's property, they follow the rule of equigeniture.

LIFE CYCLE RITUALS

Pregnancy & Child Birth

Birth is regarded as a very joyous event in a Mundari family. It makes the couple fertile and washes the stigma of barrenness of a married woman forever. It enhances the status of the husband and wife as father and mother. As

soon as a pregnancy is discovered, the Mundaris prepare themselves for offering sacrifices to their deity *Garasi bonga*.

The pregnant woman is subjected to some customary taboos in respect of her food, work and mobility for the safety of herself and the foetus in her womb. The child birth takes place in a secluded corner of the house with the assistance of a traditional midwife or experienced elderly women.

After the birth of the child, ritual pollution is observed for nine days after which the mother with her baby is taken to a nearby pond and bathed thoroughly to get rid of pollution.

Marriage

The Mundari have a hierarchy of clans. Clusters of clans maintain group solidarity and regulate marriage and socio economic relationships. The clan elders mediate in fixing marriage and bride price. Payment of bride price is an inseparable part of tribal marriage.

Among the Mundari youths, common mode of acquiring mate is through negotiation. Other approved modes of marriage are by mutual consent, by elopement, by service, by intrusion and by exchange. Junior levirate and sororate are also allowed in their society. With the passage of time, at present, negotiated type of marriage which is considered prestigious is being preferred more and more.

Widow remarriage is an accepted practice. However, males marry more frequently than females resulting in a disproportionate rate of widowhood. Divorce is as frequent as remarriage. It is settled by the intervention of clan elders and traditional village leaders. Divorcees are also allowed to remarry in their society.

Death

The Mundari are fully aware of death as a reality. They practice both burial and cremation. Generally they cremate their dead but with some exceptions in cases of abnormal deaths. Young children, adults who die of epidemics or snake bite, pregnant women who die during child birth are all given a burial and in some cases floated down the river.

Their death pollution, in both the cases, lasts for ten days and ends after performance of purificatory rituals and feast. The Mundaris believe that after the death of a person, the spirit of the deceased moves around the remains of the body and only after observance of purificatory rituals it finds its permanent shelter. The relatives of the dead man, on the third or fifth day of the death, shave their hair and bathe to purify themselves. Saplings of *tiril* tree are planted placing an earthen vessel. The spirit of the deceased is welcomed shouting his

names and later prayers are offered and other rituals are carried out in its name to appease it.

LIVELIHOOD

Mundari economy is primarily subsistence oriented and based upon a combination of agriculture, forestry and wage labour. Although the Mundaris are mainly dependent on agriculture, collection of minor forest produce continues to play a major role in household consumption and income generation. Though they are mainly settled agriculturists, they also collect minor forest produce seasonally from forest to supplement their economy. Apart from fire wood and wood for house construction, they collect honey, *tendu* and *sal* leaves, *mahua* (*madhuca indica*), *tola* (*mahua* oil seeds).

Hunting, Fishing and Animal Husbandry are subsidiary to agriculture. They also work as agricultural labourers and unskilled labourers in other fields. They hunt small game animals and occasionally catch fish. They cultivate different types of crops such as paddy, maize, black gram, mustard, bean etc. They also cultivate vegetables in their kitchen garden for their own consumption and also sell in their local market. They use timber and bamboo for house construction and making their hunting implements. They collect firewood for their own use and also sell it in the local market.

Food Habits

Their staple food is boiled rice. The well-to-do families take boiled pulse or *dal* as a side dish. Except on special occasions, their daily food items consists of only some boiled green herb or *sag* along with the boiled rice, fish and often, the meat of pigeon, poultry etc.

Fowls, goats, hens and pigs are reared for food and ritual sacrifices. Besides the green herbs or *sags*, the well-to-do families occasionally consume vegetables grown on their own backyard or farm lands. They usually grow onions, brinjals, radishes, tomatoes, pumpkins and gourds, lady's fingers, beans, varieties of arums such as *saru*, *pechki* and sweet potato etc.

An examination of the food habits indicates that the women (mostly the house wives) take meal after all the family members finish theirs which is normally followed by the caste societies.

The favourite drink of the Mundari is rice-beer (*handia*). It is generally made of boiled rice, fermented and mixed with certain kinds of other drinks too. This beer is stored in earthen jars and silver jars for about four/five days to become ready for use. Now-a-days, mostly the young ones prefer the distilled liquors available in local shops. Besides, they smoke tobacco and use of betel (*gutka*) or betel-nuts.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Mundari religion is an admixture of animism, shamanism and ancestor worship. Their religious beliefs and practices aim at ensuring personal security and happiness as well as community well being and group solidarity. Their religious practices include life crisis rites, cyclic community rites, ancestor worship and totemic rites and observance of taboos.

Mundari religion is more or less the resultant of traditions and beliefs that have come down to them from antiquity. They are basically polytheists. Their Gods differ from one another in composition, function, character and nature. The Mundari people rely on the above stated religious functionaries to please and propitiate their Gods and Goddesses at the time of sickness, pestilence or for the yield of good crops, healthy livestock and good descendants.

The Mundaris worship a number of gods, goddesses, spirits and various supernatural objects. Sing Bonga, the Sun God otherwise called *dharam devta* is their supreme god. Other deities are Basuki mata, Dessuali, Marang Bonga, Karam Bonga, Goddess Laxmi etc.

They believe that Sing Bonga punishes those who break the law of marrying within their own tribe. But Sing Bonga is not regarded as a jealous God since he allows his people to worship other celestial beings. They believe in supernatural spirits and their relation towards this supernatural world is one of reverential fear, submission and propitiation.

The contact between supernatural powers and the Mundaris is maintained by two kinds of functionaries known as the 'Pahan' and the 'Sokha'. Pahan, the priest, worships the deities on festive occasions at the sacred grove called *sarna*, located at the village outskirts.

The Mundaris distinguish between white and black magic. The practitioners of white magic are known as Sokha, Mati, Najao, Deonara, Ojha, Vaidya or Bhagat. The black magic is commonly practiced by witches (*dain*) and sorceress who if suspected are dealt with heavily by the society. Although the number of witch accusations and witch-hunt has declined a great deal in these days, yet, the deadly fear of witchcraft persists among the Mundaris.

Aesthetic Life

The tribals are born dancers and singers, so also the Mundaris. It has been documented that the Mundari tribe is fond of music and dance. Their songs and music are joyous and depicts the festive spirit that prevails whenever there is an occasion for people to gather and rejoice. Their dancing is essentially a village amusement. They form units and revolve in a circular rhythm during the dance performance. The speed of the dancing varies from dance to dance and

from region to region. The movements of their dances are very simple and repetitive. They move forward and backward the same steps.

For this purpose they use a variety of musical instruments. Most usable musical instrument is the *dholki*. They also use the *dumang*, a drum having an earthen framework within the top and the bottom of which is made of monkey-skin and the *dhanpla* or tambourine made of wood and goat skin. Other musical instruments are the *karetal* or cymbal made of brass, the *saranga* or fiddle made of wood and goat-skin with strings of horse tail, the *tuhila* or banjo made of gourd shell and wooden handle with a string of silk, the *banom*- another variety of banjo consisting of two gourd shells and two strings and brass-gauze. Besides these instruments the *rutu* or bamboo-flute and the *murli* a smaller flute which is also made of bamboo are used by the tribe in some special occasions and festivals.

Their folk songs and tales are still found to be retained specifically by the older generation.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Mundari had evolved a polity suited to their needs from a long time. It was largely a two tier structure headed by traditional chiefs and supported by other elders. They however do not have absolute power but go by consensus expressed at the meetings of a regularly constituted panchayat. The position of priest, village headman and the inter village headman in Mundari society are hereditary. Punishments or corrective measures are proportional to the gravity of the breach of norms of the society or the crime committed and the punishments range from simple oral admonition to other measures such as corporal punishments, imposition of fines, payment of compensation and ex-communication from the community. Truth of an incident is determined by oath, ordeals and occult mechanism.

From time to time the Mundari have introduced change in the composition and functions of their traditional community panchayats to meet the challenges of the situation. Hatu panchayat and Parha panchayat are the two important institutions of the Mundari polity. The former panchayat functions at the village level and the later is the regional council of a group of villages. Violation of the rule of endogamy causes permanent social segregation of a family in their society. Their panchayat system deals with the matters relating to incest, beef eating, ill treatment to parents, adultery, theft etc and generally prescribes punishment in form of compensation like giving community feast, performing some prescribed ritual ceremonies etc.

Due to introduction of Panchayati Raj system and formation of 3 tier Institutions, their traditional political system is gradually weakening. The office bearers of the statutory PRIs are elected people's representatives such as Ward

Members, Sarapanchs, Chairpersons of Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad etc. At present the officials of statutory PRIs are more concerned about the planned development efforts undertaken by the Government in their respective villages. As a result they are considered more powerful and influential in their region. Now the Mundaris have become politically more conscious than before.

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Due to development of social and physical infrastructural facilities and continuous assimilation with other caste people, many changes have been found in the socio-economic and political life of the Mundari. Their literacy level has increased to a sizable extent and their children are now found to be enrolled in the adjacent Government schools to get education. It can be seen from the results that most of the tribals encourage their children to pursue education and send them to schools and colleges for education. It is also seen that in many cases the parents are not well educated or sometimes not at all educated but they prefer to send their children to school. Their means of livelihood have also been changed. They have shifted their occupation from agriculture to industrial and tertiary sectors because of the development intervention of in their area.

The perceptions, thoughts, food habits, daily life styles, dresses, festivals, customary rules and rituals, the eco-friendly and nature related culture of the Mundari are all deteriorating due to the impact of modernisation. Most of the tribes today do not speak their original language and the Mundaris are no exception. Many Mundaris have lost their original tongue. Today, the use of local language – Odia. The practice of healing through herbs as a major practice has been replaced by visiting a doctor and moving patients to hospitals. The effects of modernisation have also been found on their life ways and beliefs of worshipping nature and natural objects like trees, rivers, mountains and mother earth. However it is a positive change in itself that the custom of animal sacrifice in rituals by the Mundaris is no longer being practiced today.

OMANATYA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Omanatya has different nomenclatures such as Amanatha, Omanaito or Omaito. Thurston reported that the community has inherited the synonyms, as its ancestor was Amatya or minister in Royal kingdom of Sri Ram in Ayodhya.

They are mostly concentrated in Nowrangpur district and sparsely distributed in all the district of Odisha except Balasore. According to 2011 census their population is 28736 (males – 14 204 and females – 14 532) and their sex ratio is 1023. Their literacy rate is 36.27 % in 1981. They have no dialect of their own and speak Oriya.

Omanatya settlements are uniclans and homogeneous. In heterogeneous villages they live in separate hamlets.

The Omanatya are generally settled cultivators. Agricultural and non-agricultural wage earning is also seen among them. At the same time, they are gatherers of seasonal forest produce. Women make substantial contribution to family income by way of their participation in agriculture, wage earning, animal husbandry, fishing as well as household work. They are usually non-vegetarians. Rice and *ragi* are their principal food. Besides, they are addicted to country liquor. Both men and women are habituated to smoking black cheroots.

The community is divided into two endogamous sections i.e. Bado and Sano which again is divided into a number of exogamous totemistic septs viz.- Bagh (Tiger), Nag (Cobra), Kachhap (Tortoise), Sua (Parrot), Kumudu (Pumpkin), Kukur (Dog), Mankar (Monkey), Dudha (milk), Sila (stone), etc.

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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Family is mostly nuclear, patrilocal; patrilineal and patripotestal. A few cases of extended families are found in their society. Family is generally monogamous but polygyny is not altogether prohibited.

Marriage through negotiation is commonly practised and is regarded as an ideal form of acquiring a life partner. The custom of bride price is prevalent among them which is paid both in cash and kind that includes jaggery, rice, paddy, clothes and country liquor before the marriage. In the marriage ritual, the groom proceeds to bride's residence in a procession and returns home with the bride where the wedding ritual is performed amidst folk dance and feast to kinsmen, guests and villagers. Musicians belonging to Domb community play music on the occasion. Remarriage of widow, widower, divorcee and junior levirate and sorrorate is permitted. Cross cousin marriage is prevalent. Other modes of marriage are by service, capture and elopement which are becoming very rare now-a-days.

Birth pollution is observed for nine days after which the name giving rites for the newborn is conducted. They observe puberty rites for an adolescent girl. It is observed for nine days during which the pubescent girl remains in seclusion. The Omanatya practise both cremation and burial for the dead. They observe death pollution for ten days and the purificatory rites on the tenth day. The bereaved family hosts a feast to lineage members, guests and villagers.

Their religion is an amalgamation of Hinduism and animism. They worship their traditional deities like Thakurani, Bhairab, Gram Devti, Isha Devta and Duma Devta and offer animal sacrifices. Besides, they worship many Hindu Gods and Goddesses including Lord Jagannath at Puri and observe many Hindu festivals like Dussehra, Diwali, Laxmi puja with their Bali Yatra, Chaita Parab, Pus Parab and Nuakhia.

The Omanatya community has its own traditional council headed by Kul Naik whose office is hereditary. The regional head is called Naik or Bhat Naik who is assisted by a messenger (Challan). The other office bearers are Pujari and Dissari, the religious functionaries. The council settles up intra and inter-community disputes.

They have preserved the rich tradition of their popular folk dance. Both men and women participate in dancing during Chait Parab and Pus Parab.

OMANATYA *

*Gopinath Satpathy*¹

The Omanatyas or the Amanatyas are one of the agricultural communities of Orissa. It is said that their ancestor was a minister (Amatya) of Sri Ram. After Ram had gone to heaven there was no one to take care of them and hence they took to agriculture. They have the different titles given by the king such as Pradhani to the Chief Secretary in Royal Affairs, Pujari to the worshipper of Gods.

Their distribution in the districts of Orissa is given below:-

Sl. No.	Name of the district	Males	Females	Total Population
1.	Koraput	6,952	7,193	14,145
2.	Mayurbhanj	61	51	112
3.	Boudh-Kondhmal	40	63	103
4.	Kalahandi	01	03	04
5.	Ganjam	01	00	01
Total		7,055,	7,310	14,365

Their total population is 14,365 of which 14,316 constitutive the rural population and 49 live in urban area. They are concentrated in North of Jeypore and Nowrangpur.

They speak Oriya and have no other tribal language of their own.

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections known as Bodo and Sano like the Bhattaras of Koraput. Many do not admit such division. They have

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a number of exogamous clans called *Bagh* (tiger), *Dhudo* (milk), *Gag* (cobra), *Kumda*, etc.

The Omanatyas live in heterogeneous villages with other communities like Bhottada, Rana, Dom, Paik, etc. There are a few villages, where the Omanatya families predominate. They have one secular head known as *Naek*, one priest known as Pujari in the village. The *Naek* decides all disputes in a general council of elders. A number of villages together constitute a *Desa*. The head of the *Desa* is the *Kulnaek*, whose office is hereditary. He arranges meetings for settling up social disputes and takes the prominent role in excommunicating the members of the caste, for their faults like *gobadh*, kidnapping women of other community. They cannot tolerate a man suffering from sores with grubs and the sufferer is excommunicated. To be received back into the caste structure, the offender has to give a caste feast of which the *Kulneak* is the first to partake.

Nuclear families are the chief social units. There are extended and joint families, but the number is very few. The extended joint families break down with the marriage of the sons and after issues are born to the new couple. The son-less family adopts his *gharjoia* or any other individual as its son. The adopted son gets the same privilege as the true son. The family is patrilineal, patrilocal and patriprotestal in nature.

Birth pollution on the part of the mother extends over 25 to 30 days. After 25 days, new pots are used and the old ones are thrown out. The nails are pared. The name giving ceremony is observed. The uncle is allowed to drink on this occasion. With the observation of the ceremony, she is allowed to touch cooking pots. The names are selected by Disari by divination. The Sonari pierces the nose and ear at the age of three.

With the growth of mustache, the boy is considered to be adult and arrangements are made to seek a girl for him. Cross-cousin marriage is the general rule. Usually girls are married before attaining puberty. In some instances, grown up girls are also married. The Omanatyas follow the same elaborate process of selecting and marrying the girls like the Bhottaras. The parents set out with some eatables to the bride's place to ask her parents. A second visit is paid in similar fashion, when the negotiation is decided. On an auspicious day fixed by Disari they send Mahal-Keria (Mediator). The mediator pays ten *annas* to the girls of the bride's village and is known from that day as the Kahalkeria for the particular marriage. On the 4th visit, the Jhola is fixed at 3 *puti* rice, 1 *puti* paddy, rupee one for bangles, and a cloth for mother and a cloth for unmarried sister in case of infant girl and 2.1/2 *puti* rice, two pieces of cloth for elderly girls. With this visit, the proposal is finalized. The villagers are asked to prepare pendals in their respective villages. On the appointed day, the bridegroom is conducted in a procession to the bride's village. The bridegroom is conducted to the booth constructed of eight posts of *sal* tree, and a central post of Bassia tree with seven pieces of turmeric and mango leaves tied to it. The bride is

brought to the pendal. The Disari links together their little fingers, while the women throw rice coloured with turmeric on them. Water, brought from the village stream and coloured with turmeric is poured over the couple from five pots. They wear new cloths and there ensues a feast. Night is spent in dance and song.

On the following day, the bride is conducted to the home of bridegroom. At the entrance of the village, the bridegroom's mother sprinkles rice coloured with turmeric over them. Liquor is distributed and a feast ensues.

The Disari takes seven grains of rice and seven areca nuts and ties them up in the ends of the cloths of the contracting couple. They go round the sacred poles seven times and return home.

On the next day they perform Kado Handi ceremony. They throw mud, turmeric water over each other. All then go to the stream and take bath. They return home, when the girl is carried on the shoulder of the boy. All pay their homage. Then the ground feast follows.

On the 9th day, the couple goes to the girl's place and a feast is given there.

At marriage, a sacred thread is given to the groom which he wears all through his life.

In case, a bridegroom is not available they make a pseudo marriage. No stigma is attached to her if she remains at her parent's house after pseudo marriage. This marriage is performed on a good day. The *mohul* post is fixed on the courtyard and is adorned with vermilion, Kajal, etc. seven sheaves of turmeric and mango leaves are tied to the *mahul* post. The bride is brought to the pendal and the marriage ceremony is consummated by pouring water on the *mahul* post and the woman, who holds it tightly. A feast is given and all depart.

At times the Omanatyas take recourse to marriage by elopement, and marriage by service as is the case with Bhottaras. The instances are very rare.

Polygyny is allowed. The younger brother may marry the wife of the deceased elder brother. Widow and divorced woman can marry again.

Both burial and cremation are practiced by them. They bury the dead in sleeping posture with the head to the south. The death pollution lasts for 10 days. They use new cooking vessels after shaving and purification. During these ten days the caste occupation is not carried out and the mourners are fed by the people of other sept. On the 11th day a feast is held in the village.

The Omianatyas worship Thakurani and one of their castes officiates as the priest. They observe Pusa Punia in Pusa, Magh Jatra in Magh, Amnua in Chaita, Akhi Muthi in Baisakh, Amus in Sraban, Dhannua in Bhadrab, Dashara

in Asin, Dewali in Kartik. Well- to-do families observe Laxmi Puja in Magusir. They also participate in Holi festival in Fagun and Car festival in Asdha with the neighbouring population.

They dance on various occasions like marriage, Pusa Punia etc. Their dances are known as *Pania Junia Nach* and *Cherachera Nach*. They sing Chaita Parba songs on festive occasions and Kutuni songs at the time of marriage.

They settle in fairly large, heterogeneous villages. The houses are set in rows, apart from the other communities. In certain villages, the houses are clustered together. There is no dormitory houses are clustered together. There is no dormitory house in the village and no common hall.

The walls of the houses are made of wood, wattles, plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with straw. Gradually, the mud houses are being replaced by brick houses. The rooms are spacious and there are 2 to 4 rooms in a house. No window is seen in their houses like those of the neighbouring population.

The stock and store of the house consists of cane basket with lid, rope, string cots, knife, storing post of straw, earthenware vessels. Well-to-do families have buckets and aluminium utensils, brass jars and pots. They have both husking lever and hand pound Kutuni. Each house has a plank used in washing the clothes. Each house has got Barsi and screw driver to make its own plough and agricultural implements.

They dress themselves like the neighbouring population. Their dress simply consists of cloth, napkin, *chaddar*. A few use shirt, banian. The females use mill-made as well as hands made clothes. They wear Khadu of silver on the wrist, armlet on the arm, glass and rubber bangles, Noli and Phulis of gold and brass in ear, Dandi and Phasia in nose, Pauji in leg, rings on fingers and toes. The males wear Nolis in the ear, Khadu in hand, rings in the fingers and necklace in neck. Golden ornaments are rarely seen. They wear black bead necklaces round their neck.

The musical instruments consist of Mardal, Gini and Thal.

They have all the agricultural implements used for wet cultivation such as sickles, plough, Ankudi, Kodi (spade), plough share. The fishing implements like traps, small nets are seen. They use axe, bow, arrow, and gun for hunting purposes.

They are good agriculturists and practice wet cultivation. Shifting cultivation is not practiced. Sugarcane, paddy, tobacco, *ragi*, several varieties of pulses, oil seeds are their major crops. Vegetables like brinjal, onion, potato etc. are cultivated. Fishing is usually carried out. Hunting is practiced at leisure.

A few of them have joined the Government service. Most of them have some amount of land which they cultivate. In lean months, they also work as labourer to earn the livelihood.

In spite of their labour and production from agricultural fields they are very poor because they are exploited by money-lenders, intelligentsia of the localities, traders and Government officials. At the time of marriage, they are in need of money and borrow the same paying high interest for the same. Similarly, the traders cheat them while selling and buying article. They do not know properly the metric measurements and Naya paisa and as a result of their ignorance, they are duped.

However, in the social scale, they enjoy a higher status. They do not touch the untouchables like Dom etc. They do not take food from Bhottaras, Bhumias. The Malis, Gauds accept food and drink from them. They do not rear pigs like the Bhottaras. They can enter Hindu temples. Some well-to-do people are now engaging Brahmins in their marriage and social functions. They are developing an interest in education and are gradually improving. It is hoped, that within a few years, they may not be considered as tribals.

OMANATYA *

*S. C. Biswal*¹

Omanaito, Omaito and Omanatya are the alternative names of an Oriya-speaking cultivating class of tribals in Orissa. They have no tribal dialect of their own, nor do they constitute a distinct community of hill tribe. These three names, identifying one and the same community, seem to have emerged in course of time in corrupt deviations through the tongues of the European officials and writers. They derive from the most popular traditional name, 'Amatya', meaning a minister of state affairs in the ancient India principality. Legend has it that the ancestor of the tribe was a minister of Sri Ram at Ajodhya, and after Ram went to heaven; there was no one to look after them, so they took to agriculture.

The tribe lives mainly with a concentration of population to the north of Jeypore and Nowarangpur in the district of Koraput. A skeleton population of the community also live in each of the districts of Orissa, with the exception of Balasore District, where not a single soul is recorded. According to the Census of India for 1991, their total population in the state was 25,915 and was confined to the district of Koraput. The growth rate in the population in 1991 over 1981 was 33.14 per cent. The level of literacy was 5.2 in 1971, increasing to 8.2 in 1981 and 13.53 in 1991. In 1991, the sex ratio was 932 females per 1000 males.

The caste is divided into two endogamous sections, called Bodo (big) and Sanno (little or small). The latter are regarded as the illegitimate children of the former by a Bhottada, Gond, or other woman. Many do not admit that this division exists. The Bodo section has a number of exogamous clans called Sua (parrot), Bhag (tiger), Kachhima (tortoise), Naga (cobra), Sila (stone), Dhudho (milk), Kumda (*cucurbita maxima*) and Kukru (dog). Nuclear families are the chief social units. The numbers of extended and joint families are few. Such joint, extended families automatically break down upon the marriages of sons and

* Published in *Tribes of Orissa* (revised edn.), SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2004, pp.236-238

¹ Statistician, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar.

birth of their children. A sonless family adopts a *gharjoia* or any other individual as its son, with the same rights and privileges as a true son. The family is patrilineal, patrilocal and patripotestal in nature.

The boy is considered adult when the moustache grows. Then a girl is sought for him. Cross-cousin marriage being the general rule, a man has the first claim to the paternal uncle's daughter in marriage. One can marry the widow of one's elder brother. Marriage is settled by negotiation. Instances of marriage by elopement and service, as among the Bhottadas, are very rare.

The Omanatya follow an elaborate process of selecting and marrying girls. The parents set out with some eatables, including jaggery (crude sugar), to the bride's home. When the negotiation is concluded, a second visit is paid in similar manner. On an auspicious day fixed by the *disari*, a *mahal keria* (mediator) is sent. The mediator pays a little cash to the girls of the bride's village and is known from that day as the *mahalkeria* of that particular marriage. On the fourth visit, the *jhola* is fixed with some rice, paddy, a little cash for bangles, a cloth for the mother and one for each unmarried sister in the case of infant girls, along with some more rice and cloth for elderly girls. At this visit, the proposal is finalised. The villagers are asked to prepare *pandals* in their respective villages. On the appointed day, the bridegroom is conducted to the bride's village in a procession, sometimes on horseback. At the auspicious moment, the bridegroom is conducted to the *sal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) and a central post of the *ippa* (*Bassia*) tree. The messenger says aloud (to the paternal uncle) 'the bridegroom has come, bring the bride quickly'. The *disari* links their little fingers together, while the women throw rice smeared with turmeric water over them. Turmeric-coloured water is also poured over the couple from five pots. They then dress up in new clothes presented by the father-in-law. The bride's party provides a feast. The night is spent in dancing and song.

The next day the bride is conducted to the bridegroom's house. At the entrance to the village the bridegroom's mother sprinkles turmeric-coloured water over the couple. Liquor is distributed followed by a feast. The *disari* takes seven grains of rice and seven green nuts, and ties them up in the cloth-ends of the married couple. They go round the sacred poles seven times and return home. The next day the Kado Handi ceremony is performed. Mud and turmeric water are thrown around, and everyone takes a bath in the stream. They return home, the girl being carried on the boy's shoulder. Then the grand feast is held.

A system of pseudo marriage is prevalent in which the girl is married to a *mahul* tree post placed in the courtyard and adorned with vermilion, *kajal*, etc. Seven sheaves of turmeric and mango leaves are tied to the *mahul* post. The bride is brought to the *pandal* and the marriage ceremony is consummated by pouring water on the *mahul* post, which is held tightly by the women. The rite ends with a feast. No stigma is attached to the girl.

Like the Gond, a Omanatya is subject to excommunication for getting sores, committing *go-baddha*, or kidnapping girls from other communities. He may return to the caste by giving a feast.

Birth pollution is observed for 25-30 days. On completion of this period, the old pots are replaced with new ones. The nails are pared and the name-giving ceremony observed. The mother may touch pots thereafter. The *disari* selects the name by divination. The *sunari* pierces the nose and ears of the child at the age of three. Death pollution is also observed by the family of the deceased for ten days. After shaving and purification, new pots are used. The caste profession is not pursued during this period and the mourners are fed on this occasion. On the eleventh day, the purification ceremony is observed with a caste feast. Both burial and cremation are used. The dead are buried in a sleeping posture.

The religious bias of the tribe is towards Hindu traditions and customs. At marriage, a Omanatya assumes the sacred thread for the rest of his life. They worship Thakurani and Chamaria Devta. They observe Pusa Punia in Pusa, Magh Jatra in Magh, Am nua in Chaitra, Akhi Muthi in Baisakh, Amus in Sravan, Dhan Nua in Bhadrab, Dhsahara in Asin, and Diwali in Kartik. Some observe Laxmi Puja in Magusir. They also take part in the Holi festival in Fagun and the car festival in Asadha. They keep away from untouchables like the Dom, etc. and do not take food from the Bhottada or Bhumia. They do not rear pigs. They use rice and water coloured with turmeric powder, exchange areca nuts and jaggery, use mango leaves for rituals of sanctification, and observe birth and death pollution, an index of their socio-religious affinity with non-tribals in the locality.

The Omanatya live in heterogeneous villages and maintain homogeneous socio-economic ties with the other communities living there. They do not practise shifting cultivation, but prefer wet land for carrying out intensive agriculture. In addition to raising crops like paddy, sugarcane, tobacco, *ragi* and varieties of pulses and oil seeds, they grow vegetables like brinjal, onions and potatoes, etc. They also carry out fishing and occasional hunting. They make their own ploughs and agricultural tools. They also own the *barsi*, screwdriver, sickles, plough, *ankudi*, *kodi*, *kodal*, *katuri*, etc. They are interested in rearing bullocks. Their implements include cane baskets, rope, string cots, knife, storing pots made of straw and other earthenware vessels, small fishing nets and traps, including bows and arrows for hunting purposes.

They dress like the neighbouring villagers. The *dhoti*, napkin, *chadar* and sometimes shirt or *banyan* are their usual apparel. Women use both hand-woven and mill saris. The ornaments of the women consist of silver *khadu*, glass and rubber bangles on the wrist, a silver armlet on the arms, *pauji* on legs, rings on the fingers and toes, gold or brass *nolis* and *phulis* in the ears, and *dandi* and *fasia*

in the nose. Black bead necklaces are worn round the neck. The men wear *nolis* in their ears. Gold ornaments are rarely worn.

They have entertainments, like dancing on various occasions such as weddings, Pusa Purnima, etc. Their dances are called *junia nach* and *cherachera nach*. They sing *chait parab* songs on festive days and *kutni* songs at weddings. They build houses in rows and at times in clusters. They are gradually replacing their mud houses with brick dwellings. There are two to four rooms in a house, which lack windows. There is neither a dormitory house nor a common hall in the village.

There are a number of titles in the community given originally by the King, such as Pradhani (executive secretary for royal affairs) and Pujari (worshipper of gods). A number of villages are grouped together as a *desh*. The head of the *desh* is the *kulnaik* whose office is hereditary. He arranges meetings to settle social disputes and deals with cases of excommunication, etc. Every village has a caste head called a *naik* and the village priest or *pujari*. The *disari* and *mahalkeria* are the functionaries connected with social functions like marriage, etc. These traditional functionaries are no impediment to the economic progress of the community at the present. A few of them have entered government service. During lean times they work as labourers without any taboo.

OMANATYA *

A. B. Ota ¹

A. K. Gomango ²

INTRODUCTION

Omanatya also called as **Omanatyo, Amanatya, Omanaito, Omaito** is a numerically small Scheduled Tribe of Odisha. They are an Odia speaking cultivating tribe largely concentrated in south Odisha.

The community is divided into two endogamous sections called *bodo* (big) and *sano* (small). The latter is said to be the illegitimate child of the former by Bhotoda, Gond or other community women.

Population & Concentration

They are mainly concentrated in districts of Koraput and Nowrangpur. As per 2001 census their total population in the State was 23 364, out of which 11 692 were males (50.04%) and 11672 (49.96%) were females. Their level of literacy according to 2001 census was 21.20% out of which male literacy is 39.02% and female literacy is 10.20%. The sex ratio was 998 females for 1000 males.

Dress and Ornaments

Their dress pattern resembles that of their neighbouring castes. Males wear *dhoti, lungi*, banian and shirts etc. whereas women use both handloom and mill made saris with *saya* and blouse.

* Published in the Photo Handbook on Omanatya, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2012

¹ Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

² Deputy Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

Females also adorn themselves with varieties of coloured bead and coin necklaces like, *kanthimali*, *sukimali*, *adhulimali* and *takamali*. They wear gold or brass *nolis* and *phulis* in the ears, *kanphul* in their earlobes, *phasia* in their ear helix, *dandi*, *guna* in their nasal septum, a silver armlet (*tad*) in their arms, *khadu* and glass bangles in their wrists, *antador* in waist and *pahud*, *painri* and *godabala* in their ankle and *jhuntia* and *pauji* in their leg finger and *dimsui*, *chipna* and *mundaphul* over their hair. Poor among them use ornaments made of brass and aluminium, by purchasing from local market but well to do females wear silver and gold ornaments designed by the local goldsmiths. Young girls and married women wear coloured glass bangles. Tattooing (*jhonti*) done by their own women artisans in the past is now out of fashion. The men also wear *nolis* in their ears.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The Omanatya live in heterogeneous villages keeping socio-economic ties with other communities. They usually live in separate hamlets by maintaining their cultural identity through traditional pattern of life while keeping distance from other ethnic groups.

Their settlements are usually located on hill slopes or foothills where water sources like perennial hill streams are flowing to provide them drinking water. They construct their houses in a linear pattern in clusters leaving a wide open space as village-street.

Their houses are made with mud wall and floor and roof thatched with *piri* grass or country made tiles (*khapar*). The walls and floor of the houses are plastered with cow dung paste and the walls are beautifully decorated by plastering its boarders with red soil. The house has verandahs both in front and back which is plastered with black soil. It consists of two rooms and has no windows for ventilation. The bigger one at the entrance is usually used as living room and to store their grains whereas the other one is used as kitchen. In one corner of their rear verandah they construct a small shed to accommodate their livestock.

They possess scanty household assets like some aluminum pots, tin lamps and lanterns; mats, winnowing fan, bamboo baskets, earthen wares and gourd vessels which they keep in the kitchen near their hearth. They hang their clothes, on a bamboo pole. Their hunting weapons like bows, arrows, spears and axes are also hung on the walls of the living room. Their agricultural implements such as hoes, ploughs and yokes are kept at the front verandah. At the entrance of their living room they keep their wooden mortar and pestle (*paurani*) for husking the grains. They keep a stone disc on their courtyard to grind the spices.

SOCIAL LIFE

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections i.e. Bado (big) and Sano (little or small) which again is divided into a number of exogamous totemistic septs (*bansa*) such as; *bagh* (tiger), *nag* (cobra), *kachhap* / *kachhima* (tortoise), *sua* (parrot), *kumuda* (pumpkin), *kukur* (dog), *mankar* (monkey), *dudh* (milk), *sila* (stone), etc. They use surnames like Omanatya, Pradhani, Pujari, Majhi, Pakhna and Choudhury.

Their family- the basic unit of their social organization is mostly nuclear, patrilocal, patriarchal and patrilineal. Few cases of extended families or joint families are found in their society which gradually breaks down after marriage of sons. A family having no male issues adopts a *gharjoian* (resident son-in-law) or any male heir who later on enjoys the same rights and privileges as a son.

Life Cycle

Pregnancy & Child birth

During the 7th month of pregnancy they observe pre-delivery ritual *sukhaprusab puja* by offering *arua* rice, egg, country wine (*mohuli*) and tobacco (*nasa*) for easy delivery and to avert ill omens. The pregnant woman is tabooed to visit crematoria, exposure to lunar and solar eclipses etc.

They engage a midwife (*sutrani*) from their own community to assist the mother for easy delivery of the child. The naval chord is cut off using a knife and disposed off outside the doorstep (*uchhana*) wrapped with *siali* leaves and the pit is covered with a stone.

The *sutrani* continues to stay with the mother to take care of the mother and the new born baby till the purificatory rite is completed. During this time fire set in a broken earthen ware (*entudi*) is ignited and to keep the new born baby warm.

Birth pollution continues till the naval cord is dried and dropped. After that the purificatory rite *haudibaulu* / *handibaura* is observed. They pair their nails, clean their house with water and polish the floor and walls using cow-dung paste. All the used earthen wares are thrown away and replaced with new ones. The baby and the mother are given a ceremonial bath. Their traditional priest *Disary* presides over the purificatory rite. He collects mango barks and after grinding and mixing it with water he sprinkles it over the family members and inside the house for purification. During birth pollution the family is tabooed to observe rituals and festivals and to offer cooked food to others.

In the evening of the ninth day, they observe the name giving ceremony conducted by the *Disary* through the rice divination method uttering the names of the ancestors of the family. After this the tonsure ceremony and the first cereal

feeding ceremony are conducted on this day. Ear piercing and nose piercing is conducted after the baby attains one year of age.

Puberty

The community observes puberty rite (*yubatman*) for adolescent girl attaining her first menarche. The girl is segregated in an isolated room for a period of seven days during which she is looked after by an experienced woman of her lineage and she is tabooed to look or talk to the male persons.

On the dawn of the eighth day, the girl accompanied by her girl friends goes to the nearest hill stream, where she takes purificatory bath anointing oil and turmeric paste and wears new clothes presented by her parents. The villagers and relatives also present new cloths and cosmetics to the girl. In the evening the family hosts a non vegetarian feast with country liquor.

Marriage

The boy is considered adult when his moustache grows. Then a bride is sought for him. Cross-cousin marriage being the general rule, a man has the first claim to the maternal uncle's daughter in marriage.

Adult marriage and monogamy is common among the Omanatya. They regard marriage, arranged through negotiation is most prestigious mode of acquiring a spouse. Other modes of marriages are by service, by capture, by elopement and by service which are very rare. Polygyny is not altogether ruled out and resorted to where the first wife is barren. The custom of bride price (*jhola*) is prevalent and is paid both in cash and kinds. Junior levirate, junior sororate, remarriage of widow, widower and divorcee are permitted in their society.

In **negotiation marriage**, groom's parents visit bride's home with some sweetmeats to putforth the marriage proposal. If the proposal is accepted their priest *disari* fixes an auspicious day on which a *mahal keria* (mediator) is sent to the bride's home with some sweets and some money as a presentation to the friends of the bride after which the **bride price** (*jholla*) is fixed which amounts a jar of country liquor, some rice, paddy, bangles, a clothe for the bride's mother and one for each unmarried sister and the marriage proposal is finalized.

On the wedding day, the bridegroom is conducted to bride's village in a procession. On the marriage alter their traditional priest the *disari* links the fingers of bride with the groom together in marriage tie, while the women throw rice smeared with turmeric water over them. Then the newly married couple is dressed up in new clothes presented by the father-in-law. The bride's party hosts a feast along with country liquor and the marriage festival is celebrated elaborately amidst dancing and singing.

The next day the bride is led to the groom's house accompanied with her friends and relatives. At the village entrance, the groom's mother sprinkles turmeric water over the newly wedded couple. The *disari* ties the married couple with the cloth ends; after which they go around seven times the sacred poles before their entry into the home.

In their society a system of pseudo marriage is prevalent in which the girl is married to a *mahul* tree post adorned with vermilion, *kajal*, etc and tied with seven sheaves of turmeric and mango leaves placed in the courtyard. The bride is brought to the *pandal*. The marriage ceremony ends by pouring water on the *mahul* post, which is held tightly by the women. Then a feast is hosted. No stigma is attached to the girl.

Divorce

Divorce is permitted and either party can divorce his/ her spouse for the reason of misunderstanding or maladjustment in conjugal life, cruelty, extra-marital relationship, alcoholism, poor maintenance, suffering from serious diseases, impotency or barrenness etc. Divorce cases are adjudicated by their community council. After divorce, taking food and water from each others' house is tabooed. If wife divorces the husband, repayment of bride price is obligatory. No other divorce compensation is allowed.

Death

They practice both burial and cremation to dispose off their dead. In case of unnatural deaths occurred by snake bite, tiger attack, small pox, pregnancy and child birth, suicide, accident and premature death of small children the corpses are thrown away in the jungle, piercing an iron nail near the heart, to be devoured by the wild beasts, as they believe that the departed souls might have some unfulfilled desires and in order to fulfill those, they might be transformed into evil spirits or ghosts and cause harm to family members and villagers.

The death news is sent first to the deceased's sister's house and after that to all other relatives. After all the relatives and kinsfolk assemble, the dead is anointed with turmeric paste and castor oil and bathed. After that they cover it with a new cloth and the pall bearers belonging to their own community carry the dead to the crematoria placing it on a cot with all the deceased's personal materials like used utensils umbrella, walking stick and some tobacco leaves etc. During cremation they place the corpse in sleeping posture keeping the head towards north. After disposal of the dead, the pall bearers and the bereaved family members take purificatory bath in the nearest hill stream.

Mourning continues for ten days and the family does not cook food and pursue their profession during this period. Their kinsfolk provide food for the bereaved family. During this period relishing on non-vegetarian foods,

worshipping of deities, observance of rituals and festivals, sexual union and offering food and water to others are tabooed.

At the end of the pollution period the bereaved family members shave and replace the earthen cooking pots with new ones. On the eleventh day, the purification ceremony is observed with a community feast.

L I V E L I H O O D

Settled cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy. It is supplemented by wage earning, animal husbandry, forest collection, hunting, fishing and *khali* stitching etc.

They prefer to cultivate paddy in their wet lands located near the hill slopes, irrigated by perennial hill streams. They also raise sugarcane, tobacco, *padadhan* (hill paddy), maize, pulses like *kandul*, *biri* (black gram), *kolthi* (horse gram), *kating*, oil seeds such as *tila* (nizer), *rasi* and grow minor millets i.e. *ragi*, *kueri*, *kangu*, *janna*, spices like ginger and turmeric in their high and dry lands.

They grow chilly, onions, potatoes, garlics, *jhudung*, *baragudi*, *lau* (gourd), *kumuda* (pumpkin), *kakudi* (cucumber), *patalghanta* (tomato), *jhata* (pea), brinjal, *saru* (colacasia), ladies finger and green leaves in their kitchen garden.

They rear cow, buffalo, goat, sheep, poultry but not pigs in their houses. They are fond of rearing bullocks.

They collect varieties of seasonal forest produce like edible roots and tubers, fruits, green leaves, *baunsa karadi*, mushrooms, honey, *jhuna*, *lac*, *salap* juice, *salap kanda* and varieties of wild medicinal herbs from the jungle throughout the year. Women contribute substantially in the field of cultivation, animal husbandry, fishing, besides their household chores.

They also carry out fishing and occasional hunting. They make their own ploughs and agricultural tools. They also own the *barsi*, screwdriver, sickles, plough, *ankudi*, *kodi*, *kodal*, *katuri*, etc. Their implements include cane baskets, rope, string cots and knife, storing pots made of straw and other earthenware vessels, small fishing nets and traps, including bows and arrows for hunting purposes.

Food habits

Omanatya are non vegetarians. Rice and *ragi* are their staple cereals. They relish on meat, fish, pork, chicken and eggs etc. Both men and women consume alcoholic drinks and smoke handmade cigarettes.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

Omanatya profess Hinduism with admixture of animism. They worship all local Hindu gods and goddesses and observe all Hindu festivals. Their pantheon includes *thakurani*, *chamaria devta*, *danger devta* and many other deities of nature. Their household deity, *ista devi* is installed in a corner of their kitchen and is worshiped by females.

They believe in existence of benevolent and malevolent spirits and ghosts which they think cause diseases and mishaps. In order to gratify these evil ones they resort the help of local witch doctor called *gunia*.

Their major festivals are *kandul yatra*, *akhi muthi* in Baisakh, *gamha*, *amus* in Sravan, *dhan nua/nuakhia*, *guluchinua*, in Bhodua, *dasara* in Asin, *diwali*, *bali jatra* in Kartik, *laxmipuja* in Magusira, *puspunia* in Pusa, *magha jatra* in Magh, *holi* in Phagun, *dangar puja* and *mahulnua*, *chait paroba*, *amnua*, *bisu sikar* and *sarlul* in Chaitra.

They have preserved their rich oral tradition of folk songs such as *chait parab geet*, *kutni geet* and their folk dance i.e. *junia nach*, *chera chera nach* which they perform on various festive occasions like wedding ceremony, *pusa punia*, *chait parab* etc. Both men and women sing and dance with the tune of music provided by Dom musicians.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Omanatya has its own traditional community council both at village level and in regional level to handle their customary affairs. The village council is headed by *naik*, and the regional council (*Desh*), by the *bhat naik/ kul naik*. The other office bearers are *pujari* and *disari*, and a messenger (*barik*) who is appointed from Dom community. The offices of *naik*, *bhat naik/ kul naik*, *pujari* and *disari* are hereditary where as the post of *barik* is through nomination.

The community council arranges meetings to settle social disputes and deals with cases of excommunication, for getting sores, causing *go-badha* (cow death) or kidnapping of girls from other communities and adjudicates cases pertaining to theft, rape, incest, premarital pregnancy, family disputes, and partition of ancestral property and divorce affairs.

The community council is empowered to punish the guilty by cash or can take penal action like excommunication for breaking social norms and the offender may return to the society by offering a feast. It also organizes their rituals, festivals and community feast.

CHANGE & DEVELOPMENT

Like many tribal societies in India, the society of Omanatya is in a state of flux for the rapid changes at the macro level that the country witnessed since

the early nineties. They are also influenced by it and therefore changes are witnessed in their every walk of life. One can find these changes in their social, political, cultural, economic and religious spheres.

While the benefits of globalisation process have largely accrued to the urban sector growth the tribal and rural sector has not been left behind. They are experiencing change in their life style, aspirations and value orientation

Various developmental programmes introduced by government to uplift the tribals to bring the tribals to the mainstream have effected planned changes in the way of life of the Omanatya. As bulk of their population is concentrated in Tribal Sub Plan area of South Orissa, their development aspects are being looked after by various development agencies like DRDA, ITDA etc.

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.

ORAON *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Oraon is an agrarian tribe of Orissa. As per their legend, they got originated from the thorax, *uras* or *ur* of a holy ascetic and thus were called as *Uraager*. Later they were known as Oraon for their unclean food habits. They speak *Kurukh*, a Dravidian tongue. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of Sundargarh and Sambalpur. As per 2011 census their total population in the state is 3 58 112 and sex ratio is 1018. Their literacy rate is 67.57 % in 2011.

They live in multiethnic villages. The Oraon have scattered settlement structures. Their houses are spacious having verandah at the front and back and an outer courtyard. The peculiarity is that their village street is at the back of all houses. They have mud houses thatched with wild grass or fireproof *naria* tiles. *Dharani*, earth goddess, is their supreme deity.

They cultivate rice, millets, pulses and vegetables. They also take up subsidiary occupations like, carpentry, tile and brick making, rope making and wage earning. Now-a-days, some of them work in the mines and industries. Oraon women are expert in broom making and date-palm mat making.

Their traditional dress includes a *Kareya* for man and a *Khanria* for woman. They make yarns and the Ganda weave their clothes. Oraon women adorn themselves with ornaments of gold, silver and alloys, and put on tattoo marks.

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

¹ Former Joint Director and now Consultant, SCSTRIT, Bhubaneswar

They worship a number of gods and goddesses, supernatural powers and ancestor spirits for their wellbeing. *Phagu*, *Seshul*, *Karama*, *Kali puja* and *Dusserah* are their main festivals.

The tribe comprises of five exogamous sub-tribes, viz. *Bagra*, *Dhanka*, *Kharia*, *Kheudro* and *Munda* and 18 clans, *varga* groupings, named after totemic plants, animals and objects.

They practise adult monogamous and negotiated marriages. They have preference for cross cousins. Levirate and sororate marriages are also in vogue. Bride price is the prevalent mode of marriage payment. The marriage is solemnized in the bride's father's house. The newlywed put vermilion mark on each other's forehead. The kinsmen enjoy rice-beer and the feast arranged on the occasion. They sing and dance and celebrate wedding for three to four days.

The Oraon observe birth purificatory rites, *chhati*, on the tenth day. The male members cut their hair and the baby is tonsured and given a bath. The Oraon priest sacrifices a fowl. The baby inherits the name of one of its ancestors, which is selected by divination. They bury and cremate the dead depending upon the nature of death. The bereaved men and women purify themselves by undergoing a treatment of smoke prepared by burning rice barn and sprinkling a mixture of turmeric water and oil onto them. On an appointed day the bones of all the deceased villagers are ritually thrown to a nearby river or stream.

Their traditional village council is constituted of the village headman, *Mahato*, priest, *Naega*, and the village elders. At the territorial level they have *parha* organization to settle inter-village disputes.

In the recent past some of them have adopted Christianity.

ORAON *

*Bhagarathi Chowdhury*¹

The Oraons constitute one of the major tribes of Orissa. Their distribution and population according to 1961 Census is given in Annexure - 1. They concentrate mainly in the Sundergarh and Sambalpur districts of Orissa. Here they live in the midst of other tribe such as Kol, Munda, Kharia and Kisan and also caste Hindus.

They have their own language which has been classed as a Dravidian language. Those who inhabit the border areas of the State speak Sadri which is a mixture of Hindi and several tribal languages. But they also know Oriya and to some extent Hindi. The original name of the tribe in their own language is Kurukh (or Khurinkh) while outsiders call them Oraon or Dhangara.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Internal Divisions- The internal structure of the Oraon tribe is very elaborate. According to their own traditions, they are clearly allied to the Males of the Rajmahal hills. As reported by Risley, there are five sub-tribes viz. Barga-Oraon, Dhanka-Oraon, Kharia-Oraon, Khendro-Oraon and Munda-Oraon. In course of time they have become strictly exogamous and distinct groups. Among the Oraons there is extremely large number of exogamous clans, all of which appear to be totemistic. Sri S.C. Roy has given a long list of Oraon clans (Gotra or Varga) "which form the fundamental feature of their social organization in so far as kinship, marriage and relation of sexes are concerned". The Oraons found in Orissa have the following totemistic groups: - (1) Tirki (mouse), (2) Lakda (Tiger), (3) Kerketa (Hedge sparrow), (4) Gidhi or Gidhiar (Vulture), (5) Toppo (a kind of fish), (6) Khalkho (a species of fish), (7) Minj (another species of fish), (8)

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Kachchu (Tortoise), (9) Bakla (a kind of grass), (10) Barla (Ficus Indica), (11) Khes (Paddy), (12) Panna (Iron), (13) Bekh (Salt), (14) Kujur (a forest fruit on a creep), (15) Kispatta (Pig's entrails), (16) Bandra (Monkey), (17) Khakha, (18) Gidhra, etc. As regards the origin of these totems they have faint memories that the totemic plant or animal is believed to have helped or protected the ancestors of the clan. The members of a clan regard themselves as descendants of a common ancestor, and as such the marital union or sexual intercourse is strictly prohibited. The religious significance and observances are not seen. Although the totemic objects are taboo for use by the particular totemic group, there is the relaxation of the rigidity of the taboo in case of indispensable article of diet or household use, e.g. the members of the Khes, abstain from eating the thin scum that forms on the surface of rice-soup, when it stands unagitated in a cool place, the members of the Bekh do not eat raw salt, but can take any food in which salt is being mixed previously.

Tribal Panchayat: - The Oraons had a tradition of managing their village affairs through Panchayats under the leadership of village Mahato (the secular head) and Pahan or Naega (the sacredotal head) who were assisted by the Pujari or Panbhara. These leaders and the village elders constituted the village Panchayat to deal with offences and disputes such as theft, assault, divisions of property, divorce, clan rules, sexual offences within the village. For the disputes involving two villages the matter was dealt with by the Parha Panchayat.

The Oraons living the midst of caste Hindus have lost their tribal solidarity and leadership. The traditional leadership based on age, experience heritage and specialization, is overtaken by the new leadership based on education, wealth and political consciousness. First the informal village Panchayats under the leadership of village headman recognized by the Government overshadowed the tribal Panchayats. Recently the statutory Gram Panchayat has given a great blow to the foundation of the traditional village Panchayats and caste Panchayats. The new leaders within the command respect as reformist and acculturated Oraon. The Naega or Kartha is there to officiate in several religious ceremonies.

The Oraon society has a section of people called Bhagatas. They abstain from drinking liquor and unclean food and also do not accept food in the hands of other Oraons. They devote their leisure's in singing religious songs. They worship Laxmi, Siva regularly.

Youth Organization- The village dormitory was a very important institution in the Oraon society. There were separate dormitories for unmarried boys and girls viz. *Jonkhedpa* for boys *Pel-adpa* for girls. The dormitory was not only a common sleeping room for the young people, but also a training institute to learn tribal myths, mythology, dance, music and many other qualities which would make them useful members of the community. The dormitory with its

elaborate system, strict discipline and duties was meeting the needs of the villagers for labour in agricultural operation, in constructing a house at a nominal payment. But this vital institution is no more existing in Oraon villages of Orissa. In some villages one can find the youth associations organized by the Block Development authorities.

Family- Family among the Oraons is patrilineal and partipotestal and all properties belong to the father during his life time. Although the dominant family pattern at the time of S.C. Roy was nuclear, existence of similar number of patrilineal extend family are found as a result of influences of caste Hindus, Christianity and other factors. Partition of property during the parents life time or where there are unmarried brothers or sisters is undesirable and discouraged.

Birth Rites- The birth pollution continues for eight to ten days in different localities, till the *chhati* (purification rites) is observed. During this period, members belonging to other families do not accept food from that family where birth has occurred. At the time of celebration the house is made ceremonially clean by besmearing the courtyard and the floors with cow dung diluted in water. They wash the clothes used by the members during the period of impurity. The woman who has acted as midwife (Kusren) and other women who attended the birth are given a feast of hearty dinner with rice-beer. In the meantime, a chick is given to the Oraon priest to sacrifice to their chief deity on behalf of the newborn baby.

Name-giving- The child is shaved, bathed and named according to the test of sinking or floating of a rice grain in water with the utterance of names of dead ancestors. This can be done on any day after the *chhati* ceremony. Sometimes name of the day in which the child is born is also given. Now the converted Oraons have started giving the Hindu names and the Sansari (unconverted) Oraons follows them.

It is the duty of the mother and old female members of the family to look after the baby. It is the primary responsibility of the mother to nourish and to feed. But an Oraon mother does all types of work when the baby starts sitting and crawling. Parents and other family members fondle the baby whenever possible. Old women, who are unable to do heavy work, look after the baby in the mother's absence. Their economic condition does not give them scope to take much care for their health and hygiene. Only well-to-do Oraons send their children to school, while other require their children to attend the simple household duties such as fetching water, looking after the cows and buffaloes and to help the father in the field. Thus education in agriculture and other manual work is imparted through periodic instructions in connection with practical situations in life by family members.

Marriage- The Oraon tribe is emphatically and rigidly endogamous. A person marrying from any lower or higher caste would be out-casted and at no cost he or she would be readmitted into the tribe. A bride belonging to one's mother's totemic group is given the first preference in marriage. As rule they can practice both child and adult marriage. Marriage among them is monogamous, though polygyny is practiced in certain cases, such as when the first wife is barren. In widow remarriage, no ceremony is necessary. Levirate and sororate are permissible.

The Oraon marriages generally take place between February and April when they get leisure from other engagements and when the house is full of grains to meet the heavy expenses for the ceremony.

In most of cases marriages are arranged by the parents with the consent of the boy and girl concerned. Parents give full freedom to their children to participate in festivals, dances and social gatherings of various kinds where courtship can take place. Thus enlightened parents approve their choice of mates. For negotiation clever persons are employed as go-between (*agua*). But in most cases parents with own relatives take the responsibility of negotiation. The proposal first comes from the boy's parents. During the progress of negotiation when they pay visits, omens are observed. When a vessel filled with water or a burning lamp is seen while starting from the own village or while arriving at other's village, it is considered inauspicious. If a jackal by passes them or an empty vessel is seen, they consider it inauspicious and further negotiation is dropped. For negotiation several visits are made by both the parties for fixing the bride-price, seeing the mates and appointing the date for marriage. The bride-price consists of Rs.4.00 to Rs. 12.00 in cash, four pieces of cloth and grains and is paid just before the marriage.

As marriage takes place in bride's village, the bridegroom accompanied by a large party of friends and relatives of both sexes proceeds to the bride's village where they are welcomed with dance and music. The bridegroom is conducted to the bride's house where his feet are washed.

Now both bride and bridegroom are anointed with turmeric paste and oil. Both of them are made to stand on a curry stone under which are placed bundles of thatching grass and a yoke. The bridegroom stands behind and presses the left heel of the girl with his toes. Then the couple is covered with a cloth and the shaman chants spells to ward off evil eye and evil spirit. Water is poured on them by the girls for the ceremonial bath. They are given new clothes to wear. The binding rite of the marriage consists of applying vermilion by the couple on each other's forehead. Then this is followed by a merry dance by boys and girls and later on guests are entertained in a feast and the occasion is celebrated with drinking, dancing and singing. Then the groom with his party and the bride returns back to his village.

There are provisions for both wife and husband to divorce on certain grounds, viz., enmity and hatred, bad nature and laziness with the approval of the tribal Panchayat. When the tribal Panchayat is informed its members try to reconcile the differences and when they fail divorce is granted. If the fault is found with the husband, he loses his bride price.

Death Rites- All deeds with the exception of children, pregnant women and other women dying at the child-birth, are generally, burnt.

For those who die after the sprouting of the new paddy plants and before the harvest, they practice provisional burial. Later on they cremate after the harvesting season. After cremation, all male members of the deceased's family and those who attended the funeral have their hair cut. Both men and women, who attended the funeral, take bath and return to the deceased's house to purify themselves by the smoke emitting from the fire in grain-husk and oil and sprinkling turmeric water on their heads. After this they are entertained with rice-beer or *mohua* liquor. On the following day women go to the cremation ground and collect bones of the deceased in a pot. In the evening the shade of the deceased is brought by men and conducted to the pot containing the bones. This pot is covered with cloth and preserved till final disposition by the practice of bone-drowning in a river or a stream once a year. When harvest is over, the bones of all the dead of the village are taken in a procession and offered cooked rice, tobacco mixed with lime and liquor before drowning for the union with the pre-deceased kinsmen.

RELIGION

The Oraon religion represents a combination of indigenous beliefs and practices and Hinduism. Their pantheon consists of one High God, namely 'Dharm' who is manifested in Sun, Mahadev, the tutelary deity of the spirit doctors called Bhagats, Chandi-goddess of hunting, etc. They also worship Hindu deities along with Hindus and observe several Hindu festivals. They offer food to the manes of the ancestors at different religious festivals. Their own priest is called Naega. They believe in the existence of a number of spirits who bring disease and death. When any misfortune befalls on a man, he at once consults a Mati or Ojha (shaman) and acts according to his advice.

Besides the religious ceremonies connected with their agricultural operations, the Oraons celebrate several festivals in a year. They conduct ceremonial hunt in Sarhul or Phagu in March and Bisu Sikar (summer hunt) in April. They celebrate Jeth Jatra in May, Jitua in September, Karma in October and Diwali in November. Of all these festival Sarhul, Jitua, Jeth Jatra and Karma are important. Every festival is followed by dance and music and lot of drink and festive meals are taken.

Dance and Music- Communal dance and music still continue to be the main items of recreation in the life of the Oraons. Dancing and singing are now performed on the occasion of festivals, marriage and generally in summer and winter nights on the *akhra* (dancing ground). They go on dancing expedition to other villages on the occasion of *jatra* or festivals. They have different dances for different festivals and occasions. They sing song in accompaniment to dance and different songs are named after the different kinds of dances they accompany. The joys and sorrows of love generally constitute a chief theme of the Oraon songs. The songs and dances are accompanied by their musical instruments.

Christianity - Christianity as a new religion has received the favour from the Oraons. Other neighbouring tribe such as Kisan, Kharia, Munda and Ho have also been converted in large number. The centers of the Roman Catholic Jesuit Mission and of the German Evangelical Mission have been established since 1899 in the district. The causes for their acceptance of Christianity are very few. They feel that by conversion they get relief from the innumerable festivals and the magic and witchcraft. The efforts of the missionaries, their philanthropy, persuasion and timely guidance and advice have attracted them. On Sundays they go to attend village churches. The converted Oraons have progressed more in education, dress than those of the non-converted Oraons. They have a broader outlook, and look more advanced. Excepting religion, they have retained most of the tribal aspects their culture. The non-converts consider the low.

MATERIAL CULTURE

House and settlements - The setting of houses in an Oraon village does not follow any definite pattern, but a scattered fashion. Houses are not built facing the filthy, uneven and irregular streets, but opened to a courtyard. The cowshed and pig-stay are built close to the living room. Now the vast majority of houses are found with low mud walls and two sloped *naria* tiled roofs. Walls are sometimes made of twig-wattles plastered over with mud and cow dung. Now well-to-do families have *pucca*-houses with cemented floor. There is a common tendency to replace the mud walls by bricks walls. Absence of windows and more than one door is generally found in Oraon houses. They build small and low verandahs in the front and high verandah at the back of the houses. Most of the families have more than one living room, the number of which depends upon the size of the family. Husking lever and grinding-stone, which are found in most of the houses, are kept in an open-shed. The Bhagats have spacious houses built at a distance from rest of the houses. They do not decorate the walls or doors. Although the houses are kept neat and clean, the village paths are made filthy with refuses and by the pigs.

Every Oraon village has one or more than one *akhra* ground for dance and meeting. There is a common tendency in the interior area to build the houses near their agricultural fields.

Household Articles – As regards household furniture Khatti (*charpoy*) is found in majority of houses, while the number of mats of wild date palm leaves found in every household is greater. Very well-to-do Oraons have stools, chairs, almirah, table and wooden cots. They have small planks of wood or similar seats made of straw on which they squat while taking their food or doing some work by sitting.

Their household utensils consist of plates and pots of various sizes made of brass or aluminium for taking meals. They generally use earthen vessels and occasionally aluminium vessels for cooking. Though earthen pots, bell-metal, aluminium and brass vessels are found abundantly, the gourd-bottles are still in use. These are used to carry liquids such as water, rice-beer and water-rice. Their household utensils are just the same as found among the neighbouring Hindus. These are purchased from the local markets as they do in case of basketry. Now well-to-do Oraons have got many more modern materials for use. They now possess lantern, torchlight, suitcase, bicycle, cotton-umbrella, etc.

As regards agricultural, fishing and hunting implements they follow the neighbouring Hindus.

Dress and Ornaments- The traditional dress of Kareya for men and Khanria for women have been given up. They were growing cotton and doing the spinning in the past. Weavers were paid for weaving their cloths. Now this practice is totally absent and they wear small mill-made cloth, i.e. napkin (by male) and mill-made saree (by female). The young boys have started wearing trousers, shorts, *pyjama*, shirt, *lungi*, banian, bush-shirt etc. and young girls have taken up, blouse, saree, petticoat and silken saree as their common dresses. Use of chappals and shoes is gaining popularity among the young boys. All the dresses are purchased from the local markets.

The amount and varieties of ornaments used by the Oraons at present is less than what they were using in the past. Most of the Ornaments worn by them are made of gold, silver, brass, aluminium or bell-metal. In the ear women wear earring made of gold or brass but not the Kinasi (aluminium ring) or the Bedio (palm-leaf rolled up and dyed red with lac). Metal chains and bead necklaces and coloured thread are worn in the neck. In their wrist they wear glass or metal bangles. Finger rings are also worn. As regards the nose ornament they use very scanty. They have rings for their toes but anklets are not commonly used. They now wear hair-clips, metal flowers and hair nets available in the local markets. Most of the young men do not wear their traditional ornaments of bali or mudra in their ear. A thread or small-sized beads strung in a thread is worn in the neck.

Tattooing- It is very popular among the Oraon women to get the different parts of body tattooed profusely by the Gaurias, who occasionally visit the village. To a teen-aged girl, tattoo marks are given on her forehead, temples, cheeks, on the

left wall of the nose and on the chin. The designs of flowers, plants and other patterns are tattooed on the arms, foot joints and on the back before marriage and after they get maturity.

As regards the purpose of tattooing, no definite answer is given. Some say that it is based on the belief that when a woman dies she cannot take anything but these tattoo marks to the other world. Some say that it is the traditional mark to distinguish them in the midst of other women. Young boys have also tattoo marks, namely dots on the forehead, a flower design on the inner side of the forearm. Now the educated acculturated Oraons do not like that their daughters and sisters to have tattoo marks.

Musical Instruments – Musical instruments used by the Oraons consist of drums (Nagera and Madal), cymbals, clappers besides flutes and metal ankle-bells. Most of these instruments are purchased.

ECONOMY

Sources of Livelihood- Agriculture continues to be the main source of livelihood and their other economic pursuits center round the agricultural operations. Many of them have acquired proficiency in several rural crafts such as carpentry, tile, brick and rope-making. Women still weave mats of wild date palm and make broom sticks from wild grass. Whenever there is leisure and opportunity they work for wages. It is not uncommon to find, educated Oraons serving in offices, schools and factory.

Most of the cultivation is mainly for their own consumption, although they have started growing some cash crops such as grams, vegetables, etc. Whatever surplus they have is also sold for cash. Their principal crop is paddy, which is grown once in a year. They also grow millets, maize and several varieties of pulses in their up-lands. In almost all fields only one crop is grown and the land is kept fallow for the remaining period.

Cultivation is a family function. Sometimes a family seeks the help and co-operation of relatives on reciprocal basis. Well-to-do Oraons employ casual labourers or contract labourers (*goti*). They use the bullock-driven ploughs, which they make themselves. All the iron implements used in agricultural operations and in the house hold are purchased from the local markets.

Hunting, fishing and collection of jungle products have ceased to be profitable sources of livelihood. Depletion of forests and pre-occupation with the expanded settled cultivation, have forced them to give up hunting.

Food and Intoxicants- The staple food of the Oraons is rice with a side dish of some edible leaves added with salt and boiled in the starchy liquid drained off from the rice at the time of cooking. Wealthy Oraons take pulses or some

vegetable-curry, which are luxury for the poor. Previously the Oraons were almost omnivorous. They have given up beef and flesh of tiger, bear and snakes as a result of Hindu influence. They relish the meat of goat, pig and fowl. They are fond of fish but very rarely they get. While preparing curry they now add salt, spices including chilly, turmeric and oil extracted from *mahua* seeds. On festive occasions, their meals consist of rice, *dal*, vegetable or a non-vegetarian dish of meat. They also prepare a few varieties of cake on these occasions.

Rice-beer, *mohua* liquor and tobacco occupy a very important place in Oraon life. Rice-beer which is brewed by them is the traditional drink and is distributed in abundance at the time of marriage, death rites and festivals. They distill liquor from *mohua* flower for their own use. Chewing of tobacco mixed with lime and smoking of tobacco rolled in Sal or Kendu leaf are popular among them to provide incentive to work.

Among women, chewing of *gurakhu* is gaining popularity. Tea has been accepted as a popular drink.

Weekly Market- The Oraons visit the weekly markets in the rural areas and the daily markets in the towns for more than one purpose. These provide opportunity to sell their agricultural products and to purchase the required articles such, cloth, cosmetic, implements, utensils, bullocks, salt, oil and other necessities of life. Besides, this provides an opportunity to meet their kinsmen living in distant villages. Young boys and girls with best of their dresses come to the markets to see each other with an aim to select a mate for the marriage.

Conclusion- Various changes have occurred in the life ways of the Oraons during the last decade as a result of impact of Hinduism, Christian Missionaries, establishment of industrial towns, spread of communication and education and also due to the initiatives taken by some acculturated leaders. But economically they are not yet better off. More time and means are required to integrate them into the Indian Society by bringing them on par with other people.

References

S.C. Roy- *The Oraon of Chota Nagpur*-pp-11, 324, 325 & 327

H. H. Risley- *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal*- Vol. II. P. 113.

Annexure - 1
Population Distribution and Literacy Level of Oran

Name of the District	Population			Literacy												Percentage of literacy	
				Literate		Primary		Secondary		Higher							
	Total (T)	Male (M)	Female (F)	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
Kalahandi	3	2	1	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....
Sambalpur	12, 129	6257	5872	868	119	183	32	12	....	....	....	....	....	2	5
Bolangir	4	3	1	3	...	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	....	100	...
Sundargarh	114103	56098	58005	6802	2265	1516	412	88	14	19	...	....	....	15	5
Dhenkanal	20	12	8	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Puri	11	3	8	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Keonjhar	1003	475	528	50	26	3	3	...	....	....	....	....	....	11	4
Cuttack	5	5		2	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	40	...
Mayurbhanj	1738	906	877	70	...	38	1	...	...	...	...	...	...	11	1
Total	1,29,061	63,761	65,300	7795	2410	1740	448	100	14	19	..	15	..	15	14.3		

ORAON *

*Bagarathi Chowdhury*¹

The Oraon are one of the major tribes in the country and are listed as a Scheduled Tribe in West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Their population in Orissa according to the 1981 Census was 2,15,336 which increased to 2,57,829 by 1991, thus establishing a growth rate of 19.73 per cent over the decade. They constitute 3.66 per cent of the state's total tribal population. They are mainly concentrated in the districts of Sundargarh and Sambalpur, which adjoin Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Numerically the Oraon are the largest tribe in the district of Sundargarh, their main concentration being in Talsara, Sundargarh Sadar, Lefripada, Bargaon, Raghunath Palli and Biramitrapur Police Station areas of the district. In Sambalpur District they are mostly found in villages around Sambalpur and Jharsuguda towns and in Deogarh Police Station area. In these areas they are found dispersed in many villages and it is difficult to find a single village with purely Oraon inhabitants.

According to Oraon tradition, their original homeland is said to have been in the Deccan. Roy (1915) has made an attempt to reconstruct Oraon history prior to their entry into their present home of Chhotnagpur. When they entered the Chhotnagpur plateau, they found the area occupied by tribes economically more backward than themselves. Up until then, the Kora and the Birhor had been either hunters or herdsman. The Mundas who had taken to agriculture had a very rudimentary method of tilling the soil. Here they settled down but could not give up the habit of moving from one place to another under hard economic pressure in search of suitable patches of land for cultivation and for their livelihood. Thus some of them migrated to Orissa and others to Madhya Pradesh.

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There are several folk tales relating to the origin of the community and of their name, discussed by early ethnologists, particularly Roy (1915). Since the first members of the community were born from the blood of the chest (Uras or Ur in Sanskrit) of the holy ascetic, they were first known as Urager, then Thakur, and then as Oraon for their unholy and unclean food habits. According to another folk tale, they were connected with one of the ancient kings, Karakh, and sometimes were known as Kurukh. However, the tribe and their original mother tongue are still known as Kurukh, although they are commonly referred to as Oraon or Dhangara.

They have their own language called Kurukh, which is classified as a Dravidian language. Those who inhabit the border areas of Bihar speak Sadri, which is mixture of Hindi and several tribal dialects of the Chhotanagpur plateau. They are the main tribe from which Kisan tribe has originated. The percentage of literacy among the Oraon stood at 38.30 as against 49.09 per cent for the total population and 22.31 per cent for the total tribal population of the state at the 1991 Census. The percentage of literacy among the Oraon improved from 23.7 in 1981 to 38.30 in 1991. Though the Oraon are far above the literacy rate of the general tribal population, they still lag behind the general population of the state.

Although the Oraon live in mixed villages, they tend to build separate settlements of their own. In the past each family had a tendency to build its house close to its reclaimed agricultural land. But now Oraon settlements, barring a few in the interior areas bordering Madhya Pradesh, are established without following any definite plan. The houses of a settlement are usually scattered and connected with uneven and irregular lanes. They now build spacious houses with fire-proof roofs of *naria* tiles (*khappar*) in place of small houses with wild-grass thatched roofs, as in the past. Most houses have mud walls and a two-sloped *naria* tile roof opening on to a courtyard. These houses have a high verandah at the back and a low verandah at the front. Houses are generally not constructed facing the village lane. Most houses have more than one living room, the number of which depends upon the size of the family. The cow-shed and the pigsty are build close to the living room.

Household articles include the *khatti* (*charpoy*) and mat made of date-palm leaves, which are used as bed. Very well-to-do families have wooden and steel chairs, a wooden table and cots and, steel and wooden almirahs. Various size of plates and pots made of brass and bell-metal for taking food, earthenware and aluminium pots for cooking food, earthenware vessels for storing water, and bamboo baskets of different sizes and shapes are other common household articles. The gourd-bottle for carrying rice and rice-beer is rapidly disappearing, and the aluminium tiffin carrier is becoming popular in its place. Oraon agricultural, fishing and hunting implements are quite similar to those seen in the households of the neighbouring Hindus. Modern articles like the bicycle,

lantern, suitcase, steel trunk, cotton umbrella, radio, tape-recorder, etc. are generally found in many households.

Their traditional dress is the *kareya* for men and the *khanria* for women, made from self-made yarn and woven by a weaving caste called Ganda. Now-a-days, these are rapidly being replaced by modern saris and other dresses available in the local market. A limited variety of ornaments made of gold, silver and alloys are worn by the women. The profusion of tattoos seen among the old women are not found among the younger generation nowadays.

The internal structure of the Oraon society is very elaborate. Risley (1898) mentions that the tribe had five sub-tribes, viz. Gagra-Oraon, Dhanka-Oraon, Kharia-Oraon, Khendro-Oraon and Munda-Oraon, who have, in course of time, become strictly distinctive endogamous groups. The larger social groupings like phratry and moiety systems, which are found among some other tribal groups of the state, are absent.

At present the Oraon tribe is internally divided into a number of exogamous totemic clans known as *gotra* or *varga*. Each clan contains a number of families which are distributed in different villages. S.C.Roy (1915) has given a long list of totemic clans of the Oraon of Chhotnagpur area in Bihar. Both Dalton (1972) and Risley (1898) have provided lists of their clans. Das and Raha (1963) give a list of 38 totemistic groups which they found among the Oraon of Sundarban in West Bengal. While mentioning the characteristic features of the clan system among the Oraon, Roy (1915) writes, 'totemism, which was the basis of social and political organization of the Oraon in what may be roughly called the hunting and pastoral stages of Oraon culture, still forms the fundamental feature of their social organization in so far as kinship, marriage and relations of the sexes are concerned'. Among the Oraon of Orissa, only 18 totemistic groups could be found. These are (1) Tirki (mouse), (2) Lakda (tiger), (3) Kerketa (hedge sparrow), (4) Gidhi or Gidhiar (vulture), (5) Toppo (a species of fish) (6) Khalkho (a species of fish), (7) Minj (a species of fish), (8) Kachchu (tortoise), (9) Bakla (a kind of grass), (10) Barla (*Ficus Indica*), (11) Khes (paddy grain), (12) Panna (iron), (13) Bekh (salt), (14) Kujur (a variety of wild fruit on a creeper), (15) Kispatta (pig's entrails), (16) Bandra (monkey), (17) Khakha (raven) and (18) Gidhra (vulture). As regards the origin of these totems, they have a faint memory that the totemic plants, animals or objects are believed to have helped or protected the ancestors of the clan. Religious significance and observances of religious rites concerning the totems are absent. Members of the totemic groups pay reverence to their respective totemic animal or plant whenever they come across it. The taboo on using totemic objects which are indispensable in daily life is relaxed. For example, the members of the Bekh (salt) clan do not eat raw salt but can take food in which salt is added. All members of a clan regard themselves as the descendants of a common ancestor, and as such marriage relations are strictly prohibited within the clan. Thus clans are exogamous and any sexual

relationship among the members of the same clan is considered highly incestuous. A person, whether male or female, breaking this rule is excommunicated, this being irrevocable.

The Oraon are described as an agricultural community. Though it is true that the major segment of the Oraon population who own some agricultural land adhere to agriculture, there has been considerable diversification in occupation. The employment pattern among the Oraon is substantially different from the total tribal population and the general population in the state. Dependency on agricultural labour is less among the Oraon, while the participation of workers in mining, quarrying, manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs within the industrial sector has shown a rising trend. They also have an appreciable quota of workers in household activities.

The crops the Oraon grow are mainly used for their own consumption. Their principal crop is rice, which is generally grown once in a year, occasionally twice by a limited number of households that have irrigation facilities. They also grow a few types of millets, pulses and vegetables during the Kharif and Rabi seasons. They also sell the surplus agricultural produce for cash, with which they buy dresses and other necessities of life. Cultivation is primarily a family activity. Sometimes a household may seek the help and cooperation of close relatives on a reciprocal basis. Cultivating households that have larger holdings engage either labourers on a daily basis or retain labourers, preferably belonging to their own group, to assist them in different agricultural operations.

Besides cultivation, some Oraon have earned proficiency in rural crafts such as carpentry, tile and brick-moulding and rope-making. Women still weave mats from date-palm leaves and make broomsticks from wild grass. People working in mining and quarries and in industrial establishments, whether as skilled or unskilled workers, constitute a sizable quota among the workers. Hunting, fishing and the collection of forest produce have ceased due to the lack of forests. The weekly market plays an important role both in their economic and social life. This not only provides an opportunity to sell surplus agricultural produce and to purchase the daily necessities of life, but also provides an opportunity to meet the kinsmen living in distant places. They do not suffer from chronic problems of indebtedness.

The staple food is rice, occasionally supplemented by millet gruel. They have changed their food habits after coming in contact with the neighbouring Hindus. They are no longer omnivorous as in the past. They have given up many items which are considered unclean by the local people. They relish goat, pig and fowl meat. Non-vegetarian food and cakes constitute the festive dishes on ceremonial occasions. Rice beer which they brew, *mahua* liquor and tobacco-smoking and tobacco-chewing are their traditional intoxicants. Among women, the chewing of *gurakhu* (tobacco paste) is gaining in popularity.

Birth pollution continues for 7 to 10 days, after which the Chhati (purification rite) is observed soon after the stump of the umbilical cord dries up and drops off. During the period of pollution the family does not take part in any ritual activities. No member of other families will accept food from this family. A fowl is given to the Oraon priest to perform a sacrifice to protect the baby from evil spirits and the evil eye. On the day of purification the houses are cleaned and all the clothes used by family members are washed. The traditional midwife (*kusren*) and other women who conducted the delivery wash the clothes and mat used by the mother. The baby is bathed in tepid water. All male members of the family have their hair cut. All those who assisted at the time of delivery are entertained with festive meals and rice beer. If the family can afford it, it may invite friends and relatives also. The baby's name is selected from among the names of the dead ancestors through grain divination performed by an unmarried boy. On this occasion the baby's hair is cut for the first time.

They practise adult marriage. Premarital unions and marriage within one's own totemic group or to a person belonging to any other community are considered unsocial. Preferential marriages to cross-cousins and levirate and sororate marriages are still practised. Marriage by elopement, capture or service occasionally takes place. But the most common but expensive type of marriage is held through negotiation. In this type of marriage, several visits are exchanged by both parties to fix the amount of brideprice and the date of the marriage. The brideprice includes Rs.4/- to Rs.7/-, four pieces of clothes, and two to three quintals of paddy. Sometimes cash only is paid, this varying from Rs.100/- to Rs.200/-. The wedding takes place in the girl's village. Putting vermilion on each other's forehead is the binding ritual. The occasion is celebrated with singing and dancing which continues for three to four days in both villages. The guests and relatives are entertained with festive meals and rice beer. Widow remarriage is socially approved. In most cases widows remarry widowers, with the rare exception of boys marrying their deceased elder brother's wife. Divorce by either side is permissible on grounds like adultery, laziness and bad temper, with approval of village panchayat.

The deceased, with the exception of children and pregnant women, are generally cremated. Those who die after the sprouting of the new paddy plants and before the harvest are buried temporarily. If the family wishes, it can cremate the deceased immediately after death. In the case of a temporary burial, the remains of the deceased are collected after the harvest and then cremated. After cremation, all male members who attended the funeral cut their head hair. Both men and women who attended the funeral take a bath and return to the deceased's house to purify themselves from the smoke emerging from the fire in grain husks and by sprinkling water mixed with turmeric and oil on their heads. After this all present are entertained with rice beer. On the following day women go to collect the bones of the deceased. The bones of all those who have died in

the village during the year are taken ceremonially for immersion in a river or a stream. The occasion is celebrated with dancing, singing and feasting.

The Oraon had a tradition of managing their own tribal affairs through multi-level panchayats. At the village level the Mahato (the secular headman) and the Naega (the sacerdotal head), assisted by the Pujari or Panbhara and the village elders, constitute the village panchayat to deal with offences and disputes such as theft, assault, division of property, divorce, offences relating to breaches of clan rules and also sexual offences committed in the village. Beyond the village, a group of neighbouring villages of 10 to 12 constitute a Parha under the leadership of the Mahato of the important village. Here inter-village disputes are settled. But after their migration to the Sundargarh area, the Oraon leadership was subjected to many factors which influenced and reduced the importance of their leadership pattern. First of all the existing village administration under the leadership of the Gauntia, Ganju, Parganadar, etc. gave the first blow to their traditional leadership. Secondly, the spread of Christianity and the statutory village panchayat reduced the importance of their traditional leadership. The leadership pattern has undergone many changes under the impact of caste Hindus. Thus the traditional leadership based on age, experience and heritage has been taken over by a new form of leadership based on occupation, wealth and political consciousness, which is trying to bring reform in their society. However, their traditional priest continues to officiate in the rituals today.

Oraon religious beliefs and practices have been considerably influenced by Hinduism and Christianity. They believe in the existence of a number of Gods and Goddesses. Their supreme benevolent God is called Dharni, who is equated with the Sun God and is worshipped at every religious ceremony. According to their belief system the fate of the individual and the community depends on their relationship with the supernatural powers who intervene in human affairs by bringing diseases and other hardship. They employ a village priest called Naega, who belongs to their own group, whenever any misfortune befalls on an individual. The Mati is also consulted. They appease supernatural powers by offering sacrifices through a series of rites and ceremonies round the year for their safety and protection. They observe religious rites connected with their economic pursuits and at each individual's life stage like birth, marriage and death. The important religious ceremonies include Phagu in February-March to mark the end of the year and the beginning of new year, Sashul in March-April before eating the new fruits and flowers of the forest, Bisu-sikar (summer hunt) in April-May, Jeth-Jatra in May-June, Jitua in August-September and Karma in September-October. Besides all these, they also observe Kalipuja and Dasahara along with their Hindu neighbours. Those who have been converted to Christianity observe the festivals of their new faith. All these occasions, including ceremonies observed in connection with birth, marriage and death, are celebrated with appropriate communal dancing and singing.

In Orissa, the Oraon are one of the most progressive tribes. In the field of agriculture they use chemical fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds and modern techniques and do not suffer from indebtedness. They have availed themselves of opportunities to improve their economic conditions through various special programmes like ITDA, ERRP and IRDP, etc. They are hard-working, and some family members temporarily migrate elsewhere for wage-earning during the period when there is no work at home. A majority earn sufficient to maintain themselves and to purchase several varieties of modern articles like watches, radios, cycles, motor cycles, dresses and other household articles. The area is accessible, and many villages have approach roads and electricity. They are now saving money to be spent on acquiring assets.

ORAON*

*P. Panda*¹

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INTRODUCTION

The Oraon is one of the major Scheduled Tribes of Odisha. History reveals them as a daring community who fought against the British for the historical injustices done to them through curtailing their rights over natural resources. During post independent period, the perpetual exploitation of the unscrupulous traders, middlemen and recently the industrial and mining activities in the area have pushed them to margins. The Oraon trace their origin to some places in Southern India from where they migrated to Chhotanagpur plateau covering the border districts of Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Chhatisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. In Odisha, mostly they are settled in Sambalpur and Sundargarh districts.

The original dialect of the Oraon is '*Kurukh*' which is classified as an off shoot of Dravidian language. At present, they are conversant with other languages like Laria, Hindi, Ho, Oriya and Sounti, which are used by them in different localities.

They call them as '*Kurukh*' (*Kurunkh*). The word '*Kurukh*' is named after the traditional tribal hero king '*Kurukh*' or a peasant tribe '*Krishan or Kurukha*'. Another mythical story describes that the first parents of the Oraon were born out of the blood from the chest of a holy ascetic. Thus, their descendants were known as Uragaon Thakurs or Uraons. The generic term 'Oraon' is not generally

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used in their own language. Most probably the name Oraon has been their exonym given by their Hindu neighbors. They were also called 'Raonaput' or the descendants of Ravana and Oraon is the present form of it. Besides, in certain areas they are called 'Dhangar', which means unmarried young man who used to work for wage.

Numerically, the Oraon people constitute the tenth major Scheduled Tribe in Odisha. As per 2001 census, the Oraon population in Odisha accounts for 0.82 per cent of the Odisha's total population. Oraons numbering 3, 08,931 have a sex ratio of 1007 females per 1000 males. Their literacy rate is leveled at 54.20 per cent. Over the decade of 1991-2001, they have registered a population growth rate of 19.82 per cent. Their literacy level has jumped from 38.30 per cent in 1991 to 54.20 per cent in 2001. Their female literacy has also recorded an increasing trend from 26.57 per cent to 42.77 per cent during the same period.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The Oraon people live in multi-ethnic villages in separate wards maintaining their cultural identity. In a ward, houses of ten to thirty families or so cluster round a small space having the dancing ground as the common platform. The houses are found scattered and connected with irregular lanes. But now-a-days, due to their immediate contact and interaction with the neighboring castes, they build houses on both sides of the common street. The houses are opened to the courtyards or to the kitchen gardens which are protected by wall or fence.

A typical Oraon house is constructed with low mud walls. Its roof is slopped and thatched with *naria* tiles, which are locally called as *khappar*. The house has high verandah at the back and low verandah at the front. The Oraons living in Bonai area use paddy straw or wild grass for thatching the roof. Now-a-days the well-to-do Oraons construct the walls of their houses by burnt bricks and have *pucca* houses with cemented floor. Windows are conspicuously absent in the house, but small windows are found in few houses. A house has two rooms; one is used as living room and the other, as kitchen. The cow shed and pigsty are built close to the house.

Household Articles:

Among household articles, *khatti* (*charpoy*) of wooden frame woven with thin rope is found in the majority of the houses. Besides, *patia* (mat) made of wild date palm leaf are also used in every household. Well-to-do Oraons have cot, chair, table, almirah in their houses. The household utensils comprise plates and pots of various sizes made of brass, bell metal or aluminum.

They use earthen vessels and occasionally aluminum vessels for cooking food and storing water. Brass vessels, dry bottle gourds are also used for storing

and carrying water, water rice and rice bear to the agricultural field. Husking lever, grinding stone and curry stone are also found in their houses. Different varieties of baskets and bell metal and earthen utensils are purchased from the local market. Now the Oraons possess modern articles like torch light, suitcase, umbrella, buckets, Tape Recorder, Radio, TV, Cell Phone, Motor Cycle etc. for their use. The musical instruments such as flute, *nagara*, *madal* are individually owned and kept in their house for use in community gatherings, dance and song performances.

Dress and Ornaments:

The Oraon generally use their traditional dress. The males use '*Kareya*' and female use '*Khanria*' made out of self-made yarn and woven by a weaver Scheduled Caste called Ganda. Small boys dress themselves with a small *kareya* and girls wear *putti* tied around the waist. Now the younger generations are using readymade garments and foot wears which are generally purchased from the local markets.

The Oraon women adorn themselves with varieties of ornaments made of gold, brass, nickel or aluminum. They put on ear ring (*sana*), coin necklace, beads, glass and metal bangles, finger rings, toe rings and different nose ornaments like *dandi*, *guna*, *nakachana* like the Hindu women. Now they wear different varieties of hairpins, hair clips, hair net, ribbon and flower designs made of metals.

Tattooing is very popular among the Oraon women and they get different parts of their body tattooed. It is believed that in the past, when women from different communities worked for the Muslim kings, in order to distinguish Oraon women, they started giving these tattoo marks. Such marks on different parts of the body are seen among the old women which is slowly losing its popularity among the young women. In some villages the boys are also found to have their body tattooed. Except some conservative Oraons, they dress like Hindus and speak Odia language.

Food habits

The Oraon is an agrarian community. The staple food of the Oraon is rice which is taken with dishes of some edible leaves. They generally prefer to take watered rice. Well-to-do Oraons take *dal* and vegetable curry with rice.

All Oraons except Bhagat Oraons were almost omnivorous. But now almost all of them abstain to take those items which are considered unclean by high caste Hindus. They are fond of taking fish. Edible fruits, roots and tubers, collected from the nearby forests supplement their diet. They generally do not milk the cows or take milk or milk products. But with the contact of Hindu castes, use of milk is gaining popularity among them.

The Oraon take rice beer, *mahua* liquor and tobacco powder both in ritual and festive occasions and also in their day to day life. Rice beer popularly known as *handia* is their favorite traditional drink. It is home made. Guests and relatives are offered with rice beer. The feasts, festivities, marriage ceremony and other rituals are celebrated with the consumption of the rice beer. At times, it is also purchased from the neighbours and local market. Both Oraon men and women like to chew tobacco powder mixed with lime. They also, smoke country made cigarettes, tobacco rolled in *sal* leaf, locally known as *bidi*. Now *bidi* and cigarettes are gaining popularity among the educated and urbanized Oraons.

LIVELIHOOD

Their primary occupation is settled agriculture. Paddy is their principal crop. The agricultural activities are supplemented by secondary occupations such as wage earning, hunting, fishing, and collection of Minor Forest Produce. They are experts in the rural arts and crafts like carpentry, tile and brick making and rope making. Women weave mats from date palm leaves and prepare broom sticks from the wild grass.

While the major segments of the Oraon population who own some agricultural land adhere to agriculture, there has been considerable diversification in occupation in these days. The occupational pattern among the Oraon is different from other tribes of the state. Dependency on agricultural labour is less among the Oraon, while the participation of workers in mining, quarrying, manufacturing, processing, servicing and repairs within the industrial sector has shown a rising trend.

Bullock, buffalo, goat and pig are common livestock of the Oraons. Fowls are also kept which are sacrificed on different socio-religious occasions and ceremonies. At the times of need, the Oraon people also sell eggs and fowls for money. They also keep pet dogs for watch and ward of their houses.

Hunting expeditions are related with several ceremonial occasions. Ceremonial hunting (*Bisusikar*) is done in the month of '*Baisakh*' (April-May). Previously when an able bodied person was unwilling to go for hunting, he was being imposed fine by the village *Pancha*. But now it is optional. The bow and arrow are the common weapons used in hunting. Nets and traps are also used during catching and hunting of birds, rats, squirrels etc. They usually catch fish by traps and nets during rainy season.

During leisure time, they collect different roots, fruits, tubers, mushrooms for personal consumption and green *sal* leaves for preparation of leaf plates and cups. They collect fibers and date palm branches for making ropes and mats and broom sticks, respectively. Besides, they collect firewood and Kendu leaf for self-consumption and also for sale.

SOCIAL LIFE

Though the Oraons live in multi-ethnic villages they retain most of the unique features of their customs, traditions, rituals and social life which clearly distinguish them from the neighboring communities. The family, lineage, clan and village are their important units of social organization. The tribe is divided into a number of totemic clans, the origin of which is shrouded in mystery. Animate and inanimate totemic objects are tabooed for consumption by the concerned totem group and are treated with reverence.

Among the Oraon of Odisha, only 18 totemistic groups could be found. These are (1) Tirki (mouse), (2) Lakda (tiger), (3) Kerketa (hedge sparrow), (4) Gidhi or Gidhiar (vulture), (5) Toppo (a species of fish) (6) Khalkho (a species of fish), (7) Minj (a species of fish), (8) Kachchu (tortoise), (9) Bakla (a kind of grass), (10) Barla (*Ficus Indica*), (11) Khes (paddy grain), (12) Panna (iron), (13) Bekh (salt), (14) Kujur (a variety of wild fruit on a creeper), (15) Kispatta (pig's entrails), (16) Bandra (monkey), (17) Khakha (raven) and (18) Gidhra (vulture).

All members of a clan regard themselves as the descendants of a common ancestor, and as such marriage relations are strictly prohibited within the clan. Thus clans are exogamous and any sexual relationship among the members of the same clan is considered incestuous. A person, whether male or female, breaking this rule is ex-communicated, this being irrevocable.

Life Cycle:

After marriage, an Oraon woman and her family members expect child irrespective of gender bias. When it is confirmed that a woman is pregnant, she has to observe some socially prescribed taboos with utmost devotion and sincerity. Experienced and elderly women act as midwives at the time of delivery. After the delivery, the new born baby is bathed and the mother cleans her body in tepid water.

Birth pollution continues for ten days. It differs from locality to locality. During this period the family does not take part in any ritual activities. No member of other families will accept food from this family. A fowl is given to the Oraon priest to perform a sacrifice to protect the baby from evil spirits and the evil eye.

Chhati (purification rite) is observed soon after the stump of the umbilical cord dries up and drops off. On this day the houses are cleaned and all the clothes used by family members are washed. The traditional midwife (*kusren*) and other women who conducted the delivery wash the clothes and mat used by the mother. The ceremony ends with bathing of the child and mother after being anointed with oil and turmeric paste and the male members getting their hair cut and the females pairing their nails before taking bath. The houses are purified by sprinkling water dropped with the help of *tulsi* (*Osimum Sanctum*) leaves. All

those who have assisted at the time of delivery are entertained with a feast and rice beer.

The name giving ceremony is held on 15th or 21st day of the birth. But in some areas it is performed after a year. Names are selected by the rice divination. Selection is made from the names of the dead ancestors either from father's side or from the mother's side. It is believed that the deceased ancestors are reborn in the house. On this occasion the baby's hair is cut for the first time.

When child attains the age of 8 to 9 months, the well-to-do Oraon families perform the **first cereal eating ceremony** by preparing rice porridge in a new pot and feeding the child with rice porridge, milk and ghee in the presence of invitees and guests. This is followed by a feast to the guests. When the child becomes two years old, his or her ears are perforated by an elderly woman. For the girl child, her nose is also perforated. After a year or so, the girl is given tattoo marks on her forehead, temples, cheeks, and chin and on left wall of her nose. All these occasions are celebrated with drinking of rice beer in group.

On first menstruation, a girl is considered ritually unclean and polluted and forbidden to take part in any socio-religious activities till she is ritually purified through **puberty rite**. When the menstruation period is over, she takes bath, wears new clothes and becomes clean to take part in all normal activities.

The traditional institution, **village dormitory** separately established for boys and girls in the past was a school of socio-economic training for Oraon youth to make them useful members of the community. Now with the disappearance of dormitory, the youth association has become obsolete. Instead of attending the dormitory, the Oraon boys in the age group of 9 to 15 years watch cattle and help parents in agricultural works and the girls do the household works, if they are out of the school

There was the practice of making scars known as *sika* by placing burning wick on the left forearm of each Oraon male when they take admission into the dormitory. It is believed that anybody found without this mark during the time of death will have to undergo this operation in the underworld. This practice is now losing importance with the disappearance of the dormitory.

Oraon marries to procreate and continue his progeny. **Marriage** in Oraon society follows with elaborate rites and observances. Some new elements are also borrowed from the neighboring caste people and included in the rites. The marriage procedures vary from place to place.

The rule of clan exogamy is very strict and even the Christianized Oraons follow the rules. Clan solidarity is found at the inter-village level. On important socio-religious ceremonies, there is closer interaction among the clan members.

They practise adult marriage. Preferential marriages to cross-cousins and levirate and sororate marriages are still practised. However, most of the marriages are negotiated. In this type of marriage, several visits are exchanged by both parties to fix the amount of bride price and the date of the marriage. Both the parties, at least five from each side, sit in an open arena at the perspective bride's house and the social interaction continues, with jokes, riddles, and finally over a few cups of home brewed liquor shared among the participants and the kinsfolk. The participants take oath holding fistful of rice, vermilion and turmeric power sprinkled with liquor to finalize the marital ties. Before they consume anything they offer the same to their ancestors and tutelary deity. The parties thereafter hug each other and share the feast organized by the host.

The wedding takes place in the girl's village. Putting vermilion on each other's forehead is the binding ritual. The occasion is celebrated with singing and dancing which continues for three to four days in both villages. The guests and relatives are entertained with festive meals and rice beer.

The other socially recognized forms of marriage and mode of acquiring mates are cross-cousin marriage and marriage by elopement, marriage by force, levirate and sororate, marriage by service, widow remarriage. They also practice of polygyny if the wife is barren. Divorce by either side is permissible on grounds like adultery, laziness and bad temper, with approval of village *panchayat*.

Death rites

When a person is about to die, the relatives offer the person boiled gram (*urid*) to eat and water to drink with the belief that he / she should not die hungry. The deceased, with the exception of children and pregnant women, are generally cremated. Death of a person is followed by loud wailing and lamentation. The dead body with cotton thread, paddy grain and favorite possessions (in case of male only) is carried to the cremation ground with a wooden bier. In the past, the women were joining the procession as well as carrying the corpse to the cremation ground. Now, they only accompany the corpse to the cremation ground but do not carry it. In the cremation ground, the corpse is placed on the pyre with its head to the south.

After cremation, a flag is fixed near the spot. All the male members who attended the funeral cut their head hair. Both men and women who attended the funeral take a bath and return to the deceased's house to purify themselves from the smoke emerging from the fire in grain husks and by sprinkling water mixed with turmeric and oil on their heads. After this all present are entertained with rice beer. On the same day or on the following day, the bones of the dead are brought by a group of women in a new vessel covered with a new cloth and kept safely in the deceased's family.

Different clans of the village perform the bone immersion ceremony on the same day only for all deaths occurring among the families in the year. Once in a year, when harvest is over, the earthen vessel containing the bones of the deceased Oraons are carried in a procession for immersion in the nearby stream or river which is referred to as 'Ganga'. The procession is accompanied by music and dance. For immersion, each clan has a separate place called *kundi*. At *kundi*, men relegate the bones to the water and smash the vessel and offer homage to the soul to live with the ancestral spirits. Then they take bath and came back and perform the ceremony by dancing, singing and feasting.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The religious beliefs and practices of the Oraon though basically centers around animism, are now considerably influenced by Hinduism and Christianity. They believe in the existence of a number of Gods, Goddesses, ghosts and spirits who they believe control their mundane life. Their benevolent supreme being is *Dharni* - the Earth Goddess who in accompaniment with the Sun God is worshipped on every religious ceremony. Besides in their pantheon there are several deities of nature, their ancestors whom they worship offering sacrifices on various occasions to seek their blessings and protection for their wellbeing.

In each and every Oraon village there is a "sacred grove" called "Sarna" in which all their important deities reside and they are communally worshipped in all important festivals and rituals. They also observe religious rites connected with economic pursuits and important occasions. All the occasions are celebrated with communal dancing and singing.

Their traditional village priest is called called *Naega*, *Kalo* or *Jhankar* who officiates in the worship of village deities.

According to their belief system the fate of the individual and the community depends on their relationship with the supernatural powers who intervene in human affairs by bringing diseases and other hardship. They believe that diseases are generally caused by three agencies i.e. (1) vagaries of nature (2) human agency (witches and sorcerers) and (3) supernatural agencies i.e., the malevolent spirits. The traditional method of treatment through magico-religious practices is still in vogue among them. The educated Oraons go to the hospital for modern treatment.

Their important festivals and ceremonies are Phagu in February-March to mark the end of the year and the beginning of new year, Sarhul in March-April before eating the new fruits and flowers of the forest, Bisu-sikar (summer hunt) in April-May, Jeth Jatra in May-June, Jitua in August-September and Karma in September-October. Besides all these, they also observe Kalipuja and Dasara along with their caste neighbours. The converted Oraons observe the

festivals of their new faith. All these occasions, including those connected with birth, marriage and death, are celebrated with appropriate communal singing and dancing.

Dance & Music

Their traditional dance and music is their main source of recreation. They have specific dances and songs for different occasions. Young boys and girls of neighboring villages in batches also participate in the dance to celebrate the socio-religious ceremonies.

The most colorful and popular dance of the Oraon is *Karma* dance usually performed in Karma Festival observed in the month of September-October. In this festival, they worship the branches of Karama tree. The young boys, who observe fasting, chop-off the branches of the tree and take every care that the branches separated from the tree should not touch the ground. All the people of the village come forward to take these branches to the *puja pendal* performing the Karma dance. Now-a-days, the Oraon dance groups are taking part in different district, state and national level festivals being organized by different organizations.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Oraon had a tradition of managing their own tribal affairs through multi-level *panchayats* (councils) which were democratic in nature. In Oraon settlements, there is a tribal traditional village council headed by the Mahato (the secular headman) and the Naega (the sacerdotal head) who are assisted by the Pujari or Panbhara and the village elders. In later times in western Odisha, the *Gauntia* also called as '*Pargaradar*', '*Maufidar*', '*Ganjhu*' etc in different localities, became the most important village official vested with powers over village affair and collection revenues. The post of *Gauntia* has been hereditary.

The main function of the village *Panchayat* was to maintain law and order and to decide disputes about partition of family property, offences against marriage rules, divorce cases, violation of taboos, suspected cases of witch craft, cases of other kinds of sexual offences, physical assault and theft etc. The posts of village officials who were elected from the Bhuinhar families (the original settlers of the village) were generally hereditary.

Beyond the village level, a group of 10 to 12 neighbouring Oraon villages constitute a *Parha* under the leadership of the Mahato of the important village. The *parha* has an inter-village council (*parha panchayat*) in which the matters which are not resolved at the village level are settled. The headman of the most important village called Raja presides over *parha* meetings. Other officials like '*dewan*' (prime-minister), '*panrey*' (clerk), '*kotwar*' (bailiff) and '*kartaha*' assist him. Besides the maintenance of peace and order and adjudicating the inter village

disputes, the main function of the '*parha*' was to undertake communal hunting expeditions in different occasions in the past. Thus, the '*parha*' organization was functioning as a social, judicial and political body.

In the traditional set up, pre-marital sexual relationship is not tolerated in Oraon society as it is considered immoral and unsocial. In such cases the offenders are awarded severe punishment. They have to undergo atonement rites with prescribed worship and sacrifices and to host a feast for the village community.

In modern times, the spread of Christianity and functioning of the statutory *panchayatiraj* has undermined the importance of their traditional leadership as well as the traditional mechanisms of social control. Thus the traditional leadership based on age, experience and heredity has been overtaken by a new form of elected modern leadership.

CHANGING SCENE

Various changes have occurred in Oraon society and culture with passage of time. Oraons have accepted many new cultural elements from the neighboring castes and tribes in course of their prolonged contact with them. Compared to other tribes of Odisha, Oraons have advanced with time. Apart from the Government, the role of missionaries and NGOs has been important in their transformation. The corporate houses as a part of their periphery development under Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) have contributed to the development of the tribesmen in their own way.

On the other side, the age old traditional social institutions are declining under the impact of conversion and modernization. The bond friendship ties, which was confined to their own community for exchange of grains, vegetables, gifts, has now extended to other castes /tribes. Way of life of the neighbouring castes has made inroads in to the Oraon society and culture. Sacrifice of buffalo or cow is no more prevalent. Due to influence of Christianity, a number of Oraon people have abandoned their traditional beliefs and practices. The converts do not take part in traditional dances on different religious ceremonies. The non-converts do not take food from the converts through they are not treated as untouchables. The spread of education, establishment of hospitals, and creation of awareness against superstitious belief by Christian missionary have not only influenced the life of converts, but also have enlightened the non-converts.

Government has launched development programmes exclusively for tribal areas and tribal people with two fold objectives i.e. economic upliftment of tribal beneficiaries through Income Generating Scheme and area development through Infrastructure Development Schemes under various sectors of state plan. Urban and industrial development, Government's initiatives by establishment of ITDAs in Oraon concentrated areas has created a lot of positive impact on

development of education, agriculture, communication, drinking water, housing, health and sanitation. Initiative have been taken at GP and Block level to create awareness among them on different development schemes so that they can reap the benefit out of it and become prosperous.

Implementation of PESA Act in tribal area has also brought a lot of change in the quality and pattern of leadership among the tribe. Oraon's occupational pattern and means of subsistence have been changed. Money economy has replaced the traditional barter system. Change is observed in their living pattern, social customs, food habits and dress pattern. There is increasing use of modern electronic gadgets, mill made cloths, cosmetics etc. The importance of religious functionaries has declined and in many cases the rituals are observed symbolically.

At present, in Odisha, the Oraons have become one of the most progressive tribes. In the field of agriculture they use chemical fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds and modern techniques and hardly suffer from indebtedness. They have availed themselves of opportunities to improve their economic conditions through various special programmes like ITDA, ERRP and IRDP, etc. They are hard-working, and some family members temporarily migrate elsewhere for wage-earning during the period when there is no work at home. A majority earn enough to sustain themselves and to purchase several varieties of modern articles like watches, radios, cycles, motor cycles, dresses and other household articles. Their area has become accessible, and many villages have approach roads and electricity.

The ST and SC Development Department, Government of Odisha under the aegis of Ministry of Tribal Affairs has established a Tribal Museum of Arts and Crafts in the Premises of SC and ST Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI) at CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar for preservation and exhibition of material culture of different tribes. In this exclusive anthropological museum, the ornaments, personal belongings, hunting weapons, fishing implements, and musical instruments of Oraon tribe have been displayed in the different show cases which reflect their inherent quality on fine arts and crafts. Besides, the live performance of Oraon dance in the open *pandal* in the Annual Adivasi Exhibition every year starts from 26th January onwards for 15 days and the replica of Oraon house in the ITDA stall exposes the richness of Oraon culture to the world outside.

ORACULAR ACTIVITIES AMONG THE ORAONS *

*P. S. Das Pattanaik*¹

In the Oraon belief system the 'Pahan' is considered as a man in whom the divinity is incarnated. He is considered as a being superior to man. The divine powers become incarnate in him for longer or shorter periods. The practitioners of different varieties of magic, on the other hand are considered as ordinary human beings, though possessed of an unusually high degree of powers. This type of magician draws his extraordinary powers from a certain psychical sympathy with nature. His whole being, body and soul is in harmony with the world forces. They are called by several names like Mati, Sokha, Banmari, etc., and function as Oracles and leech craft practitioners. It is presumed that the magical art is generally employed for the benefit either of individuals or of the whole community. A few magical agencies like the witch or witchdoctor practise black-magic which is directed to cause disease, death, destruction and ill-luck. The leech craft practitioners and oracles are supposed to practice white-magic with the view to do good to the people. There is a well regulated native institution where the Oracular activities are learnt. The purpose of this paper is to give a description of the Oracular activities among the Oraons.

Evans Prichard in his book "Witch- Craft among the Azande" (page-9) defines 'oracle' as the "techniques which are supposed to reveal what cannot be discovered at all, or cannot be discovered for certain, by experiment and logical inferences the reform". Further he states that they are regarded by the people to be more satisfactory means of ascertaining the future, and the hidden things of the present, than are witch-craft. The intrinsic meaning of Oracle is "an opinion deemed infallible". The function of the oracle is to search out the hidden or lost things. Even he can say the place where the stolen things are kept secretly. He can trace out the criminal and at the same time the things stolen by the criminal.

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If a man loses some money, cattle or ornaments, etc., he approaches the oracle, who can easily tell the where-about of the things. Even if a lost thing is lying in a tank, the instrument which he uses for tracing out must come near the tank and stops there. This would indicate that the thing is inside the tank. However in order to find out the hidden things some magical performances are done and at the same time some rituals are observed.

Training of the Oracle

A man desirous to know the oracular activities approaches a 'Guru' who should be an experienced Oracle. The Guru finally selects a day when the disciple comes with two rupees to take the course. The goddess 'Kalimai' is installed on an alter (Bedi) prepared by the Guru beforehand. The disciple is expected to bring various Puja accessories, such as dhup (incense stick), 'dhuan' (incense powder), *dhub* grass, Gulaichi (Merry gold flower) and a white chicken. When the Puja materials are arranged, the Guru and the disciple sit facing each other before 'Kalimai'. The 'Guru' catches the hand of the disciple and whispers some incantation in the ear of the disciple. The latter, too, mutters the same spells repeatedly. Thus the hymns are crammed by repeated utterances. After one hour or so, the Guru starts worshipping Kalimai with the Puja accessories. At the end of the Puja, the white chicken is sacrificed and the blood is sprinkled over both the stone image of the goddess and the disciple. The blood is believed to be the blessing water and helps to attain the 'Sidhi'. After the puja, the Guru tells his disciple various magical processes of finding out things one after the other and finally hands over all the spells writing them on a piece of paper. These spells are indispensable while practicing the oracular activities.

The disciple, after getting his blessings from the Guru, comes to his house and starts practicing the course from the full-moon day of the month of Kartika. This day is considered to be very auspicious. In a separate apartment in the vicinity of his house, he installs the image of Kalimai. For a month, he confines himself to this room and performs Puja every day. None but his wife is allowed into the room. She only comes at noon and at the close of the day to give food. For a month the disciple undergoes rigorous taboos such as abstention from sexual activities, all sorts of play, etc., and lived on a vegetarian diet. The regular practice of spells and incantations is supposed to make him a master of the art. At the end of the month an ostentious ritual is performed with the sacrifice of four chickens.

Nature and process of Oracular activities

The Orans believe that there are two magical processes to trace out the stolen or lost things. The first process is called 'Bichar' or judgment. That means, things lost or stolen can be found out by way of judgment. Through the judgment the Oracle can tell where, how and who has taken the things or the place where it is laying. The second process is called 'Bahari'. 'Bahari' is a small

brass vessel which moves itself and stops near the place where the thing is hidden. This is called 'Searching out method. These processes also help in searching out the evil eyes.

When a man faces some loss he seeks the help of the oracle. In this case the second method is used. The oracle comes to the house of the party and cleans small portion of ground before the house. The ground is smeared with 'Dudhaati' (White Clay). The oracle draws various small squares on the smeared ground with charcoal. In each square he writes with a small piece of brick the names of persons who might be suspected and the places where the thing might have been kept. Then a small child from the 'Tirki' clan is called by the party. The child sits on an 'Assan' and a piece of cloth is tied over its eyes. The child is hypnotized by the oracle with the repeated spells. The child moves his head and hands frantically. To check this frantic action the oracle keeps his right palm on the right hand of the child. Then the child drags his hand and touches any one of the squares. Again his hand is taken out from the square and the same process is repeated. If the child touches the same squares thrice, the name of the persons or places written there is taken to be the required one. But if the hand of the child does not touch the ground all the names and places written on the squares are declared to clear of suspicion. So again he writes other probable names in those squares. This process is very time taking and the actual names come after a number of repetitions. Finally when the name of the person or the place is known a 'Sal Pattar' (Sal leaf) is spread on the ground on which a Duba or Bahari is kept. The oracle recites mantras (hymns) and throws Arua rice on it. With his magical spell, the 'Duba' starts moving towards the suspected place or the person. If the 'Duba' comes to a person and moves round him, he is considered to be the thief. If the stolen thing is buried under the ground or kept inside the tank, the 'Duba' drills the soil or goes near the tank. The person concerned or the place is ascertained by this process.

The first method, called 'Bichar' is used only when the accused is known to have left the village and remaining in some neighbouring area. Sometimes the things lost (like cows, bullocks, buffaloes) are known by this method. The man who acts evil eyes is also known by this method here the 'judgment' is told by a 'Bahan' whose appearance is reflected on the digit of the finger.

This method is considered very authentic as the pictorial appearance of the lost thing is visible. When the picture is visible, the party can easily recognize the person, animal or thing.

In this case also the oracle proceeds in the same manner as before. The boy from the 'Tirki' clan is called seated on an 'assan'. Before him an earthen pitcher is filled up with water is kept, above which a small strip of bamboo is used to threaten the mediator when his appearance is visible. A black oily substance is anointed at the top digit of the middle finger of the boy. The boy

raises his hand upward showing the middle finger towards the oracle. The oracle recites 'mantras' and invokes 'Kalimai' to help him' suddenly the 'Dut' or 'Bahan' (carrier animal of Kalimai) is visible at the black-stained digit which seems to be transparent. The 'Bahan' is threatened by the oracle with the split of bamboo to catch the actual criminal or to show the place where the stolen thing is kept. The figure gradually fades away. Just after a few minutes, the actual criminal becomes visible. With the appearance of the figure the boy loses sense.

The oracle is highly ovated by the Oraons in their villages. When a man does not get the deserved output from his lands, he naturally blames the evil eyes. To justify it, he approaches the oracle, who tells him the actual causes. The oracle can trace out the evil eyes easily. If it is due to 'deota' or dissatisfaction of the *pachabalar* (ancestors spirits), he advises the person to worship them by giving proper sacrifice. In the case of death, the oracle is also consulted. When a man faces an unnatural death, his people consult the oracle and know the cause of death. The oracle is also consulted to ascertain the reasons of barrenness of women. An oracle is very useful when a commoner chooses a new homestead site. When a man chooses a site for constructing the house he never starts without consulting the oracle. The owner is concerned about auspicious or inauspicious nature of the place. The oracle goes to the side and smears a small portion of the ground with cow dung. Then he keeps 'Aura rice' in three different places giving small gaps. He then covers three 'taba' (Date leaf) on the rice very carefully and leaves it alone to remain throughout the night. Early in the next morning he comes and examines the covered rice. If the rice is scattered the place is considered inauspicious and the house can never be constructed there, but if it remains intact the place is declared to be auspicious.

Magic is ordinarily employed for therapeutic purposes. The distinctive feature of oracular magic is that it is also employed for detection of crimes. Thus in the Oraon society both medicine and the criminal code of the tribe form an integrated pattern in conjunction with magic.

WITCHCRAFT AND RELIGION AMONG THE ORAON OF MALGO *

P. S. Das Pattanaik ¹

Malgo, an inaccessible village, predominantly inhabited by one of the primitive tribes, Oraons, is situated at the western corner of Chhotanapur in the district of Ranchi. The village is surrounded by long stretches of contiguous hills with thick forests. The topography gives the impression of the village being situated at the bottom of a cup.

The social life of this tribe is dominated by magico-religious activities. They believe that there are various kinds of magical agencies, such as witch, witch doctors, Sokha, Banmari practitioners, etc. each of these agencies plays some magical role affecting the socio-economic activities of the tribe.

It is the common notion of the villagers that a person practicing witchcraft is called witch and the supposed psychic emanation which is believed to cause injury to health and the property is called witchcraft. This psychic emanation is due to some codified incantation. A man has to undergo rigorous training to pronounce this incantation, embalming certain deity or spirit, with magical effect. Conversely to de-victimsie a person from witchcraft the witchdoctor performs propitiation and supplication ceremonies addressed to Gods and spirits and attempts to appease them with sacrificial offerings.

When the woman is pregnant, she is supposed to be extremely susceptible to contagion. She must not touch a dead body or go the cremation ground. She must not remain outside when lightning flashes in the sky or thunder peals. While going out from the house she must cover her body

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completely with her 'Sari'. All these are done to avoid evil spirits. The spirits of wicked women or on who was not as good terms with the pregnant woman may recognize her and cause harm to the foetus in the womb. Hence, she has to go under cover. These spirits are called *dain* or *churin*. When a woman is pregnant for the first time, a pig or three chickens are sacrificed to the ancestor spirits by any members of the woman's paternal lineage. All the members of the family also worship Sarna Mai to save the girl from apprehended evil spirits. This ceremony is called Joda-kamma. They also perform another ceremony called Dand Puja. Both the ceremonies are performed to save the mother and the foetus from the evil spirits and witches. The witchdoctor (Mati) performs the Puja at the outskirt of the village under the mango grove. The family members of the victim assemble near the grove to see the Puja. The Mati invokes the ancestor of the victim and worships them one after another. Ultimately, he sacrifices one goat or sheep near the pat (altar) and blood is sprinkled on the stone, representing Saran Mai. Later on the meat of the sacrificed animal is cooked and given to the patient and distributed among other members of the family.

Difficult labour during child-birth is ascribed by some people to some witches and their evil eyes. If a woman gets lean and falls ill during pregnancy, it is supposed to be due to the malevolence of witches. In such cases the witch doctor is called upon to perform magical rites. He utters incantations taking Chulha Miti (the soil from the hearth), Mircha (chilly) and Nun (Salt) in his right hand and drives out the evil spirit. Most often a new born baby is washed and taken to the Gandur garha (manure pit) where it is laid down by one woman and forthwith taken up by another woman of the same family. This inevitable happens if the preceding child had died. It is believed that this protects the child from the witches and malignant spirits, as they would not care for a babe thus thrown into a manure pit like useless refuge. Such a boy is also named as Fekua (cast away) or as Gandura (belonging to cow-dung). They also bury the placenta and umbilical cord, etc., near the door step. Nobody should see them when they are buried – not even animals. It is to prevent witches and sorcerers from stealing and giving them to some barren women who would thus become fertile, transferring their barrenness to the other women.

The Oraon believe that a child born with one or two teeth is very inauspicious. The moment it takes birth with such teeth, it should be killed by pouring raw salt into his mouth. Such a boy or a girl is sure to turn Dain in future and causes harm to the society. (Such extreme practice is not resorted to now-a-days).

Either on the day of birth or within two or three days, some *arua* rice on a *sal* leaf and two *tumba* (copper) coins are to be waved on the baby's head. This ceremony is conducted by Pahan (village priest). After some offerings and propitiations Pahan orders for a red or a grey fowl which he immolates and offers to the ancestor spirits. Thus, the protection from the ancestor spirits is

solicited. This ceremony is called 'Paisari'. The same procedure is also adopted for newly purchased cows and buffaloes.

It is during the period of impurity following child-birth that evil spirits and witches are most dreaded by a woman. For it is then that both mother and child are liable to their attacks, than at any other time. It is believed that the witches approach the mother in the guise of a black cat. If a cat licks the vagina of the woman then it results in stopping the menstruation and causes death. To guard the mother and her baby against the attack a weapon made of iron is placed by the bed side close to the mother's head. A handful of mustard seeds is also tied at one end of mother's cloth, so that witches may not approach her in the apprehension that the mustard seeds will be flung at them should they venture to do so. Sometimes a line of coal powder is drawn near the threshold of the room where mother is lying so that no witches can go inside it. When the child is taken outside one iron bracelet is put on his arm or a brat (Patiya) is tied on the wrist.

On the sixth day after birth the courtyard is besmeared with cow-dung. The witch-doctor is invited to perform a *puja*. He is supplied with an egg, a small Bhelwa twig (a kind of fruit), a little rice- flour and lump of coal dust. With all these things mixed together he draws a diagram representing a magic symbol on the ground. The witch-doctor squats before the diagram and breaks the egg. Then he recites 'Mantras'. After subsequent uttering's the evil spirits are believed to have gone away. This is called "Danda-Katta" ceremony.

When a baby cries constantly or does not take anything (even does not suck the mother's breast) or suffers from insomnia, the witches are held responsible for that. The mother in that case touches a handful of mustard on the head of the child and the child is no more bewitched. Another device is to attach one or more cowries shell to the baby's neck or waist. With the same object their children are sometimes marked with soot on the forehead between the eye brows.

According to tradition, the Oraon never select a bride from such house which is connected with the case of witch or witchcraft. One of the rituals in the marriage custom is that the bridegroom presses the bride's heels behind a cloth screen. A few female relatives of both the groom and bride remain inside the enclosure. One or more male relatives stand outside the enclosure brandishing swords to ward off the evil. When a bride leaves her father's residence she is given an arrow (made of bamboo) which she has to carry till her arrival at her father-in-law's residence. This is supposed to protect her during the journey. When ultimately she reaches the groom's residence, she enters into a room and must not leave the arrow until the Danta-Katta or the ceremony of cutting the evil teeth has been performed by a witch-doctor.

When a man dies, he is kept inside a room. Some women go out towards the cremation ground and return and reach the door-step of the deceased's room. Before entering the room they call out the dead man and inform that they are his own kith and kin. Then they open the door and all enter the room. They all examine the flame which they had lit before quitting the room. If the flame is seen wavering and some steps of animals are seen near it, then the death of that man is caused by some spirits or witch, if not it is natural death.

Among the Oraon there is hardly any differentiation between religion and witchcraft. The two are organically connected. The sacrifices, worships and divinations have always a practical purpose. They are meant to cure diseases and avoid evil. The spirits, whom the Oraon believe are malevolent, bent upon doing harm to men and their possessions.

COUPLE-CHILDREN RATIO IN THE FAMILY TYPE OF THE ORAONS OF SUNDARBAN *

Sunil Kumar Basu ¹

During 1967-68 a field investigation was undertaken in certain selected villages of the district of 24-Parganas, West Bengal under a 'Village Survey Project' with the objective to assess the intercommunity differences in their educational and economic attainment. In addition to that certain data were also collected relating to family constituents. The present paper is based on these data. Here the purpose is to examine the per-couple average children in different types of families among the Oraons of the area.

The Population

The data presented here relate to the Oraons, a tribal community whose migration to their present habitat may be traced to at least seventy years back from the adjoining State of Behar. The history of this migration dates back to the time of deforestation in the Sunderban area of coastal Bengal. The characteristic feature of the settlement pattern of these people is often marked by their population-concentration in certain localities-be it in one village or in a group of villages.

The locale selected for the present study, is a village of Boyarmari Abad under Sandeshkali police-station of the district. This is a fairly large village with more than 837 family units living dispersedly over a number of hamlets.

There are altogether twenty-two ethnic groups identified separately with caste, community or religious faiths. The Oraons represent 280 families with a population of 1,880 (34.79 per cent). The present analysis deals with 460 monogamous couples and their average number of children living at the time of survey. Besides them, there are seven other polygamous couples with more than

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one wife at a time; of them, one is in simple family type and the rest six are in joint families. In the polygamous couples, in joint family types, there are sixteen children in all. There are only two children with the polygamous couple living in the simple family.

It is observed that for the Oraons the norm of the marriage contract is primarily based on monogamous type. Hence, in working out the couple-children distribution only the monogamous couples have been counted in the accompanied table (No. I).

Procedure

Couples have been categorized according to their living in simple or joint family units. Further division has been made in relation to complete and incomplete (absence or either of the spouses) family structures. For the joint family, especial reference has been made to spouses of the two generation levels filial and parental. As the social norm of the community concerned is based on patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence, the patrikins only have been taken into account for delimitation of family structures.

Some salient features

Of the total 460 couples, 126 are living in simple families and the rest 334 are found under joint families. Incomplete couples, with the absence of either of the consorts, are met mostly among the joint family units of parental generation. There are 59 such incomplete couples among them, and this figure is the maximum for any single category or any combination thereof. The maximum numbers of seven children are found only in two cases of the couples among the simple families as against only three cases of the couples in the joint families. Conversely, there are 13 (10.32 per cent) couples of the simple families and 50 (14.94 Per cent) couples under joint families who, in both cases, are childless. Proportionately high percentage of couples, both in simple (53.96) and joint families (67.06) are found with children varying from one to three in number. For the simple families in general, the number of couples increases with the number of children at the beginning. But from three children upward, the number of couples decreases gently. In cases of joint families this increase in the number of couples with one child is registered as maximum; the slope then follows an abrupt fall with decrease in couples along with the successive increase in number of children.

The per couple average number of children is found highest (3.22) among the simple family types. Correspondingly, for the couples of joint families, this average appears as 2.4 children. The trend is maintained although for each category of simple family. Conversely, among the couples of joint family of any category (complete/ incomplete/ filial/ parental) the averages for children are consistently low. But among the couples of the joint family

themselves the average of children is a bit high (2.27) in their parental generation as against 1.51 children per couple in their filial generation. (Please see table-I)

Discussions

From the above findings it may be deduced that (i) the couple-formation among the given population of the Oraons is primarily based on monogamous marriages. (ii) Maximum number of couples has one to three children, and (iii) per couple distribution of children is higher among the simple family units.

The above findings stand in conformity with the previous study of similar nature made among the Santals of Midinapur district.

TABLE-I
Showing per couple average distribution of surviving children in different family types of the Oraons

Couples living in	Couples without children	Number of couples with children							Total couples and total children (cols. 3to 9)	Average No. of children per couple
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Simple family (complete)	13	17	23	23	20	13	10	2	108	
Total Children	0	17	46	69	80	65	60	14	351	3.21
Simple family (in complete)	..	1	2	1	..	1	..	..	5	
Total Children	..	1	4	3	..	5	..	..	13	2.60
All simple families	13	18	26	24	20	14	10	2	113	
Total Children	0	18	52	72	80	70	60	14	364	3.22
Complete joint family (filial)	41	48	37	27	12	18	5	1	148	
Total Children	0	48	74	81	48	90	30	7	378	2.55
Incomplete joint family (filial)	2	5	2	1	1	..	..	..	9	

Total Children	0	5	4	3	4	..	..	..	16	1.77
All joint family (filial)	43	53	39	28	13	18	5	1	157	
Total Children	0	53	78	84	52	90	30	7	394	1.51
Complete joint family (parental)	4	19	18	15	12	2	0	1	71	
Total Children	0	19	36	45	48	10	24	7	189	2.66
Incomplete joint family (parental)	3	32	14	6	1	2	..	1	56	
Total Children	0	32	28	18	4	10	..	7	99	1.76
All joint families (parental)	7	51	32	21	13	4	4	2	127	
Total Children	0	51	64	63	52	20	24	14	288	2.27
All joint families	50	104	71	49	26	22	9	3	284	
Total Children	0	104	142	147	104	110	54	21	682	2.40

(Pakrasi and Mukherjee ; 1969). In that study the average distribution of children among 154 couples living in simple and joint families were shown. It was found that the per couple average of Children was highest (2.7) in simple family units, while the corresponding figure for the couples of joint families appeared as 1.8 only. Similar study was also made by Chakraborty (1971) among the Santals of Malda and Birbhum of West Bengal. The couples counted were 310 in total. The findings revealed the same trend that couples in simple families had larger number of children (3.29 averages) against the average of 2.48 in joint family units.

Comparative figures showing the findings of two parallel studies

Total couples and total Children			Average number of Children per couple	
Couples living in	Pakrasi and Mukherjee 1969 N=154 couples	Chakraborty 1971 N=310 couples	Pakrasi and Mukherjee	Chakraborty
Simple families	57	122		
Total Children	153	401	2.7	3.29
Joint families	97	140		
Total Children	176	347	1.8	2.48

To arrive at a firm conclusion, despite the repetitive nature of findings, further probing into the total count of conceptions is needed. Consideration of age of the wives should be another point to judge the potentiality of the child bearing couples.

Willy-nilly, it is expected that this primary knowledge about the couple-children ratio will be helpful to choose the clientele for selling the much cherished idea of Planned Parenthood. The association of larger number of children with the couples of simple families poses a further question as to whether these families should be the vulnerable units for population planning. Because, the hitherto common belief has been that with the increase of urbanization there should be an increase in the number of simple families. Taken this as accepted, the greater ratio of couple-children in the simple family types becomes a corollary to urbanization.

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DISINTEGRATION OF LEADERSHIP AMONG THE ORAONS OF SUNDERGARH DISTRICT OF ORISSA*

*Bhagarathi Chowdhury*¹

Since the Oraon migrated from Chotnagpur in Bihar to the Sundergarh district and other adjoining areas of Orissa the pattern of leadership among them has undergone considerable change. This sort of transformation is of much historical and sociological importance. The impact of modernity and the effect of altered environment on a tribe which is in the process of a sea-change are quite interesting. As long as a community remains isolated, it develops solidarity, exclusiveness and affinity. But when it moves out of its narrow local limits and comes in contact with the people at large of the world outside, disintegration of its culture and disruption of its homogeneity set in. This has happened to the Oraons of the Sundergarh district of Orissa whose ways of life are in flux since migration from their original native-place. This article attempts to show how traditional leadership based on heredity, custom, wealth and wisdom has given way to a dynamic and revolutionary leadership based on education, enlightenment and political consciousness. An attempt has also been made to describe how the new leadership has become ineffective in the recent past and how formal leaders of some distinction and influence are on the wane. The village priests, of course, command same respect, but their influence is confined to the performance of the religious rituals.

In their new settlement at Sundargarh their traditional Panchayat has lost much of its importance because of reduction its functions and diminution of its influence. In the past the Panchayat was invested with socio-religious

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responsibilities and political and judicial powers. In the changed set-up it was reduced to the position of a formal body in nominal charge of socio-religious affairs. In consequence the traditional leaders who once wielded much influence and were held in high esteem by the feudal chiefs lost their power and prestige. On the other hand, new leaders emerged. They were keen on reforming the society by abolishing degrading traditional practices with the help of tribal council organized on the model of the caste council of the neighbouring Hindus. In this respect they were greatly inspired by the pre-independence movement in the country. The special privileges accorded to them by the Government and various social legislations enacted during the post-independent period accelerated their reformatory movement. But the new leaders did not continue effectively of long on account of various impediments. This resulted in the disintegration of Oraon leadership as discussed here. The existence of a well-organized village administration by the feudal kings before independence, the spread of Christianity and missionary activities, social institutions of the caste Hindus, dissemination of education and the all-round improvement of their condition effected through special measures by the Government, provision of modern amenities of life, introduction of the statutory Panchayat and the industrial facilities in the area are responsible for the changes in their leadership pattern. Before going into these details a brief account based on the observations of S. C. Ray in 1915 on their leadership pattern should better be given at the outset.

The Oraons, in the past managed their own affairs by enforcing laws, customs and usages through the full-fledged machinery of village and *Parha* a group Panchayat (council of a group of neighbouring villages) which were democratic in nature. At the village level, the Mahato and the Pahan (also called Baiga and Naega) was the chief official of the Panchayat. The former was the secular headman and the later, the religious headman who was assisted by the Pujar or Panbhara in discharging his duties. In some villages both the posts were held by a single person. These posts of village officials belonging to *Bhuinhar* families (the original settlers) of the village were generally hereditary. They along with the village elders constituted the village Panchayat to maintain law and order. They also decided all disputes, and tried all cases of social offences and suspected cases of witchcraft and sorcery. Sometimes cases of assault and theft were disposed of by them. Besides these village officials, there were also village servants like *Garait* (barber), the *Ahir* (the shepherd), the *Lohara* (the blacksmith) and the *Kumbhar* (the potter).

Beyond the village, there was the organization of *Parha* Panchayat formed by a group of neighbouring villages. The traditional headman (*Mahato*) of the most important village (called Raja village) was to preside over the *Parha* meetings. There was also other officials viz. the *Dewan* (Prime Minister), *Panrey* (the clerk of the crown), *Kotwar* (Bailiff) and the *Kartaha* (the priest for social and socio-religious functions). Besides the important task of maintaining peace and

order and adjudicating inter-village disputes, it arranged hunting expeditions. Thus the *Parha* organization was a social, judicial and political body.

On their arrival in Sundargarh nearly a century ago they settled down in multi-caste and multi-tribal villages where the most important official in the well-organized village administration was the *Gountia*. He was also known as *Ganjhu*, *head-Ganjhu*, *Parganadar*, *Maufidar*, *Kharposhdars* and *Shikini Gountia* respectively in different localities. The post was usually hereditary, the eldest son succeeding the father. In the absence of lineal descendants one collateral senior male relative succeeded if he was joint holder with the deceased *Gountia* or a co-sharer in the village *bhogra* (rent free land). In the absence of heirs, the widow of the last *Gountia* succeeded. She held the title for life or until she was re-married. If there was more than one widow the senior-most among them succeeded.

Besides *rayoti* land, the *Gountia* was allowed to enjoy *Bhogra*-land for his services. He was exempted from payment of rent. He had unlimited administrative power over the village in his charge. Some of his multifarious duties were (i) to accord permission to the new migrants to settle down in the village and to recommend to the ruling chief for allotting land to them, (ii) to collect and credit into the treasury the revenue, cesses, grazing fees and all other dues of the village as directed by the authority, (iii) to keep the authorities informed of the movement of strangers, of unnatural death and out-break of calamities like smallpox, cholera and famine, of unauthorized cutting of trees from the forest, and of illegal transfer of land, (iv) to look after the maintenance of village orchards, (v) to supply rations on payment at the prevailing rate, (vi) to assist the officials on tour in the performance of their lawful duties, and (vii) to supervise the work of the village *Chowkidar* (watchman), the *Kalo* (village-priest) and the *Nariha* (waterman). He was also responsible for their appointment and dismissal with the concurrence of the ruling chief.

When such a system of village administration with the *Gountia* at the head was in force, the Oraons who settled down amidst them were also subject to the rules and the mandates of the village council. Under such circumstances the Oraon village officials lost all political and judicial powers and the *Parha* organization disappeared. The tribal council of the village became a body to look after socio-religious matters peculiar to their own tribe only. Thus the prevailing village-administration gave the first and foremost blow to the foundation of the traditional Oraon leadership.

The second important cause of toppling of the traditional Oraon leadership was the proselytism and spread of Christianity in the area. The Christian Missions of various denominations have been working in the area for the last 80 years or so. They have succeeded in converting tribals on a large scale. The Orans have embraced Christianity in a large number (23.8 per cent of the total Oraon population are Christians as per 1961 Census). They run a number of

schools, hospitals and other voluntary organizations including churches. After conversion, they no more follow their traditional customs including religious beliefs and their former practices and treatment of diseases. They changed their mode of life in many respects and availed themselves of the educational, medical and other facilities like the non-converts to some extent. Notwithstanding of the good effects of their conversion, some unhealthy repercussions are manifest in the village life of the area. Religion is one of the most important binding forces in a rural society for its integrity and harmony: and when there is emergence of a new group with a new religion, there is disintegration of traditional culture with disunity and disharmony in the society. This was the case in the Oraon society. The new group with a new faith looked forward to the Christian priests for aid and advice in everything. They established separate organizations like the Church, the grain gola, the hospital and the school of their own in different villages. Thus a portion of their population owed their allegiance not to the traditional leaders but to the leaders of the new faith which resulted in the decline of power and prestige of the traditional leaders.

Industrial innovations in the area also contributed to changes in their traditional leadership. Establishment of Industrial Township like Rajgangpur, Rourkela and Kansbahal provided ample scope for employment to them. They moved from place to place for employment and there occurred social mobility due to contact with various alien groups. Their temporary migration to different places and new avenues of employment influenced them to adopt new cultural ways. Prior to this, there were the influences of superior cultural groups into whose midst they come to settle down, and these influences acted to bring about changes in them. Due to several degrading cultural practices, the Oraons were considered untouchable by their superior neighbours who assigned to them a lower rung of the social ladder. With this back ground the enlightened and educated people of the tribe thought of moulding their fellow tribesmen in the changed environment. The pre-independence movement gave them courage and impetus to reorganize their society by adopting reformatory measures. Special programmes of development and privileges and facilities were guaranteed to them by the constitution of the country after Independence. The post-Independence measures accelerated the inchoate movement among them.

There emerged dynamic and educated leaders to revive village and inter-village tribal assembly on the model of their old *Parha* organization. New nomenclatures for the office-bearers adopted in imitation of the prevailing caste-council of the Hindus of the area were in vogue. A group of neighbouring villages formed Parha with a Raja or President as its head and a *Dewan* or a Secretary to keep records and to organize its meetings. The traditional *Kartah* was retained to officiate in the ceremony of re-admitting an excommunicated Oraon. These office-bearers, the educational qualification, outlook, influence in the society, and contact with others castes and tribes were taken into consideration. The *Behera* was, in his turn, elected by the elders of the concerned villages.

When the *Parha* Panchayat were thus reorganized, several reformatory resolutions relating to their heavy addiction to liquor, dance, illiteracy, conversion to Christianity and marriage customs were passed. They also dealt with social offences such as disobedience of marriage rules, clan rules, sexual offences, violation of taboos and conflicts arising during partition of property. A few examples of the functions of the *Parha* Panchayat of Lahunipada area of the district are furnished below:-

- (a) A girl who runs away with or marries a boy of another caste or tribe, will on no account be readmitted into the community. If she comes back and stays with her parents or previous husband the whole family will be shut out of the caste. The family, thus ex-communicated, will not be readmitted till the ex-communicated girl is driven out from the family.
- (b) If Oraon boy marries a girl belonging to another caste or tribe, the boy and his family will be ex-communicated till the boy abandons the girl. When the girl goes away, the boy and his family are readmitted on undergoing the purificatory ceremony.
- (c) If an Oraon boy marries a girl of his own clan the boy is excommunicated. Only after dissolution of the marriage the boy is readmitted to the tribe.
- (d) The amounts of bride-price and other presentation at the time of different types of marriages were fixed as follows:-
 - (i) For marriage by negotiation and polygamous marriage the payment of bride-price was to Rs. 7.00 in cash, three pieces of cloth (18' X 6' in size each) and Re. 0.25 for the bride's girl friends of her village.
 - (ii) In case of marriage between a man having children and a widow who had issues by the deceased husband, the bride price was fixed at Rs.3.00 in cash, two pieces of cloth and Re. 0.12 for the girls of the widow's village.
- (e) For violation of food taboos in relation to other castes and tribe, punishment in shape of excommunication was prescribed.
- (f) For readmitting a person excommunicated for violation of tribal endogamy and food taboos the offender had to pay Rs. 250.00 towards the purificatory rites which included a communal feast.
- (g) For readmitting a person excommunicated for marriage within the own clan, Rs.360.00 would be charged on the offender for the purificatory ceremony.

- (h) The use of immoderate quantity of alcoholic drink freely during communal gatherings to celebrate religious or other ceremonies was banned.
- (i) Regular dancing and singing were also restricted to festive occasions.
- (j) As most of them are illiterate all were persuaded to send their children to the nearby school.

Besides the reformatory measures, the *Parha* organization, organized general meetings to discuss the various problems arising under the changed circumstances. On such occasions the leaders appealed to their tribesmen to refrain from the degrading practices without being lured by the Christian Missionaries. They also appealed for regaining tribal solidarity which they had been enjoying earlier to achieve progress and prosperity. Influential Oraon leaders from different parts of Sundargarh district were also invited to several meetings of tribesmen in the neighbouring States of Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. In such meetings their leaders appealed to their tribesmen to boycott the Christian Missionaries and to get united to retain the past glory.

The organized *Parha* Panchayat, later on, becomes functionless. The powerful *Gauntia* at the level of village administration was also stripped of his powers after the introduction of the statutory Grama Panchayat system in 1955. Among the Oraons the village priest known as *Naega* and his assistant *Phulsuari* (in some localities only) still continue to officiate in whatever ceremonies of aboriginal origin they have so far retained. The tribal Panchayat at the village level consists of informal leaders from each ward, if there are several wards in the village. These informal leaders are generally the representatives of the village on the statutory Panchayat. They are kinsmen of the ex-*Gauntia* or of the village - *Mati* (shaman), or of the educated persons. There is also institution of traditional *Kartah* to officiate in the ceremony for re-admitting the excommunicated Oraon. These influential persons and the village elders are responsible for the social control of the tribe at the village level.

In spite of the gradual decline of its powers through modern influences the informal tribal council still administers justice in case of breaches of tribal usages and customs, and organizes the communal rites and festivals.

PARENGA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Parenga is believed to be a sub-tribe of Gadaba of the Munda group. They are inhabitants of undivided Koraput district of Odisha. They are largely concentrated in Padwa area of Koraput Sadar Sub-division. They are synonymous with Parenga Paroja. According to 2011 census their population is 9445 with sex ratio of 1084. Their literacy rate is 32.78 %. The Parenga speak a dialect of their own called *Parenga bhasa* which belongs to the Munda family of languages. Besides they speak Odia and Telugu.

Parenga are settled cultivators and wage earners. Their livelihood is supplemented by seasonal forest collections. Their staple food is *ragi* and maize. Occasionally they take rice. They also eat non-vegetarian items and are habituated to alcoholic drinks and smoking tobacco.

They are divided into a number of exogamous totemic clans viz. Antal (cobra), Khara (sun), Khilla (tiger), Pangi (vulture), Khinbudi (bear), Machha (fish) and Golari (serpent) etc.

Parenga family is nuclear, patrilocal, patrilineal and patripotestal. Sororate, junior levirate and cross-cousin marriages are prevalent among them. Marriage by negotiation (Raibadi) is considered ideal and prestigious. Marriage by capture, elopement, exchange and by service is in vogue. Family is monogamous and remarriage of widow and widower and divorcee are allowed. Bride price costing around Rs.2000/- includes a goat or a sheep, rice beer and food grains. Divorcee is approved by the traditional council of the village elders.

A pregnant woman is attended by a mid-wife (*Sutrani*) belonging to Dom community during childbirth. Birth pollution is observed for seven days and on the

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10th day name giving ceremony is observed. The first hair cutting is performed after one year. They have puberty rites. The first menstruating girl remains in seclusion for seven days. The Parenga practise both cremation and burial. Dom musicians beat the drum when the corpse is carried to the burial ground. They observe death pollution for 5 days. Their priest, Disari officiates in the rituals and a feast is given to the villagers, kith and kin on the 5th day. They perform the annual *Barsikia* or *Badkum* rites and like the Gadaba conduct *Gottar* rites for the deceased.

Besides their own deities like *Nissani*, *Nangseri*, *Budha Bhairab* and *Mangal Pura* they worship different Hindu Gods and Goddesses, visit Hindu temples and observe Hindu festivals. They observe *Pus Parab*, *Chaita Parab*, *Bandapana*, *Ammu* (new mango eating) with dance and music.

Naik is the traditional village headman. He is assisted by a *Challan* or *Barik* belonging to scheduled caste community. *Disari* and *Sisa*, the ritual functionaries also assist the *Naik* in managing the village affairs. The regional head is called *Bhata Naik*.

The institution of youth dormitory was in functional form. Now it is dwindling. However, they have preserved their rich tradition of dance and music. Their popular dance forms are *Dhemsā*, *Ghumura*, *Gottar* and *Lathidudia* performed on various festive occasions.

PARENGA *

*Gopinath Satpathy*¹

Mr. Thurston has treated the Parengas as a subdivision of Gadaba. Mr. Bell has dealt it as a distinct principal tribe of Munda group. It is ascertained from the areas near Padwa in Koraput district that there are certain similarities among the Parengas and the Gadabas but they are different tribes. In the list of scheduled tribes of Odisha they have been mentioned separately.

They are mainly concentrated in the undivided district of Koraput. The district wise population is noted below:-

Name of the district	Number of males	Number of females	Total population
1. Koraput	3,262	3,440	6,702
2. Keonjhar	40	43	83
3. Mayurbhanj	14	2	16
	3,316	3,485	6,801

Their total population is 6,801 of which 6,800 live in rural areas.

They have a tribal language of their own. Some authorities identify their language with that of Gadabas. Prof. Ramamurti has pronounced their language to be very closely akin to that of Savaras of Parlakimedi Maliahs. They opine that their language is known as Parenga bhasa, which Gadabas may not follow properly. Some of the Parengas can understand and speak local Oriya.

They are divided into two endogamous sections known as Kholei, and Parenga. They have a number of exogamous septs as sun, beer, tiger, etc. The septs are totemistic in nature.

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Their families are nuclear, patrilineal, patrilocal and patripotestal. The village is a socio-economic unit. The festivities are observed in the village communally, they go to hunt together. All the villagers join in dance and music. Social observances like birth and death are communal affairs, where all the villagers participate.

They have youth organisations. Boys of 8 years and above live in the dormitory till they married. At certain places, dormitory houses for girls are seen but in most of the places, they sleep in a widow's house having no separate house for them.

The birth pollution is observed for 7 days. The name giving ceremony is held on 10th day, the name being selected by Dissari by divination. The birth day is taken into consideration in selecting the name. The hair-cutting ceremony is observed after one year, on a day suitable to them and the maternal uncle shaves the child. The hair is thrown outside. Ears and nose are pierced on a day convenient to them. They believe, unless the ears and nose are perforated, they will not be considered as Parengas by their deities.

When the boy has moustaches, they consider him as adult and arrange marriage for him. Both adult and child marriage are in vogue. The Disari is consulted in the selection of bride, in fixing up the time to proceed for negotiation, and for settling the date of marriage. The Disari officiates as the priest for the marriage. Bride price in the form of cow, bullock, are usually paid. Recently, they have developed the payment of money in place of cow, etc., at a certain localities. The Chalan goes to bring the bride. They also adopt marriage by elopement, marriage by capture. Very often the married women go with other unmarried person, leaving her first husband and in this occasion Sagarta is demanded. Polygyny is prevalent. An individual may marry his deceased elder brother's wife.

Death pollution is observed for 5 days. In the 3rd day, they are shaved, and perform *Pita* ceremony. On the 5th day, a feast is given to villagers. After a year, they perform *Badkam* and all are invited to this occasion and are given drink and food. The Gottar ceremony is observed like the Gadabas. A he buffalo for each deceased male, a she buffalo for each deceased female are killed on this occasion. They practise both burial and cremation and in either case the male corpse is laid with head to the West and the female with the head to the East.

They observe Push Parab in Pusha, Nandinacha or Punia in Magh, Amma and Chait Parab in Chaitra, Asa Parab in Asadh, Amus in Sraban, New rice eating ceremony in Bhadrab, Dasara in Asin, Khala Puja in Magusir. New crops are dedicated to ancestor, spirits and Gods, before they are used by them. The most important festival is Chait Parab, which is observed for 10 days. On the 1st day, they sacrifice a goat, two fowls at their village deity. At evening they cook rice, fish independently at their houses and feast. On the 2nd day, they clear

a spot on the road with cow dung. Two fowls are sacrificed one for road worship and the other for ancestor worship at their homes. For the following days up to 8th day, they join in dance and song. They drink excessively and enjoy the occasion. On the 9th day, they sacrifice goat, fowl, and pig before village deity. Their hunting implements are kept before the Goddess and are worshipped. The village priest officiates on this occasion. On the next day, they go to the jungle after offering two or three fowl to hill and forest Gods. All hunt in the forest for a number of days and return with grand success.

In the month of Sraban they observe Amus, when they kill a cow or bullock in a temple. They join in a feast and dance in joy.

They are very fond of dance and music. On the arrival of an outsider, they express their eagerness to dance if some amount is given to them to arrange the Mahuria. The important dances are Dhemsha Nach, Gotar Nach and Ghumura Nach. In Gotar Nach, all will dance with swords and sticks. In Ghumura Nach flute, *gini* and *thal* are used. Dudunga Nach is not so widely practised as with Parajas and Gadabas.

They sing songs known as *kindri gita* in Chaita Parab, which seems to be borrowed from Oriya songs. The specimen for such song is given below:-

“Gad Kandi Kandi Kanta Bausa
Babu Kale Kalikate
Chaita Masar Kinderigita
Gouteba gote gote.
Ga ga Mor ga Kertan Ga Teba Suni Dekhu
Tumari Amari Ekant Tile
Pade Pade gai Dekhu
Gaileru babu, Chhank Thibu, Nohile Garahu
Jibu- Chaita Parb Mangalbar.”

Their *gotar* songs are very thrilling and suit to the situation. Similarly they have Biha songs at the time of marriage.

Their houses are very small in structure having two rooms. The out room is used for kitchen and sleeping purposes. The inner chamber is the seat of their ancestors, and they store everything in it. The houses are thatched with leaves of forest plant and grass. It is too low and the thatch seems to veil the entire house. The walls are made of wattles plastered with clay. The walls are painted. The verandas are spacious, where they perform their daily activities. The houses are clustered at places in the village.

The household equipments consist of earthen pots, gourds, leaf umbrellas and *kutuni* etc. With a certain family's brass plate, cups, jars and

aluminium utensils are found. Their females wear hand-made sarees. Their original cloth made of *kerang* fibre is similar to that of Gadaba, but is striped on a white or dingy white background, while, the Gadaba cloth is broadly striped in various colours. This traditional *kerang* dress is not in full use and most of them dislike to wear it now. The males wear hand-made and mill-made cloth, napkin while going out; but their daily dress is a piece of *kaupini*. Shirts, banyan are also used by well-to-do and advanced members of the society. Their musical instruments are Drum, Tamak, Ghumura, Mardal, Gini, Thal and Flute. Mardal, Gini and Thals are purchased. They make their own agricultural implements like plough, yoke, ploughshare, *ankudi*, spade and digging stick.

Their main occupation is agriculture. They practise both shifting and wet cultivation but they depend mostly on shifting cultivation. Lands are changed year wise, as there are no more big trees. Collection of forest products like edible roots, fruits are often resorted to. Fishing is practised. Hunting is made at times.

They eat rice, *ragi*, *suan*, sweet potato, pulses, maize and types of grams which they produce in their field. Salt and clothes are purchased either payment in cash or in kind. They take the meat of all animals. Beef, pork, fowl, meat mutton are very much relished. Liquors of various types are daily taken by them. Rice beer, Mahul beer, Ragi beer, Date palm beer are few of them. Their staple food is maize and *ragi* as the paddy goes for a very limited period. Mango kernels, *mahul* flowers manage them for a certain part of the year.

They are mostly exploited for their illiteracy. Interests at a very high rate are realised from them by the money-lenders and business-men at the time of recovery. They charge at the rate of 50 per cent as interest. They are duped by the traders of clothes and salt. They do not know the use of metric system and as a result of this they are mostly cheated.

They are illiterate and looked down upon by the neighbouring castes. They are the worst sufferers and deserve special attention for their upliftment.

P A R E N G A *

*J. P. Rout*¹

The Parenga are a sub-division of the Gadaba, a colourful tribe of Koraput district. Mr. Bell considers this community to be a distinct principal tribe of the Munda group. Though in their social traits and characteristics the Parenga have a lot in common with the Gadabas, local enquiries revealed that they are two separate tribes and that it would be a mistake to regard them as one and the same tribe. The origin of the tribe is concealed in obscurity. In spite of local enquiries and fieldwork, it was not possible to obtain any legend or tradition regarding their origins or migrations. They have no subdivisions, but they are divided into two endogamous sections known as Kholei and Parenga. They have a number of exogamous clans as sun, bear, tiger, etc. The septs are totemic in nature.

The Parenga are mainly inhabitants of Koraput District and are concentrated in the Padwa area of Koraput subdivision. Their total population was 5 843 in 1991, in comparison to 9623 in 1981 census. Therefore, they had a negative growth rate of 39.27 per cent during the period 1981-91. The percentage of literacy was 14.66 in 1991 as against 11.50 in 1981. The sex ratio is 937 females per 1000 males. They have a language of their own. Some social scientists and linguists identify their language with that of the Gadaba. The Parenga speak a Munda language, and according to Professor Ramamurti, their language closely resembles that of the Savara of the Parlakhemundi Maliahs. They say that their language is known among themselves as *parenga bhasa*. Some Parenga can understand and speak Oriya, but most of them can speak Telugu.

Parenga families are nuclear, patrilineal, patrilocal and patripotestal. The village acts as an independent socio-economic unit. The festivals are observed in the village communally. They are expert hunters and all the villagers join in

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¹ Deputy Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

hunting together. Social observances like birth and death are communal affairs in which everyone participates.

The headman of the tribe at the village level is called the Naik. The Naik had traditionally been given a high place in Parenga society, as he was the agent of the Zamindar at the village level for the collection of land revenue. He is also responsible for the maintenance of law and order. The Challan, who belongs to a Scheduled Caste community in the village, assists him in the day-to-day affairs of the village. All disputes arising out of divorce, marriage and other social constraints are referred to the Naik, who seldom seeks advice from elderly persons to settle matters. The regional head is called the Bhata Naik.

Unnatural deaths from tiger bites, falls from trees, burning or drowning are held to be the consequences of serious crime by the society. The members of the household in such cases are outcasted. They are accepted into the caste and their normal social inter-course is restored only when they undergo penance. If anyone marries a Gadaba, Jhodia or Khond girl he is also outcasted. Such matters are usually referred to the Naik.

Previously they had dormitory houses separately for the boys and the girls. But now-a-days, these youth organizations are absent in most of the villages. Boys above eight years old visit the dormitory house in the evening and sleep there. The girls also visit dormitories, but they sleep in a widow's house where there is no dormitory house for them.

Pregnant women are forbidden from taking intoxicating liquor in any form. She is also forbidden from taking rice gruel, the flesh of wild boars, jackfruits or pumpkins. The bedroom is usually set apart for the delivery. Generally the old women assist the parturient woman in delivery, but only one, the most experienced woman of the tribe, is present in the lying-in room. She cuts the umbilical cord with a knife or blade. The mother of the newborn buries it beside a fence with the placenta. The child is anointed with oil and turmeric paste and bathed after the birth. Birth pollution is observed for seven days. The name-giving ceremony is observed on the tenth day, and the name given to the child is selected by the Disari. Generally, the child is named after the name of the day on which it was born. The hair-cutting ceremony is observed after one year on a fixed day convenient to the family. The maternal uncle shaves the child on that day and the hair is thrown outside. On both the Handidharni and name-giving days, either a goat or fowl is killed, according to capacity, for a feast in the household. Segregation is observed for the girl attaining puberty till the menstrual flow stops. At the end of the period she is taken to the nearest stream or river for a bath, where the Disari also performs some rituals.

Marriage within the same clan is forbidden. Adult marriages are common, and cases of child marriage rare. A man can marry the daughter of his father's sister. But wedding with the cousin-sister (father's brother's daughter) is

strictly forbidden. Divorcees and widows are allowed to remarry with the approval of the society. In some cases a widow can remarry her deceased husband's younger brother. Among the Parenga marriages occur through negotiation and capture. Most marriages are settled by negotiation, called Raibadi. In marriages by capture the young men of the tribe called Dhangadas bring a girl by force to the house of one of their mates, whose choice is she. But in the case of marriage by consent, boys and girls elope for a day or two and then return for the ceremony to be solemnised.

Marriage formally takes place in the house of the boy. A feast is arranged at the girl's house with contributions from both sides. A platform is made under a shed which has five supporting posts of mango and *jamo* wood. Near each post is arranged a pillar of earthenware pots. The girl is asked to move round the central post thrice. She is then taken into the house to wear a new sari. After this, with the accompaniment of her girl friends, she joins the return procession to the boy's house.

Unmarried boys and girls of the tribe sleep in separate dormitories although in the villages nowadays the dormitory system is disappearing fast. The old people of the village say that the girls' dormitory is kept in charge of an elderly woman, while an old man remains in charge of the boys' dormitory. Here they learn songs and dances, and in the course of the communal dances, the boys have an opportunity to select their partners. Boys after marriage continue to stay with their parents. Partition occurs only when they have children and the size of the family becomes very large. Even after partition the system of joint cultivation of land continues.

The deceased are disposed of both by burial and cremation. Those dying of smallpox are buried. The body of an expectant woman is disposed of by cremation. Death pollution is observed for five days. On the third day they are shaved and perform the Pita ceremony. On the fifth day a feast is given to the villagers. After one year they perform Barsikia or Badakam, and everyone is invited to this occasion and given drink and food. Like the Gadaba they perform the Gottar ceremony, killing a he-buffalo for each deceased male and a she-buffalo for each deceased female. In both burial and cremation a male corpse is laid with its head to the west and a female corpse with its head to the east.

Parenga houses lie in irregular clusters and no systematic pattern appears to guide their method of settlement. The houses are small and mostly have two rooms, one the bedroom and the other the store. The house has a single door and no windows. A wide verandah is provided at the front. The walls are made of split bamboos and wattles plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with straw. The Disari is consulted to fix an auspicious day for laying the foundations of a house.

The Parenga do not dress themselves very significantly. But the old people in Parenga villages say that previously they used to prepare their own cloth called *kerang*. Such practices have disappeared long since. There is no specific reason for it except that the influence of outside culture might have induced the Parenga to give it up. Now they wear hand-woven and mill-made coarse *dhotis* and saris. Many of the males also wear shirts and *banyans*. Parenga women wear ornaments made of brass and nickel. Some women wear gold ornaments. Their wrists are adorned with silver *khadu*, glass bangles and *gendu*. Use of anklets called *khadu*, once so popular among the women, have been given up. The men wear gold rings in their nose and ears and silver rings on their fingers. Some wear small *mali* on their necks. Castor and *kusum* oil are used for the hair. They do not tattoo their limbs.

The Parengas' staple food is maize and *ragi*, but they also eat rice for a limited period. Salt are purchased either by payment in cash or in kind. They eat beef, pork and fowl. Liquor of various types is usually drunk daily by the Parenga. Agriculture is the mainstay of their economy. Most of them practise shifting cultivation. Wet or settled agriculture is limited to those having some land. They supplement their income from land through forest collection and wages. They grow vegetables like brinjals, pumpkins, tomatoes, etc. in their kitchen gardens and sell these in the nearby weekly markets.

Of their main festivals, mention may be made of Pus Punei, Chait Parab and Bandapana. On the day of Pus Punei, they take great care of their cattle, washing them and anointing them with turmeric paste. A grand feast is arranged in the village for everyone, and good food is also given to the animals. In Chait Parab they worship Nangseri, on which goats and fowls are sacrificed to the deity. The festival continues for eight to ten days, and during this time they pursue communal hunting in the nearby forest. This is also the occasion for eating the mango fruit for the first time. Bandapana, which is observed in Sravana, is the occasion for taking the *gour* twigs for the first time.

The Parenga are great lovers of songs and dancing. They use drums, *tamaka*, *ghumra* and flutes while performing dances. The *dhemsa* dance is performed in Chait Parab and *lathidudia* during Pus Parab. In performing the *dhemsa* dance, a large number of women stand in a circle holding each other's hands and dancing in a rhythm to the accompaniment of music. Other types of dance, such as *gottar* and *ghumura*, are also performed. In *gottar* they use swords and sticks while dancing.

PARENGA *

A. B. Ota ¹

P. Patel ²

B. K. Paikaray ³

IDENTITY

The Parenga is numerically a small and little known tribe of Odisha, mainly concentrated in Nandapur and Lamptaput area of Koraput district and are sparsely distributed in Malkangiri, Kalahandi, Sundargarh and Bolangir districts. They claim to be the autochthones of their habitat. According to their annals, they were referred to as *Kerang Poroja* by their neighbouring communities during distant past as they used to wear apparels made of *Kerang* fibres, for which the name of the community has subsequently been changed into *Pareng Poroja* and lastly as *Parenga*. The term *Poroja* is conglomeration of several endogamous communities and Parenga is one among them. The epithet *Parenga* in local tongue Odia denotes *rayats*, signifying a class of people, who during distant past had their distinct existence as persons ruled by the then monarch of the kingdom. According to Thurston (1909) the Parenga are a section of Gadava while R.C.S. Bell opined them as a branch of Bondo or Didayi.

The Parengas have Proto-Australoid origin. Linguistically, they belong to Austro-Asiatic group and speak *Gorum*- a Munda language as their mother tongue. It is a non literary dialect of proto Munda family of languages belonging to South Munda branch. Some linguists identify their language with that of the

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Gadaba. According to Prof. Ramamurti, their language closely resembles that of the Savaras of Parlakhemundi. Some Parengas can understand and speak Odia but most of them can speak Telugu and Desia.

Population & Literacy :

As per 2011 census their population, in the State is 9445 among whom, 4532 are males and 4913 are females. The sex ratio is 1084 females per 1000 males. Their level of literacy is 32.78 percent of which male literacy is 46.95 percent and female literacy is 20.09 percent.

Personal Adornments:

Dressing pattern of Parenga is very simple and is devoid of any distinctive cultural marks to distinguish them from other communities. As they like to live in isolation in remote area in early days, they struggle hard for their survival and subsisted by food gathering only. Their dress pattern was influenced accordingly to the barest minimum. At that time they used to wear only a short loin cloth made out of *Kereng* fibers to conceal their pubic regions only for which they acquired the nomenclature of *Parenga*. The old persons in Parenga villages often say that previously they used to prepare their own cloth called *kerang*. Such practices have gradually disappeared in course of time.

Traditionally, in their day to day life, the Parenga men wear loin clothes and their women wear a short piece of hand woven coarse cloth around their waist, leaving the upper parts of the body fully uncovered.

Presently, the trend of modernity has been reflected in their personal appearance. Now their males wear *dhoti*, *lungi*, pants, shirts, banyan etc. and females wear printed and coloured *sarees* with *saya* and blouse etc coping with the modern fashion.

Like all women, the Parenga women to enhance their beauty and charm adorn themselves with varieties of ornaments. They wear *jhuntia* (toe ring) in their leg fingers, *pati*, *pailu* and *goda khadu* in their ankle, *antadar* (waist band) around their waist, *tinki mudi* (finger rings) in their fingers, glass and brass bangles, *gajul*, *gendukadhi* and *kakhan* in their wrists, *bandaria*, *katuria*, *kalturi* and *baju* on their arms, *khagala*, *nan*, *kiprimali*, *sadhasora*, *dhanmali*, *sadhamali*, *kaliyamali* and bead necklaces-*gunjumali* made of tropical bamboo or clumsy wood around their neck. They also wear *khanja*, *kanjaluli*, *hirabauli*, *julupi* and *nadiamodi* on their earlobes and *tamatilu* in their ear helix, *dandi*, *asguna*, *nat*, *mudi* and *labangakadi* in their nose septum and *khosojka*, *chipna* and *dimsuja* on their hair bun and also decorate it with seasonal wild blossoms to look beautiful and attractive. Usually their ornaments are made of gold, brass, copper, nickel, silver, aluminum, beads, glass or herbal seeds and are available in their local markets. Tattooing was an old fashion, done by experienced women of their own community which has been discarded by young girls now-a-days.

Men wear gold rings in their nose and ears and silver rings in their fingers. Some males wear small *malis* around their necks. They use castor and jasmine oil on hair.

HABITAT, SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

The undivided Koraput District - the homeland of the Parengas, is a mini tribal Odisha. Lying above 3000' plateau, it has picturesque natural scenery with rolling mountains, meadows, roaring rivers, rapid waterfalls, water reservoirs, lakes, valleys and primitive and colourful tribal inhabitants. People here enjoy varieties of living in different seasons with its misty morning of the monsoon months, golden autumn, severe winter, thrilling spring and mild summer. The region has the largest tribal concentration. The geographical location still keeps this territory isolated from the coastal areas although these areas are fast opening to the outside world with development of communication facilities. One enters the elevating *ghat* roads spirally ascending the lofty hills and descending the steep valleys passing through many sophisticated railway tunnels through high range mountains touching different tourist spots of interest en-route.

The Parenga habitat is generally located amidst irregular topography with amazing landscapes of the Konda Kamberu mountain ranges of the great Eastern Ghats situated at about 3000 feet above the sea level, surrounded by lush green vegetation of deep forest. It has an intimate interface with life sustaining bountiful nature, found in hills and dales, rapids that swirl in the valleys of Koraput. It extends to the adjoining states of Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh in the districts of Vishakhapatnam and Bastar respectively.

In typical Parenga settlements, their houses are scattered in irregular clusters scattered here and there. Some ethnic deities are found settled in the middle of the village. At the center of the village, lies the community meeting place called *sadar* marked by laying of flat stone slabs for sitting. The dancing arena is located near the *sadar*, where ethnic dances are performed on different socio-religious occasions.

The Parenga houses are small and mostly have two rooms; one is the bedroom and other is the store. The house is built by using clay, mud for the wall and straw or a wild grass (*piri*) for the roof. The inner room i.e., the store room where material belongings are kept is the sanctum where the family deity is worshiped. Nobody except the clan members is allowed to enter the room. The house has a single door and no windows for ventilation. A wide verandah is provided at the front. The walls are made of split bamboos and wattles plastered with mud. The roof is thatched with straw. The domestic animals are sheltered in a shed lying close to the house. The Disari (the village priest) is consulted to fix an auspicious day for laying the foundation of the house.

SOCIAL LIFE

Parenga is an endogamous community which is divided into two sub groups namely as *vaishya* and *putuli* which are sub divided into various exogamous clans (*bansa*) that regulate their sex and marriage. As all the members of a particular *bansa* are regarded as siblings no marriage among them is allowed. The clans, which are of equal status, are totemistic and are named after various animals and natural objects such as *khila* (tiger), *khinbudi* (bear), *khora / surya* (sun), *ontal* (cobra), *golari/ hanu* (monkey), *pangi* (vulture), *kankara* (crab), *machha* (fish), *pujari* and *sis*a etc. they suffix their clan names after their first name, as their surname. They also use Majhi and Muduli as their surname.

Parenga families are nuclear, patrilocal and patrilineal in structure. Vertically extended families or joint families are found in rare cases. Inheritance of ancestral property follows the rule of equigeniture in male line only. In cases, where the family having no male successor, the daughters can inherit the parental property. Issueless families may adopt a male child from among the nearest patri-lineage, who can inherit the adopted father's office, title as well as property. In Parenga family the juniors respect the seniors. Relationships between the family members are very cordial.

LIFE CYCLE

Pregnancy:

After the seventh month of pregnancy of a woman, first her paternal family presents her delicious sweet meats according to her desire. It is followed by their lineage members and other relatives. During the 9th month of pregnancy, they observe the pre-delivery ritual *gotabangaba* conducted by their magico-religious specialist Sisa and his female counterpart Gurumai to appease the malevolent deities Sani and Kamini to avert ill omens that might harm the foetus and the mother by offering vermilion, *ragi* powder, *mohua* liquor, egg and a fowl. The expectant mother is imposed with certain taboos like not to eat the meat of the ritually sacrificed animal, take alcoholic drinks, consume hard food stuffs which can affect digestive system, stomach and intestine, sleep alone, travel in darkness, visit cremation ground, expose during lunar or solar eclipses etc. She is also forbidden to take intoxicating drinks in any form, rice gruel, and flesh of wild boars, jackfruits and pumpkins. A pregnant woman has to perform all her routine activities except hard work right up to the day of delivery.

Child birth:

The birth of a child is usually arranged in a separate hut or in a confined enclosure, specifically constructed in their rear verandah or backside of their living room to be used as lying in chamber. They engage an experienced woman as midwife (*sutrani*) from Dom, Gadaba or Jhodia community to help for easy and safe delivery of the baby. The most experienced woman of the village also

remains present in the laying-in-room. The umbilical cord is cut off using a broken piece of earthen ware (*jhikirakati*) or by a knife or blade by the midwife and the placenta (*pou*) is buried in the backyard of the house near the fence, keeping it in an earthen pot covered by a lid. The baby is anointed with oil and turmeric paste and bathed after birth.

Birth pollution continues for five days (*chhutakl purudu*) and during this period the mother cannot enter into the kitchen. On the fifth day they observe the purificatory rite *handi dharani*. They also observe name giving ceremony on the same day or on the tenth day conducted by their priest Disari and the new born baby is given a name according to the name of the week he/she has taken birth. They observe the first cereal eating of the baby after sixth month of the baby and the tonsure (*balutarani*) ceremony when the baby attains one year of age. Ear piercing ceremony (*kanbida*) and nose piercing (*nakbida*) rites are held for the baby after he/she attains five years of age.

Puberty rite:

Parenga observe puberty rites for their adolescent girls, on onset of her first menarche. The girl is segregated for a period of seven to nine days in an isolated room and is looked after by an experienced elderly woman. During her seclusion, she is prohibited to look or be looked at by any male person. An earthen lamp is kept burning un-interruptedly in the seclusion room during her period of confinement. She also is imposed certain restrictions regarding brushing her teeth, using utensils for her dining and sleeping on earthen floor. After the pollution period is over she takes purificatory bath at the early dawn, in the nearby hill stream accompanied by her girl friends, anointing her body with turmeric paste and Kusum oil and disposes all her used clothes there and wears new clothes presented by her family. When she approaches home, their Disari pours a pitcher full of holy water over her head and scarifies a pig or a fowl for the girl after which the cleansing rite is over. Then her maternal uncle presents her new clothes and some cosmetics. In the evening the family hosts a non-vegetarian feast to lineage members and guests along with country liquor.

Marriage:

The Parenga follow the rule of community endogamy and clan exogamy. In their society adult marriage and monogamy are the norm, but instances of polygyny are rare but allowed where the first wife is found to be a barren. Child marriage was a past tradition. Residence after marriage is patrilocal.

Modes of acquiring mates includes *mangani biha* (marriage by negotiation), *udia* (marriage by elopement), *jhika* (marriage by capture), *bada* or *badal kaniya* (marriage by exchange), *rajiruja* (love marriage by mutual consent) and by *dhuka* (marriage by intrusion) and *ghar juian* (marriage by service).

They consider marriage, arranged through negotiation called the *mangani biha* or *raibadi*, as ideal and prestigious mode of acquiring a spouse. The groom's parents take initiatives to find a suitable bride for their son. They engage a mediator for the purpose. After selection of the bride, the groom's parents proceed to the bride's house to put forth the proposal. They take with them a jar of country liquor *mohuli* as present. If it is accepted by the bride's parents, then the proposal is considered to be accepted. The marriage is settled after both sides exchange several visits.

Payment of bride price *jholla/ jola* is obligatory and is settled during the process of negotiation. It is paid both in cash and kind consisting of dresses for the bride, a saree for the bride's mother (*guhaluga*), a cloth for the bride's mother's brother (*mamumada*), a ring for the bride (*chinamudii*), bead necklaces, vermilion and eye liner *kajal*, goats, sheep, rice beer (*chauli*), a fowl for girl's friends (*chinaluchm*). The bride is escorted to marriage pendal prepared in her paternal house in a procession accompanied by her parents and female companions, lineage members and guests, singing their wedding folk songs to the tune of melody provided by their drum beaters. The wedding rites are conducted there.

First, they observe the *lagini* rite in the auspicious moment as prescribed by the Disari. The women assembled there ritually bathe the groom and the bride anointing them with turmeric paste and oil. Then the bride and groom proceed to the marriage alter wearing their wedding costume and the crown made of mango twigs.

Their traditional priest Disari officiates in the wedding ritual. He performs the rites by chanting hymns and sprinkling holy water over the bridal couple. Then they observe the *biribhat khiani* rite in a room, where a special dish prepared by mixing *aru* rice with black gram is served to the couple. The groom and the bride enjoy it by feeding each other. All the men present there rush there to have a share of the ritual dish. After that they observe the *kada handi* rite in which all the guests smear clay on each other's face and make merry. Then they proceed to the nearest hill stream take bath and return. They are entertained with a sumptuous non vegetarian wedding feast accompanied by drinks of country liquor.

The newlywed couple stays in their in-law's house waiting for the auspicious moment as prescribed by the Disari to return to the patrilocal residence of the groom. The marriage is consummated in groom's home on the day fixed by the Disari.

Junior levirate, junior sororate and cross cousin marriages are allowed in their society, but not the parallel cousin marriage. A man can marry his father's sister's daughter or mother's brother's daughter but not his father's brother's daughter or mother's sister's daughter.

Similarly widows, widowers and divorcees are allowed to remarry. Divorce is allowed and either party can seek divorce on the ground of maladjustment in conjugal life, misbehavior, cruelty, poor maintenance, extra marital relationship, alcoholism and suffering from incurable diseases etc. The traditional community council decides the cases of divorce. If the divorced woman remarries another man then the second husband has to refund the bride price to her first husband which is called *sagarta*. In some cases the widow can remarry her deceased husband's younger brother.

Death Rites:

The Parengas practise both cremation and burial to dispose of their dead. Dead body of small children and small pox victims are buried but in case of unnatural deaths occurred due to falling from tree, snake bite, tiger attack, child birth or suicide, their corpses are tabooed to be disposed of in their crematoria and for that purpose they bury these dead bodies in an isolated place inside the forest, as they think that deceased's souls might become an evil spirit and can do harm to villagers. The body of an expectant woman is disposed of by cremation.

After the death of a person, the news (*mad a bartani*) is communicated the villagers and to all the relatives who after being informed congregate in the house of the deceased to take part in the crematory/burial rites. The corpse is placed in the court ward, keeping its head towards north and face upwards. It is bathed, anointed with turmeric paste mixed with oil and clad by a white cloth. The lineage members make a bier (*dangla*) using seven *sal* poles tied by *siali* fibers. The pallbearers (*maradandia*) carry the corpse to the crematoria and the Dom musicians play the music by beating drum in front of the procession, followed by the eldest son of the deceased who carries fire in an earthen pot to ignite the pyre. After disposal of the dead, they take bath in the nearest hill stream and return to the deceased's house, where they take mango barks with water (*pitachaba*) for purification.

Death pollution continues for ten days. During the pollution period, observance of rituals and festivals, visiting the deities, offering oblations, giving alms to beggars, relishing non vegetarian items, using oil and sexual union etc. are strictly tabooed.

They observe the first purificatory rite *pitabad* on the third day in which the pallbearers, the clan members along with the Disari visit the crematoria in dark night, where they sacrifice a fowl and offer cooked rice and chicken along with country wine in a leaf plate to the departed soul and eat it there.

The final purificatory rite *badbud* is observed on the tenth day near their bathing *ghat* where the lineage male members cut their hair, shave the beards and females pair off their nails. Then they take the purificatory bath and wear new clothes, provided by the bereaved family and dispose of their used clothes there. They also throw away all their used earthen wares and clean their home

with cow dung water. In the evening the bereaved family hosts a non vegetarian feast to all the villagers, guests, relatives and lineage members along with country liquor.

They have no tradition for construction of monument on the memory of the departed soul nor for conducting the annual *sraddha* rite for the deceased. However, on an auspicious occasion, they immerse the bones of the dead in holy water for salvation of the deceased soul.

LIVELIHOOD

Cultivation is mainstay of their subsistence economy which they supplement with allied pursuits, such as shifting cultivation, share cropping, wage earning both in agriculture and industrial sectors, livestock rearing, seasonal forest collection, fishing, rope making and *khali* stitching etc.

Most of them practice shifting cultivation. Wet and settled agriculture is limited to those having some land. They supplement their income from land through forest collection and wage earning for which some of them temporarily migrate to work in major projects which are executed in the area. They grow vegetables like brinjal, pumpkin, tomato etc in their kitchen gardens and sell these things in the nearby weekly markets. They visit weekly markets and towns and at the same time they dispose of their produce at the door steps of the visiting Dom traders. Children start working right from the age of nine to ten years. No bonded labour is found among them.

They are settled agriculturalists and practice cultivation in whatever quantity of land they own privately. They have small patches of wet lands, located near foot hills which are irrigated by perennial hill streams. In the wet lands they produce their major crop paddy. In their uplands they usually cultivate *padadhan* (hill paddy), *ragi*, minor millets like *kangu*, *kosla*, pulses such as *kulthi* (horse gram), *biri* (black gram), *dangar rani*, *bodhei* and red gram, *kandul* and maize etc. In their *podu* lands they grow *suan*, *khetjanna*, *janna* and oil seeds like *alsi*, mustard etc. Adjacent to their house, they possess small kitchen garden where they raise *ranikanda*, *langalkanda*, *kumuda* (pumpkin), cucumber (*kakudi*), ridge gourd (*janha*), *lau* (water gourd), snake gourd (*chhachindra*), *ghatu*, *jhudunga* (cow-pea) *semi* / *jhota* (pea), *tendka semi*, *buta semi*, *jabasaru*, *sarukanda*, green leaves and varieties of seasonal vegetables like brinjal, cauliflower, cabbages, radish, tomatoes (*patalghanta*), pumpkin (*kumuda*) and chili etc. Some among them know carpentry and house construction as well as house thatching. They can make and repair agricultural implements, doors and windows.

Parenga women contribute substantially to their family income by participating in cultivation, wage earning and by collection of forest products, such as seasonal fruits, roots, tubers like *pitakanda*, *serenda*, *tarekkanda*, bamboo shoots (*karadi*), green leaves, grasses, fodders, medicinal herbs, fire woods,

varieties of mushrooms, flowers, fibers and bamboo and varieties of seeds both for consumption and extraction of oil for domestic consumption.

Food and drinks:

Parenga are purely non vegetarian. Rice and *ragi* are their staple cereals. They relish on meat, chicken, eggs, fish, dry fish, beef and pork etc. Besides that they also consume different locally produced minor millets like *suan*, *khetjanna*, *janna*, *kangu*, maize, pulses and seasonal vegetables. During lean season, they mainly depend on varieties of roots, shoots, fruits, flowers, green leaves, mushrooms, mango kernel and bamboo *karadi* collected from forest, for their diet and survival.

In past their staple food was maize and *ragi*, but now they have started eating rice as their staple food. Salt is generally purchased by payment either in cash or in kind. Their cooking medium is *olsi* (linseed), mustard and groundnut oil. Whenever they can afford to they consume milk and milk products. Fruits are eaten as per the seasons. Mango is first eaten after the celebration of the *chait parab*, tamarind after *Osa Parab* and rice after *Dasera*.

They are addicted to alcoholic beverages like country liquor -*mohuli*, rice beer (*pendum*), *ragi* beer (*kusuna*), date palm juice toddy and sago palm juice (*salap*) etc. Their favorite alcoholic drinks include *salap* and *pendum*, which they prepare at home or purchase from outside. Both men and women take alcohol. Both males and females are habituated smoking hand rolled cigar (*pikka*, *bidi*) and chewing tobacco paste.

MAGICO-RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & PRACTICES

The Parengas are polytheists. They profess animism with admixture of few elements of Hinduism. Their pantheon includes a number of deities who are natural objects. *Dartani* (goddess earth) is their supreme deity. She and her consort *gudi devta* remain in the sacred grove at the village outskirts.

Hundi and *Nisani* are their village deities. *Mulamunda* / *Pidar* is their household deity, installed in the corner of their kitchen and is worshipped by their women. They also worship deities, such as *budhima*, *mauli*, *gangama* (water deity), *mermind* (rain god), *rangesari*, *patakhanda*, *darturula* (forest god) etc. Besides, they worship many Hindu deities like, Siva, Durga, Ganesh, Jagannath, Laxmi and Hanuman etc. in different festivals. They do not worship their totems. They also make pilgrimage to Puri to worship Lord Jagannath, Bhubaneswar to worship Lingaraj and Lord Gupteswar installed near river Saberi in Baipariguda area of Koraput.

They believe in the existence of spirits and ghosts, out of which some are benevolent and others are malevolent. They are called *duma*, *rakhas*, *pichasuni*, *daini* etc. In order to get rid of those evil spirits, they seek the help of their

traditional witch doctor *sisal* and *uremia* who by conducting their magical practices appeases those evil spirits by offering periodical oblations such as eggs, country wine and by sacrificing fowls etc.

Sacred specialties known as *Disari* and *Sisa* (Priest) officiate in various rituals. The *Sisa* is the village priest who worships the village deity as well as acts as a *shaman* to protect them from the evil spirits and deities. All the important festivals like *Pus Punei*, *Chait Parab*, *Baura*, *Bandapan*, *Osa Parab*, *Dasera*, etc are observed by them in which the *Disari* and the *Sisa* officiates.

Jhakar Yatra is their major festival, which they observe during the month of *chait* and *pond* (*magasur*). Other festivals they observe are *nuakhai* during *phagun*, *amnua* during *chait*, *asadh yatra* during *asadh*, *bandapan* during the month *bandapan* (*sraban*), *dhannua* during *osha* (*bhod*) and *hundi yatra* during the month of *diwali* (*kartik*) etc. Besides that, they also celebrate many Hindu festivals like *raja*, *rath yatra*, *gamha*, *dasera*, *diwali*, *holi*, and *jagar* etc.

On the day of *Pus Punei*, they take great care of their cattle, washing them and anointing them with turmeric paste. A grand feast is also arranged in the village for all and good food is also given to the animals. In *Chait Parab* they worship *Nangseri*, on which goats and fowls are sacrificed to the deity. The festival continues for eight to ten days and during this time they pursue communal hunting in the nearby forest. This is also the occasion for eating the mango fruit for the first time. *Bandapana* which is observed in *Sravana*, is the occasion for taking the gaur twigs for the first time.

They possess rich folk traditions. Their folk songs include *khindiri geet*, *oli geet*, *kemta geet* which they sing while performing *dhemsa nat* during their marriage ceremony. Likewise they sing *salodi geet* and *bent geet* during their communal hunting ceremony. The other folk songs are *tode*, *budia*, *khatani*, sung during de-grassing in their cornfield. The females sing *ninjani geet*, *bali geet*, *tel geet* and *baina geet* etc.

Their folk dances include *kathinat*, *dhemsa*, *uansamunda* and *saimoldi* etc. They use drums, *tamaka*, *ghumra* and flutes while performing dances. They are known for *Chait Parab* songs and *Demsha* dance. Both men and women participate in the dance. The *Dhemsa* dance is performed during the *Chait Parab* and *lathidudia* during *Pus Parab*. In performing the *dhemsa* dance, a large number of women stand in a circle holding each other's hands and dancing in a rhythm to the accompaniment of the music. Other types of dance such as *gottar* and *ghumura* are also performed. In *gottar* they use swords and sticks while dancing. They get the services of the musicians during marriage and death rites and on the occasion of communal dances during celebration of festivals.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Parenga possess their own traditional community council both at the village level as well as at the regional level. Their village council is known as *Panchadi*. It is headed by the secular head - *naik* who is assisted by the sacred specialist - *disari*, the magico-religious specialist - *sisā* and the messenger - *chalan*. The village elders are the members of the council. Their meeting place is called *sadar*. The annual session of the council is held on *chait parab* in the month of *chait*. Their regional community council is called *mutha* and is headed by *mutha naik*, who is assisted by *pujari*-the priest and the *naiks* of member settlements and *barik*-the messenger.

The post of *naik*, *mutha naik*, *disari*, *pujari* and *sisā* are hereditary whereas the *chalan* and *barik* assume their offices through nomination. They are selected from Dom community and get remuneration in kinds from each individual Parenga families of the settlement on annual basis.

Their community council acts as the guardian of their traditional norms and customs and adjudicates cases pertaining to family disputes, theft, rape, premarital pregnancy, incest, molestation, partition of property, separation, divorce, inter village rifts and violation of customary norms etc. It also organizes their feasts and festivals.

Their office bearers are highly esteemed persons and the council is also empowered to punish the offenders or can ostracize for breaking their customary norm and traditions, after judging the gravity of the crime committed by the culprit. The Naik had traditionally been given a high place in Parenga society as he was the agent of the Zamindar at the village level for the collection of land revenue. He was also responsible for the maintenance of law and order.

The Parenga village functions as an independent socio-economic unit. The festivals are observed in the village communally. They are expert hunters and all the villagers join in hunting together. Social observances like birth and death are communal affairs in which everyone participates. Unnatural death from tiger bites, falls from trees, burning or drowning are held to be the consequences of serious crime. The members of the household in such cases are out-casted. They are accepted into the caste and their normal social inter-course is restored only when they undergo penance. If anyone marries outside their tribe he is also out-casted. Such matters are usually referred to *Naik*.

CHANGING SCENE

The Parenga are numerically a small tribe of Odisha who during the past usually liked to live isolated and undisturbed in their remote sylvan habitat, with their age old traditional subsistence economy. After independence, the Government has launched many developmental programmes for uplifting the

socio-economic standard of the tribes. The implementations of various income generating schemes and development of infrastructures helped their exposure to the modern world and influenced them for development. With passage of time as they have come in close contact with the neighbouring caste Hindus, they have incorporated so many cultural elements for which changes are seen in their material culture.

The age old traditions, customary societal organizations are declining under culture contact and modernization. Their means of subsistence and occupational pattern have also changed. Their age-old tradition of barter system has changed to money system. The traditional exchange system was a key factor of solidarity but now it has totally disappeared. Change has been observed in many facets of their life like: their living pattern, social customs, food habits and dress pattern. There is increasing tendency of using modern articles such as T.V., radio, mobile phone, motor cycle; mill made cloths, cosmetics etc. The importance of religious functionaries has declined and in many cases the rituals are observed symbolically.

Through the interference of development plans and programmes, their existence, economical status, communication and living style has been changed. Government initiatives basically by establishment of ITDAs have created a lot of positive impact on overall development of education, agriculture, communication, drinking water, housing, health and sanitation. Initiatives have also been taken at Gram Panchayat and Block Level to create awareness among them about different development schemes so that they can reap the benefit out of it and become prosperous.

At present the Parengas have become one of the most progressive tribes in the district of Koraput. Predominantly in the field of cultivation, they are using fertilizers, pesticides, improved seeds and modern techniques and hardly suffer from indebtedness. Now they are going through a period of transition where in one end they continue their traditional life and in the other they are fashioning their life style as the mainstream world.

PAROJA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Paroja, the nomenclature is derived from the local Oriya word *Praja* or *Paraja* meaning the common people who are tenants or subjects or citizens under ex-feudal lords or *Raja*. It is one of the major tribes of southern Orissa, largely concentrated in the undivided Koraput district and the adjoining Kalahandi district.

As per 2011 census, their population in the State is 9445 among whom, 4532 are males and 4913 are females. The sex ratio is 1084 females per 1000 males. Their level of literacy is 32.78 percent of which male literacy is 46.95 percent and female literacy, 20.09 percent.

The Paroja live in big and small settlements in the company of other communities. The villages lie in the plains, at the foothills and near forests in close proximity to hill streams.

Inside the village there are two important spots – *Berna Munda* and *Nissan Munda*. The former is the seat of traditional village council. It is marked by a constellation of circular stone slabs at a central place, preferably in front of the headman, *Muduli's* house. The latter is a monument made of a circular stone slab encircled by menhirs representing the seat of the village deity called *Hundi*. Youth dormitories for boys and girls, *Dhangda Basa Ghar* and *Dhangdi Basa Ghar* respectively were functioning till the recent past. The dormitories provide opportunity to both young men and women to meet, sing and dance together. The institution is now obsolete.

They were practising shifting cultivation extensively in the past. Gradually they took up settled cultivation. Using simple implements, they grow a variety of cereals, pulses and vegetables in their dry and wetland and kitchen garden round the year. They are fond of raising livestock. They meet a part of

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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their subsistence needs by collecting minor forest produce. Millet and rice are their principal food. Use of liquor is customary in all rituals.

Their dress and ornaments are more or less similar to those of the neighbouring tribes like the Kondh, the Gond, the Gadaba etc. Wearing of brass made nose rings and earrings, *khagla*, the silver neckband and *khadu*, the silver armlet and wristband is compulsory for married women. Tattooing is popular among women.

Their artistic talents find expression in *Dhemsā* and *Dungdunga* dances and *laga* songs. The most significant and colourful Paroja festivals are *chait parab* and *pus parab* observed with much pomp during December-January and March-April respectively.

The tribe is divided into two broad sections: the Bada Paroja and the Sana Paroja. Each section further divided into two sub-sections: Bada Paroja or Sodia Paraja and Bada Jodia Paraja or Penga Paraja under the former, and Bareng Jodia Paraja and Konda Paraja or Selia Paraja under the latter. The major distinction between both the sections is that the Bada Paroja are more Hinduised than the Sana Paroja. The former do not take beef. They observe elaborate purificatory rites in the event of the death of a cow or buffalo in their household while the latter are said to be beefeaters. Among all the four sub-sections the Selia or Chhelia who were goat-breeders in the past are given the lowest rank.

The Paroja prefer adult marriage, monogamy, cross-cousin marriage and village exogamy following the rules of clan exogamy. Marriage by negotiation is relatively an expensive affair. Those cannot afford it resort to other means, such as capture, *jhinka-utra*, elopement, *udlia*, levirate, sororate, etc.

The Paroja observe birth pollution till the naval cord of the newborn dries up. The name giving and first hair cutting rituals held during the first year. *Disari*, the astrologer chooses auspicious dates. The maternal uncle and grandparents play a major role in the ritual. The puberty rites are observed for girls. The pollution period continues for seven days during which they observe several taboos.

The affairs of a Paroja village are managed by a set of traditional leaders designated as *Mduli*, the secular chief, *Jni*, the priest, and *Challan*, the messenger-cum-assistant. Other important magico-religious functionaries are *Disari*, *Gurumai*, *Gunia* and *Bhatanaik*.

PARAJA *

*Siba Prasad Rout*¹

The Parajas are otherwise called Paroja, Porja, Paroja or Parja and inhabit in Koraput, Kalahandi and Sundargarh districts. According to the 1961 Census the Parajas number 1, 59, 866 and found mainly in Kalahandi and Koraput districts. A few Parajas are also found in Sundargarh, Sambalpur, Boudh-Phulbani, Cuttack, Dhenkanal, Puri, and Mayurbhanj districts. Their distribution in various districts is stated as follows:-

Districts where the Parajas are found	Total population	Males	Females
Koraput	1,41,694	70,681	71,013
Kalahandi	16,410	7,500	8,910
Sundargarh	1,220	1,220	...
Dhenkanal	04	04	...
Phulbani	03	01	02
Puri	08	02	06
Cuttack	340	155	185
Mayurbhanj	113	55	58
Total	1,59,866	79,664	80,202

The name Paraja appears to be derived from the Sanskrit term Parja, a subject. Mr. Charmichael has stated that "by far the greater number of these Parajas are akin to the Kondhs of the Ganjam Maliahs" and emphasised that the Gadabas are "by no means of the patriarchal type that characterises the Parajas. Russell and Hiralal, on the other hand, hold the view that the Parajas are a kin to the Gonds and not Kondhs. As they write, "The Parajas appear to be Gonds and not Kondhs. Their sept names are Gond words, and their language is a form of Gondi, called after them Parji." Parji has hitherto been considered a form of Bhatri, but Sir G. Grierson has now classified the latter as a dialect of the Oriya language, while Parji remains. "A local and very corrupt variation of Gondi, considerable mixed with Hindi forms". Now most of them including the women

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speak Oriya, although traces of their original dialect can be picked up from their traditional songs. Their tradition traces, their original home to Bastar. In Koraput they live with Rana, Gadaba, Paik, Mali, Doms and Kondhs.

Sections of the Tribe

The term Paraja is so broad a term that it includes in a very loose sense of the term, a number of other communities. At times the Bondas and Gadabas also refer themselves to be Bonda Parojas and Gadaba Parojas, respectively. Hence, it is very difficult to give a complete list of the various sections of the Parajas. Their main sections, however, are-

- (1) Sodia or Bad Parja
- (2) Bareng Jodia Paraja
- (3) Penga Paraja
- (4) Konda Paraja or Selia Paaja

The first section is considered to be of highest social ranking as compared to others. They abstain from taking beef and buffalo meat, while the other sections eat buffalo-meat and beef. The Konda Parajas are known to be Selia or Chhelia Paraja as they were said to be goat breeders in long old days. They now call themselves to be Konda Parajas and claim to be a section of the Parajas, but R. C. S. Bell, in his Koraput district Gazetteer, 1945 has equated them with the Konda Dora and has thus excluded them from the bulk of pure Parajas.

Exogamous Septs

The Parajas have a number of totemistic septs, as Bagh (tiger), a Kachim (tortoise), Bokda (goat), Netam (dog), a Gohi (big lizard), Pandki (dove), and so on. Killing harming, or eating the totem animal is forbidden and they have certain rights to show respect to their clan totems.

Kinship and Marriage

Marriage is strictly prohibited between the members of the same clan, but Russell and Hiralal hold the view that at times "the rule is not adhered to, and members of the same sept are permitted to marry so long as they do not come from the same village, the original rule of exogamy being perhaps thus exemplified". *Medha Gantia*, the foreteller reads the omen to forecast the success of marriage. The proposal for marriage is made by the boys' father. Cross-cousin marriage, i.e., marrying mother's brother's daughter is the general rule. Marriage is performed after the boy attains 18 years of age and the girl above 15 years.

Marriage by arrangement is the common form of marriage but a few cases of marriages other than arranged marriages are also found. These types of Paraja marriages are thus mainly five in number.

- (i) Haribol Baha (marriage by arrangement)
- (ii) Udia Baha (love marriage)

- (iii) Jhinka-Utra Baha (marriage by capture)
- (iv) Paisamundi Baha (marriage of the widows and the divorced ladies)
- (v) Gharjwain (marriage by being adopted as a son to the wife's father)

The marriage takes place at the boy's house where two separate sheds are made for such purpose. The bride is taken to the groom's house by her female relatives only. In the groom's house they are made to sit on a new mat and three to seven pots of water are poured over them. The bridegroom's expenses, as estimated by Russell and Hiralal are about Rs.50 and that of the bride is about Rs.10. but now-a-days the bride price (Jhola or Pani) of the Jodhia Parajas of Koraput amounts from Rs.50 to Rs.150.

At weddings the Parajas have a dance called Surcha. Music for the dance is provided by bamboo flutes, drum and string instruments of violin type.

Widow marriage is permitted, and in fact the younger brother has every right to marry his deceased elder brother's wife. Divorce is also permissible.

Religion and Festivals

The Parajas worship the various Gods and Goddesses residing over hills, streams and forests. They also worship Danteshwari, in tutelary Goddess of Bastar. They observe festival to mark first sowing, eating of new rice, eating of mango and so on. Chickens, rice trains and other *Puja* materials are offered to deities as well as to the ancestors. Most villages have a *Sirdha* who is possessed by the deity. When rain is wanted the Parajas fix a piece of wood into the ground and worship it as the king of the clouds for rain.

A snake, a jackal, a hare and a dog are unlucky objects to be seen while starting on a journey. Wednesday and Thursday are lucky days.

A few members of the Paraja tribe belong to the Ramanandi sect and they observe certain specific ritual taboos.

Disposal of the Dead

The dead are invariably buried, the corpse being laid in the ground with head to the east and feet to the west. Some of the Parajas put the head to the north direction being influenced by the Hindus.

Occupation and Social Customs

The Parajas are primarily cultivators, but the poorer sections are mostly landless labourers. They are not considered to be an impure caste. Women are tattooed and some Paraja boys grow long hair to form a bunch on the head.

Educationally, the Parajas are backward like many other tribes. About 96.6 per cent of them are found to be illiterate according to the 1961 Census.

PAROJA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

The Paroja are one of the well-known major tribes of Orissa. Their main concentration is in the districts of Koraput and Kalahandi, but the tribe is also found in small numbers in other districts such as Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Puri and Cuttack. According to the 1991 Census the total population of the tribe was 3, 53, 336. The sex ratio is 1041 females per 1000 males. Their growth rate was 32.24 per cent during the period 1981-91.

The term 'Paroja' is a local Oriya term sometimes pronounced as Paraja, Parja or Poroja. It appears to be derived from the Sanskrit word Praja, which literally means the common people, i.e. subjects or citizens as distinct from the former ruling chiefs called the Raja or the Zamindar in pre-independent times. One of the legendary traditions of the tribe also states that formerly the Rajas and the Prajas lived like brothers. Later the former took to luxury and comfortable living like riding horses, while the latter accepted the hardship of carrying burdens. The term 'Paraja' also has another meaning in Oriya language, namely the tenant (peasant) or Royat.

The Paroja have many features in common with the neighbouring major tribes namely, the Gond, Kondh and Gadaba. In Koraput, the Paroja live with other communities like the Rana, Paika, Mali, Domb, Gadaba and Kondh. The following main sections of the tribe are found in southern Orissa:

1. Bada Paroja or Sodia Paroja.
2. Bada Jodia Paroja or Penga Paroja.
3. Bareng Jodia Paroja.
4. Konda Paroja or Selia (Chhelia) Paroja.

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But broadly speaking the tribe is divided into two sections, such as Bada Paroja and Sana Paroja. The Bada Paroja comprise the first two groups and the others constitute the Sana Paroja. Apart from their respective cultural differences, the major distinction between the two sub-divisions is that, following the Hindu tradition, the Bada Paroja do not eat beef or buffalo meat, and observe elaborate purificatory rituals even when a cow or buffalo dies in their households, while the Sana Paroja eat the flesh of both these animals. In general, the Bada Paroja seem to be more progressive and economically advanced than the Sana Paroja. Hence, the former groups claim a higher position in social ranking than the latter.

Among all sections of the tribe the Selia (Chhelia) Paroja or Konda Paroja are considered to be more primitive than others. The name Sella or Chhelia is a local term meaning people who live from goat-breeding. This section of the tribe were goat-breeders in the past. Now they do not like to be called Chhelia and instead identify themselves as Konda Paroja. Hence, R.C.S. Bell, in his Koraput District Gazetteer, 1945, has equated them with another tribal group named the Konda Dora and thus excluded them from the bulk of Paroja.

The Paroja in general are strong, stout and hardworking. Compared with other tribal communities, they show some cultural differences, especially in respect of their settlement pattern, dress and ornaments, economic life, belief and worship, manners, customs and folk traditions. They are simple, friendly and hospitable, but like to remain aloof from the people of other communities as they feel shy of them.

The men usually wear loin cloths and napkins, and women wear coarse and cheap saris. Children of up to three to four years of age go naked. After that, they wear a small piece of cloth, torn off from old, discarded clothing of the adults of the family, which barely covers their genitals and is called *koupuni*. These clothes are not washed regularly except for certain important social occasions but used in a dirty condition for days on end. Nowadays, due to external contact, modern dresses like shirts, banyans, blouses, coloured saris, ribbons, etc. are becoming popular. These dresses are preferably worn during festive days or while visiting friends and relatives. Common ornaments worn by Paroja women are bangles, armlets, bracelets, necklaces, rings, hair pins, etc., usually made of silver, aluminium, brass and sometimes gold. A number of brass earrings dangle from each ear and the nose. A married woman must wear these rings lest she be subjected to severe social criticism and ridicule. Silver rings called *shamka*, often studded with coins, are also worn around the fingers. On the toes they wear silver rings known as *bakuli* and *gungur*. Wearing glass or plastic bangles on the wrists is very common. Metal chains and bead necklaces adorn the neck and chest. The *khagla*, a kind of heavy and broad silver ring is used as a necklace, while a thinner type called *khadu* adorn the forearm and upper arm. Wearing *khagla* and *khadu* is compulsory for married women. Tattooing is

prevalent among Paroja women. Girls above five years of age have tattoo marks on their faces and hands.

The Paroja inhabit large or small settlements, either exclusively or with other communities like the Domb, Rana, Kondh, Sundhi and Gauda, etc. In large villages either they live in separate wards inside the village or in a separate hamlet a little away from the main village. The villages or hamlets are usually found near the forest or in the foothills adjacent to a permanent water source like a perennial stream or river and are linked to footpaths from various directions. Paroja are not nomadic in nature, but they often move from one place to another in order to obtain relief from natural calamities, attacks of wild animals and other disasters which affect their economy and well being. Moreover the primitive section, which still practises shifting cultivation, also changes place of settlement along with the shifting of their cultivation sites. This kind of movement is made within specific pre-selected sites following a cyclic rotation. To select new sites, elaborate ritual procedures are followed with the advice and active participation of the village priest, headman and elders.

The settlement pattern of the villages does not follow any typical or regular model. In some villages houses are scattered here and there, while in other villages individual houses run in two parallel rows facing each other along a common street. In the open spaces between houses, sheds are built to accommodate domestic animals like cattle, sheep, pigs and fowls. Individual households have small kitchen gardens in front of the house. In the village there are two important places called Berna Munda and Nissan Munda. Berna Munda is a centrally located place inside the village comprising a constellation of circular stone slabs where the village headman, leaders and elders gather and sit down to discuss and decide village affairs. Sometimes, this place is in front of the headman's house and otherwise called Munda Dand. The Nissan Munda is another place where a circular stone slab is kept encircled by menhirs standing erect. This is the seat of the village deity called Hundi Debta.

The pattern of individual housing is more or less the same, irrespective of the difference in the social or economic status of the household. The Paroja use indigenous raw materials like soil, mud, cow-dung (*lappy*), bamboo, wood, straw (*piri*) and country-made tiles (*jhikar*) for house construction. Laying the foundations of a new house involves elaborate rituals conducted by the household head and the village priest. Animals such as pigs or fowls are sacrificed to appease the deities and ensure the smooth construction of the house as well as the well-being of the occupant's family. The walls, verandah and floors are regularly maintained by plastering with cowdung and decorating with coloured soils. The Paroja are fond of using red or white coloured soil mixed with cowdung or ashes to colour the house. The roof is maintained by thatching the house once a year, preferably after the harvest when paddy straw are

available. In order to protect the low thatched roofs from the cattle, wattle fencings are made around the house.

The typical feature of Paroja housing is that, like those of agricultural tribes like the Kondh, Bathudi, Gond and Santal, the Paroja houses, besides having a kitchen garden, have a verandah raised higher than floor level and a spacious courtyard on either side of the house. The verandah is used as a place for sitting, gossiping and sleeping. The doors are smaller in dimension but coloured and decorated with carvings. Inside the house, partitions are made for the hearth and the kitchen, store and sleeping spaces. A space lying preferably at the eastern corner of the house and strictly prohibited for outsiders is earmarked as the sacred seat of family deities and ancestral spirits. Livestock is accommodated in a separate shed beside the house and poultry is kept inside a small cabin either inside the house or on the verandah.

Although the houses are similar in type, the size of the house and number of rooms vary according to the need and economic status of the individual household. Nowadays, well-to-do families are constructing big, strong, spacious houses having more than two rooms. Some progressive people construct brick walls and semi-permanent roofs using country-made tiles and providing multiple doors instead of one common door. Well-to-do landowners among the Jodia and Penga Paroja living in Kalahandi district have large double-storied houses locally known as Dhaba Ghar. The Dhaba Ghar usually has country-made tile roofing. The upper storey is smaller in height and used for storing grains, implements and other household assets.

In the course of his mundane life between birth and death, a Paroja individual passes through several successive phases and crises of life. They have their own rational view that human life begins in the mother's womb and terminates with death. They are quite aware of the fact that conception results from the sexual union of adult men and women but with supernatural blessings. A pregnant woman is subjected to many taboos and restrictions in respect of her diet and daily activities for her well-being and safe delivery. However, in practice, pregnant women remain engaged in their daily chores till a late stage and often up to the moment when the labour pains start.

At childbirth the woman is confined to a room and no male members are allowed inside. Only elderly and experienced woman and the traditional midwife attend the expectant mother. Gurumain, the female shaman, is summoned to conduct rituals for smooth delivery. In spite of all these measures, if the delivery becomes painful and if any complications arise the traditional witch doctor-cum-medicine man (Gunia) is sought to diagnose the cause, and he prescribes appropriate herbal remedies. After the delivery of the child, the umbilical cord is cut by the midwife, and the child is given a bath near a pit dug in the courtyard of the house for this purpose. The mother and child remain

polluted and secluded inside the house until the naval cord dries up. On this day, the midwife throws the dried-up naval cord into the pit. The pit is then filled up with earth after lighting a lamp and incense sticks near it to ward off evil spirits. Then the mother and the child take a bath and change clothes. Family deities are worshipped for the well-being of the family and newborn. The family's earthenware cooking pots, and the clothes and beddings from the delivery room, are thrown away and replaced with new ones. A ritual is conducted to purify family members from birth pollution. The midwife is remunerated in the form of a new sari, some rice, *ragi*, turmeric, oil and vegetables. Then the mother resumes her normal activities.

The rituals and ceremonies connected with the name-giving and first hair-cutting of the child is held within a year on auspicious dates fixed by the traditional astrologer (Disari). In these ceremonies, the maternal uncle and grandparents play a vital role. The child continues to be breast-fed until two to three years of age. Older people, namely the grandparents or elderly children who are unfit for outdoor activities, always act as baby-sitters and take care of small children while parents are working outside. If there is no one in the house to look after the child, the mother usually carries the baby with her to the work site. The child grows up in an atmosphere of fondness and affection.

Paroja boys and girls attain puberty at between 12-14 years of age. A girl enters into womanhood and is considered fit for marriage after puberty. At the time of her first menstruation, a girl is considered impure and unclean, and she remains in seclusion in a remote corner of a room for seven days. During this period, she is subjected to many taboos and restrictions. She should avoid the sight of male members, abstain from eating non-vegetarian and spicy food items, and should not move outside alone. She should not use oil, soap or cosmetics. At the end of her confinement, she takes bath, wears new clothes, worships the deities and removes her pollution.

In traditional Paroja society, the institution of the youth dormitory functioned in every village. Like those of the neighbouring Kondh tribe it is called the *basaghar*, one each for the unmarried boys (*dhangda basa ghar*) and girls (*dhangidi basa ghar*). The boys and girls spend the night in their respective dormitories and enjoy the liberty of knowing one another more and more intimately. Whenever they wish, they meet at the communal dancing ground at the centre of the village (*serna munda*) and amuse themselves by dancing together or simply hold song competitions. The songs are mostly of the question-answer type (*lagagita*). The boys and girls communicate their ideas and feelings through romantic love songs. The music and dancing that often follows the song competition makes the whole situation more lively and attractive. During festive days, groups of boys and girls visit the neighbouring villages and hold dance competitions with groups of opposite sex there. These sessions help in creating an intimacy between the boys and girls of different villages which culminates in

love affairs leading finally to the selection of a marriage partner. Sometimes the whole night is spent dancing. When they feel tired, they retire to their respective dormitories. However nowadays, the youth dormitories have lost their significance and are gradually dwindling away. In most Paroja villages this age-old institution is now almost non-existent.

Marriage is the most significant event in a Paroja's life. It is also an important ceremony in the Paroja villages. Paroja boys are considered fit for marriage after attaining eighteen years of age, and girls after attaining puberty. Formerly child marriages were prevalent in the Paroja society. Nowadays adult marriages have become the common practice. Among the Paroja cross-cousin marriage is preferred, and the rules of clan and village exogamy are rigidly followed, as the boys and girls of the same clan are treated like brothers and sisters. Russell and Hiralal observed that sometimes, 'The rule of clan exogamy is not adhered to and members of the same sept are permitted to marry as long as they do not come from the same village; the original rule of (clan) exogamy being thus perhaps exemplified'. It is the boy's side which takes the initiative in arranging the marriage. When a boy is considered an adult and capable of earning his own living, he is considered fit for marriage and his parents look for a suitable match for him. A girl having a good physique, attractive appearance and capacity for hard work is usually preferred. When the boy's parents find a suitable bride, they initiate the proposal before the girl's parents and negotiate the match after finalizing the brideprice through successive customary visits to the bride's place. But before finalizing the match the consent of the boy and girl is obtained by their respective parents. The consent of the girl is very important in this matter, because if she marries against her will she may desert her husband after few days, thus causing disgrace and economic loss to both her husband and her own parents, which may finally lead to divorce and separation.

As in other tribal communities, the Paroja have various ways of acquiring mates. The most common, prestigious and ideal way is marriage by formal negotiation. The Paroja call this *haribol/maga*. This is a ceremonial type of marriage involving elaborate procedure and greater expense, which only the well-to-do families can afford. In this type of marriage, the parents or guardians of the boy seek a bride by observing the conventional rules and make the proposal to the father or guardian of the selected girl at the market places or fairs after offering drinks. The consent of the boy and the girl is formally taken by their respective parents, and the traditional village astrologer is consulted to forecast the future of the match-making before proceeding further.

These marriages are held in the month of Magh (January-February), when the harvesting is over and the Paroja families have plenty of food, money and leisure. The formal negotiation of marriages starts from the month of Kartik (September-October). At first a small party consisting of the boy's parents and male relatives visit the bride's house carrying presents such as rice, *ragi*, fowls,

palm wine (*salap*) and money to put forward the marriage proposal. After several such visits with more and more presents, the girl's side agrees. Then the amount of brideprice (*jolla* or *pani*) is finalized.

The amount of brideprice paid for *maga* marriage varies from place to place. However, it is paid in both cash and kind. Generally a few head of domestic animals (usually cows or buffaloes), a huge amount of rice or millet (*ragi* or *mandia*), clothes for the girl and her relatives, rice beer (*pendum*), *mandia* beer (*landha*), palm wine (*salap*) and some cash above a hundred rupees are paid. The day on which the brideprice is finalized, both the parties celebrate the occasion by entertaining their guests in a small feast in which rice, meat and wine are served. The wedding ceremony is held at the boy's house. The day before the wedding, the bridegroom, accompanied by a group of his friends and relatives, goes to the bride's house and escorts the girl and her close companions to his house in a procession, after which the marriage is consummated.

The extravagant expenses, huge brideprice and lengthy procedures of negotiation in the case of the *maga* or *haribol* types of marriage practically makes the groom's family bankrupt. Those who cannot afford these forms opt for other types of marriage, which are simple and less expensive. The other types of marriage are marriage by capture (*jhinka-utra*) and marriage by elopement (*udlia*). Levirate and sororate types of marriage are also permitted. Divorce is socially permitted on the grounds of marital incompatibility, mal-adjustment and infidelity. Cases are decided in the traditional village council. A husband divorcing his wife pays her compensation as fixed by the village council. If the woman divorces her husband she has to return the brideprice which he has paid to marry her. After the divorce has been formally granted, the man and woman are free to marry again elsewhere.

Death is regarded as the most dreadful event in Paroja life. Death pollution is observed for three to nine days. During this period the deceased's family and kinsmen observe certain restrictions in respect of food, sex and other daily activities. Conventional death rites are performed, and a feast is given to the villagers by the deceased's family after the pollution period is over. Poor families may postpone the feast and arrange it within a year, especially during the month of Magh or Pausa, when they have plenty of food and money after the harvest.

The Paroja have exogamous totemic clans such as Bagh (tiger), Kachhim (tortoise), Bokda (goat), Netam (dog), Gohi (lizard), Pandki (dove), Bedia, Moria, Sodria, Halkaria, Chemia and so on. They highly respect their respective totemic species and observe taboos against killing or harming them. The family is the smallest social unit in Paroja society. Nuclear families are common while joint families are very rare. The family is patrilineal and patriarchal.

The Paroja are seasoned cultivators and agriculture is the mainstay of their economy. Formerly, the Paroja subsisted from shifting cultivation which is nowadays reduced to being a secondary or tertiary means of livelihood. Nowadays they mainly depend on wet cultivation, which is supplemented by shifting cultivation and other allied economic pursuits like the collection of forest produce, wage-earning, animal husbandry, etc.

Their cultivable land is divided into four major categories. The first type is known as *beda* or wet land and is best for paddy cultivation. The second category is known as *huda* which is plain non-irrigated upland where paddy and minor millets are grown. The third category of land is *dongar* and is meant for shifting cultivation, where oilseeds, millets and pulses are grown. The fourth type is the kitchen garden situated behind the house where different kinds of vegetables are grown. Regular care is taken of the kitchen garden and every year these plots are manured with cowdung.

The major crops grown by the Paroja are of the highland variety, namely maize, minor millet, early paddy, *ragi*, *suan*, *jowar*, *niger*, etc. Recently new crops such as potato, *arhar*, wheat, sugar cane, and vegetables like cabbage, cauliflower, brinjal, tomatoes, etc. have been introduced by the development agencies. On shifting cultivation sites they grow minor millets, *kandul*, *suan*, *ragi*, maize, *biri*, early paddy, etc. Fruit and vegetables are also grown in a small kitchen garden behind the house and in the lowlands where irrigation is available. For cultivation, the Paroja use very simple agricultural implements, namely the plough, spade, hoe, axe, etc. Cultivation of land, manuring, sowing, weeding, reaping, harvesting are done carefully and systematically. In all phases of agricultural operations mutual co-operation and coordination between people are striking features.

Paroja farmers are occupied in different agricultural pursuits throughout the year. In the month of January long-duration paddy, maize, small millets (*suan*) and a few other crops are harvested. During the months of February and March the people amuse themselves with feasts and festivals, as there is very little work to be done in the fields. However, the collection of *mahua*, jungle grass, hunting of games and group fishing are some important gainful activities pursued during these months. During April the seasonal agricultural operations start, and the farmers prepare their lands and raise maize and vegetable crops in the kitchen garden. Mangoes and oil-seeds are collected from the forest. May and June are the busiest months when small millets and paddy are sown in the uplands and dry lands. In these months the fields for shifting cultivation are cleared and twigs burnt. Ploughing of the fields and clearing of stumps are also completed in this month. In the month of July the sowing of wetland paddy and millets and raising of some vegetable crops and maize are completed, followed by different routine agricultural operations in the months of August and September. These two months are considered to be the lean months, when the

people live on forest produces and sometimes incur loans in either cash or kind. The months of October and November bring hopes and happiness when the people harvest short-duration paddy, *ragi* and small millets. They celebrate new crop-eating festivals (Nuakhia) and perform magico-religious rites for eating beans. Otherwise, watching over and caring for long-duration paddy and sowing of oil seeds keep them engaged during this month. December and January are the main harvesting months, when the long-duration paddy is harvested and the crops are stored. The Paroja are fond of cattle wealth. They raise cows, bullocks, buffaloes, goats, pigs and fowls. The cows, she-buffaloes and she-goats are not milked but used as agricultural draught animals.

Paroja society is governed by a division of labour based on age and sex. Small boys and girls are not assigned any work. Older boys and girls are trained to help their parents in indoor and outdoor activities. Usually hard work like ploughing is done by men, and household chores and minor agricultural operations are performed by women. Paroja women are more hardworking, meeker and milder than the men.

Rice is the staple food, supplemented by millets, maize, vegetables they grow themselves and other edible fruits, roots, leaves, and tubers collected from the forest around the year. Non-vegetarian items, cakes, sweets and other delicacies are eaten during festive occasions and whenever available. The Paroja are addicted to alcoholic drinks and beverages. Use of liquor is a customary practice in all magico-religious rituals, feasts and festivals. They drink various kinds of liquor such as *mahua* liquor, millet liquor (*landha*), rice beer, palm wine (*salap*), etc. *Landha* and *salap* are the most favourite drinks.

The Paroja village has a well-organised socio-political system, which functions as an independent autonomous unit. It has its own set of traditional functionaries who remain in charge of the different internal and external affairs of the village. The Jani is the sacerdotal head. The Muduli is the secular head of the village and he is assisted by a Challan. The Jani functions as the village head priest. His physical presence in all important matters of the village is indispensable. His words are honoured in the village. The Muduli is the de facto chief of the village. He decides civil and criminal disputes, collects revenue, organizes communal functions, receives and entertains guests and officials, and acts as the spokesman of his fellow men with external agencies. He is assisted by a Challan who conveys the decision of the Muduli and Jani to their people. The offices of the Jani, Muduli and Challan are hereditary and carry high social prestige.

There are other magico-religious functionaries in the village called the Disari Gur-main, Gunia, and Bhattanayak. The Disari acts as the village astrologer and determines auspicious dates and moments for holding marriage ceremonies, communal festivals and rituals, seasonal agricultural operations and

so on. He also finds a name for new-born babies and predicts the future of match-making activities regarding matrimony. The Gurumain is the priest-cum-witch doctor whose duty it is to worship the village goddess on the different festive occasions and to ensure the recovery of the sick. The Bhattanayak is an important functionary in the Paroja village, purifying ritually polluted people who have been condemned for committing socially disapproved offences.

The Paroja worship a number of gods and deities for their well-being. The important deities are Danteswari, their tutelary goddess; Laxmi, the goddess of wealth and fortune; Landi, the god in charge of ensuring an orderly social life; Jhakar Debta, the earth goddess; Dongar Debta, the forest god; Mahapuru, the supreme god; and Nisan Debta, the village deity. Dead ancestors, who are called Duma Debta, receive routine worship and sacrifices at festive occasions. The Paroja observe many seasonal festivals with pomp and ceremony around the year in order to propitiate their deities and ancestors as well as for their own enjoyment. Among these the important ones are Asadh Parab, Nuakhia, Diali Parab, Baulani Jatra, Pus Parab, Chait Parab, etc. In the month of Chait or Baisakh (April) they observe the Bihan Thapa festival. The village Disari announces an auspicious date for this festival and collects a small quantity of paddy seeds from each and every household. He performs a ritual at the *Nissan munda* of the village in honour of Jhankar Debta (the Earth Goddess) where he purifies the seeds by sacrificing a pig. A portion of the ritualized seeds is distributed among the different families. These seeds are mixed with the remaining seeds of the family and are sown in the field on an auspicious day fixed by the Disari.

Asadh Parab is observed in the month of Asadh (June and July) and consists a series of two or three rituals performed one after another. Langaladhua Punei or Bandapana Parab is observed during the month of Sraban (July-August). In it Paroja families perform certain rituals. Agricultural implements are cleaned, decorated with red coloured earth and covered with a piece of new white cloth. They enjoy the occasion by preparing and eating cakes and sweets, and singing and dancing. Bhada Parab or Nachuni Parab is celebrated in the month of Bhadrab or Ashwin (September) for first eating of new rice. Diali Parab, the festival of lights, is held in the month of Ashwin or Kartik (September-October). The most significant and colourful festival of the year are Pus Parab and Chait Parab. Pus Parab is held in the month Pausa (January) in order to celebrate the harvesting of paddy and other crops. Chait Parab is held in the month of Chaitra (March-April) when the people go on communal hunting expeditions. The day following Chait Parab, all the able-bodied men of the village proceed in a hunting expedition. If anyone stays behind, he is humiliated by the ladies who throw dirty cowdung water over him and virtually push him out of the village. Women also go to the forest and collect fruits, leaves and flowers. The hunting expedition continues for two or three days. Success in hunting foretells the well-being and prosperity of the village community in the

coming year. The flesh of the hunted animal is distributed equally among the villagers. The Jani and Muduli get a larger share, including the head of the animal. Then the Chait Parab comes to an end.

Dancing, song and music are characteristic features of Paroja aesthetic life, without which they feel their mundane life to be meaningless. They are experts in all these arts. Their inborn theatrical talent finds expression in dances and songs like *dhemsa nacha*, *dundunga nacha*, *laga gita*, etc. Songs and dances are performed as an indispensable part of all individual and communal functions and festivals. They also enjoy themselves through song and dance whenever they wish to do so. Whenever the boys start playing their musical instruments and singing songs, the villagers, young and old men and women rush to the *berna munda* and amuse themselves by dancing and singing. As a rule, the women form separate groups according to age and start dancing and singing, while the boys play musical instruments and sing songs. In their dances they imitate the peculiar movements of animals like the snake's crawl, frog's jump, bird's chirping and the like. They compose their own songs suitable to particular occasions and fix the tune and rhythm of the dance and song. The finer and beautiful elements of nature, i.e. the sky, stars, sun, moon, rain, wind, hill, hill streams, trees, flowers, birds, animals, influence and appear in their song and music.

So far the Paroja have more or less retained their own way of life, which distinguishes them from other tribal and non-tribal communities. Their traditional economic organization, marriage and kinship system, political system, magico-religious life, folk culture and world view, though having changed to some extent with the changing times, still continues to function effectively. But by and large, they have remained socio-economically backward as compared to the general population.

PAROJA

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IDENTITY

Paroja/ Parja/ Paraja is one of the well-known major Scheduled Tribes (ST) of Odisha. They are also found in Andhra Pradesh, undivided Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra where they have been enlisted as a Scheduled Tribe and also in West Bengal and Assam to which they have migrated from Odisha in the recent past but in these two states they do not enjoy the status of ST.

As compared to other states, the tribe has its largest concentration in Odisha which they regard as their homeland and where they number 3 17 301 persons (1 55 626 males and 1 61 675 females) accounting for 3.89 percent of the total ST population and enjoying the rank of the 10th largest ST of the state as per 2001 census. Their population has registered a decadal growth rate of 10.20% when compared with the data of 1991 census. Their literacy rate is 17.96% which is very low. Their male literacy is 30.95% and their female literacy is appallingly low i.e., 7.35%. They inhabit the hills and valleys of southern Odisha with the largest chunk found in Koraput district followed by Nabrangpur, Malkangiri, Kalahandi and Rayagada districts in the descending order.

The Parojas are hill cultivators found in the (undivided) districts of Ganjam and Koraput. They seem to have been inhabiting this country from about the second century of the Christian era. (District Gazetteer: Koraput. 1966: 103). Earlier ethnographers defined them as of Dravidian stock. They say that their original name is 'bastaria' as they have migrated from Bastar

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area of Madhya Pradesh (now Chhatisgarh). Paroja is a conglomeration of various endogamous sections and is not a compact community.

The term Paroja is a local Odia term sometimes pronounced as Parja, Paraja or Poroja. It is a impure form of Sanskrit word Praja which literally means the common people, i.e. subjects or citizens as distinct from the former ruling chiefs called the Raja or the Zamindar in pre-independence era. One of the legendary traditions of the tribe also states that formerly the Rajas and the Prajas lived like brothers. Later the former took to luxury and affluent living like riding horses, while the latter accepted the hardship of carrying burdens. The term 'Paraja' also has another meaning in Odia language, namely the tenant (peasant) or Royat. In the Madras Census Report of 1871, Carmichael stated that Parja is a class denomination, the familiar epithet of *ryot* (cultivator). Their mother tongue Parji is a form of Gondi belonging to Dravidian family of languages which varies according to locality influenced by the local tongues like Odia or Telugu. But now most of them living in undivided Koraput district speak the regional language called "Desia"

The Paroja have many socio-cultural features in common with the neighbouring major tribes namely, the Gond, the Kondh and the Gadaba. In Koraput, the Paroja live with other communities like the Rana, the Paika, the Mali, the Domb etc. They are in general, strong, stout and hardworking. Compared with other tribal communities, they show some cultural differences, especially in respect of their settlement pattern, dress and ornaments, economic life, belief and worship, manners, customs and folk traditions. They are simple, friendly and hospitable, but like to remain aloof from the people of other communities as they are shy by nature.

Dress and Ornaments

Their traditional dress pattern is plain and simple. Little children hardly wear any cloth but after reaching seven to eight years of age they wear a small piece of discarded clothing (*koupin*) which barely covers their loins. Adult males generally wear a small napkin or loin cloth (*langoti / kachha*) leaving the entire body completely naked. Females wear loom made coarse sarees purchased from local weavers or from weekly markets, which cover up to the knees and tied in a knot in the left shoulder. The saree and its typical wearing style make it convenient to work in fields as well as to participate in dancing. Now-a-days, due to external contact, modern dresses like shirts, banyans, pants for males and blouses, coloured sarees, ribbons, etc. for females are becoming popular. These dresses are preferably worn during festive days or while visiting the market, fairs, friends and relatives.

Women love to adorn themselves with varieties of ornaments to beautify themselves. They put *kanjika*, *sikidiguba* and *suju* on their head, *phasi* and *jilligut* and rings on their earlobes, *dandi* on the helix of their nose and

mundra on their nasal septum. They also wear *kagada*, *khadimadi* and *adalimadi* and coloured bead necklaces around their neck, *bajubandh* on their arms, coloured glass bangles around their wrist, varieties of finger rings such as *kumudaati*, *takahajer* (coin finger ring), *hitudhajer* on their finger and *godbada*, *painjali*, and *jetra*, etc on their anklets. In their society use of nose and ear rings is a customary practice for the married women. A married woman must wear these rings lest she be subjected to social criticism. Silver rings called *shamka*, often studded with coins, are also worn around the fingers. On the toes they wear silver rings known as *bakuli* and *gungur*. The *khagla*, a kind of heavy and broad silver ring is used as a necklace, while a thinner type called *khadu* adorn the forearm and upper arm. Wearing *khagla* and *khadu* is compulsory for married women. Their ornaments are simple and are usually made of silver, aluminum, brass and are available for purchase in local markets. The well-to-do families among them buy gold ornaments. Women comb their hair applying oil and style the bun at the right of back side. Females are fond of tattooing their body by skilled women belonging to Kela community with beautiful designs such as *kumbana*, *sikidibana*, *udulibana*, *hulbana*, *danbana* and *topa*, etc. to enhance their beauty and charm.

SETTLEMENT & HOUSING

Paroja settlements are exclusively homogenous and uniclans in structure and are usually located near foothills where perennial hill streams are flowing to provide them drinking water throughout the year. In multi ethnic villages they live in separate hamlets keeping social distance from other ethnic groups and maintaining their own cultural identity.

In typical Paroja habitations, the settlement pattern does not follow any typical or regular model. In some villages houses are scattered here and there, while in others individual houses run in two parallel rows facing each other along a common street.

In the village there are two important places called *berna munda* and *nissan munda*. *Berna munda* is a centrally located place inside the village having a constellation of circular stone slabs where the village headman, leaders and elders sit down to discuss and decide village affairs. Sometimes, this place is in front of the headman's house and called *munda dand*. The *nissan munda* is another place where a circular stone slab is encircled by menhirs standing erect. This is the seat of the village deity called *hundi debta*.

The Paroja use indigenous raw materials like soil, mud, cow-dung (*lappy*), bamboo, wood, straw (*piri*) and country-made tiles (*jhikar*) for house construction. Laying the foundations of a new house involves elaborate rituals conducted by the village priest. Animals such as pigs or fowls are sacrificed to appease the deities and ensure hassle free construction of the

house as well as the well-being of the family. The walls, verandah and floors are regularly maintained by plastering with cowdung and painting with red or white coloured soils. The roof is thatched with paddy straw or *piri* grass once a year. To protect the low thatched roofs from the cattle, wattle fencings are made around the house.

The typical feature of Paroja housing is that, like those of agricultural tribes namely the Kandha, the Bathudi, the Gond and the Santal, the Paroja houses, besides having a kitchen garden, have a verandah raised higher than floor level and a spacious courtyard on either side of the house. The verandah is used as a place for sitting, gossiping and sleeping. The doors are smaller in dimension but coloured and decorated with carvings. Inside the house, partitions are made for the hearth and the kitchen, store and sleeping spaces. Generally, the houses are two roomed having no windows for ventilation. The bigger room near the entrance is usually used as living room-cum-store to stock their food stuffs whereas the smaller one is used as kitchen. In the kitchen a sacred space lying preferably at the eastern corner of the house is earmarked as the seat of family deities and ancestral spirits which is tabooed for entry for the outsiders. Livestock like cattle, sheep, pigs and fowls are accommodated in separate sheds beside the house mostly in the open spaces between individual houses and the poultry is kept inside a small cabin either inside the house or on the verandah. Adjacent to the house there is a small kitchen garden fenced with bamboo splits.

Although the houses are similar in type, the size of the house and number of rooms vary according to the need and economic status of the individual household. Nowadays, well-to-do families are constructing big, spacious houses having more than two rooms. Some of them now have houses with brick walls and semi- permanent roofs using country-made tiles, asbestos sheets and multiple doors. Affluent landowners among the Paroja living in Kalahandi district have large double-storied houses locally known as Dhaba Ghar. The Dhaba Ghar usually have country-made tile roofing. The upper storey is lower in height and used for storing grains, implements and other household assets.

The Paroja possess scanty household assets. Their utensils are comprised of earthen wares, gourd vessels to store drinking water and few aluminum utensils. Their winnowing fans, some bamboo baskets and wooden mortar and pestle are kept in the living room. The mortar is apparently big in size and at a time two women can take part in pounding the food grains. Hunting weapons like bows, arrows, knife, spears and axes are hung on the walls of the living room. Grass mats, pillows made of wooden slabs are kept in a corner of their house and clothes are hung on a bamboo pole inside the room. A flat stone disc and a stone pestle are put aside the doorsteps to grind the spices and condiments.

LIVELIHOOD

The Paroja are primarily hill cultivators. Settled cultivation as well as shifting cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy. They live near perennial hill streams amidst hills, valleys and use the spring water to irrigate their terraced agricultural fields on hill slopes and valleys. They cultivate *danger dhan*, *ragi*, *alasi*, *khetjanna* (*bajra*), *kating*, *kasala*, *kandul*, *biri* (blackgram), *chana*, etc in their up lands, high yielding paddy in their low lands and maize, chilly, tobacco (*dhungia*), garlic, onion, cucumber, *kumuda* (pumpkin), *lau* (gourd) and varieties of vegetables in their kitchen garden. For cultivation, the Paroja use very simple agricultural implements, namely the plough, spade, hoe, axe, etc. Cultivation of land, manuring, sowing, weeding, reaping, harvesting are done carefully and systematically. In all phases of agricultural operations mutual co-operation and coordination between people are striking features.

Besides cultivation, they supplement their livelihood with allied activities such as seasonal forest collection, hunting, fishing and livestock rearing. They rear domestic animals like cows, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs and fowls. They are skilled in carpentry, mat making, and in making country tiles (*khapar*) and bricks.

Paroja society is governed by a division of labour based on age and sex. Small boys and girls are not assigned any work. Older boys and girls are trained to help their parents in indoor and outdoor activities. Usually hard work like ploughing is done by men, and household chores and minor agricultural operations are performed by women. Paroja women are more hardworking, meeker and milder than the men.

Food Habits

The Paroja are non-vegetarian. Rice and *ragi* are their staple food. Besides that they also consume several minor millets such as *kangu*, *kosla*, *khetjanna*, maize, mango kernel, sago palm stem powder and tamarind powder and varieties of seasonal roots and tubers.

They relish on non-veg foods like fish, chicken, crabs, snails, lizards, mouse, pork and flesh of buffalo. They are fond of eating fish and therefore catch fish from the hill streams, rivers and reservoirs. Eating of beef is strictly tabooed for them. Violation of this taboo is a sin and the sinner is ostracized from the community.

Both males and females consume country liquor (*mohuli*), rice beer (*landa*), millet beer (*pendum*) and sago palm juice (*salap*). Both men and women chew tobacco and males smoke handmade cigars (*pikka*).

SOCIAL LIFE

The Paroja tribe according to their social traits is dichotomized into two broad divisions i.e., Bada Paroja and Sana Paroja. The concept of purity is a vital factor to make the distinction between these two sections and the underlying reason is that the former section is more Hinduised and abstain from taking beef whereas the latter is still primitive and reportedly take beef. The Bada Paroja constitute Sodia Paroja, Jhodia Paroja, Bada Jhodia Paroja, Penga Paroja and the latter is represented by endogamous groups such as Konda Paroja or Bareng Jhodia Paroja and Selia Paroja or Chhelia Paroja. The Chhelia Paroja were goat breeders in the past.

All these sections are again subdivided into several totemistic exogamous septs such as *angaria*, *atimundia*, *bageria* (tiger), *baria* (wild boar), *bedia*, *chahaderia*, *chahia* (Champak tree), *chalia*, *chemia*, *chikamia*, *chhembia*, *chindria*, *dabia* (piri grass), *dindia* (egg of a bird), *hachodia*, *hadria*, *halkeria*, *handia*, *haranginia*, *jiria*, *kadengia*, *kanwakharia*, *kutesia*, *narkia*, *gadadia* (banana tree), *ganuria*, *girilia* (Girli tree), *hukesia*, *jamudia* (Jamun tree), *kaledia*, *kaleria*, *kaletia* (a snake), *kartaria*, *katedia*, *katia*, *kharlia*, *kochia* (a type of eel), *kodikharia*, *kodinga*, *kodiparia* (a hill), *kucheria*, *kuhuria*, *kundaria*, *lauria*, *lulia*, *maribtia*, *marlia*, *murkharia*, *nangeria*, *nerkeria*, *ornagaria*, *rengia*, *sanderia*, *sodia*, *tarighatia*, *titosia*, *tuadia*, *tualaria* and *tumudia* etc. These clans are named after the names of villages, hills, plants and animals. They revere their totemic objects and observe taboos for their social well-being.

Life Cycle

Pregnancy, Child Birth & Afterwards

In the course of his life between birth and death, a Paroja individual passes through successive phases and crises of life. They have their own rational view that human life begins in the mother's womb and ends with death. They are quite aware of the fact that conception results from the sexual union of adult man and woman but with supernatural blessings. A pregnant woman is subjected to many taboos and restrictions in respect of her diet and daily activities for her well-being and safe delivery. However, in practice, pregnant women remain engaged in their daily chores till a very advanced stage and often up to the moment when the labour pains start.

They observe pre-delivery ritual- *gotuja* / *artiuja* on the ninth month of pregnancy conducted by female shaman (*bejuni* or *gurumai*) to get protected from ill omens and evil spirits by sacrificing a pig or fowl and offering rice, turmeric water, vermilion and resin.

At the time of childbirth the woman is confined to a room. Only elderly and experienced women and the traditional midwife attend the mother. Gurumai, the female shaman is called to conduct rituals for smooth

delivery in case of trouble. After the delivery, the umbilical cord is cut by the midwife, and the child is given a bath near a pit dug in the courtyard of the house for this purpose. The mother and the baby remain polluted and secluded inside the house until the naval cord dries up. The birth pollution continues till that time. On this day, the midwife throws the dried-up naval cord into the pit that is then filled up with earth after lighting a lamp and incense sticks near it to ward off evil spirits. Then the mother and the baby take bath and change clothes. Family deities are worshipped for the well-being of the family and the newborn. The family's earthen cooking pots, and the clothes and beddings from the delivery room, are thrown away and replaced with new ones. A ritual is conducted to purify family members from birth pollution.

The midwife is remunerated with a new sari and food stuffs. Then the mother resumes her normal activities. On that evening they observe the name giving ceremony conducted by their traditional astrologer-*dissary* and female shaman- *gurumai*; using rice divination method and selecting a name from the names of the ancestors. They observe the first cereal feeding of the baby after one month. A special dish of rice and pulses is prepared which is offered first to a cow and then a little paste is put on the baby's mouth. On that day, they also observe the tonsure and ear piercing ceremony conducted by the maternal uncle, *dissary* and *gurumai* and the family hosts a non-veg feast to the kinsfolk. In these ceremonies, the maternal uncle and grandparents play a vital role.

The baby is breast-fed up to two to three years of age. The grandparents or elderly children, who are unfit for outdoor activities, always act as baby-sitters and take care of small children while parents are working outside. If there is no one, the mother usually carries the baby with her to the work site. The child grows up in an atmosphere of fondness and affection.

Puberty Rite

The Paroja observe puberty rites for adolescent girls attaining their first menarche. The girl is secluded in an isolated room for seven days and during this period she is tabooed to look or talk with males and to perform any household chores. Pollution period continues for seven days and the girl takes her purificatory bath on the dawn of the eighth day in the nearest hill stream anointing with turmeric paste. Her family and relatives present her new clothes and cosmetics and in the evening a non-vegetarian feast is served to kinsfolk and relatives along with country liquor- *mohuli*.

Marriage

In the Paroja community, adult marriage and monogamy is the norm. They regard, marriage arranged through negotiation (*kudianala*) is ideal and prestigious and for that it is the common practice. In other cases they resort

to other modes of marriages such as by capture (*jhika nata*), by service (*gharaon*), by mutual consent (*mana raje*), by elopement (*udilia*) and by exchange (*badulu*) etc. Cross-cousin marriage is a preferential mode of marriage in which a man may claim traditionally, to marry his mother's brother's daughter or his father's sister's daughter. Junior levirate and junior sororate are permitted by which a man can marry the widow of his deceased elder brother (*boudeur ghar*) and deceased wife's younger sister (*tada*). Remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees are socially permitted.

In all regular modes of marriages payment of bride price (*jholla*) is obligatory which is paid in cash and kinds. It includes Rs.5/- to Rs 500/- in cash, clothes for bride and her mother, some rice, goat or fowl and some jars of country made wine. As the Paroja settlements are mostly uni-clan, village exogamy is the rule. Divorce is permitted and either party can pursue divorce on the grounds of misunderstanding in conjugal life, misconduct, cruelty, extramarital relationship etc. Divorce cases are adjudicated in their traditional community council and if the conflict between the couple is not settled, the divorce is socially approved and then the divorce seeking person gives a copper coin or pebble (*chelo*) to his/her spouse.

Death Rites

The Paroja usually practice cremation to dispose of their dead, but corpses of pregnant women, children, and victims of leprosy and small pox are buried. The corpse is given a bath anointed with turmeric paste and clad with a new cloth. The pallbearers (*malbadia*) carry the dead to the crematoria where the eldest son puts fire on the pyre. All the personal belongings of the dead such as his used cot, clothes, walking stick, tobacco container, umbrella etc. are thrown away near the funeral pyre. The *malbadias* bath in the nearby stream and eat mango leaves and resin for purification and sweep their body in brooms to prevent themselves from the wrath of the departed soul.

Death pollution continues till they perform the minor purificatory rite *sana kama / duma misani* after three or five days after the death. Some well-to-do families conduct the major purificatory rite *bada kama* or *dasa* on the tenth day of the death which is expensive. The bereaved family does not perform any economic activities nor cook food during the mourning period but food is provided to them by the lineage families. During this period they observe certain taboos such as abstinence from eating non-vegetarian foods, observances of rituals and festivals, worship of deities, consumption of alcoholic drinks and sexual union, etc. Their traditional priest Jani presides over their mortuary rites and the maternal uncle acts as the barber. On the eleventh day he plants a vertical stone menhir near the cremation spot in the honour of the dead.

MAGICO-RELIGIOUS LIFE

The Paroja profess their own autonomous tribal religion which is an admixture of animism with later addition of elements of Hinduism by external influence. Their supreme deity is *patra buda* and his consort *jakar*, the earth goddess is installed under the shed of trees at the outskirts of the village and is revered as the deity of agriculture. Their village deity seated at Nissan-munda in the centre of the village street is worshipped by their traditional priest Jani. She is propitiated during all the rituals and festivals to protect the village from all calamities. They also propitiate some deities of nature residing in hills, forests, streams and rivers namely, *dongar devta* (hill god), *janikudi*, *khandual* etc.

In course of time, under the impact of regional Hindu caste culture, they have incorporated some Hindu Gods and deities into their pantheon. They are Hindihuta (Lord Siva), Lord Jagannath of Shabar Shrikshetra of Koraput, Maa Laxmi - the goddess of wealth and fortune etc. For their legendary association with the ex- Raja of Bastar and historical subjugation under the ex-Zamindar of Kashipur and the ex- Raja of Kalahandi they worship, Goddess Danteswari- the patron deity of Bastar and Goddess Manikeswari - the patron deity of Kashipur and Thuamul Rampur and the ex-state of Kalahandi with great devotion.

Like other tribes of this region, they have the cult of ancestor worship. They conduct animal sacrifices to appease their deities

Their majico religious functionaries are *jani*- the priest, *disary*- the astrologer, *gurumai*- the female shamanin and *chalan*- the messenger. Their major festivals during the year are *bihan puja* held during Baisakh, *mandiarani*, *baghraj*, *ladu chapu* (new eating of mango kernel during Asadh), *chitalagi*, *kendumunda topi* during Sravan, *bhad baduani* in the month of Bhod, *dassera* during Aswin, *diwali* during Kartik, *anakakara* (to make new gourd spoon for offering wine to procure *piri* grass for house thatching) during Margasira, *pus parab* during Pus, *jakeri puja* in Magh, *kandul bhaja* (new eating of *kandul*) during Phagun and *chait parab* in the month of Chaitra.

The Paroja have a rich folk tradition of song, dance and music to rejoice in all festive occasions and whenever they find time to celebrate. They are talented singers, musicians and dancers. Their common form of dance is the famous *demsa* (serpentine) dance which is the common dance of Paroja, Gadaba and other tribes of Koraput district. They perform *ranikheta nach* during observance of *mandiarani parab*, *bhadani nach* during *bhadabaduni parab*, *jaruna nach* during *dassara parab*, *sailori / demsa nach* during *pus parab* and *turulimaga nach* during *chait parab*. Both male and female folks joyfully dance with the tune of the drum and *mohuri* played by the Dom musicians.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Paroja have their own traditional community council at the village level held at *berna munda* headed by the *gauntia / muduli*. Their traditional priest *jani*, astrologer *disari* and messenger *challan* are respected members and all family heads of the village are members of this body. All the functionaries hail from their own community. The post of *gauntia / muduli*, *jani* and *disari* are hereditary. They have another village messenger called *barik*. He is from the Dom (SC) caste and carries messages to distant villages. Both *challan* and *barik* are appointed by nomination.

They have inter-village council known as *bisi berammunda* constituted of the *mudulis*, *janis* and *chalans* of ten to fifteen Paroja villages and headed by a *naik* whose post is hereditary.

These councils act as the guardian of their customary affairs and adjudicate cases of family disputes, rape, theft, adultery, incest, divorce, extra-marital affairs, formation of maggots in the wound (*bittada*), killing of cow (*go hatya*), death by the tiger attack, slapping with shoe (*chapel mada*) and intra and inter-community rifts. The unsolved cases of the village councils are referred to inter-village council. The council sits especially on *pus punei* to decide to organize seasonal festivals and rituals. The *naik* is held in high esteem and his judgment is final and binding. He holds the power to excommunicate the offender and readmit him into their society.

CHANGING SCENARIO

The Paroja are no longer isolated from the world outside. In post independent scenario being declared as a Scheduled Tribe of the State, they are influenced by a package of development and welfare programmes and their varied exposure to the developing world has made impacts in their traditional way of life.

Yet, by and large, the Paroja have more or less retained the core elements of their age-old traditional way of life, which distinguishes them from other tribal and non-tribal communities. Though their traditional economic organization, marriage and kinship system, political system, magico-religious life, folk culture and world view, have externally changed to some extent with the changing time they still continue to function effectively. But by all standards and parameters, they have remained socio-economically backward as compared to the national mainstream.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE PARAJA *

*Rama Chandra Ulaka*¹

The Paraja are one of the main tribes of Orissa. Compared with other tribal communities they show some differences in respect of their settlement pattern, manners and customs and cultural configuration. Their dress and adornments and the ornaments used by their women are of special types. They like to remain aloof from the people of the other communities and fell shy of them. Free mixing and frank conversation with outsiders are not their custom.

All the Paraja houses are of a single design, irrespective of economic or social difference among them. The houses of different families are built in isolation from one another and there is only one entrance to each dwelling-house. No exit is provided at the back of the house. Thus the front door of the houses serves both as entrance and exit. The hearth, granary, abode of the family deity and place for sleeping are all inside the house. All the members of a family irrespective of age sleep on the floor inside the house. For want of space the use of cot is rare. According to their economic status the Paraja are divided into two sections: the *Bada Paraja* and *Sana Paraja*. The former are more prosperous and progressive than the latter. Though they lack education and are steeped in superstition, the Paraja are simple, hard working, tolerant and hospitable.

There are mainly two important places in each Paraja village. One is known as *Berana Munda* and the other *Nisani Munda*. A constellation of some circular stone slabs lying at the centre of the village is called *Berana Munda*. The Paraja denote this place as *Mandu Dand* which lies in front of the house of village head-man. The people of the village gather at *Berana Mudna* or village assembly and discuss matters relating to the village and the festival observed in the village. The village sanctuary in which the deity called Hundi debata is installed is called *Nisani Munda*. It is made of stone slabs and encircled by Menhirs which are fixed

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¹ Minister, T. & R. W. Department, Government of Orissa.

erect on the ground round the shrine. Hundi devta consists of an earthen pot and a chopping tool made of iron and an iron pole which is fixed into the ground ever since the village was established. The iron pole is kept fixed and undisturbed in its original position. But the earthen pot and the iron chopper are replaced with new ones thrice in a year, once in the month of *Srabana* (*Bandapana Basa*), and once either during any Nuakhia (new rice eating) ceremony or just before Chait Parab, and finally at the end of the year in accompaniment with proper rituals and ceremonies. The main element of the ritual complex consists of offering to the deity of animals such as fowl, goat and pig which are sacrificed with the help of the new iron chopper.

In each Paraja village there is a dormitory for unmarried youths (*Dhangada Basaghar*) and a dormitory for maidens (*Dhangadi Basaghar*). The boys and girls spend the night in their respective dormitories and dance together at the village assembly (*Berana Munda*). They meet freely at *Berana Munda* and almost every evening keep themselves busy there in singing songs of question-answer type (*Laga Gita*) in competition with one another. This is the best occasion for them to communicate and exchange their ideas and feelings with one another through the media of love songs. The music and dance which accompany the song competition make the whole situation most attractive and such good activities culminate in match-making leading eventually to marriage between lovers. When the boys and girls feel tired by continuous dancing and singing they retire to their respective dormitories for rest.

The office-bearers of the administrative structure of the Paraja village are Jani, Muduli, Ghatan, Disari, Gunia, Gurumain and Bhatanayak. Jani is the village headman-cum-priest and he is the custodian of religious articles. Muduli is another chief of the village, and he is in charge of all affairs concerning the village. The posts of these two headmen are hereditary. Chalan is responsible for intimating the decisions of Jani and Muduli to the people and coercing and persuading them to follow these decisions. Determining auspicious moment for observing rituals and giving names to new-born babies are the functions of Disari. He is more or less an astrologer in Paraja village. Gunia is a sorcerer-cum-medicine man. He tries to cure the illness of people by uttering incantation and applying herbal medicines. Gurumain is the priest whose duty is to worship the village goddess on the occasion of rituals or festivities. His good offices include offering of prayers to village goddess at the time of illness of some persons of her village for recovery. Generally, a Paraja woman works as Gurumain. *Bhatanayak* is an important person in a Paraja village. He has to purify those who are ostracized for having committed certain socially disapproved acts or for suffering from ritually polluted conditions. Some of the ritually defiling acts and conditions are cow-slaughter, injury or wound caused by the attack of a tiger, formation of maggots in sore of the body and illness and suffering caused by any contagious disease. The concerned person who is a victim to these sufferings is shut out from the society and until he is made free from ritual pollution by

undergoing purificatory rites prescribed by the village *Bhatanayak*, he is not readmitted into the tribe. In addition to the purificatory rituals the out-caste has to contribute a pig, a goat, three fowls and some money and rice to the village feast which is arranged by all people of the village on this occasion.

The processes of ritual purification include the following steps. The village *Bhatanayak* takes the out-caste to the confluence of the rivers or hill streams and shaves his head clean. Thereafter he sprinkles over him cow-dung diluted in water, and bathes him in the river. After he is bathed, he touches a hot gold ring with his tongue. These actions are believed to make the concerned person ritually clean and help him in getting himself admitted into his society. *Bhatanayak* receives a piece of new cloth, five rupees, half of a kilogram of rice and half a kilogram of ragi from the concerned person for his religious services. The last role which *Bhatanayak* has to play on this occasion is to eat first the rice cooked for the feast. At this time a five-rupee note is kept by the concerned person underneath the leaf-plate from which *Bhatanayak* eats his food in payment of additional gift to him for the religious services. After *Bhatanayak* eats his meal, others present at the ceremony make full justice to the ritual feast.

The manner in which the Paraja women wear their clothes and ornaments is unique. Ten to twelve brass rings dangle from each ear. Similar rings also adorn the nose. If any Paraja woman does not wear such rings she faces serious criticism by the society and is subjected to severe humiliation at her mother's-in-law place. Therefore, every Paraja woman, whether rich or poor, is very much particular about wearing the ear and nose rings. A Paraja woman exhibits a great skill in getting herself dressed and adorned. She forms the locks of the hair or her head into the shape of flat bun and uses a number of hairpins on either side of the bun in order to keep it in position. This adds to the beauty of the manner of her hair-dressing. Besides, she uses silver rings, one round each finger of her hands. The old one-rupee or half-a-rupee silver coin is studded on each ring and all these rings, when worn round the fingers, make her look more handsome. She also likes to wear two or three chains of necklace made of coloured beads. She put on plastic bangles of various colours in her wrist.

The Paraja woman adopts a special manner of wearing cloth. She uses three-fourths of her cloth to cover portion from the waist to the knees and rolls the remaining one-fourth of the cloth round her breast and back and ties the end of the cloth by means of a knot which rests on the upper side of her left shoulder. The Paraja women are very fond of dancing and the manner in which they wear their clothes is adapted to it. It is their opinion that any alteration in their usual manner of wearing cloths creates obstacles in dancing. The traditional way of wearing clothes is also very suitable for field work.

Though the Parajas lag behind in the sphere of education they are far advanced in respect of dance and music. The inborn histrionic talent with which they are endowed finds expression in dances and songs like *Dhemsā* dance,

Dundunga-Dance and *Laga* songs, (competitive songs). As soon as the Paraja boys play their stringed musical instruments in accompaniment to self-composed songs, all others, young and old, assemble together and get ready to dance. As a matter of habit, young girls, the matrons and the old women are grouped together separately according to age groups and start dancing. Competitive songs are generally sung at the time of marriage ceremonies and Chait festival. The Paraja forget their woes of life and feel relaxed after hard work by devoting every evening to these recreational and cultural activities.

The Paraja are habituated to drinking a kind of drink called '*Landa*'. Men and women are fond of drinking this wine in festivities. The process of preparation of *landa* is like this. They soak *ragi*, *suan* and *jana* in water till they are germinated. Then they dry these up sufficiently. Then these are pulverized into flour. In the like manner rice is also pulverized. They mix the rice flour in water and make small balls and then boil these in steam. Then they put the corn powder with the boiled rice balls in an old earthen jar and pour water into it, and keep it undisturbed. In three or four days the contents get fermented and turn into an intoxicant which is a great favourite drink of the Parajas.

There are three types of marriage noticed among the Paraja. They are called *Maga* marriage, *Jhinka* marriage and Pasmamundi marriage. *Maga* type corresponds to marriage by arrangement in which the marriage settled by negotiation. Generally the arranged marriages are held in the month of Magha because all crops are harvested by this time, and food is available at home in plenty. In this case two or three persons on behalf of the bridegroom visit the house of bride's father. They carry a bamboo pole and some wine with them to the bride's village. Generally such visits take place in the month of *Kartik*. On reaching the bride's house the bridegroom's team keeps the bamboo pole inclined to the middle wall of the bride's house, and keeps hanging from it all the wine bottles which they carry with them. The bride's father makes enquiry as to the purpose of their coming. In reply the bridegroom's party reports that they have come for a *Malabar* or *Raibar*. If the bride's father does not want to give his daughter in marriage to the particular boy he asks them to remove the bamboo pole from his house and indicates to the *Raibar* or *Malabar* to take away the wine bottles. On the other hand, if the bride's father is in favour of the proposal he or the bride's brother accepts the wine bottles; and all present there including *Raibar* drink the wine, and ask the *Raibar* to come again. This is indicative to the consent of the bride's father to the proposal. Preparations are made by the bridegroom's party for the next visit to the bride's house. Disari is consulted and an auspicious Wednesday is fixed for the visit. On that day the *Raibar* and the *Malabar* proceed to the bride's house. They carry with them a bottle of wine, some rice, *ragi*, and money. The bride's father receives them and makes arrangements to entertain them and his village headman with the wine. He mixes some wine with the wine brought by *Raibar* and *Malabar* and invites the village headman to grace the occasion by his presence. He offers wine to the

Raibaria and *Malabaria* and the village headman and discusses the negotiation with them and finally settles the matter.

An auspicious day is fixed for the next visit to the bride's house. This time the bridegroom himself goes to the bride's house accompanied by his relatives. According to the tradition the bridegroom's father pays some bride-price (*Jalla*) to the bride's father. While returning with the bride and before crossing the boundary of the bride's village the mother's brother of the bride is given a pig and some wine in token of gratitude shown to him. The bride's brother is also paid some-thing which is known as *Sala Khedia*. On reaching the groom's village the marriage is celebrated with great pomp. A curious type of gymnastic performance known as *Kumudamara* is arranged at the time of marriage in the Paraja society and it is performed by those who can afford it. In this case two long bamboo poles are set apart and fixed upright on the ground; and another pole is tied to them horizontally at a height beyond reach, and a water melon is kept suspended from it. The upright bamboo poles are anointed with castor oil and made slippery. The bride's party is given chance first to climb up and cut the melon with one stroke. If the bride's people come out successful in doing so, they are given a pot full of wine (*landa*) with some meat in recognition of their success in the feat. If the bride's party fails in doing so, the groom's party comes to make an attempt at it. Success on their part means a reward of a pot of wine and some meat from the bride's party. In this exercise the defeated party gives a reward of fixed quantity of wine and meat to the winning party in recognition of its skill of performing the feats of valour.

If the parents of the bride and the parents of the bridegroom cannot afford to perform the marriage of their children by arrangement, marriage is held by capture (*Jhinka marriage*). A mediator (*Sutra Kari*) acts as liaison between the bride and the groom. At the appointed place and time the friends of the groom capture the bride and bring her to the groom's house by force. Generally incident of bride-capture takes place at the weekly market or at the time of some festivals. In this case the groom makes a beginning by gently holding the hand of the bride and pulling her to his side. Thereafter his friends join and carry her to the groom's village. The curious element to be noted in this process of capture is that if the bride gives blows to the groom's friends it is indicative of her consent to the proposed marriage with particular groom. After a few days some people of the bride's village visit the groom's village in search of the kidnapped girl. One of the search party acts as the leader of the party (*Khojbana*) and the others of the team accompany him as *Raibaria*. *Khojbana* is distinguished from *Raibarias* by his iron-plated bamboo pole which he carries with him on this occasion. They enter the groom's village on the plea of searching for their 'lost cow'. It is needless to say that the village involved in this capture is known much before the visit of the bride's people to this village. On reaching the village the party walks straight to the headmen and asks the chief of the groom's party in whose cowshed their 'cow' is tied. In reply the village *Muduli* informs them that their

'cow' has been confined in some cowshed and is given gruel and water properly and that there is no question now of returning it to the owner. The concerned person adds by saying that the price of the cow will be paid duly. On the behalf of the groom, the village Muduli assures the Khojabana of the payment of bride-price and asks him to come again someday to get it.

After a few days the bride's father send intimation through the village *Chalan* to the groom's father about the day on which he proposes to visit his village. On that day the groom's father keeps things such as rice and wine ready for the feast. As soon as the bride's party including *Khojabana* arrives at the groom's village they are respectfully greeted and led into the groom's house. The married women of the groom's house come forward and in great submissiveness anoint the feet, knee, shoulder and fore-head of the *Khojabana* with turmeric paste mixed with water and then greet them with folded hands. After they are led to some one's cowshed where they all sit and start talking to each other, both the parties carry on arguments and exchange words with one another. At the end the bride's father receives the bride-price and with others of his team returns home satisfied. The last ritual to be observed in this case is to anoint turmeric paste on the body of the bride and groom on an auspicious day fixed by the village *Disari* and solemnizes the union.

The third type of marriage which is known as Paisamundi is equivalent to marriage by intrusion. As a prelude to such type of union song competitions go on days together among the boys and girls, and through the medium of competition feelings of love and affection are exchanged between different pairs of boys and girls. When the emotion of natural attraction reaches its climax the girl takes initiative in this matter and proceeds to the house of the boy whom she loves most. On reaching his house she asks his mother for some rice or ragi gruel. The groom's mother knows already the implications of her request and therefore welcomes her and serves the gruel in a leaf-cup. After eating it the girl puts the leaf-cup underneath the water pot; and the boy's mother understands from this that the girl wants to become her daughter-in-law. She then confirms it by asking the girl to fetch water in the Jar given to her. The girl goes to nearby hill stream or to any other source of water and fetches water and boils it. As soon as her prospective bridegroom arrives at home she anoints turmeric paste on his body and bathes him in tepid water. Sometimes later the groom's father informs the bride's father of it. The bride's father gets annoyed at the self-indulgence of his daughter in match-making and sends some of his relatives to the groom's house to get the bride-price instead of going himself for this purpose. On the day of payment of the bride-price the groom's father arranges a feast to entertain the bride's party and as advised by the village *Disari*, the marriage is solemnized and consummated. The other terms used for such type of marriage are *Udulia* and *Paisamundi* marriage.

The Paraja take the help of an elderly woman at the time of child birth. *Gurumain* of the village is also asked to remain present at the time of delivery. The work of *Gurumain* is to light the lamp and burn incense and utter incantations. In spite of these measures if the delivery becomes painful and if any complications arise, then the sorcerer is sought and the necessary herbal medicines prescribed by him are administered. After the child is born umbilical cord is cut and the child is given a bath near the pit dug in the courtyard of the house for this purpose. The mother and child remain polluted until the naval cord dries up and falls off. The midwife who helps at the time of delivery is called home on the day on which the stump of the umbilical cord falls off and in her presence it is thrown into the pit, and incense is burnt and lamp is lighted near the pit which is then filled in with earth. The midwife gets from the family some rice, ragi, turmeric and oil on this occasion, and thereafter the family under goes purification of birth pollution.

When death occurs in a family two people carry the dead body to the cremation ground. These two people are called *Madadharia*. A potful of gruel is also taken along with the dead body. This gruel is known as *Pendchopa*. After the dead body is cremated the pot containing the gruel is pressed under a piece of stone in order to break it. All the things used by the deceased are thrown on the cremation ground. The relatives of the deceased family contribute one rupee each and with this they buy some wine which they drink together after taking bath. To express mutual sorrow the people get their gruel from their respective families and dine together for one and a half day in the house of the deceased. On the second day they get house of the deceased cleansed and the clothes of the members of the deceased family are washed. The pall-bearers go to the cremation ground and collect the ashes into a heap and place three pieces of stone in a triangle on the ashes and lay a large piece of stone over them to keep the ashes covered. Then they go to the nearby river or hill-stream and catch some fish and reach the place where the clothes of the deceased family are washed. They take out their own clothes and wear some leaves of a tree called *Kan Kada Patar* and leave their clothes for washing. After the clothes are washed they throw away the leaf dress and wear the wet clothes and proceed to the house of the deceased with the fish caught from the river or the stream. On reaching the house they start cooking seven fistfuls of rice and fish and divide the cooked food into seven shares and make seven food packets with the help of Sal leaves, and give these to the members of the family to eat. This food is known as *Pitakhia* or *Pitachhua*. Thereafter they collect all the cooking vessels, ladle, strainer, wood and ashes from oven and throw them near the cremation ground. In the evening a fowl is sacrificed at the place where the person died; and some rice, ragi, money, oil and turmeric are given to the pall-bearers who in their turn anoint the oil and turmeric over their body and get themselves purified.

At night two people go to the cremation ground with a packet of cooked rice held suspended from a carrying pole and call aloud the deceased person by

shouting his or her name and ask him/ her to eat the cooked rice which represents *Pitabhat*. In the meantime some ragi flour is spread over a leaf-plate at the house of the deceased family and kept covered under a basket. No-body is allowed to remain present at that place. The members of the deceased family come out and stand outside their house. The pall-bearers soon return home and on their way back home keep uttering loudly the name of the *Bhagabat*. They also stand in front of the house of the deceased family. Some-one from inside the house asks the reason of their coming. At this the pall-bearers reply "We have brought happiness in place of sorrow". Thereafter the pall-bearers get into the house and scrutinize the ragi-flour kept covered therein. If any foot-print of a person is marked on the flour it is suspected that some sorcerers have eaten up the deceased person. If foot prints of any animal or bird are noticed, then it is believed that some deity has eaten up the deceased person. If no foot print is seen on the flour then it is believed that Yama or the god of death has taken away his life. On the third day the deceased family arranges a feast and invites all peoples of the village to partake of it. It is the tradition of the Paraja culture that everyone in the village should take part in the feast. A family of moderate means arranges a modest feast on the third day as the last ritual of the death rites whereas a family of substantial means arranges a sumptuous feast in the month of Pausa or Magha on this occasion.

The term used by the Paraja for the soul is *Duma*. The soul of the person killed by a tiger is called *Baghaduma*. The places of residence of Dumas are those where death occurs as a result of falling from a tree or drowning in water, or falling down from a hill or attack by a savage beast in a cave. No one dares visit such a lonely place. If some-one is attacked any time by *Duma*, he or she takes the help of sorcerer or *Gurumain* to be free from its evil influences. It is the tradition that each Paraja family should solemnly invoke the spirit of the Dumas of the deceased members at the time of feasts and festivals and worship them first and perform necessary rituals on the occasion thereafter.

The Paraja observe different festivals in different months. In addition they observe a festival called *Raji Sustha Puja* which is connected with heavenly bodies. If the '*langia*' stars, or '*Dhuma ketu*' (the comet) or the *Ulka* (falling star) appears in the sky the Parajas apprehend that the country will be seized with calamities and visited by famine and scarcity. Accompanied by the village *Gurumain* the people in different groups visit village after village and collect alms from different families. When these stars disappear they consult the village *Disari* who finds out an auspicious day in which the rice collected from the village is cooked and eaten by all people concerned. They also perform *Puja* for the Rain God, invoking *Indra* to give rain and protect the crops from the attack of beasts. During Solar and Lunar eclipse they offer prayers with the help of *Gurumain* and Sorcerers to the planets to rid them of their evil effects. The rites observed on this occasion are called *Rahu* and *Ketu Puja* and animals which are

sacrificed to appease the planetary bodies are pigs, goats and fowl. At the time of eclipse herbal medicines are also collected.

The Paraja observe *Jhankar Puja* or *Annaka Puja* or *Dahani Paju* in the month of *Margasira* as the Kandha tribes do. On this occasion they use new ladles made of gourd in place of old ones which they dispose of as a part of the festival.

They observe *Laxmi Puja* or *Taku Parab* in the month of *Ashara*. On the day which precedes *Srigundicha* the village Jani offers lamp and incense at *Nisani Munda* and sacrifices a fowl. The village Chalan keeps the people of the village informed of this festival on the precious day. Each household keeps its house and clothes clean, and performs the *Laxmi Puja*. The village Jani brings a *ragi* plant from his own field after performing necessary rituals. Then, offering lamp and incense to the plant he sets it straight at '*Nisani Munda*'. After performing necessary rituals there, the village Jani puts the plant in a basket and brings it to his house. During the transit of the plant from the *Nisani Munda* to the Jani's house people sing and dance and the village rings with the sounds. The *ragi* plant represents the goddess '*Laxmi*' and the village Jani worships her by offering lamp and incense and vermilion. After the *Puja* starts Jani's wife takes some turmeric powder and rice and marks these on the forehead of the persons who constitute the procession of transporting the *ragi* plant from the *Nisani Munda* to her house. The same process is repeated in each and every Paraja family which brings a *ragi* plant from its own field straight to its house where it is worshipped. The wife or daughter-in-law of the man who brings the plant marks turmeric and rice on his forehead.

As the last part of the '*Laxmi Puja*' the Paraja perform *Taku Parab*. The village Jani prepares a cake by roasting mango kernel mixed with molasses and offers it to Jhankar goddess. Non-vegetarian meals are forbidden on this occasion. But cakes are prepared on this day and offered to the Jhankari deity and eaten sumptuously, the *Taku Parab* involves heavy expenditure for about ten or eleven days. From the time the *Taku Parab* is observed, people spend their time in feasting and drinking, dancing and singing. After *Bahuda Gundicha* the Parajas offer again incense and lamp to the *ragi* plants already brought home previously. They keep them at the place where seeds of crops are stored. With this the *Laxmi Puja* as observed among the Paraja comes to an end.

The Paraja observe *Langaladhua Punai* or *Bandapana Parab* in the month of *Srabana*. Those who have ploughs observe this festival; and those, who do not have ploughs, observe it by only preparing cakes and eating them. On this day they clean their houses and stop all work relating to cultivation. They wash the ploughs, yoke and other agricultural implements in the nearby river and keep them clean at home. They also wash the equipment called '*Badam*' which is used at the time of sowing seeds and keep inside it a crab. Thereafter they proceed to the forest and collect some flowers called *Baghanakhi*. They also bring from the forest a kind of tuberous plant called *Tainladandi* with its leaves and roots intact

and some branches of *Bela* and *Amla* and keep all of these on the plough and yokes which are decorated with a kind of red earth called *gerumati*. They also cover the plough with a new piece of cloth. Thus they prepare several sweets and offer them to the plough, and the yoke *Badam*. At sunset, when the cattle return home, the headman of each family covers his body with the new cloth which is kept on the plough. The members move gently the flowers of '*Baghanakhi*' on the cattle, and beat them with '*Tainladandi*'. The significance of this ritual is that the cattle will not be attacked by tiger.

The next ritual items of this festival are that the head of the household keeps their handful of cooked rice in the *Badam* in which the crab is kept and worship it by offering incense. Next day, the crab is released in the field and the cooked rice is sprinkled over the field. After this people are engaged in eating, drinking, dancing and singing. Next day, the festival is brought to an end by soaking the tuft of grass in turmeric water and sprinkling it over the place.

Nachuni Parab or Bhada Parab is observed at the time of Dasara in the month of Bhadrap. The people clean their houses and start the ritual by cooking new rice or paddy leaves, A tamarind, a kind of tuber called *taraga*, is also used as a substitute in their respective houses. The villagers collect, according to their means, the articles of the rituals and sacrificial animals such as goat and fowl. The y go out of the village, make a small shed thatched with the leaves of *Jamukoli* tree and sacrifice the animals there. Then they come back home and eat the cooked new rice with mead and wine. This is the end of the *Nachuni Parab*. The Paraja observe the festival of lights called "*Depabali Parab*" either two days earlier or two days later than the due date of '*Deewali*'. On this occasion, each household cooks a mixture of water-melon, *Jhudanga* and varieties of green leaves, and place some quantity of this cooked vegetables and green leaves on the roof and start worshipping the god of fire. Similarly, each family keeps some portion of the cooked vegetables and green leaves in the basket in which crops or seeds are kept and then they start worshipping the goddess Laxmi. The other household articles are kept are mortar and pestle, grinding-stone and the loom. It is at this time that the family members pray that all the household belongings may be in use for all time. The broom-stick is also offered with the cooked vegetables; so that it keeps the house clean all the time. In the like manner, they offer cooked vegetables and green leaves to all the agricultural implements and pray that all the agricultural operations may go on smoothly all the time. This is the occasion on which the Dumas of their agnates are remembered and offered food for their kindness in providing them with food and drink. At night each Paraja family kills a fowl and cooks it and eats the meat with wine.

The Pusa Parab comes in the month of Pausa. It is observed on the full moon day of this month. The Parajas exhaust in this month all the crops harvested in the month of Margasira. Each family disposes of almost all the agricultural produce such as paddy, *suani*, *kantia*, *alasi*, Chili, sweet potato, etc. at

a cheap rate, and with the sale proceeds they buy new cloths for all the members of the family. The Parajas purchase winter-clothes in this month. It is noticed that the price of their agricultural produce goes down and the price of their daily necessities rises up in this month.

On the day of Pusa Parab each family finishes cleaning the house very early in the morning and married women are busy with such work as grinding *ragi* and husking rice. The able bodied adult male members of the village form into different groups and proceed to the forest to collect the required fuel for the following eight days. In the evening the married women walk to the river with their respective earthen pots and bring water called *Duma Pani* and install at the shrine (Debata Gandi) in their respective houses. At night they remember the *Duma* deity by sacrificing a fowl and offering incense and lamp at the shrine.

In the meantime fire is set to the big logs of wood piled up at the village assembly. All the villagers gather round the fire. The unmarried youths start playing their stringed instrument (*Dudunga*) and maidens start dancing groups. After a few hours the youths and the maids under the guidance of their chosen leader (*Mula Dhangada*) start the work called Pusachora. The leader is to see that discipline is maintained among youths and the maidens, and the meaning of Pusachora is that the young men and the young maidens get into the backyard or the garden of any family of the village and steal potato, pumpkin, cabbage, brinjal etc. un-obstructed. Whatever vegetables they get by this method they roast them in the fire at the *Berana Munda* and eat them up with wine in great delight. The fire which is lighted at the *Berana Munda* is called *Mandukod*. In the meantime a fowl is sacrificed at the house of their chief and thereafter they dance and sing together and move from ward to ward in the village.

The Landi god is one of their most important deities who is believed to be appearing once very year to go round the dwelling-places of the tribe. The Landi songs are themes of devotion and tolerance, peace and order. All people of the Paraja community participate in the rituals concerning the Landi deity. The Paraja women with the village Jani spend the whole night at *Berna Munda* (*Mandukod*) on this occasion. On the second day all house-holds of the village make cakes of *ragi* and *alasi*, cook rice and meat and prepare curry and invite each other to their respective houses for partaking of the food. The unmarried women of the village get themselves busy with distributing the food stuff in each other's houses.

On the third day a community feast is arranged and all people of the village contribute rice, dal and vegetables for this feast. After everything is cooked the rice is served in two big mats, one for the males and the other for the females. All men of the village sit around the mat and eat together. The women follow suit. Sometimes one feeds the other, and if someone refuses to eat and gets away, others follow him or her and bring him or her back to the place. The tradition of eating together and the songs concerning the *Landi* god reinforces

fellow-feeling and *esprit de corps* among themselves. All intra-personal conflict and tension are forgotten on this occasion and all people get themselves bound together in a tie of affection, friendship and mutuality of obligation.

Next day, inter village visits take place among the relatives and friends. The visitors move from door to door and partake of whatever food and drink are served to them. The maidens collect some money from each other and arrange a feast and invite the unmarried youths of village to it. In the same way the unmarried youths reciprocate the custom. This kind of reciprocity also goes on among old men and women.

Feasting, entertaining and inter-village visits continue for four or five days, and during this time the family resources are almost exhausted, and the people become indebted to the itinerant money-lenders and merchants. On the last but one day which is called *Denamapa* all the households deposit their respective shares of 'Landa' wine in the courtyard of the village Jani. On this day they abstain themselves from drinking wine.

A symbolic episode takes place on the occasion to warn persons contemplating sexual offences. Imaginary sexual maniacs are brought to book in an interesting manner. A supposed scene of a man and a woman living in illegal relationship and of the social punishment inflicted on them is enacted thus. Three of the bachelors of the village tie long string to the legs of two fowls. All people, irrespective of age and sex, assemble at *Berana Munda*. The village *Jani* and *Muduli* are made to sit at *Berna Munda*, and the two fowls are tied to their legs. The offending couple who have already enjoyed marital life for three or four years, are summoned before the village Jani and Muduli and are fined one rupee each. With this amount some tobacco and 'bidi' are purchased and all people get their respective share of it. The next item of work is to strip the wings off the dead fowl tied to the leg of the village *Jani* and dangle it to a bamboo pole. The significance of this action is that the community disapproves such moral lapses on the part of the unmarried boys and girls. It also means a vow of the latter before the elders of the village present at '*Berna Munda*' not to commit further sexual illegalities. The maiden get the wingless fowl and the village *Jani* and *Mudli* get the other fowl. At the same place the fowls are roasted and all people present there eat the meat with Landa wine. The night is spent in great merriment and thus the festival comes to an end.

Though the month of Chait is the first month of the year, it is the month of acute scarcity and it is needless to say that it is the end of all months. Whatever food stuff and financial resources are left over after observing different festivals held in previous months are exhausted at the time of Chait Parab, and the people become completely bankrupt.

The Parajas observe the new rice-eating ceremony in respect of Mango, Mohua, Kandul and many kinds of fruits and roots collected from the forest.

They pay up all old debt and get new debts in this month. They are employed as labourers on annual basis from this month. Chait Parab is observed with great pomp in this month. This is how the festival is observed.

The day previous to the day of festival is the day of cleaning. Each family cleans its house and levels up the surroundings. In the evening the married women of the village carry vessels and go in a procession to the nearby river to fetch water (Duma Pani) in new earthen vessels. The water which is brought at an unearthly hour, in the midst of chanting of the name of the 'Dumas', is called Duma water. They place these vessels at the altar of the deity of each family. At night the women cook rice and *dal* mixed together and offers it to Duma water with respect. All people, regardless of their economic status, wear new cloths on this occasion.

On the second day the women carry on the work of cleaning of their houses again, and proceed to the forest to collect some flowers and fruits including mango, Mahua, and plums. In every house plenty of rice, *dal* and curry are cooked and distributed extensively among the kith and kin. In the evening the unmarried youths start playing their Dudunga and the maidens join them in singing and dancing. The dancing and singing party moves from one ward to the other. While moving they receive from each household a handful of cooked rice and curry which they eat and in expression of their gratitude to all people of the village they entertain them with their dance and song. No drinking is allowed on this day. But chewing of tobacco or smoking of *bidi* is not forbidden. At this time the village 'Jani' goes from door to door and collects from each house some *Kandula* which he fries at *Nisani Munda* or *Jhankara Dedi* after offering prayers and people are permitted to eat *Kandalu*.

From the third day onwards community revelry starts. Food is cooked in every house and collected at *Berna Munda* and all people of the village eat together to their heart's content.

Except the village headmen, all other men go out on hunting as a matter of compulsion. If anyone stays behind and does not take part in hunting, he is humiliated by the ladies of the village. They throw cow dung at him and force him out of the village. No one escapes such humiliation. It is the duty of the women to carry food into the forest for the hunters. In the meantime the young unmarried girls, who stay behind, go on singing so loudly that the locality is resounded with their music. On their way back home from the forest the married women collect varieties of flowers from the forest and on reaching the village they adorn the non-Paraja youths of the village with these flowers. If any outsider visits the village at this time the maidens of the village throw cow dung at him and canvas for contributions in a sweet persuasive manner.

Hunting goes on for three or four days during the Chait Parab. If they succeed they believe that they will reap a very good harvest in the current year.

In other words, success in hunting signifies plenty and prosperity throughout the year. The animal that is killed during hunting is brought to the village kept at *Nisani Munda* and the whole night is spent in dancing and singing. Next day the animal is cut into pieces. Thereafter a portion of meat is given first to the village headman and the remaining portion is distributed equally among all others of the village. In the evening the village Jani carries on some worship under the tree at the outskirts of the village. He carries in a leaf-cup rice cooked in his own house and hangs it from a tree and sacrifices fowl. This is called, Jani- Next day, village Jani offers prayers at the *Nisani-Munda* after which the Chait-Parab comes to an end. After the village Jani arrives at the *Nisani-Munda* the villagers assemble at that place, each of them carrying with him some crops in a winnowing fan. The village Jani mixes all the crops brought by the villagers, utters some incantation and scatters them around; while the Jani scatter the grains around the villagers lift each of their winnowing fans above and look up to see that some grains fall in their respective winnowing fans. Each of the villagers mixes some more seeds with those collected ritually and sows these in the fields. This is the time when the wife of the *Chalan* bathes the village Jani and the village Disari with ash-mixed water. Thereafter the able bodied adults of the village carry the village Jani on their shoulders from *Nisani Munda* to his house to the accompaniment of dance and music; this is the end of the Chait Parab.

The tune, the lilt of the song and the kinds of dances known to the Paraja community are various. They compose verses and set the tune of the dance and music in imitation of the manner in which the snakes crawl, the frogs jump, and the birds sing. The presence of mind and common sense of the Paraja are remarkable. They compose songs in conformity with different situations and apply rhythm appropriate to the music. The clouds, the wind, the ripples, the sound of the stream have considerably influenced the tune of their music. Living freely under the sky and in the recesses of the hills, the Paraja enjoy, without inhibition singing and dancing all the year round. It is true that the authors of the Paraja songs remain obscure, but their compositions are replete with life and pleasure, the mysteries of the dark hills, the grandeur of the forests and the sublimity of the sky. Their folk-songs and indigenous musical instruments are unique contribution. The life of the Paraja is clouded by poverty and indebtedness, on the one hand, and brightened by jollity and the spirit of comradeship, on the other. The true charms of community life are enjoyed by them.

MARRIAGE CUSTOM AMONG THE BARENG JODIA PAROJA OF KORAPUT *

Bhagarathi Chowdhury ¹

Introduction

The Paroja inhabit the district of Koraput in Orissa and the adjoining areas of the Andhra Pradesh. Their name is said to be a corruption of the Sanskrit word 'Prajā' which means people (also subjects or simply, *rayats*). Linguistically, they are included in the Dravidian group, their original language being 'Parji'. Now most of them including woman speak Oriya, although the traces of their original tongue can be picked up from their talk and song, the tribe is originally an offshoot of the Gond tribe. One of their main tradition states their original home to be in Bastar (now in Madhya Pradesh) and their migration to present Koraput and the adjoining areas of the Andhra Pradesh (which were previously included in the Madras Presidency). In Koraput, they live together with Rana, Gadaba, Paika and Dom. Previously their main occupation was agriculture, which was supplemented by hunting and food gathering. But at present majority of them are landless labourers.

Sub-Division:

The Paroja tribe is sub-divided into several sections. It seems improbable, at the first instance, to find out a complete list of these sections due to variations in names in different areas. In the adjoining areas of the Koraput town the Parojas of the following sections are found.

- (a) Sodja Paroja or Bada Paroja.
- (b) Bareng Jodia Paroja.
- (c) Bada Jodia Paroja or Penga Paroja.
- (d) Konda Paroja or Selia (Chhelia) Paroja.

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The Sodia Paroja which is given the highest position in the hierarchy of these sections is again subdivided into two viz; Bada Sodia Paroja and Sana Sodia Paroja. Among them the former abstains from eating the flesh of the cow and buffalo while the latter only from beef but takes the flesh of buffalo. When a cow or a bullock dies, the houses are cleansed and the used earthen pots are removed by the family concerned. The Parojas of the other three sections eat beef and the flesh of the buffalo. The Konda Parojas were previously known as Selia or Chhelia Paroja due to their main occupation of breeding goats in the distance past. Now they call them-selves as Konda Paroja as a section of the Paroja tribe, and when identified as Chhelia or Selia Paroja, they get irritated. R. C. S. Bell in his Koraput District Gazetter, 1945, has equated them with Konda Dora and thus excluded from the bulk of pure Paroja.

Marriage:

These sections of the tribe are endogamous, although instances of marriage outside the own section are not totally absent. Among them there are several clans such as Khil (Tiger), Hantal (Snake), etc., and marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. All the members of a clan believe in the descent from a common ancestor and hence are brothers and sisters.

The most important event in the life of an individual and a significant function in the community of a village is the marriage. As said by R.C.S. Bell (1945) the Paroja marriage customs differ considerably among the different sections in different areas.

The Barenga Jodia Parojas inhabiting in the village around the Koraput town, observe the following marriage customs. Among them there is only adult marriage, and the common age at marriage is 18 to 21 years for boys and 15 to 18 years for girls. Premarital familiarity and the system of free love are socially recognized by the Parojas, Cross-cousin marriage (a boy marrying maternal uncle's daughter) is a favoured form of marital alliance. A man if so likes can marry his deceased wife's younger sister or the wife of the deceased elder brother. Divorce can be effected with the approval of the tribal council of the village on the grounds of marital faithlessness and marital incompatibility. If divorce is demanded by the woman, the bride price of the same amount of it, if paid, is returned back to the husband. A man wanting to divorce his wife was to pay compensation to the woman according to the decision of the tribal assembly. Widow re-marriage is allowed; and involves no payment of bride price.

Among the Bareng Jodia Parojas marriage takes place in one of the following ways.

(A) Ceremonial marriage, arranged by the parents according to tribal conventions is called *haribol* marriage. It is the most elaborate and expensive type of all marriages; hence occurs in rare cases.

(1) In case of *haribol* marriage, initiative is always taken by the boy's side. The parents or guardians of the boy make searches and informal approaches for birds. The proposal is generally put forward from the boy's side in their informal meetings in the market, festival or in the villages. Before any formal visit is paid to the girl's family, the consent of the marriageable boy is taken by the guardian. But in most cases the boy generally conveys his intension of marrying the girl whom she loves, because pre-marital familiarity between the marriageable boys and girls are socially recognized and they get opportunities at the time of dances on the occasion of festivals and marriages. When everything has been considered properly by the boy's side, the first visit is paid for negotiation.

(2) In the first calling, the boy and his parents carrying liquor, uncooked rice, fowl and vegetables with them go to see the girl formally. The expenditure involved in this visit is generally four to six rupees. They return to their village without putting the proposal for consideration.

(3) Five persons including the father or guardian of the boy and a woman, pay a visit to the girl's house to put the proposal for the first time. The visiting party is called *raibadia*. These visitors take with them a pot of wine, nine mans of uncooked rice (about twenty seers), two mans of cooked rice, *landha* and five rupees in cash. Palm (*salap*) wine is also taken, if available, as a favourite item of presentation. On their arrival, the girl's parents ask them whether they are got (informal visit of a person to a relative's house) or *Khunt* (visit of a person or persons to the house of another to establish new relationship by marriage). When the purpose of the visit is made clear to them, the girl's parents invite the kinsmen and other influential persons of the village for negotiation. Person present for the occasion enjoy the food and drink. Now the topic is initiated from the boy's side with the saying "A flower has blossomed in your garden. We have intended to pluck it". Before any reply is given, the consent of the marriageable girl is obtained by asking the same question for three times. When she expresses her willingness, the girl's party will reply "If you are strong enough to bear the burden, you can take the flower". Sometimes a proposal cannot be finalized due to the unwillingness of the girl or of the parents, who wait for the advice of their important relatives. So one or more subsequent visits are made till the parents and the girl express their willingness.

(4) When a proposal has been accepted, the girl's parents invite the boy's side to their house. This time also the same party carrying perched rice, rice-beer and other eatables with them go to the girl's house. On this occasion a grand feast of rice, rice-beer and preferably buffalo meat is arranged for the guest; and

influential persons of the tribe and kinsmen of the village are also invited. This is the occasion when the negotiations are confirmed.

(5) The bride-price known as *Jhola* or *Pani* is generally settled in another calling. Previously the bride-price was commonly paid in kinds consisting of (a) three bullocks and cows, (b) three *puttis* (three *maunds* approximately) of unhusked rice or *mandia*, (c) Rs. 3.00 in cash, (d) clothes worth Rs. 5/- , (e) four *kandis* of rice-beer (*pendum*) and *mandia*-beer (*landha*). But at present the cash payment varying from Rs. 50/- to Rs. 150/- is very commonly prevalent.

(6) In consultation with the *dissari* the boy's party pays another visit to fix the marriage date which would be convenient to most of the people of both the villages. Moreover marriages can only take place during the spring and summer seasons when there is no pressure of agricultural operations and when they have some grains in the house to meet expenses.

(7) A day preceding the marriage day, the village boys and young women escort the bride wit song and music to the village of the bridegroom. Before entering into the boundary of the groom's village, the Jani performs a puja with a sacrifice of a fowl to the village deity in order to admit the girl into the new village. Then they are welcomed by the groom's people with music and dance. They are given a separate house to retire during stay in the village. Now the bride's party demand the bride-price fixed earlier which the boy's father is bound to comply with.

(8) On the marriage day, the bride is taken to the house of the groom, and *Dissari* and *Jani* consummate the marriage. This is followed by feasting and drinking. Singing and dancing to the accompaniment of the sound of the musical instruments continue for the whole day and night.

(9) After a month or so from the date of marriage, the newly wedded couple with food and other eatables pay a visit to the parents of the girl. There they stay for a week or so. This is known as *handi bahudani*.

From the above description it can be calculated that the total expenditure involved in the *haribol* type of Paroja marriage is always above Rs. 250/-, which every Paroja father cannot afford due to economic hardship. So this type of marriage occurs rarely. At present most of them are landless labourers, and prefer other types of marriage in which expenditure is comparatively less.

B. Udlia Marriage:

This is type of marriage based upon mutual love which leads to elopement. Boys and girls meet in weekly markets and in communal dances on the occasion of marriage and festivals. When a boy and girl love each other and decide to marry, they run away from their houses to another village, where some

relatives of the girl or of the boy live. Sometimes they also go to a distant place, where no relative lives. There they spend a week or so and then return to the boy's village. Now they are socially recognized as husband and wife and cannot be separated by their parents. The bride's parents accompanied by their kith and kin come to the house of the boy and induce the girl, if they do not approve of the marriage, to return back to her village. Her parents and relatives are pacified by the boy's party with request, food and drink. Now they demand the bride price and a feast. When the amount of bride price has been settled, the guests and influential people of the tribe in the village are entertained in a feast. In this case, the amount of bride price is less and can be paid in several installments'.

C. *Jhinka-Utra Marriage:*

The marriage by capture is known as Jhinka-Utra marriage. As mentioned earlier, the boys and girls meet each other on several occasions, namely in *Chait* festival, when young men go on dancing expedition to the neighbouring village and in marriage festival, when village maidens and boys escort the bride to the bridegroom's village. These occasions provide scope for the boys to capture the girls whom they select for marriage. In most cases capture is also mutually pre-arranged by the boy and the girl, or by the parents who direct their sons and daughters to go to a definite place for capture. Physical capture rarely takes place. When a girl has been captured the parents of the girl accompanied by the influential persons of their village and relatives come to abuse and threaten the boy's family and placate the girl to come out of the house. If the girl is not willing for the marriage, she may come out and surrender herself. She is then taken back to her home, and compensation is demanded from the boy's family for the mistake of the boy. If the girl expresses her willingness, she may be induced by the unwilling parents to return back to village. When the girl remains adamant, the girl's party demands the bride price. When the girl is captured with the consent of the parents and the girl, the bride price is only demanded. When the girl's people would be busy in shouting and catcalls, the boy's parents must be busy in preparing festive meals with meat and liquor to pacify the guests. Influential people of the boy's village also come to the rescue of the boy's family. When the temper falls and tension released, persons from both the parties sit down to settle the quantum of the bride price including the compensation, if any. In this case the bride price is less and is not required to be paid immediately. When everything has been finalized, the guests are given a grand feast with liquor and other intoxicants as the most important item. In an auspicious moment as advised by the *dissari*, the bride and bridegroom are given new clothes to wear. A fowl is killed by striking it against the heads of the bride and bridegroom. The wedded couple cooks it and eats in a feast.

D. *Paisamundi Marriage:*

Marriage by intrusion is called *Paisamundi* marriage. This type of marriage though socially recognized, rarely occurs. In most cases the widow and

the divorced women are involved in this type of marriage. When a woman fails to allure the man whom she desires to marry, she goes and makes an intrusion into his house. She takes some presentations with her with the intention to become a wife. She is generally abused, beaten and refused food and also put under several ordeals. If she remains silent she is finally accepted as the daughter-in-law of the family. No ceremony is performed and only a feast demanded by the tribesmen of the village is organized by the boy's family. Among the Parojas the widow and divorced women commonly resort to this type of marriage.

F. *Gharjwain*:

The poor Paroja boy may serve in the comparatively well-to-do family with the aim of getting the latter's daughter or sister in marriage after a stipulated period of service, which varies from three to five years. During this period, the boy lives as a family member and renders whole time service. After the stipulated period, the girl is given in marriage with the boy and all the expenses of it are borne by the girl's parents or guardians. After marriage the couple, if they so desire can return to the boy's original village, or can continue to stay there and set up a new home. If the girl's guardian can afford, a few acres of land is allotted to the boy. Thus the marriage by service is aimed at to evade the bride price and other expenses involved in other types of marriage.

A B O BLOOD GROUP OF PARAJAS OF KORAPUT DISTRICT *

*Basanti Rath*¹

In this paper the ABO blood group of Parajas of Koraput district is presented. The investigation was carried out in 1971. A total number of 100 unrelated individuals of which 69 male samples and 31 female samples were studied. The sample is small sized.

Material and Method

The samples selected for the present study are collected from different villages of Koraput district of Orissa. Blood samples were collected by finger pricks and grouping test was performed by the slide method.

Result and Discussion

The total number of persons tested were 100, of which 69 males and 31 females were studied. The percentage of O group in case of male group is 33.33 which is followed by the groups B and A: the percentages of which are 29.98 and 26.08 respectively. The percentage of AB group is 11.50 which is very low.

From the table I it is observed that among the female group the percentage of A group is 38.7 which is closely followed by the B group, the percentage of which is 35.7, O group and AB group show the percentages 16.1 and 9.6 respectively. Bisexual variation is very predominant.

Chi 2= 17.30 (3 d. f)

P is less than 0.001

(The gene frequencies have been estimated as $P=0.215$, $q=0.162$, $r=0.623$).

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In the Table II the distribution of ABO blood group in different population of Orissa Compared. The ABO blood group of Parajas shows close similarity with the Gadabas.

The 'O' blood group peoples of Sashana Brahmin, Sabara, Juang and Gadaba shows similarity with Parajas of present study.

In AB blood groups, the tribe of Orissa - the Juang and castes - Bhoi, Oriya Khandayat (studied by Tripathy and Mitra), Gaura, Pano and the tribe - Gadaba (studied by M. Mahapatra, unpublished) have similarity with the Parajas of the present study.

Table III represents the distribution of ABO blood group in Indian population. The table shows that the Parajas of present study are similar with Santals and Oroans of Bihar, Maria Gonds of Bastar and Gadabas of Koraput district which is studied by M. Mahapatra (unpublished). Compared with world frequencies, P and Q for this group are greater than the world average of 0.215, 0.162 and 'r' is less in former than the world average.

Compared with the population studied by MC Arthur and Penrose (India, Ceylon, Maldiv Islands, Nepal and Pakistan), 'p' and 'r' of Paraja group are greater than 'p' and 'r' of those populations and 'q' of Paraja is lower than the 'q' of those populations. In comparison with Australoid's, the 'p' and 'q' of Paraja group are greater than the 'p' and 'q' of Australoids and 'r' of the Paraja group is lesser than the 'r' of the Australoid group.

Summary

Blood samples of 100 Parajas of some villages of Koraput district of Orissa were tested for ABO blood groups. The percentages of group A, group B, group AB and group O are 30 percent, 31 percent, 11 percent and 28 percent respectively. The gene frequencies have been estimated as p-0.215, q-0.162 and r-0.623.

Data Tables are given below.

Acknowledgement

I am very grateful to Dr. Usha Deka, Reader in Physical Anthropology, Utkal University for her kind help and valuable suggestions in preparing this paper.

Table-I

Sex	No. of subjects	Phentotypers (Percentage)						
		A	B	AB	O	P	Q	R
Male	69	26.08	28.98	11.59	33.33	0.232	0.239	0.529
Female	31	38.7	35.7	9.6	16.1			

Table-II

ABO BLOOD GROUP DISTRIBUTION AMONG ORISSA POPULATION

Population	No.	O	A	B	AB	Author
Aboriginal tribes of Orissa	153	36.39	21.36	31.07	10.6	Sarkar 1956
Juang	115	21.74	21.74	47.83	8.69	Sarkar, 1956
Sabara	86	22.09	24.42	38.37	15.12	Sarkar, 1956
Bhoie	58	17.24	31.93	41.37	10.36	Tripathy, 1968
Oriya Khandayat	60	40.00	18.33	25.00	11.67	Macfariane, 1938
Santal	57	11.78	10.02	23.10	6.14	Raychowdhury et.al
Brahmin	28	37.17	25.00	39.28	1.57	Tripathy & Mitra, 1967
Karan	45	33.33	22.22	37.77	6.6	Ditto
Khandayat	38	18.42	26.32	44.73	10.53	Ditto
Other Castes	54	20.36	27.77	51.86	9.26	Ditto
Gaura	118	36.57	23.28	46.99	10.66	Raychowdhury et.al
Shashana Brahmin	200	30.99	27.75	37.37	7.76	Dr. U. Deka Mahapatra , S.Mishra
Pano	125	40.75	31.47	41.42	11.34	Raychowdhury et.al
Oriya Brahmin	235	46.3	25.5	26.50	1.28	Patnaik and Ghosh Maulik (Unpublished)
Gadaba	250	28.80	31.20	30.00	10.90	M. Mahapatra Unpublished.
Paraja	100	287	31	30	11	Present study

Table-III
COMPARISION OF A B O GROUP AMONG THE TRIBES & CASTES OF INDIA
AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Population	Authors	No.	O	A	B	AB	P	Q	R
Angami Nagas (Assam Border)	Mitra, 1935-36	165	46.06	38.79	11.51	3.64	24.13	7.89	67.98
Angani Nagas (Assam Border)	Bhattacharjee, 1967	100	45.00	38.00	15.00	6.0	25.03	8.35	66.12
Khasi (Khasia Jaintia Hills of Assam)	Basu, 1938	50	46.6	15.6	33.3	4.5			
Bihar (Assam)	Sarkar	21	38.10	57.14		4.76			
Hos (Bihar)	Majumdar, 1950-51	186	34.95	31.72	27.96	5.36	20.87	18.52	60.61
Mundas (Bihar)	Macfarlane, 1941	120	33.33	32.00	29.17	7.50	21.03	20.52	58.4
Orang (Bihar)	Sarkar, 1949	115	26.90	27.83	33.91	12.17	22.52	26.55	
Santal (Bihar)	Sarkar et. all, 1952	407	31.69	21.37	35.63	11.30	17.83	26.97	
Jats (Punjab)	Khurana, 1950	93	41.93	22.58	34.41	1.07	12.82	12.97	
Chamars (U.P.)	Majumdar, 1947	150	36.67	18.67	39.33	5.33	12.58	25.24	
Doms (U.P.)	Majumdar, 1942	125	36.00	20.00	33.60	10.40	16.43	24.95	
Oraons (Calcutta)	Sarkar, 1942-43	155	47.10	12.90	34.84	5.16	9.95	24.47	
Maria Gond Bastar (Jagdalpur)	Macfarlane, 1940	123	78.45	26.02	34.15	11.38	20.84	26.14	
	Pandit, 1934	200	29.50	19.50	38.00	13.00	17.05	29.68	
Bhotia (Almira)	Tiwari, 1951-52	144	18.06	15.97	50.79	15.97	15.20	40.40	
World average	Mc Arthur and Penrose					0.215	0.162	0.623	
India, Ceylon, Bhutan, Maldiv & Pakistan	Mc Arthur and Penrose					0.185	0.230	0.50	
Gadaba (Orissa)	Mahapatra (unpublished)	250		28.80	31.20	30.20	30.00		10.00
Paraja (Orissa)	Present study	100	28.00	30.00	31.00	11.00	0.232	0.239	0.539

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PENTIA *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Pentia is otherwise called Penthia and Pentiya, Holva, Holuva or Halba (Thurston, 1909). The Pentia are inhabitants of undivided Koraput district and some parts of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts. They are said to be betel leaf sellers and Oriya cultivators of Vizagapatam Agency (Madras Census report, 1901). Mr. C. Hayavadan Rao reported that Pentia have migrated from Bastar State and settled as agriculturists in Petikona area and hence were designated as Petikonaya or Pentia denoting the place they inhabited.

As per 2011 census, their population is 10,003 and the sex ratio, 1054. Their literacy rate is 44.93 percent. However, their females are lagging far behind with 32.59 percent literacy, while 57.99 percent of males are literates.

They had their own dialect, Haluva in the past. Now they have adopted local Odia as their mother tongue.

The Pentia are generally settled cultivators and agricultural labourers. They produce paddy and some minor millet. Besides, they collect different edible roots, tubers and other forest produces. They are non-vegetarians. Rice is their principal diet. Most of them are addicted to country made liquor.

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections i.e. Bada and Sano which have several exogamous totemic septs like Surya (Sun), *Mankar* (monkey), *Bagh* (tiger), *Nag* (cobra), *Kurum* or *Kachop* (tortoise), etc.

Pentia family is generally nuclear, patrilocal, patrilineal and patripotestal. Marriage through negotiation is regarded as the most desired mode of acquiring mates; cross cousin marriage is permitted. Few cases of junior

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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sorrorate and junior levirate are reported. Though polygyny is not disallowed monogamy is commonly practised. Remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees is permitted. Bride price both in cash and kind is paid on the date of solemnization of marriage. Other modes of marriage are elopement and capture, where parental consent and payment of bride price is not easy to come.

The Pentia observe name giving ceremony for newborn babies, and follow puberty rites for adolescent girls. Pollution period in case of puberty is observed for nine days and the pubescent girl is segregated for 9 days till she takes purificatory bath. The Pentia practise both burial and cremation. They observe death pollution for a period of ten days. During this time the family members are tabooed against taking non-vegetarian foods. Services of Hindu Barber and Brahman are utilized during observation of mortuary rites. Finally the bereaved family hosts a feast for the kinsmen and villagers.

Pentia religion is admixture of Hinduism and local beliefs and traditions. Besides their own deity, *Nissani* and *Tahkurani*, they worship Hindu deities like *Gupteswar*, *Jagannath* and celebrate festivals like *Nuakhia*, *Amm Nua* (new mango eating), *Pus punei* and *Diwali* with dance and music.

Pentia have their own traditional village council headed by *Naik* and an inter-village council headed by *Bhata Naik* or *Kul Naik* that settles intra- and inter-community disputes. The other office bearers who assist the *Naik* are *Dissari*, *Pujari*, *Bhandari*, *Dhoba* and *Challan* (messenger).

They claim a better position in the social hierarchy than their neighbours, like, the Kandha, the Gadaba, the Paraja and the Koya, for they get the services of Brahman, *Barik* (barber) and *Dhoba* (washer man).

PENTIYA *

*Gopinath Satpathy*¹

The Pentiyas (Pentias) of Orissa identify themselves as Haluva Paiks, or Simply Haluva. In the Madras Census Report, 1901, they are designated as Pantia and Pentiya and are described as Oriya bétel-leaf sellers. Today, they are found in large number in Koraput district of Orissa and their main profession is cultivation. It is told that they have migrated from Bastar to Pentikonna and later to other parts. Hence they are known as Pentiya (Pentia). Their district wise population is given below:-

Sl. No	Name of the Districts	Number of Male	Number of Female	Total population
1.	Koraput	2,067	2,045	4,112
2.	Mayurbhanj	1,968	1,885	3,853
3.	Keonjhar	370	315	685
4.	Phulbani	277	274	551
5.	Dhenkanal	182	187	369
6.	Cuttack	16	45	61
7.	Sambalpur	18	06	24
8.	Puri	01	00	01
Total		4,899	4,757	9,656

Their total population is 9,656 of which 9601 constitute rural population and 55 live in urban areas.

It is reported in gazetteers that their language is Haluva which the Pentiyas of Jeypur do not admit. They speak Oriya and admit Oriya to be their only language.

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections called Bodo and Sanno. The Sannos are held to be the illegitimate descendants of the Bodos. This

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pure section namely Bodo has a number of septs like 'Kurum', 'Bagh', 'Naga', 'Surya'. The objects which the septs indicate are honoured.

The family is nuclear. It is patrilineal, patrilocal, and patripotestal. Joint families are rare.

They have their tribal council. The officials are designated as Bhatnaek and Kulnaek, Pradhani, Dalei, Dhoba, Bhandari and Chalan. The Challan is the messenger and acts on the direction of the naek. The Bhandari shaves the offenders, the Dhoba cleans his clothes. Over a number of villages, there is one Kul or Bhatnaek. He is assisted by Pradhani, Dalei, in deciding caste matters and social disputes. Especially the council is summoned to readmit the out casted persons. When a person accidentally or knowingly kills a cow, or is affected with sores (*machiapatak*), he is out casted. He is restored into the caste after a ceremony is performed. The offender is taken to the bank of stream; given some offerings from the Jagannath temple at Puri. He then hosts a feast, and the Bhatnaek is to accept the food, first. After the feast, he takes a bath and is purified.

The birth population is observed for 21 days by the mother. She is not allowed to cook, though she is free to touch water after 12 days. They perform name giving ceremony and the name is selected by the Disari or astrologer according to the day and time of the birth. The Ekoisia ceremony on the 21st day is observed and some of them perform ear piercing ceremony on that day.

They adopt adult marriage though; the occurrence of child marriage is not rare. Cross-cousin marriage is preferred. The negotiation being complete and the date fixed, pendals are raised in front of both bride and bridegroom's houses. On the day of marriage, the bridegroom with his party goes to the bride's village with customary bride price like three cloths for bride's mother, three rupees for her father, a cloth and two *annas* for each of her brothers. They present these articles to them and take rest in a separate house. Some amount of rice, liquor, and food articles are also given to the bride's party. The couple takes bath and are brought to the pendal. The Disari officiates as the priest. On the pendals, the bride and bridegroom stand apart with a screen between them. The bridegroom is given the sacred thread and the couple goes round the pendal for seven times. The Disari links their fingers together and the ceremony is over. There ensues a feast. On the following day, the bride and bridegroom return to the bridegroom's house. At his house, they play with each other by throwing turmeric water. A feast is given and the night is spent in dance.

The widow can marry again. The younger brother may keep the wife of the deceased elder brother. Polygyny is permitted in their society.

The dead are burnt. Death pollution is observed for 10 days. They follow the death rite similar to that of their Hindu neighbours. A feast is given to the caste people at the end of the purification ceremony. Annual Sradha ceremony is performed by them and a Brahmin is called to officiate.

Their main festival are Akhi Trutia in Baisakh, Gundicha in Asadh, Rakhi Punia in Sraban, new rice ceremony in Bhadrab, Dasara in Asin, Dewali in Kartika, Laxmi Puja in Magusir, Pusa Punia in Pusa, Magh Parab in Magh, Holi in Fagun, new mango eating ceremony in Chaitra. They participate in all the festivals of the Hindu neighbours.

The Pentiya villages are mixed ones. They live on plain. Agricultural lands and forests surround their villages. The houses are set in two continuous rows and the village path passes in between. Their houses have more rooms, with courtyard. The rooms are spacious. There is a wide verandah in front of the rooms. The cowsheds, goat sheds are separately built from the main sleeping room. The houses are thatched with straw or grass. The walls are made of planks plastered with mud and are painted yellow and black.

They use earthen vessels, string cots, leaf umbrellas, sticks, husking lever, etc., and these types of domestic articles are found in each house. Aluminum utensils, brass plate, jar, and glass, lantern, cloth, umbrellas, torch light are found in most of their houses. They have all agricultural implements like plough, yoke, ploughshare, leveler, sickle, digging stick, *ankudi*, and spade. The axe, *katuri*, knife, sword, and a few guns are available in their village. Fishing traps, fishing nets, are mostly seen in their houses. They play on Drums, Tamaks, Madals, Gini and Thal. They wear mill-made and handmade clothes and adorn them with gold, silver, and brass ornaments.

Their main occupation is settled agriculture and they do not practice shifting cultivation. As major crops, they harvest paddy, *ragi*, niger, pulses and different kinds of gram. They grow vegetables. Fishing is often practiced. Hunting is resorted to as pastime. Collection of edible roots and other forest products play important role in their food quest.

They live upon rice. In the months of scarcity they take *ragi*, mango kernel, sweet potato, etc. to supplement their diet. They do not eat beef or pork but they take meat and mutton etc. Fowl is their favourite food.

They occupy a high social position. They are served by barber, washer man. Brahmin is employee on certain occasions by well-to-do families. They treat tribal people such as Koya, Paraja, Gadaba, Bonda, Kondh etc. and castes like Dom, Pano, Sundhi, Teli, as inferior to them. They are interested to educate their children and the village schools are attended by their boys and girls in large number. Since they are poor, they fail to secure the position in the society as they deserve. It is hoped that their condition will improve and they will receive the due recognition in the society.

PENTIA *

*A. Mall*¹

The Pentia, a numerically small tribe of Orissa, are mainly concentrated in Koraput, followed by Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar Districts. The Pentia also call themselves Haluva or Halaba or Halba. In the Madras Census Report of 1901, they are designated Pentiya or Pentia and described as Oriya betel-leaf sellers. According to Mr C. Hayavadana Rao, a number of them migrated from Bastar state (now in Madhya Pradesh) and settled at Pentikonna. That is why they are called Pentkonaya or Pentiya.

The total population of the Pentia according to the 1991 Census is 11,399. Their population in the district of Koraput alone accounts for 76.88 per cent of the total. According to the 1991 Census they constitute only 0.16 per cent of the total Scheduled Tribe population of the state. During the period from 1981 to 1991 the tribe registered a growth rate of 44.14 per cent. The sex ratio is 835 females per 1000 males.

The percentage of literacy, which was only 24.8 per cent at the 1981 Census, showed a decline by 1991 by going down to 16.96 per cent. It is reported in the Gazetteer that their language is Haluva, which is easily understood by Oriya-speakers. But the Pentia of Jeypore do not acknowledge this and state that Oriya is their only language. Very few of them are bilingual.

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections called Bado (larger, genuine) and Sano (little). The Sano are regarded as being the illegitimate descendants of the Bado. This pure section, namely Bado, are further subdivided into a series of clans, e.g. Kurum (tortoise), Bagh (tiger), Nag (cobra) and Surya (sun). The totemic objects are honored.

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Pentia villages are located in the plains and are mostly heterogeneous. But they generally live in separate hamlets. In rare cases they live together with other castes or tribes with whom they hold social intercourse.

Before building a house they choose an auspicious site by burying rice in the traditional way. On this day, they consult the Panji and choose the day to lay the foundation of the house. Before construction is started they dig at the spot three times, making offerings of flowers, sandalwood paste and incense. They also consult the *panji* before the first occupation of the house. The well-to-do invite 10 to 15 people and feed them on the day of their first entry into the new house. In a village, the houses are arranged in two continuous rows facing the village street. House design mostly resembles that of their Hindu neighbours. Most houses have verandahs at the front. The walls are generally constructed with mud or with a plastering of mud over split bamboos and wattles. The roofs of the houses are thatched with straw or grass. Ceilings are provided by spreading bamboos on the walls. Windows are rarely seen. Sheds for cows and goats are built separately near the house.

Earthenware vessels, string cots, leaf umbrellas, sticks, husking levers, etc. are the common household articles found in Pentia houses. Aluminium utensils, brass plates, jars and glasses, lanterns, cloths, umbrellas and torches are found in some Pentia houses which are economically well-off. Being agriculturists they possess agricultural implements like the plough, yoke, plough share, leveler, sickle, digging stick, *ankudi*, spade, axe, *katuri* and knife. A few also own swords and guns of traditional varieties. Fishing traps and fishing nets are mostly seen in their houses. Musical instruments like drums, the *tamak*, *madala*, *gini* and *thal* are also found.

Although the Pentia are very neat and clean, they are very poorly dressed. They wear both mill-made and hand-made cloth. The common male dress is a *dhoti* which is sometimes too short to cover their knees. The women wear saris without any undergarments. The ornaments they wear are mostly of silver and brass and sometimes of gold. They use the *noli* and *phuli* for the ear, *dandi* for the nose, beads (made of *pohala* and gold) for the neck, *khadu* and glass bangles for the wrist, and brass and aluminium *paunris* for the ankle. They do not have any distinctive features in their hair style. Some women tattoo their limbs, particularly the arms and legs, though this is not popular nowadays.

The Pentia are mainly settled agriculturists. But as most of them are landless, they earn a living working as agricultural and industrial labourers in different parts of the state. They grow vegetables in the backyard. Fishing and hunting are rarely practised. They collect different edible materials like roots, tubers and leaves from the forest during their leisure time. They do not practise shifting cultivation. Rice is their staple food. They also eat *mandia*, *suan*, *gurzi*, *kangu*, *mahul* flowers and mango kernels at different seasons of the year. They do not eat beef or pork and hate those who do. But they eat fowl, which is their

favourite non-vegetarian food. They like to drink *mahul* or *salap* wine. Distillation of liquor at home is rare. They usually purchase their daily requirement of liquor from the market.

Pentia women generally feel proud to bear child. Pregnancy brings happiness to family members. But they are unaware of the proper pre-natal care of the pregnant mother. A few restrictions concerning food and movement are imposed on her during this period. Birth takes place in one of the living rooms of the house. No separate room is provided to the mother and newborn baby. An experienced elderly woman of the tribe is called in to assist during the delivery. She cuts the umbilical cord with a knife and buries it along with the placenta in the backyard. The delivered mother is served boiled *kulthi* water as a medicine. During the post-delivery period the mother is not given brinjals, ladies finger or dried fish to eat. Birth pollution is observed for 21 days, but the mother is allowed to touch water after twelve days. The child is given a name as selected by the Disari or astrologer according to the day and time of its birth. On the 21st day, the Ekoisa ceremony is observed, and some Pentia perform the ear-piercing ceremony on that day, otherwise about six months after the birth.

Girls generally reach puberty between the age of 12 to 15 years. On attaining puberty, a girl is kept segregated for nine days. During this period no one is allowed to see her except her mother who gives food to her. At the end of the period of pollution she is escorted to the river where she takes bath and puts on a new cloth. The female counterpart of the Disari offers some worship in the presence of female members of the tribe.

Both child and adult marriages are in vogue. Thus girls are married either before or after puberty. Love marriage generally prevails in their society. They prefer cross-cousin marriage; though do not follow it strictly. When a boy and a girl make up their mind to marry each other, the boy seeks to obtain the consent of the girl's father by sending some presents consisting of rice, dal, vegetables and Rs.50/- to Rs.60/- in cash to the parents of the girl. If the girl's parents accept these presents, a feast is arranged in the house of the girl and the marriage is solemnized in the house of the boy. In the case of an arranged marriage, the parents of the boy send friends with flattened paddy and molasses and liquor as presents to the house of the girl. Then several visits are exchanged by the two parties. The parents of the boy have to give *kanyamula* (bride price) which ranges between Rs.100/- and Rs.180/-. The date of the marriage is fixed by the Disari. The marriage generally takes place at the house of the bride. *Pandals* are raised in front of both bride and bride groom's houses.

On the day of the wedding, the bridegroom and his party go the bride's village with the customary brideprice, which includes three clothes for bride's mother, Rs.3/- for her father, a cloth and two *annas* for each of her brothers. They present these articles and take a rest in a separate house, where some rice beer and food are also given to the bride's party. The marrying partners bathe, put on

new clothes and are brought to the altar by Disari for rituals to take place. The bride and bridegroom stand apart from one another with a screen between them. The bridegroom is given the sacred thread and the couple is asked to go round the altar seven times. The Disari performs *homa* and enchanting mantras, and ties the right palms of the couple together, a rite called *hataganthi*. This marks the end of the marriage ritual. Then after enjoying a feast given by the bride's parents on the following day, the bridegroom's party returns home with the bride. Soon after arrival the newly married couple plays with each other by throwing turmeric water. A feast is arranged and the night is spent dancing.

A widow can remarry, preferably to the younger brother of her deceased husband. If a widow remarries anyone else, her deceased husband's brother claims Rs.100/- to Rs.150/- as compensation from the second husband. But no such compensation is paid in case of a divorcee.

The dead are either buried or cremated. The period of death pollution is ten days. They follow a death rite similar to that of their Hindu neighbours. Immediately after death news is sent to the relatives and friends of the deceased person. When they arrive, the dead body is carried on a bier made of split bamboo to the burial ground. Some paddy and rice grains and small earthenware lamps are placed at each of the four corners of the bier. At the burial place they point the head of the deceased towards the north with the face upward. In a case of disposal by cremation the eldest son first touches fire to the mouth of the deceased. They wait until the dead body is fully burned. Then the pall-bearers return home, take their bath, and take rice and gruel in the house of the deceased.

The Pita ceremony is observed on the third day. The friends and relatives are invited to a feast where non-vegetarian items of food are served. But the eldest son and wife of the deceased are forbidden from taking any non-vegetarian food for a period of ten days. On the tenth day members of the deceased's household take their bath after shaving and paring their nails. Then they wear sacred threads and new clothes. A final feast is given to the relatives and friends of the deceased and thus the purification ceremony ends. Every year on the particular day on which the death of the person had occurred the Sradha ceremony is performed by the family of the deceased and a Brahman priest is called to officiate.

Samalai Thakurani is their most important deity. They worship this deity on all important occasions. When epidemics like smallpox, cholera, etc. break out they worship the goddess in the belief that she can stop the outbreak of the epidemic. They observe Nuakhia in the month of Bhadrapad on the occasion of the first eating of rice. Goats are sacrificed before the goddess on this occasion. Amba Nua is observed in the month of Chaitra when they first take the mango fruit. They also observe Pausa Purnima when they worship Nisani or home deity in

their houses. On Dewali they worship their cattle and sacrifice a goat before their goddess.

Like other tribals, Pentia are also lovers of dancing and music. Each and every festive occasion is followed by dance and music. They generally use the *dhola*, *madal* and *gini* as musical instruments. At weddings the boys and girls of neighbouring villages also indulge in dancing for hours on end.

The tribal head at the village level is called the Bhata Naik or Kul Naik. A group of elderly persons with the Bhata Naik at their head take decisions on all important social matters. The other officials are called Pradhani, Dalei, Dhoba, Bhandari and Chalan. The Chalan is the messenger of the council and acts on the instructions of the Naik. Over a number of villages there is one Kul Naik or Bhata Naik. An individual becomes outcast when he accidentally or knowingly kills a cow or becomes affected with sores. He is taken back into the caste after a ceremony is performed. The offender is taken to the bank of the stream where his tongue is burnt with a gold or silver wire or ornament by the Bhata Naik. Then some offerings from the Jagannath temple at Puri are given to him. He is then taken home and he provides a feast in which the Bhata Naik has to accept the food first. When the feast is over he is again taken with some cooked rice to the stream and with it he enters into the stream and takes bath. This ceremonial bath makes him free from pollution.

The Pantia occupy a high position in the society. They are served by barbers and washermen. A Brahman is employed on certain occasions by well-to-do families. They treat tribals like the Koya, Paroja, Gadaba, Bonda, Kondh, etc. as inferior to them. They do not take water or any cooked food from castes like the Dom, Pano, Sundhi or Teli.

Since they are found mostly within the Sub-Plan area of the State, they are benefitted by various special developmental programmes implemented through the Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs). Because of their high social status and level of literacy and their eagerness to achieve self-reliance, they will be able to use this assistance to enhance their economic condition at a faster pace than the other primitive tribal groups inhabiting this region.

PENTIA*

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IDENTITY

The Pentia is a Scheduled Tribe community of Odisha which is synonymous with Holva. They are numerically a small tribe largely concentrated in Koraput district. They are also sparsely distributed in Malkangiri, Deogarh, Nowrangpur, Keonjhar, Sundergarh and Mayurbhanj districts of Odisha. The very name *Pentia* is derived from the term *Pentikonya* denoting the place of their original habitat Pentikona, located at Bastar district of Chattisgarh from where they have migrated to Odisha during the past. They also call themselves *Haluva* or *Halaba* or *Halba*. In the Madras Census report of 1901, they are designated as *Pentiya* and described as Odia betel leaf sellers.

Their population is 10,003 as per 2011 census. The sex ratio of the tribe is 1054. Their literacy rate is 44.93 percent. However, their females are lagging behind with 32.59 percent literacy, while 57.99 percent of males are literates.

Their mother tongue is *Halbi*, a non literary semi-autonomous language belonging to the southern section of old Indo-Aryan family of languages having affinity with the Chattisgarhi, Odia and Marathi languages. They are well versed with Odia and use its script both for inter and intra-group communication.

Personal adornments:

They exhibit no exclusiveness in their dressing pattern. Although they are very neat and clean, they wear very simple handmade and mill made cloths. Males dress themselves with a short *dhoti* which covers up to their knees only and women wear *sarees* devoid of any undergarments. They adorn various

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jewelries of gold, silver and aluminum like *noli* and *phuli* for the ear, *dandi* for the nose, beads made of *pohala* and gold for neck, *khadu* and glass bangles for wrist, brass and aluminum *paunris* for ankle. Tattooing is a very old fashion. Women are fond of tattooing their body, specifically in their limbs (arms and legs) with beautiful emblems such as sun, creeper, stars, dots, peacock, snake, ladder, flowers and *jhoti* marks in order to beautify themselves and to look attractive and charming. Tattooing is done by experienced women belonging to *Ghogia* community. Now-a- days, the girls of younger generation, have discarded this fashion. With the change of time, the Pentia women of well-to-do families are using expensive gold ornaments and the males are wearing shirt and banyan when they visit the market or relative's house. Glass and plastic bangles and silver necklaces have become very much popular among the women.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Pentia villages are generally homogenous. They are located near hill slopes or foot hills with amazing picturesque topography with mild humidity and average rainfall. Perennial hill streams provide them drinking water through out the year and also they channel its flow to their crop fields for irrigation. In the plains, specifically in ethnically heterogeneous settlements they usually dwell in separate hamlets keeping distance with other ethnic groups and maintaining their own cultural identity. They prefer to remain socially excluded from other caste people. In a village, houses are arranged in a linear pattern and the parallel rows of houses face the wide village street.

The Pentia houses have verandahs in front, which are usually higher than the floor of the house and the walls are constructed with mud over bamboo wattles. The roofs are thatched with straw or *piri* grass or country tiles. Some people make ceilings on their living room by bamboos fixed on the walls. The houses lack windows for ventilation. Their women keep their walls cleanly polished using red, white or yellow coloured soil paste and the verandah with black clay and cow dung paste. They build separate shades near their house to accommodate their livestock. Pentias keep their surroundings neat and clean.

Prior to house building they choose an auspicious site by burying rice in traditional way. They consult the Hindu almanac to find suitable day for foundation lying. Before construction, they dig the spot three times making offerings of flower, sandal wood paste, incense etc. They also consult the astrologer to find out auspicious moment before occupying the house. They arrange a feast for their kith and kin on the day of first entering their house.

As regards their household articles, most of the families possess earthen vessels, string cots and leaf umbrellas, husking leaver, aluminum utensils, brass plates, jars and glass tumbler, lantern, clothes etc. Bicycle, radio, umbrella, torch lights are found only in well-to-do households. All agricultural implements like

plough, yoke, plough share, leveler, sickle, digging stick, *ankudi*, spade, axe, *katuri*, knife, fishing nets and traps are stored in their living room. Some families possess their traditional swords and guns as their ancestors were recruited as soldiers in the army of the then feudal chiefs. They also possess their traditional musical instruments like drums, *tamak*, *madala*, *gini* and *thal* which they use during performing their folk dances on festive occasions.

LIVELIHOOD

The Pentias are settled agriculturists. Settled cultivation as well as shifting cultivation is the mainstay of their subsistence economy. As most of them are landless or marginal farmers, they pursue supplementary economic activities like wage earning both in agricultural and non agricultural sectors along with share cropping, forestry, small business, service, seasonal hunting, fishing, basketry, rope making, *khali* stitching and animal husbandry. Apart from collection of fuel wood, they collect various seasonal minor forest produce like fruits, roots, tubers, fodders, bamboo, wild grasses for house thatching and various medicinal herbs from the forest. They grow vegetables in the backyard. Fishing and hunting are pursued occasionally.

They grow rice in their low lands and in their dry land they raise *padda dhan* (hill paddy), *ragi* (*mandia*), *kandul*, maize, *jhudung* (cow pea) and *semi* (pea). In their up lands they produce various kinds of millets such as *kangu*, *kosla*, *suan* and *gurzi* pulses like *kandula*, *kulthi* (horse gram), *biri* (black gram), *dangarani*, *bodhei* and red gram etc. All of them possess a small patch of kitchen garden adjacent to their houses where they raise varieties of vegetables like brinjal, cabbage, radish, tomato (*patal ghanta*), cow pea (*jhundug*) and various type of peas, cauliflower (*gobi*), pumpkin (*kumuda*), gourd (*lau*), cucumber (*kakudi*), leafy vegetables, maize and chilly etc. for their domestic consumption.

They rear domestic animals like cows, buffalos, fowls, sheep and goats but not pigs. Women have important roles in contributing to their family income by participating in the field of agriculture, wage earning, animal husbandry, forest collection, basketry, *khali* stitching, besides their various routine household works. Their significant socio-economic roles in the maintenance and upkeep of their families have accorded them an influential social position to have a say in the affairs of their families and enjoy a respectable position in society.

Food Habits:

The Pentias are non-vegetarians. Cereals like rice and *ragi* are their staple food. But, they relish on mutton, chicken, fish, dry fish, snail and frog etc. and abstain from taking pork and beef. They generally abhor the people who eat these forbidden foods. The flesh of fowl is their favourite non-vegetarian food. Besides, they consume cereals like *Suan*, *Kangu*, *Khetjanna*, *Janna*, Maize, *Gurji* etc., pulses like *Kandul*, Black gram and tubers -*pitakanda*, *ranikanda* etc. and

various seasonal vegetables and fruits like *mahul* flower, mango, mango kernel, jackfruit etc. They use *kusum*, *sal*, niger and *til* oil as cooking medium. Use of milk and milk product is common and use of spices has recently been adopted.

They are addicted to alcoholic beverages like *mohuli* liquor, *pendum*, *landa*, rice beer *handia* / *pachhi* etc. which they prepare in their homes or purchase from local liquor vendors. The juice of the Sago Palm tree that abundantly grows in the area called *Salap* are consumed in all occasions. Both males and females smoke hand rolled cigar - *pika* or *bidi* and chew tobacco paste (*gurakhu*).

SOCIAL LIFE

The tribe is divided into two endogamous sections such as *Bado* (big) - genuine or purer section and the other is *Sano* (little) who are regarded as the illegitimate descendants of *Bados*. These sections are further divided into a number of totemistic and exogamous septs viz. *Sonakeria* (vulture), *Dhanogundia* (a kind of paddy), *Mankara* (monkey), *Bagha* (tiger), *Surya* (Sun), *Karna* (the great warrior in the epic of Mahabharat), *Kachhop* or *Kurum* (tortoise), *Koktia* and *Nag* (cobra). They revere their clan totemic objects and refrain from doing any harm to it. In the local social hierarchy they claim equal status with those of *Bhumia*, *Bhattada*, *Omanatya*, *Rana*, *Kotia*, *Barhatika Paik* and higher status than *Paroja*, *Gadba* and *Kandha*. They place themselves in the Shudra Varna of the four Varna systems. They are served by washer man, barber and Brahman a priest and also accept cooked food and water from the Brahman *Khandayat*, *Gauda* and *Omanatya*. They use *Dalai*, *Nayak*, *Halva*, *Majhi*, *Pradhani*, *Patra*, *Pujari*, *Randhari* and *Chalan* etc. as their surnames.

Family

Pentia families are predominantly nuclear consisting of married couple and their unmarried children. They follow patrilocal rule of residence after marriage and patrilineal rule of descent. The eldest son succeeds his father's social position. Inheritance of parental property follows the rule of equigeniture in male line only. In the family having no male successors, the married daughters inherit the property and if the family has no issues, it may adopt a male child from the nearest kin of the patri-lineage who may inherit the ancestral property.

Life Cycle

Pregnancy, Child Birth and afterwards

Bearing child is a matter of pride for a Pentia woman. By getting pregnant she brings joy to herself and to the whole family. Pregnant woman has to adhere to certain restrictions regarding her food and movements such as exposure during solar or lunar eclipses, visiting the cremation ground, to sleep alone during night, to cross the river or stream and to eat the flesh of the animal ritually scarified etc.

Delivery takes place in the living room of the house. They engage a mid wife (*suturani* / *bondigharani*) - an experienced elderly woman of the tribe, to assist the pregnant woman during the child birth for easy delivery of the baby. She cuts the umbilical cord using a broken earthen ware (*jhikirakati*) and disposes it by placing it in an earthen pot covered by an earthen lid along with the placenta that is buried at the backyard of the house. This is done to avert evils done by witches or sorcerers that may hurt the baby or mother.

They also observe post-natal care and rites. The mother is treated with serving of boiled *kulthi* water which is believed to act as pain reliever. She is forbidden to eat certain foods like brinjal, ladies finger, dried fish and sour food items and is given bitter foods for a quick recovery from weakness.

Birth pollution is observed for a period of twenty one days or till the umbilical stump drops out but the mother is allowed to touch water after twelve days. At the end of this period, the purificatory ceremony (*ekosia*) is conducted as per the *Disari*'s (astrologer) prescriptions. On this day, they observe the name giving ceremony (*Handidharni* or *Nadharni*) in which the new born is given a name by the *Disari* as per the name of the day of the week the child takes birth. They also perform the ear-piercing ceremony (*kanabida*), nose piercing (*nakbida*) on nose septum for boys and girls done by an experienced man on the same day or after the baby becomes six months old. The child is given a ceremonial bath. Then dressed with new garments his/her ear lobes, nasal septum are pierced by using a new needle and *neem* sticks are inserted in the hole. Castor oil and turmeric paste is applied at the injuries for quick healing. On this occasion, the house and clothes are cleaned. New earthen pots are put in use and the family hosts a non-vegetarian feast for their kinsmen. They also observe the tonsure rite (*bal utrani*) when the baby attains one year of age. The child is given first cereal feeding in a ceremonial way when he or she crawls. Rice, molasses and milk are boiled together and given to the child.

Puberty Rite:

At the onset of the first menstruation (*yubat*), the girl is kept segregated for nine days in an isolated room wherein her mother attends her. The girl is prohibited to look at or to be looked at by any male, to enter into the kitchen and cook food and pursue any indoor or outdoor works. Certain dietary restrictions are also imposed upon her. She is allowed to eat only *joka bhat* i.e black gram and rice boiled together served by her mother. At the end of nine days, the pollution period is over and she is escorted to a village rivulet accompanied by her friends where she takes the purificatory bath. After bath she is presented with new clothes by her family. She is also given some indigenous medicine by the female *Disari*. When the girl approaches the village entrance the *Disari* pours holy water on her and also conducts some rite, after which she becomes free of pollution. On the evening the family hosts a non-vegetarian feast along with country liquor to the lineage members.

Marriage:

Adult marriage and monogamy is their traditional norm but, polygyny is also allowed in the cases where the first wife is found to be barren or suffers from chronic diseases. Child marriage was a past tradition which is not practised at present. Marriage arranged through negotiation (*mangani*) is regarded as ideal and prestigious mode of acquiring a life partner and is very popular although it is more expensive.

In the Pentia society payment of bride price (*jholla*) is obligatory in all regular types of marriages. It consists of two hundred fifty rupees in cash, one *saree* for bride's mother (*guhaluga*), a cloth for bride's mother's brother (*mamumada*) and a golden ring (*chinamudi*), bead necklaces, vermilion and eyeliner (*kajal*) for the bride and gifts for bride's friends (*chinaluchani*) including some coins, a fowl, *lia* (fried rice) and cakes .

In negotiation marriages, the boy's party visits the girl's house carrying gifts like some flattened rice, molasses and liquor to put forth the marriage proposal. In the next phase, the girl is taken by her kinsmen to the boy's village. She enters the boy's house at an auspicious moment fixed by the *Disari* and is left there. She is allowed to stay there as a member of the household but not as the boy's wife. This is called *ghar mondani*. She performs all household chores there as a member of that house. She may visit her parents and come back after a couple of days. *Disari* is consulted for fixing an auspicious day suitable for marriage.

Their marriage rituals are quite elaborate and last for two days. On the first day, known as *nita* or *neuta*, the bridegroom and his party go the bride's village with the customary bride price. They present these articles along with some rice beer and food and take rest in a separate house. Then the bride and bridegroom are given ceremonial bath in turmeric water, dressed with marriage apparels and wear the marriage crown made with mango twigs. The bridegroom is also given the sacred thread to wear. It is followed by *legandin* rite i.e., the worshipping of village deity by the *Disari*. At the marriage place, pandals are raised using five *sal* poles for the bride and nine *sal* poles for the groom to which a pot containing some *anla*, *harida*, *bahada* fruits and *arua* rice is tied. The bridegroom sits on his father's lap and puts on the sacred thread given by the *Disari*. A cloth is hung between them like a screen. At the advent of the auspicious hour or the *lagana*, the cloth is removed, the couple's right hands are united (*hataganthi*) and after that they start encircling seven time round the marriage altar. The *Disari* performs the *homo*. It is followed by the *bandani* rite in which the newly wedded couple receives gifts and presents from the guests and relatives.

The second day is known as *kadahandi*, characterized by a peculiar kind of game played by all the persons irrespective of age and sex by throwing mud at

each other. The bridegroom is smeared with mud and turmeric paste by the women folk. They go for a bath. At the end, they are given a grand feast with special servings of locally brewed liquor and the marriage ceremony comes to an end. The bride and groom are given permission to start living as husband wife. After some days the newlywed visit the bride's parental home and stay there for five to nine days as per their convenience which is called *bahura*. The Disari fixes an auspicious day (*ghardiani*) for union of the newly wedded couple and on that day the marriage is consummated.

The other modes of marriage are by capture (*jhika*), by service (*gharjuan*), by exchange (*badal kania*), by mutual consent (*monoraji*), by elopement (*udulia*) and by intrusion (*paisamundi*) etc. Cross-cousin marriage is allowed and marriage with paternal aunt's daughter is preferred.

A widow, widower and divorcee are allowed to remarry. A widow can preferably marry a younger brother of her deceased husband. In case of her marriage to someone else, the second husband has to pay back the compensation to her deceased husband's younger brother as decided by their community council. In case of divorce no compensation is given.

Death rituals:

Occurrence of death in the family is mourned with deep sorrow and pain. They practise both cremation and burial to dispose of their dead. On occurrence of unnatural death i.e. by tiger attack, snake bite, suicide and child birth or by accident the corpse is disposed of in a lonely place of the jungle as they believe that the dead person's soul might become an evil spirit and cause harm to the villagers.

The news of death is conveyed to all the villagers and relatives by a special messenger and after their congregation the corpse is removed for disposal. The dead body is given a bath anointed with turmeric paste and wrapped with a new cloth. Then it is taken to the cremation ground on a *mara dandi* (bier) made with bamboo or *sal* poles. At one end of the bier rice, paddy and earthen lamps are placed. It is buried or cremated with its head pointing towards north and face upward. In case of cremation, the eldest son sets the fire on the mouth of the corpse and in case of burial, he throws the first fistful of earth to the pit. After cremation or burial, the pall bearers (*mada boha*) return after taking bath and eat rice and mourn in the house of the deceased.

The death pollution lasts for a period of ten days. During this period of mourning and mortuary pollution, the family members observe certain taboos in respect of their food and works like relishing on non-vegetarian foods, giving alms, worshipping of deities, observances of rituals and festivals, use of oil, visiting sacred places and sexual union. All activities connected with socio-religious and economic spheres are suspended.

They observe the first purificatory rite (*Pitabad*) on the third day. A small vegetarian feast is hosted for friends and relatives. On the tenth day i.e., the day of final mortuary rite, they observe the *dasa / badbud* rite. On that day the mourners go to the river, take bath and get their beard, moustache and nails cut by the barber. All mourners wear new clothes and sacred threads. A feast is given to the relatives. This rite marks the end of the death pollution.

Thereafter, the annual *Shradha* ceremony is performed by them every year by engaging a Brahman priest on the death day to commemorate the dead. Some well-to-do families immerse the bone of the deceased in holy rivers or streams for salvation of the departed soul but do not construct any monument in honour of the dead.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Pentia profess their own endogenous tribal religion of animism with an admixture of some elements of Hinduism. Their pantheon includes a number of deities of nature and by the impact of their prolonged culture contact with the neighbouring castes they have also started worshipping many Hindu gods and goddesses. Consequently, they are observing many Hindu festivals and rituals besides their own.

They worship *Dartani* (Goddess Earth) and her consort *Nisani Munda* as their supreme deities installed in the sacred grove at the outskirts of their village who are worshipped by their traditional priest - *Disari* or *Pujari*. *Samalai Thakurani* is their important deity worshipped on all important occasions as also on the outbreak of epidemics like smallpox, cholera etc. They worship *Thakurani* their village deity. They install their family deity in the corner of their kitchen, worshipped by their females. They worship the female deity *Kamini* on Saturdays. Nobody accept anything from the house where she is worshipped, as she is a malevolent goddess who may accompany him and urge him to become her devotee and can do harm if not appeased properly. Besides, they propitiate many Hindu deities like *Rama*, *Sita*, *Satyanarayan*, *Siva*, *Durga*, *Kali* etc. on festive occasions. Their places of pilgrimage are Gupteswar temple in Koraput, Jagannath temple at Puri and Lingaraj temple at Bhubaneswar.

Their sacred specialists called *Pujari* and *Disari* are chosen from their own community to officiate in various rituals. Their services are sought for appeasing the deities. Their religious belief and practices have been greatly influenced by Hindu tradition. They also believe in astrology. The Pentias are said to offer rice and other things to Brahmans, once in a year on the new moon day in the month of *Bhadrapadam* (September-October).

They observe *Nuakhia* (ceremonial first eating of new crops) in the month of Bhadrap in respect of some newly harvested crops and specific food items. They celebrate *Amnua* in the month of *Chaitra* for new eating of mango, *Dhannua*

in the month of *Bhadrab* for new eating of paddy. *Nisani* is worshipped during *Puspuni*. During *Diwali* they perform cattle worship. *Balijatra*, *Chait Parab*, *Mondai*, *Pus Parab*, *Osa Parab* are their other important festivals. Besides, that they also observe *Ratha Jatra*, *Gamha*, *Dussera*, *Diwali* and *Raja Parab* etc. They perform sacred thread ceremony on reaching of adulthood of the boys or before marriage.

SOCIAL CONTROL

The Pentia's possess their own highly organized traditional community council headed by the Bhatnayak or Kulnayak who is assisted by the Pradhani, Umriya Nayak, Nayak, Dalayi, Pujari (priest), Randhari (ceremonial cook), Bhandari (store keeper) and Challan - the messenger. In important matters concerning village or society these functionaries hold the meeting and pronounce the final decision. Their traditional community council adjudicates cases pertaining to theft, rape, family, disputes, partition of property, adultery, extra marital relations, premarital pregnancy, divorce or separation, violation of customary norms, molestation, misbehavior, intra and inter community disputes etc. It also performs other functions like organization and arrangement of community festivals, rituals etc. Their traditional community council acts as the guardian of their traditional norms and customs and the office bearers are highly esteemed in their society. The session of the community council sits annually on the day of the *pus parab*.

Bhat Nayak is the secular head of the village. His consultation becomes necessary in every matter. Re-admission of ostracized person in to the society becomes impossible without his approval as it requires elaborate rituals based upon the decision of the community council.

Though with the imposition of Statutory Grampanchayat at present these institutions have lost their importance, still the traditional leaders have retained their clout in customary matters. They still hold the power of imposing cash fines, social boycott etc., depending upon the gravity of the offence.

CHANGING SCENE

As a numerically small tribe who lived in remote area with their age old traditional subsistence economy, the Pentia led a life undisturbed in the past with little change and development. But, after independence, noticeable 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

Government has established ITDAs in tribal dominated pockets with the objective to uplift the economic condition of tribal people which has brought a positive impact in their developmental attitude, after which visible changes have occurred in the field of their agriculture, communication, drinking water, education, health and sanitation, housing etc. Government has also launched various special protective and promotional programmes like providing the legal aid, establishment of residential schools and hostels, reservation for tribal students in educational institutions, in employment in various sectors and in public representation for them.

The implementation of Right to Education Act 2010, development of infrastructure facilities, economic support by various developmental agencies, construction of Anganwadi centers, P.D.S centers, housing facilities under Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) and Mo Kudia Yojana, vocational and orientation training to youths have brought a great change in day to day life of the tribe. Particularly the implementation of PESA act in tribal areas has helped them to take active part in village administration and development. They have also been benefitted by the introduction of subsidy linked loan facilities by the Government which help them taking institutional loans at the time of need with low interest rate instead of being dependant on private money lenders who used to exploit them by charging high rate of interest. Marketing facilities for their agricultural produces and minor forest produces has replaced the traditional barter system. It has also saved them from the clutches of middle man.

The SCSTRTI on the support of Ministry of Tribal Affairs have established a Tribal Museum in the premises of SC and ST Research and Training Institute located at CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar for preservation and display of Art and Artefacts of the tribes of Odisha including those of the Pentia, that reflects the inherent richness of talent in their arts and crafts.

The Pentia are no longer isolated from the outside world, rather they are slowly but surely advancing towards integration with the mainstream of the society. It is noticed at present that the impact of modernization has gradually influenced the age old traditional traits and usages of tribes. Their age old traditional social institutions are declining under the impact of modernization. Yet they have kept intact their cultural identity.

RAJUAR *

*S. C. Mohanty*¹

Rajuar is a small tribe peasantized a great deal. Rajuars are found concentrated in the districts of Mayurbhanj and Balasore. Dalton believed them to be the descendants of Kurmis and Kols. Russell described them an offshoot of the Bhuiyas of the Central Provinces. Risley mentioned that the tribe is original settler of Manbhum of Nagpur. They have synonyms like Rajbansi, Rajwar and Rajualas and claim equal social position with that of the Bhuyan citing about their Kshyatriya origin.

The Rajuars mainly inhabit Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts of Odisha. Those residing in Balasore claim that they had migrated from Handibhanga of Mayurbhanj district long ago.

As per 2011 census, the total population of Rajuar in Odisha is 3518 including 1753 males and 1765 females. Their rate of literacy is 51.97 percent i.e. 63.62 percent for males and 40.42 percent for females. They speak Odia both for inter and intra group communication.

Their settlement pattern is traditionally unclan and homogenous. In multi-ethnic villages they live in separate hamlets.

Cultivation is their primary occupation and womenfolk prepare pounded rice (*chuda*) and sell it in weekly market. As most of them are landless and marginal farmers they supplement their livelihood resorting to wage earning both in agricultural and non-agricultural sectors, forest collection and livestock rearing. They are non-vegetarians and rice is their principal diet. They consume home brewed beer and country liquor, smoke cheroots, tobaccos and tobacco paste.

* Unpublished article of 2000 updated in 2019

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The tribe is divided into three exogamous septs, such as, *Nageswar*, *Sankha* and *Kashyapa* Family is predominantly nuclear, patrilocal and patrilineal. Monogamy is common practice in their society and marriage through negotiation is regarded prestigious. Cross cousin marriage, junior levirate, junior sororate, remarriage of widows and widowers and divorcees are socially permitted. Other forms of marriage are through mutual consent and by service. Bride price is obligatory and is paid both in cash and kind. The wedding rituals are performed in bride's residence and the nuptial, at the groom's residence. A low grade Brahman priest conducts the marriage rituals.

The Rajuar observe puberty rites for adolescent girls. The pollution period lasts for seven days and the girl remains in seclusion. A Brahman priest conducts purificatory rites for the pubescent girl. Birth pollution is observed for nine days and name-giving ceremony is held on twenty-first day. An experienced woman from Korua community acts as midwife, and purificatory rite, *Narla* is observed on the ninth day. The Rajuar usually practise cremation and in circumstances of unnatural death they bury their dead. Death pollution is observed for eleven days. The mortuary rite is held on the same day with the help of a Brahman priest of lower rank, barber and washerman. The bereaved family hosts a feast to lineage members.

The Rajuar profess Hinduism and worship Hindu deities like *Laxmi*, *Kali*, *Durga*, *Siva* and village deities like *Gaon Thakurani*, *Chandi*, *Basuli*, *Situli*, etc. and observe festivals like *Makar*, *Nuakhia*, *Karam* and *KasamBasuli*. A Brahman priest officiates in the rituals.

They have their own traditional community council. The headman of the community is called *Paramanik* who is assisted by a *Chatia* who acts as a messenger-cum-assistant. The council also includes village elders and it settles disputes at the village level.

The Rajuar imitate Gond, Bathudi, Bhumij and other clean castes in matters of dress, ornamentation and in some other cultural habits.

RAJUAR *

*Bhagarathi Chowdhury*¹

The Rajuar or Rajwar is a minor tribe of Orissa. Their population is only 1,018, out of which 956 were enumerated from the district of Mayurbhanj. Most of the authorities gave the opinion that the tribe is probably an offshoot of the Bhuiyans. The Rajuars of Bengal give a different story admitting that they are the descendant of mixed union between Kurmis and Kols in Chhotnagpur, they claim to be an inferior class of Rajputs.

Subdivisions

Risley has mentioned several subdivisions of the tribe. They are: Angrok or Angwar, Chapwar, Sikharia, Sukulkara, Bar-Ghori, Majhal-Turiya and Berra-Rajwar. Again these subdivisions are divided into a number of exogamous groups. The following names of these groups are quoted from 'The Tribes and Castes of Bengal'. These are: Bhogta, Chapa, Chirra, Dori-har-jogi, Karhar, Kasyapa, Katwar, Kharakwar, Lathuar, Loharatengi, Majhiya, Marrik, Matwara, Nag, Rikhi, Sankwa and Singh.

Marriage

They practice both adult and infant marriage. Sexual intercourse before marriage is strictly prohibited and looked down upon. A woman having sexual affairs with a man of another caste would be excommunicated. Polygamy is allowed. Widow re-marriage in the *sanga* form is prevalent. Divorce is allowed on reasonable grounds such as adultery, incompatibility of temper. The rite of *sindurdan* (marking of vermillion) is the binding portion of the marriage. Their marriage is said to resemble to the marriage among the Kurmis.

* Published in ADIBASI, Vol.V, No.3, (Spl. Issue), TRB, 1963-64, pp.143-144

¹ Research Assistant, Tribal Research Bureau (TRB), Bhubaneswar

Death rites

The dead are generally cremated. Death pollution continues for eleven days when a Shradha ceremony is performed. A piece of bone of the deceased is collected and preserved for final disposal in a river.

Occupation

Agriculture is their main occupation. But their economic condition is like those of the landless labourer.

They do not eat beef, pork, and other unclean food. They take fowl and alcoholic drinks and the leavings of the higher castes.

Status

In their ceremonial and religious observances they employ degraded Brahmins. The tribe is considered low and Brahmins do not accept water in their hands. Those Brahmins and Vaishnavas who officiate in certain ceremonies accept Pakka food from them. Kudumis are the lowest caste from whom they accept food.

RAJUAR*

*A. B. Ota*¹

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*Nilamadhava Kanhar*³

INTRODUCTION

Out of 62 scheduled tribal communities of Odisha, the Rajuar constitutes a numerically small cultivating tribe. Besides Odisha, the Rajuars are also concentrated in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. They are also known by the name Rajual, Rajuad or Rajwar. Some of the authorities are of opinion that the tribe is probably an offshoot of the Bhuyan. The Rajuars of Bengal admit that they are the descendants of mixed union between Kurmis and Kols. According to Risely, the Rajuars are descended from a Rishi who had two sons. From the eldest, the Rajuars are descended who became soldiers and obtained their noble title and from the youngest, the Musahars who got their name for eating '*chapatti*' which the Rajuars do not.

Population and Concentration

The Rajuars mainly inhabit Mayurbhanj and Balasore districts of Odisha. Those residing in Balasore claim that they had migrated from Handibhanga of Mayurbhanj district long ago.

As per 2011 census, the total population of Rajuar in Odisha is 3518 including 1753 males and 1765 females. Their rate of literacy is 51.97 percent i.e. 63.62 percent for males and 40.42 percent for females.

* Published in the Photo Handbook on Rajuar, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar, 2016

¹ Commissioner-cum-Director, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

² Museum Guide, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

³ Museum Guide, SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar

SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

Rajuars feel proud of identifying themselves as “Nagabansi” as they believe that they are the descendants of ‘Nagabansa’ (cobra dynasty). They are known for their simplicity, honesty and co-operative attitudes.

So far as their physical characteristics are concerned they are of both short and tall stature with dark complexion. Their main source of livelihood is agriculture and side by side they also prepare flattened rice and sale it from door to door.

As they are the immigrants from Chhotanagpur to Odisha, the languages they speak are a mixture of Hindi, Bengali and Odia. However, they are conversant with regional language “Odia” now.

The Rajuars assert that their ancestors placed them on equal footing with the Bhuyan, as a result of which they exchange water, food and social visits with the Bhuyans. But they usually claim a higher social status than that of Kurmis, Kol, Bathudi etc. So they do not exchange water and food with these communities.

Dress and Ornaments

There is no uniqueness reflected in their dress pattern. Like the non tribal people, the Rajuar men wear short *dhotis* (loin cloth) and banyan and women wear short cotton sarees, blouse and petticoats. But the younger generation prefers to use modern dress as available in the market. Rajuar women adorn themselves with different types of ornaments like necklace (*harmala*), earring (*kanaphula*), nose ring (*lulukphul*), toe ring (*jhantial*), anklet (*panjan*), armulet (*baju*), glass bangles (*churi*), silver bangles (*chujrhal*), hairpin (*munda ganja kanta*), coin necklace (*charini mala*) etc. The old ladies decorate their bodies with tattoo marks especially on their foreheads, eye corners, and in both hands and legs.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSING

The Rajuars live in multiethnic villages, thus, forming part of a composite rural society. The rural ethnic groups are socio-economically interdependent on each other. When setting up a new settlement or a hamlet in multiethnic village, they give first priority to the availability of natural water resources. Each settlement consists of two or three hamlets locally known as “sahi”. The houses remain scattered and the internal road is very narrow.

At the west of the village, the village deity “Maa Mahisashuri” resides. The cremation ground is found at the village outskirts.

Before selecting a place for construction of a new house, the male elders of the household go to the proposed site where they clean a patch of the land, plaster it with the paste of cow dung and mud, keep there a jug filled with water

covered with a cap in the name of the supreme god and leave it there overnight. Next morning if they find the level of water in the jug decreased, it signifies that the place is very inauspicious for house construction. Alternatively, they keep few grains of rice in that place and cover it with a bamboo basket. Next day morning if they find the grains disturbed, the site is considered inauspicious.

The Rajuars build their houses over a rectangular ground plan. The gable shaped roofs are usually thatched with straw. The walls are made of mud. The half of the walls are coloured with red ochre by the female folk. In average the length of the house is about 15 feet and the breadth is 7/8 feet. At the front of the house there is a narrow verandah attached to the house which is always kept clean and used as a place for meeting or recreation for family and relatives. In most of the houses, the paddy husking lever (*dhinki*) is installed on one side of the verandah. Floors are plastered with the mixture of cow dung and mud.

Each house consists of 3 rooms namely bed room (*staba ghara*), kitchen (*randha ghar*) and store room (*badaghar*). The front room of the house is used as the bed room. The store room or *badaghar* is adjacent to the bedroom where they keep grain bins and agricultural produce. Rajuar believe that the presiding deity of the household (*esta debata*) resides in the corner of the store room. The kitchen room is used for cooking and keeping utensils. At the backside of the house, there is a separate cowshed.

Household Articles

The Rajuar use a number of articles in their day to day life. Some of the articles are made by themselves and others are purchased from the local market. For agricultural works they keep plough (*har*), yoke (*juant*), leveler (*mer*), spade (*kodar*), digging hoe (*kurala*), carrying pole (*bhinga*) etc. in their houses. For cooking and storing purposes they use earthen wares (*handini*) and aluminum vessels. Besides these other important household articles like wooden framed cots woven with strings (*daudia khata*), wooden stools (*pirha*), broomsticks (*batin*), winnowing fans (*sup*), bamboo baskets (*jhudi*), Grain bins (*khanchi*), etc are also used by them in their day to day activities. For hunting purpose they keep bow, arrow, spear, bird traps, rabbit traps etc. During leisure time, they go for fishing to nearby streams and rivulets for which they also keep various types of fishing traps and nets in their house.

LIVELIHOOD

Agriculture is the mainstay of the Rajuar economy. Previously they were practicing shifting cultivation but now they have abandoned it in favour of settled agriculture. Usually they cultivate three types of lands like *bada bil* (wet land), *dhip bil* (up land) and *dahi bil* (up land). Once in a year they cultivate rice. Besides rice they also cultivate other cereals and pulses like millets, black grams, *ragi*, *suan*, *kandula* etc. Now besides cultivating rice and other cereals and pulses,

they prefer to cultivate the cash crop 'sabai' grass on their agricultural field which is found to be most profitable. They also grow different types of vegetables in their kitchen garden like brinjal (*baigan*), bitter gourd (*karla*), ladis finger (*bhendia*), ridge gourd (*jhinga*), beans (*nauka*), green pea (*simbi*), snake gourd (*kaita jhanga*), pumpkin (*kakhur*), gourd (*laaa*) etc. for their day to day consumption and also for the market.

Like other tribal communities, the Rajuar prefer to domesticate different type of animals and birds. Usually they rear cows, bullocks, buffaloes for consumption of milk and to utilize them in agricultural work. They rear sheep, goat, and fowls for ceremonial sacrifices, for domestic consumption and often for the market to meet contingent expenses. They also domesticate dogs for watching the house and helping in hunting. From social point of view, it is believed that the households who have more number of domesticated animals and birds, they are considered well to do families.

They also depend upon the forest to collect minor forest produce seasonally for the purpose of marketing and consumption. They usually collect different seasonal edible roots and tubers, mushrooms, green leaves, mango, black berry and the like mainly for consumption purpose and also collect bamboos, sal leaves and raisin for the market to earn money. During leisure time they also go for hunting small game animals and birds to supplement their food. Previously when they went for hunting, first of all they worshipped *Baba Bajinath* for getting success in hunting and also for the protection from the attack of the wild animals. Sometimes, only for consumption purpose, they go to the nearby streams and rivers for catching fishes by using fishing traps.

Now due the impact of industrialization, most of the Rajuar men and women go for daily wage labour in the local mining and factories. Some of them who are educated are also employed in different private and government sectors. In addition to agricultural activities, some of them also carry on the business of flattened rice. They prepare it themselves purchasing paddy from the local market and sell it for cash in the neighboring villages moving from door to door.

Food Habits

Rice is their staple food which is supplemented by pulses and curry prepared out of mushrooms, vegetables, fishes, meat and green leaves etc. In the morning, the Rajuars usually take watered rice with fried green leaves, vegetables, tamarind, green chilly and salt. Some of the people also prefer to take flattened rice (*chuda*) and puffed rice (*mudhi*) with tea. In the lunch as well as dinner they eat boiled rice with pulses and curry prepared out of vegetables.

They are mainly non vegetarians and very fond of eating egg, meat of different small birds and animals like goat and sheep along with different type of fishes caught from nearby rivers and streams. They are strictly forbidden to eat

beef, pork and flesh of buffaloes as they consider them as unclean food. During fairs and festivals like Dussera, Asadhi, Jantal, Magha and Raja, they prepare special type of cakes like *chakuli pitha*, *jhankar pitha*, *tala pitha* (palm cake), *poda pitha* (baked cakes), *patei sijha pitha* (cakes of boiled green leaves), rice gruel and curry of meats of scarified birds and animals. These items are taken by them along with the boiled rice and country liquor.

Rajuars like other tribal people take intoxicating traditional drinks such as 'Handia', 'Tadi' and 'Mahua'. Sometimes, these liquors are prepared by them and sometimes they purchase it from the market. Chewing tobacco and smoking *ganja* (sun hemp) are quite popular among the adult males.

SOCIAL LIFE

The Rajuar community is divided into a number of exogamous patrilineal clans (*gotra*) such as 'Kashyapa', 'Nageswar', 'Sankhua' etc. The members of each clan believe to have been descended from a common ancestor or to have some mystic ties with its totem. Marriage within the same clan is strictly prohibited. After marriage, girls change their clan (*gotra*) and become members of husband's clan (*gotra*). A strong sense of reciprocity and co-operation exists among clan member as they consider themselves as brothers and sisters. Some of the common surnames like 'Ram', 'Ray', 'Parmanik' and 'Behera' are used by the people of the Rajuar community.

In the Rajuar community, village is also regarded as an important social unit. Inter-family linkages of different clans in the village are mostly characterized by mutual understanding and co-operation.

Family

In the Rajuar society all the members of a family act as a well-knit group. Occurrence of nuclear families is the maximum followed by the occurrence of extended families. In all cases, the eldest male member is the head of the family. The relation between the parents and the grown up children is more of mutual obligation than that of love and fear and the relationship between husband and wife is of mutual help and co-operation. After the death of the father, the property is equally shared by sons but in some cases the eldest or the youngest sons may receive a little more extra share than the other brothers but in absence of sons, daughters may inherit the paternal properties.

Life Cycle

Pregnancy and Child Birth

In the Rajuar community, child birth irrespective of sex is believed to be the rebirth of their ancestors because of which all the family members take special care of the pregnant woman. During pregnancy the woman observes

certain taboos and prohibitions regarding her food, drink and mobility. She is forbidden to eat a particular type of fish locally known as 'Dhandi' and especially, the fishes caught by angling. She is prohibited to eat mushrooms growing on the anthills known as Hunkachhata. Furthermore, she is not allowed to go alone to the stream side or to a river for bathing or fetching water and also forbidden to cross them.

Usually the delivery of the child takes place in a corner of the living room. An old and experienced woman of the 'Karua' caste assists in child birth. Immediately after the delivery, boiled water of 'kolatha dal' (horse-gram) is given to the mother to drink. The umbilical cord of the baby is cut with an oyster shell and along with the placenta it is buried by the midwife in the premises of the house. The midwife is remunerated with food and a new saree for her services.

Birth pollution is observed for nine days at the end of which purification ceremony called 'nasta' is observed by the family members. On this day, the barber and the washer man serve them before they take their bath and after the bath they worship on the embankment of a water source.

The name giving ceremony is organized on the 10th day or the 21st day of the birth of the child. Usually members from the maternal uncle's side or old men and women of the community select a name for the child. Nursing of the child is left to the mother. Mother has an important role to take care of the child and its socialization.

Puberty

On attainment of menarche, the girl is treated as impure and confined for a week in a secluded room. She has to follow some taboos. She is forbidden to participate in any ritual and to look at or talk to any male person. On the eighth day, she anoints turmeric paste mixed with oil, takes a purificatory bath in the nearby river or stream and wears new clothes. Sometimes a feast is also hosted by her parents for the kith and kin.

Marriage

Marriage is the most important hall mark of Rajuar life cycle. The suitable age to get married is 20 to 22 years for the boys and 14 to 15 years for the girls. Marriage by negotiation is the most common and ideal form of marriage. However, other types of marriages like love marriage, widow remarriage, junior levirate and junior sororate are also practiced. In rare cases marriage by exchange and marriage by service are also practiced. Monogamy is the rule but in some cases polygyny is also permitted when the first wife is found to be barren, diseased or abnormal. Widow or widower remarriage though permissible is not appreciated in their society. They can remarry a year after the death of their spouse.

In negotiation marriage, the initiative is always taken by the parents of the groom. Preliminary enquiries are made from both sides regarding economic condition and suitability of the prospective mates. If the proposal is accepted then the date of negotiation and the amount of the bride price is fixed.

The wedding ritual is performed in the bride's house and a low grade Brahmin priest conducts marriage by usual Vedic rites. The bride and groom after the completion of wedding rites are led to the house of the groom under a canopy of cloth held over their heads. A non-veg feast known as "desakhia" is hosted by the bride's side to all the relatives. When the girl goes with her husband to his house it gives an immense sorrow to the girl's friends and relatives. So the groom has to pay some money to the bride's friends which is known as "Sanga Chhalani".

The groom's side also has to host a feast to their relatives at the groom's residence. Some rituals are also performed in the groom's house.

Divorce

The practice of the divorce is present in the Rajuar community. Either husband or wife can seek divorce. Divorce is effected with the consent of the traditional community panchayat on grounds like adultery, bareness, cruelty, insanity, chronic illness, impotency and maladjustment. Divorce compensation is paid by the husband as decided in the panchayat. Status of the children is also determined as per the customary divorce rules. A divorcee can also remarry but after a year of the dissolution of the marriage.

Death

Both burial and cremation are done for the disposal of the dead. The corpse of a child and of those dying of epidemic and other infectious diseases like small pox, cholera, leprosy etc. are buried. When a pregnant woman dies, her abdomen is incised but when a woman dies during child birth, a gourd, pumpkin or the inflorescences of a banana plant is buried along with her.

News of death is disseminated to all friends and relatives who assemble in the house of the deceased. The corpse (Mala) is washed with a pot of water fetched by the son of the deceased from a tank or a stream. Then a new white cloth is covered over the corpse. Its forehead is anointed with vermilion and sandal wood paste. Then a bier is prepared with bamboo poles to carry the corpse to the funeral ground along with a basket, a pitcher and spade.

The corpse is lowered at a spot on the outskirts of the village where cooked food is offered to the departed soul from the third day of death till the 10th day rite (*dasa*) is performed. The eldest son of the deceased leads the funeral procession. Both in burial and cremation, the dead body is placed in the north and south direction with head pointing northwards and face upwards. Then the

eldest son by closing his left eye lights the funeral pyre. After cremation, a small piece of bone of the deceased is collected from the spot and brought home which is kept in the backside of the house and worshipped regularly.

The third day of the death is known as Telkhai. On this day, the house is cleaned with cow dung. Then all the kin members take bath anointing with oil and turmeric paste. After that they enter into the house by sprinkling water with Tulasi leaves (*Osmium sanctum*) over their heads. The purification ceremony (*dasaghar*) is conducted on the 10th day of the death. On this day, the house is cleaned and used clothes are washed. All the clan members cut their hair, pare their nails, take a purificatory bath and wear new clothes. On the 11th day, the Brahmin priest performs a *homa* and a feast is hosted for all kith and kin.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

The Rajuars are polytheists. They strongly believe in the existence of innumerable malevolent and benevolent spirits. At the end of the village, under trees of the sacred grove, the village deity, Ma Mahisashuri resides who protects the whole village from all crises. With her “Baichha budha”- the village god is also worshipped by the people for the wellbeing of the villagers. The trees of the sacred grove under which these deities reside are also treated as sacred and the people are forbidden to cut the branches or pluck the leaves of the trees.

“Dehuri” is the religious head or priest of the village. The village gods and goddess are worshipped by him every day and he officiates in all the village and community level rituals. All the community level festivals and rituals are celebrated before the village deity “Ma Mahisashuri”. To appease her people also sacrifice of birds and animals before her.

The post of Dehuri is hereditary. He gets specific remuneration from the people to conduct different rituals and festivals and also gets a good deal of prestige and status from the village people. He is assisted by ‘Ghalaharia’ who is not paid any remuneration but only some share from the Dehuri.

At the family level, they also perform various rituals. They believe that ancestral spirits reside in one corner of the kitchen room. This corner is locally known as ‘Esana’. In different rituals and festivals they propitiate them as they always protect the family members from the crises and bring peace and order in the family.

Now under the influence of Hinduism they worship various Hindu gods and goddesses in their houses by keeping the photos of Mahaxmi, Shrikrishna, Shiva, Parbati, Ganesh and few others.

They have also faith in magical practices. The sorcerer is known as ‘Gurabudha’. The centre of the magico-religious practices is known as

“Akhada”. This is adjacent to the backside of the sorcerer’s house. The size of the house is very small. There is no window but one door. The sorcerer always works for the wellbeing of the people. He also acts as a traditional magico-religious-cum-herbal healer to diagnose and treat different diseases.

Festivals

The Rajuar observe various festivals to appease their gods and goddess round the year. As they are agriculturalists, most of their festivals revolve around different agricultural activities of the year. Dhulia festival is observed in the month of April - May before the village deity Ma Mahisashuri. This is a community level festival and its main objective is to have rain in right time for better agricultural yields.

Jantal festival is one of the harvesting festivals observed by the Rajuar in the month of November - December. It is also a community level festival conducted by the Dehuri. Before four to five days of this festival, Dehuri collects paddy grains from the agricultural fields of every household. Then pressed rice is prepared from these paddy grains and offered to the village deity after which it is taken by the people present in that festival. They also arrange a communal festival by sacrificing animals and birds before the deity.

Magha festival (Magha Puja) is another important festival of the Rajuar celebrated in the month of January-February. For the protection of wild animals and for better collection of forest produce they worship ‘Baichha pat’ / ‘Baichha budha’ during this festival. To appease the god, they sacrifice small animals and birds before them.

Karma festival is another important festival observed in the month of August when a ‘Karma’ twig is brought and worshipped. This festival is performed by household heads. Likewise Bandhana festival is observed on the day following Kalipuja. On this occasion they worship their cattle. They celebrate Makara festival for two days starting with the first day of Magha (January-February). During this festival they sacrifice a goat before the Ganjhavar arani (a village deity). Both the days are spent in dance, music and drinks. Members of the community wear new clothes after a ceremonial bath.

Besides the above, festivals like Chhatuar, Muthi, Andhari, Ashadhi, some Hindu festivals like Chaitra Samkranti, Laxmi Puja, Durga Puja, Ganesh Puja and Rathajatra are also observed by the Rajuar. All these events are celebrated with singing and dancing to the tune of music.

SOCIAL CONTROL

To maintain peace and order in the Rajuar community, there is a well organized traditional village council locally known as “Gaonke Vichar”. It is

constituted of traditional authorities like Parmanik (secular headman), Dehury (priest), Chhatia or Dakua (village messenger and assistant to Parmanik) and village elders.

The post of 'Parmanik' is hereditary and his role is very important. He presides over all the meetings of the village council. All the members are free to participate in the discussion and women are not allowed to do so but they may be summoned as parties to the disputes and as witnesses. The final decision in secular matters is given by Parmanik where as Dehury decides the magico-religious issues. The decision given by the Parmanik is unanimously accepted. He does not receive any remuneration but gets a good deal of prestige and social status for his services. The post of Dakua or Chhatia is hereditary but sometimes he is nominated by the village elders. For his services he is paid in terms of cash or kinds by the villagers.

Generally the village meetings are held in the village street or in the verandah of any household. The offences and disputes regarding theft, conflict, violation of customary rules, witchcraft and sorcery, partition of property, sale and mortgage of land, marriage, bride price, divorce, adultery and the like are all settled in the Gaonke Vichar.

Punishment given to the offender varies according to the gravity of the offence. Usually the offender is asked to host a feast for the villagers and/or pay fines in cash. For commitment of serious offences, the culprit is excommunicated. When the accused does not admit his guilt he is asked to plead his innocence by swearing in the name of God, by touching the earth goddess, cow, grass or a small baby in front of the village council. Since the Rajuar people have a strong faith in their gods and goddess, they believe that telling a lie after swearing the liar will be severely punished by the god.

Consequent upon the introduction of Panchayat Raj institutions, their traditional political system is gradually declining. People take the help of law, police and court to settle disputes relating to murder, theft but small disputes like, conflict in family, violation of customary rules, conflicts relating to marriage, bride price, divorce etc. are usually settled in Gaonke Vichar. There is a co-existence of both the systems in the Rajuar society.

CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

Change and development is inevitable in every society. The Rajuar community is not an exception to it. Both the Government and Non Government Organizations now take a lot of initiatives for their holistic development to raise their standard of living and quality of life. So the Rajuar community is in the process of development and change. These changes have been noticed in their social system, techno-economic and religious spheres too.

Education is the prime indicator of development. Traditionally till the recent past, they were showing little interest in educating their children irrespective of gender as they were utilizing their children's capabilities in economic pursuits, but now various plans and programmes are initiated by ST & SC Development Department and other concerned departments to raise their level of literacy and education. Various categories of school like Ekalavya Model Residential Schools, +2 Colleges, High Schools, Girls High School, Ashram and Sevashram Schools are running in interior tribal areas. To attract number of students they are also provided with free residential facilities, mid-day meals, stipend, free text books, reading and writing materials, dresses, bicycles, laptops etc. This initiative has produced remarkable results.

In the economic field, they have also shown a remarkable change. Traditionally, they adopted archaic method of cultivation but now due to introduction of irrigation facility, market assurance, use of modern pesticide, use of modern tools and techniques they are able to produce more and also besides rice now they cultivate other cash crops like 'sabai' grass. Apart from that most of them now also prefer to take up jobs as wage earners. The recent development interventions through the formation of SHGs both by men and women have brought significant changes in the socio economic life of Rajuar.

Primary Health Centers, Police Check Posts, Veterinary Hospitals, Post Offices, weekly markets, big shops, PDS Centers, Anganwadi Centers and Commercial Banks are now established in their areas which effect a lot of change in their life pattern. Their villages are also linked with *pucca* roads under the scheme of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana. Electricity has reached their houses under the scheme of Rajiv Gandhi Biduyut Yojana. Under Indira Awas, Mo Kudia and Biju Pucca Ghar Yojanas, they are also provided with *pucca* houses.

There have been visible changes in the material aspects of their culture. Now they, like other communities, use mobile phones, T.V. sets, computer and other modern and sophisticated accessories. While accepting the changes the old guards of the Rajuar society are struggling hard to preserve the time tested best elements of their culture to maintain their cultural identity.

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