

KISAN

**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute
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2013



PREFACE

The Kisan are a numerically larger community in Odisha, the home land of 62 different Scheduled Tribes. They are settled agriculturist. Their cultural life is enriched with traditions, values, performing arts, faiths and festivities. The unique culture of the Kisan has undergone changes under the influence of hinduisation as well as modernization. The significance of tradition, cultural and value system of Kisan are gradually losing their meaning to the young and educated Kisan. Time to come, if unpreserved they may disintegrate slowly. Thus Govt. in ST&SC Development Department has taken steps for documentation of some ethnic tribes and their life and living. So far 18 such attempts have been made by SCSTRTI, Bhubaneswar by documenting and publishing 18 Photo Hand Books on Tribes including PTGs, like Bonda, Birhor, Chuktia Bhunjia, Didayi, Dongaria Kondh, Gadaba, Cond, Juang, Hill Kharia, Kutia Kandha, Lanjia Saora, Mankirdia, Saora, etc.

This publication of Photo Hand Book presents a visual portrayal of Kisan. It will be 19th Publications of SCSTRTI and first of its kind for the year 2013. The Kisan are known as a cultivating community, which produce all most all, whatever they consume. Although they have been greatly influenced by Hinduism, their practice of animism is unabated. They have undergone with perceptible changes due to influences of education, development interventions, hinduisation and modernization. These are pictured in the photo handbook. The photos used in this book have been collected from Tribal Museum source and selective of Kisan villages. The ethnic contents of the book are a compilation at secondary source, both published and unpublished research materials.

The ancient and contemporary situations of the Kisan ethnicity are sketched through the pages of this book. The joint effort of Prof. (Dr.) A.B. Ota, Director and Sri T. Sahoo, Former Joint Director and Consultant, SCSTRTI have brought out this publication. The authors and the editor, Prof. (Dr.) P. Panda, Former Director, SCSTRTI and Former Member Secretary, ATLC, Bhubaneswar deserve thanks. Hope, this piece of work will be appreciated by the learned readers.

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KISAN

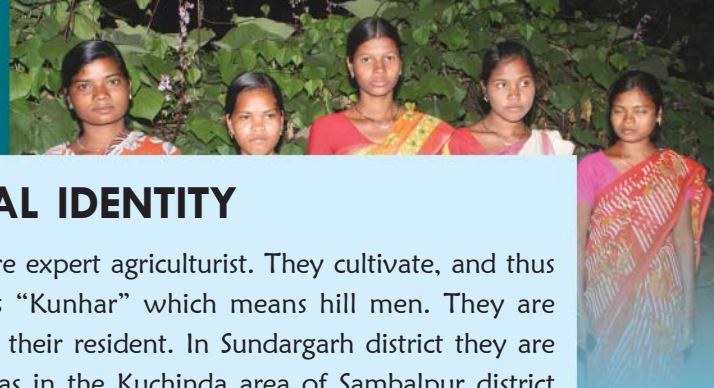


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SOCIO-CULTURAL IDENTITY

The Kisan people are a peasant community. They are expert agriculturist. They cultivate, and thus are called as Kisan. The Kisans call themselves as “Kunhar” which means hill men. They are known by various names according to the place of their resident. In Sundargarh district they are called as ‘Kuda’ or ‘Kor’ and even ‘Mirdha’ whereas in the Kuchinda area of Sambalpur district they are known as ‘Kola’ or ‘Morva’. The Kisan of Odisha use surnames such as Dash, Bhoi, Mohapatra and Kisan after their names. The name of Kisan is found in the list of Schedule Tribes in the state of Odisha.

In India, they are distributed in the states of Bihar, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. In the state of Odisha, the Kisan are found in most of the districts. But their concentration is more in the districts like Sundargarh, Sambalpur and Keonjhar.

The Kisans of Odisha speak ‘Kisan’. It is considered to be a Dravidian language, which is allied to the Oraon language. They are also conversant with the regional language, ‘Odia’ and use the Odia script for writing. Some are conversant with ‘Laria’ as well as with ‘Hindi’. From cultural and linguistic points of view the Kisan seem to be a branch of Oraon. In dress and ornaments they do not show any peculiarity. Common dresses are used by the rural folk are worn by the older generation. Tattoo marks are mainly seen among the old woman.





Probably they came to Odisha earlier than Oraons and settled in the states of Gangapur, Bonai, and Bamanda. According to their local traditions they first lived under the patronage of Bhuinya chiefs and later migrated to different parts either in search of land or labour. Now, the Kisan is a peasant community and many of them posses land of their own. The tribe is very adaptive. In most areas people of other castes and tribes are their immediate neighbour.

According to 2001 census, the total population of Kisan in Odisha is 321592,



i.e. 3.94 % of the total tribal population of the state. Their sex ratio comes to 993 female per 1000 males. Their level of literary is 50.19 per cent for all, 64.43 per cent for males and 35.88 per cent for females.





HABITAT & SETTLEMENT



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The Kisan settlement is homogeneous. Mostly the settlement consists of a single lineage. In multiethnic villages, they live in separate hamlets. The arrangement of houses in a Kisan settlement and the house pattern there are not the same throughout the locality. In some settlements, generally in the original and older villages, the houses are clustered together. In certain new cluster of houses, these are conspicuously arranged along the village roads and streets.

For the selection of a new house site, the Kisan observe a method of grain divination. At the selected site, seven grains of fried rice “Arua” covered with a papal leaf with sand on it are placed





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in a spot that was cleared earlier in the name of mother earth goddess and the Sun god. In the following morning, if it is found that the grains are undisturbed, the site is considered as auspicious for settlement. Before the actual construction of the house starts the first auspicious wooden pillar is fixed in a ritual by the oldest male member of the household.

Kisan houses are rectangular in size. Each individual house has its compound with one door in each room open to the courtyard. Most of the houses have low mud walls and a naria tiled roof. Besides the cowshed and the kitchen, each house consists of more than one living room.





HOUSEHOLD MATERIALS

Kisan household articles do not differ much from those of middle class Hindu and other tribal groups like the Oraon and the Gond. As regards the household furniture, the Khatti (Charopy) with a wooden frame woven within Siali rope is found in many households. Patia or mat made out of date-palm is also used very commonly as bedstead. Some of the well-to-do houses have a framed wooden cot, chair and table. Their household utensils



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PHASA (Rabbit trap)



PHASA (Bird Trap)

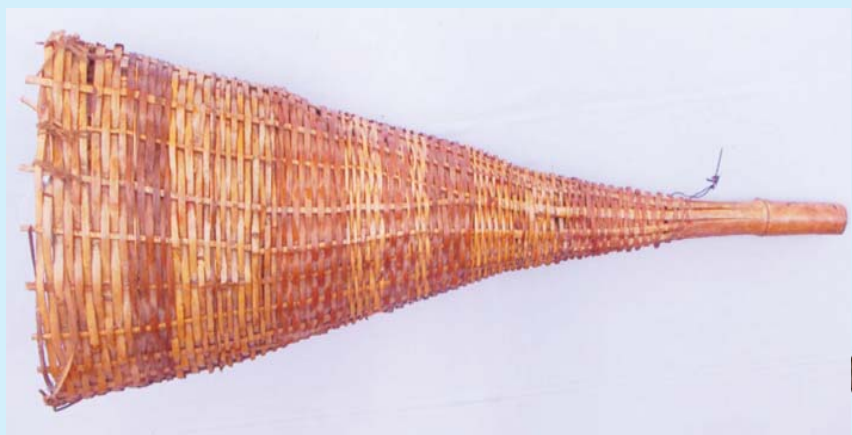




include plates and pots of various sizes made of brass, bell metal and aluminum. Husking lever and grinding stone are the common objects of every household. Their other household articles include different varieties of agricultural implements, fishing traps and weapons for hunting, musical instruments which include drums of different size, are owned collectively by the villagers.



TANGI (Axe)



KUMUNA (Fishing Trap)



Each household has own cattle wealth, agricultural implements, weapons and household utensils. Their agricultural implements comprises of plough, kamaba or khanti, kudal, khurapi, sickles, axes, etc. The household utensils consist of earthen pots, aluminium pots, bronze thali, lota, tumbler, iron knife, karahi, chholani, kalchhul. They use baskets of different sizes for storing and carrying forest produce, grains, loads etc. They prepare these baskets, brooms, mats and winnowing tray with the help of bamboo and date leaves. They have few cots, machia and sikia which they prepare from the ropes. They weave and prepare ropes from the local grasses for self use and also selling for additional income. They have Lathi, Ber, Barchha, Bhala, as hunting weapons. Now a days some households own Radio, watch and bicycles.



TADA (Armllet)



CHUDI (Bangle)





FOOD AND DRINK

Rice is their staple food. It is taken twice or 3 thrice daily with a side-dish of green leaves or vegetables. They also eat lentils, roots, tubers, *mandia*, maize, arrowroot, greens, fruits, nuts, berries, flowers, mushrooms, which are collected from the nearby forest. They use mustard oil for cooking. Occasionally they also eat mutton, poultry, egg and fishes. Most of them prefer water rice, which is taken with salt, chilly and





edible greens and vegetables. Besides their daily intake of food, they also prepare special foods, like boiled and baked curry and non-vegetarian dishes on the festive occasions.

The Kisan men drink alcohol, mostly home or locally brewed country liquor like rice beer and mahua, a spirit distilled from the flowers of the local mahua (or the *bassia latifolia*) tree. They smoke and chew tobacco. Also the use of tobacco paste (*gurukha*) is their common habit.





LIVELIHOOD

Traditionally, they are a farming and food gathering tribe. As their name suggests the Kisan pursue agriculture as their primary occupation. And that justifies the connotation of their name as a land owning cultivator community. For a long time, the Kisan have been enjoying the reputation of being good farmers among the tribes. They mainly grow rice and gulji, minor millet, as their main food crop. Most of them still follow the traditional method of cultivation, and very few have taken up new methods by using improved seeds or





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chemical fertilizer. They use the same types of agricultural implements that are used by their neighbours. In addition, to agriculture, the Kisan depend on forest collection as much as their places of habitation permit. They collect firewood, green leaves, fruits, *mohua* flowers and seeds mostly for their own consumption, and lac, honey, kendu leaves for sale. In the leisure time also they go for hunting animals from the near forest and finishing. As regards to household industries women have knowledge of making mats and broomsticks from wild date palm leaves, while many men know brick-making and carpentry. The landless Kisan people eke out their livelihood primarily as the agricultural laborers. Some of them were brought to work in the tea plantations of West Bengal by the British during colonial times. Since then they have been continuing till today. Now-a-days a little bit of change is also seen in their occupation. Few of them are employed in private and government sectors or own small business, while many of them are daily-wage laborers in industry, construction and agricultural sectors.





SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Kisan social structure is reported to be comprised of as many as 16 sects or lineages. They are Lakada (Tiger), Babala (Wild dog), Bhada (Bangan), Kind, a kind of fish (Seula), Tapo (A kind of bird), Kajur (A kind of leafy plant), Minj (Kite), Eka (Tortoise), Mahacr (Crow), Tigar (Monkey), Hesar (Paddy), Punner



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(Iron), Bakur (Salt), Palar (Cur), Majhi (Term used for the village by boatmen), Khalir (Secular head man), etc. Each of these social units is exogamous in nature. On principle of the Kisan society marriage within the social fabric of the clan is restricted. According to ancestry, each lineage is again divided into a number of divisions called khudi.

Although many live in nuclear families, there are some that live in extended families. Parental property is equally divided among the sons and the eldest son succeeds to the late father's authority. The Kisan women, although granted secondary states to men, have many significant roles to perform in the social, economic and religious spheres.



LIFE CYCLE

The life cycle of Kisan passes through such events as conception, birth, childhood, adulthood, marriage, old age and death. The rituals associated with life cycle are also cautiously observed.

Experienced women of the village assist the expectant mother at the time of the child delivery. The delivery of a child always takes place in one corner of the living room. At critical situation the traditional shaman's help is summoned or the woman is taken to the nearest hospital. Soon after birth, the naval cord is severed with a knife, and along with the placenta it is buried in a pit. Until the purificatory rites are performed the mother is forbidden to cook or go out. She takes restricted food, like boiled rice and Kulthi dal to eat during this period. On the seventh day, the mother washes her clothes, takes a complete bath and takes Tulsi water for her purification. On the 21st day after the birth, the name giving ceremony of the child takes place. On this day, if the family can afford it, it may invite the neighbours and relatives to eat festive meals, which include liquor.

The Kisan marriage custom strictly follows the principle of endogamy. Monogamy is the practice, but the Kisan society also considers the bigamy. Marriage within the same clan or to a member of any other caste or tribe is forbidden. The Kisan prefer adult and arranged marriages. In some cases, marriage by mutual consent, phony capture, elopement and service are also considered



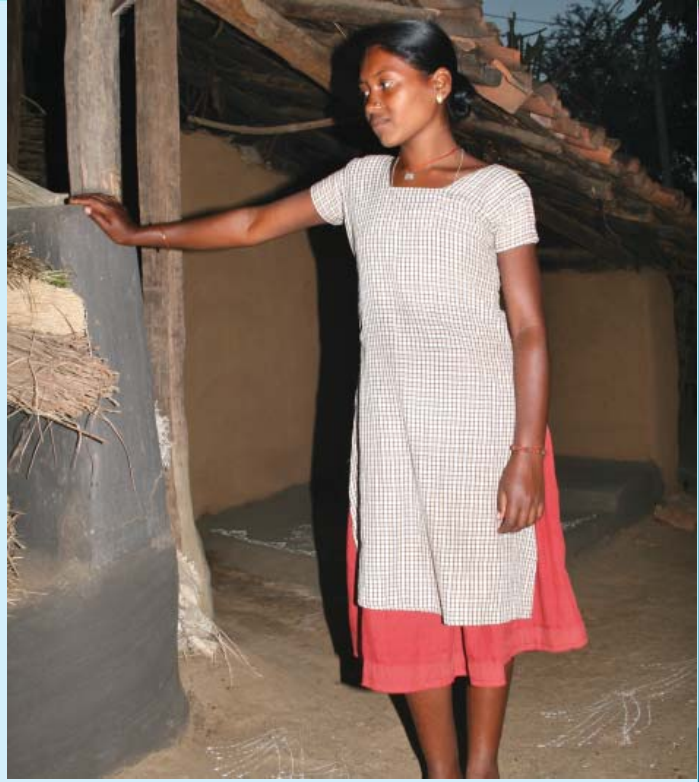


acceptable. Marriage with one's mother's brother's daughter is common. The symbols of matrimony for women include sindur (vermillion in the mid hair parting), glass or lacquer bangles, earrings and toe rings. The practice of bride price is prevalent among them. Divorce due to adultery, maladjustment, impotency and cruelty is socially permissible, as the re-marriage of widows, widowers and divorces is also socially approved. A widow may marry her younger brother-in-law, while a widower is allowed to marry his younger sister-in-law. The Kisan have their own oral tradition and both men and women sing weddings songs.

They bury and also burn the deceased at times. Death rites are observed in two stages as primary and secondary rites. During the primary death rites, they dispose of the corpse, collect its bones and observe purificatory rites. After death,



corpse is anointed with turmeric and is carried to the cremation ground in a bier or a charpoy. After cremation they take bath and return to the deceased house, where they purify themselves with the smoke from a burning fire in which oil is poured. On the third day of cremation, they go to collect the bones in a pot. On the eight or twelfth day the final purificatory rites are observed by cleaning the houses and washing the clothes. During the secondary rites the bone immersion ceremony is observed. After the harvest, they ceremonially throw the pot containing the bones of the deceased into the fixed water source popularly called as the 'Ganga Ghat'.



RELIGION, RITUALS AND FESTIVALS



Like the religion of other tribes, the Kisan religion is mostly based on nature and ancestor worship. The religion of the Kisan is plainly infused with remnants of their tribal roots. Among many deities of their ancient religion, Ista Devta, along with Samalai Maha Prabhu are revered as household deities, while Gosain, Ganasir, Budha Bandha, Baghia, Bihma Devta are worshipped as some of their tutelary village deities.





Among the Kisan different rituals and festivals are observed in honour of Gods and goddesses round the year. Their festivities are connected with agricultural operations like sowing, harvesting and consumption of first fruits, etc. Their agrarian activities start with the *Bihanbuna*, ceremonial first sowing of paddy in the month of Baisakha (April-May). The *Gamha* festival for installation of kendu twigs is held in the agricultural

fields in the month of July-August. They observe Nuakhia in the month of Bhadrab (August-September) for eating new rice. They celebrate Dusserha in the month of Aswin (Sept-Oct.) for





worshiping the village deity and finally *Puspunei* in the month of pusa (December and January) for ancestral worship with dance and song and merrymaking which marks the end of agricultural operation for the year. On these festive occasions the sacrifice of goats and fowls is very common. Also special food like cakes, chicken and mutton are taken. Rituals and festivals are always celebrated with singing and dancing on the tune of music.



The Kisan also follow Hinduism and worship all major gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon like Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Kali, Durga, Hanuman, Rama and others. Like their Hindu neighbours, the Kisan observe the Festivals such as Dusserha, Kalipuja, Janmastamai, Holi. The services of Brahmin priests, known as purohit, as well as priests from their own community, called Kalo or Soin perform all life-cycle

ceremonies and ritual worship of deities. Medicine men called Gunia, Moti and Baidya, from other neighboring communities are consulted to ward off evil spirits and to cure diseases. They are famous for their Singing and Dancing along with their hospitality.





LEADERSHIP & SOCIAL CONTROL

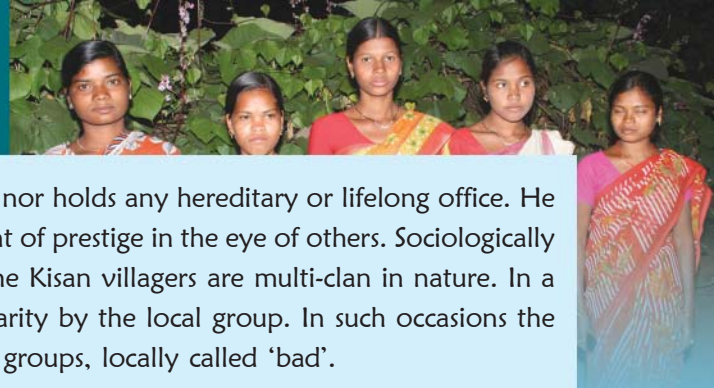
The elders are leaders, the torch bearer of the Kisan society. They are respected by all and are the most important persons. The Kisan socio-political structure is always democratic in spirit and the Kisan leaders are mostly informal in nature. But having been ruled long by the feudal chiefs and coming in contact with other caste Hindus they have organized their social structure on caste principles. The two important formal leaders within the tribe are the Bariha and Panigiri.

The post of Panigiri is not very important as he just officiates in the ritual of readmitting the ex-

communicated persons into the tribe and formally presides over the mass-meeting held every year at the time of throwing effigies or bones in the so called Ganga Ghat. But in the olden days the Bariha was very powerful with large amount of authority and discretion up to recent past. Then he was considered as the Raja of the tribe and was a dictator to some extent. Within the democratic framework of Kisan social structure, the institution has been destroyed at present partly under the pressure of modern forces and partly through the instrumentality of informal Kisan leaders. In course of time the significance of the post of Bariha has been reduced. His role is now just of historical interest as it functioned as the leaders of the tribe in the past.

For all socio-political purposes local group is the most important social unit in the Kisan society. The local group may be a village or a word within the village. In the local group an informal council of elders is the real authority. The prominent person within the group is called Sian or





headman but he neither exercises any special power nor holds any hereditary or lifelong office. He is just a common man though he enjoys some amount of prestige in the eye of others. Sociologically considered every local group is not a single unit. The Kisan villagers are multi-clan in nature. In a Bigger village it is not convenient to maintain solidarity by the local group. In such occasions the local group becomes divided into a number of sub groups, locally called 'bad'.

This inter-village organization is called punchupalli though it is a loose and evolving organization. The members who join the puanchaupalli meeting to adjudicate cases get no remuneration. If they visit the village of the complaint, they are treated respectfully and Bhang (powered tobacco) Kahali (tobacco leaves rolled as cigars in sal leave) and liquor are offered to them. Sometimes they are also treated by giving meals if they come from distant places. The important disputes which are not finalized in the bad level are discussed in the village level and if no satisfactory decision is arrived at that stage important Sians of five or six villages are invited to adjudicate the issue.

The Kisans retain some amount of solidarity in the lineage level or sub-clan level through the functions of Bansa Puja and Bansa Khoja. Bansa Puja is held annually or once in two or three years, when the representative of the clan or sub-clan members of each village gather at a particular

place. They worship the Bansa ancestors and other deities and pray for the expansion of the Bansa and for the protection of Bansa members from diseases. In some sub-clan such regular worship is not held but in 12 or 20 years they hold a general meeting called Bansa Khoja. When the members of the clan or sub-clan trace their genealogies and get themselves





acquainted with the lineage members who might have resided at distant places. In case of Bansa Puja there is a formal official called Kalo, who officiates as priest in the lineage worship but organization of such meetings are executed by the informal leaders.

The Kisan society of Odisha has a traditional community council (Jati Samaj). The Mukhia is its head. All heads of the household are the members of the village Panchayat. As a mechanism of social control it operates at the village level to solve disputes among members of the community. The matters related to husband-wife conflict, divorce, property distribution, theft, adultery, extra marital relations, violation of marriage rule, witchcraft, village level worship etc. are decided in traditional village Panchayat. Through this village Panchayat, the Kisan maintain their customs and tradition. To decide the cases between two or more villages there is a larger organization called as 'Kisan Mahasabha' which operates at the regional level. The Mahasabha is headed by Bariha and looks after the welfare and development of the community at regional level. Both the posts of Mukhia and Bariha are hereditary. The decisions of the village and regional panchayats are welcomed by all the Kisans.



CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

After independence, the Kisan are listed as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) under the provisions of the constitution of India. This enlisting benefits them by providing access to fixed quotas in government jobs, reservation of seats in educational institutions to study medicine or engineering and in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly and Panchayat bodies. Through the govt. interventions, especially by the ST& SC Development Department, GOO by opening schools and special hostel for STs, the Kisan have availed formal education for their children.

There are a few Kisan students who have reached postgraduate level. Both modern and indigenous medicine is used by the community. Many of he Kissan people have adopted family planning measures.





There are opportunities extended through the ITDAs under various employment generation schemes. Some Kisan households have taken advantage of these. Besides, the Kisan people have benefited from the government's child welfare and immunization programmes and the Public Distribution System. At present the national banking facilities are made available in their localities. The Kisan women have been attached to Mahila Mandal, Self Help Group etc. and taken up economic and social welfare activities.



Now days, there is modern Gram Panchayat headed by Sarpanch. Through this modern Panchayat development works are being implemented. Now there are Thana, Police, Court, Lawyer etc., who look after the criminal cases. Few Kisan have gone in the shelter of the court for justice and availed the free legal aid facility. After independence, the Kisan have become voters. During different elections they participate in democratic process by casting their votes. But the village Panchayat by and large decides their voting behaviour. Amidst recent changes most of the Kisan are a tribal peasant community that has retained

many aboriginal characteristics of its forest tribe origins. For the conservation and preservation of





tribal arts and crafts of Odisha some of the Kisan's arts and artefacts have been displayed in the Tribal Museum at SCSTRTI, CRPF Square, Bhubaneswar. Still now the Kisan are apparent in their social customs and culture.



Brass Money Purse



CHURIA (Fishing trap)



JHAMPI (Bamboo box)



JUALI (Yoke)



KODALI (Bill-hook)



BARCHHA (Spear head)



DAA (Sickle)



TUPULI (Decorative basket)





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