

The Society And Culture Of The Kandhas Of Odisha :- A Brief Study

*Dr. Bijaya Kumar Sahoo
Assistant Regional Director,
IGNOU, Bhubaneswar
7894015420
bksahoo@ignou.ac.in*

Abstract of the article titled The Society and Culture of the Kandhas of Odisha: A brief study.

The state of Orissa has an area of 155.7 thousand square kms with a total population of 41, 974,218 lakhs according to 2011 census. There are 62 tribes in Orissa constituting 22.85% of the state's tribal population (95, 90, 756 and 9.7% of the nation's total tribal population. More than one third of its area namely 59, 963 square kms is covered with hills and dense forests where the aboriginals have taken shelter. The Kandhas constitute one of the major tribes of Orissa with a population of 16, 27, 486, out of that women and men are 7,90,559 and 8,36,927 respectively. The literacy rate of the Kandh tribe is 46.95 and they are famous in history for their Meriah (human) sacrifice.

In Odisha, the Kandha is numerically the most populous tribe and it is a major tribe of the state as well as the country. Though their population is unevenly spread throughout the State, their main concentration is in south Odisha. Geographically, their stronghold lies in the central region (Boudh & Kandhamal districts), Rayagada region (Rayagada district) and south-western part (erstwhile Kasipur and Mahulpatna areas) of Eastern Ghats Region.

The Kandhas are very straight forward and they express their feeling before the people whom they trust. Their intimate relationships emerge from the core of their heart. They are kind, open hearted, honest, bold, trustworthy and ready to sacrifice life for their true friends. They are emotionally attached to nature and natural resources like land, deities, spirit, mountain, river, forest etc. which are

precious for them. They believe in work and worship and never disregard or misbehave anybody unless they are very seriously hurt. They dislike people who cheat and betray them and are afraid of evil spirits, black magic and taboo. They hate people who take bribe and exploit them by grabbing their land and by depriving them of their rights. They are very sympathetic and helpful at the time of crises. They give equal importance and respect to the women. The Kandha women consider their husband's elder brother's children as their own children. Under the impact of western culture, modernization and spread of education, the practices, beliefs, customs and traditions of the Kandhas have been diluted and acculturated.

Key words-konda, *Kui loku, Kui enju, Kuinga, kui, kuvi, Desia Kandha, Dongria Kandha, Kutia Kandha, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, Malua Kandha, sinda, bala, gogla, sarsuria mala, naka, putuki pujupaka, kichedka, tikanguhpa, darni penu, tunenji mag, pagan, baisaak, jerset, nadangi, pranga, irki kalu, paeri aaka, chaukuni, pideri panu kanu, garka, sindu mala*

The state of Orissa has an area of 155.7 thousand square kms with a total population of 41, 974,218 lakhs according to 2011 census. There are 62 tribes in Orissa constituting 22.85% of the state's tribal population (95, 90, 756 and 9.7% of the nation's total tribal population. More than one third of its area namely 59, 963 square kms is covered with hills and dense forests where the aborigines have taken shelter. The Kandhas constitute one of the major tribes of Orissa with a population of 16, 27, 486, out of that women and men are 7,90,559 and 8,36,927 respectively. The literacy rate of the Kandh tribe is 46.95 and they are famous in history for their Meriah (human) sacrifice. (Ministry of Tribal affairs, 2010)

In Odisha, the Kandha is numerically the most populous tribe and it is a major tribe of the state as well as the country. Though their population is unevenly spread throughout the State, their main concentration is in south Odisha. Geographically, their stronghold lies in the central region (Boudh & Kandhamal districts), Rayagada region (Rayagada district) and south-western part (erstwhile Kasipur and Mahulpatna areas) of Eastern Ghats Region. (Rath, 1986)

According to Captain Macpherson (1846) the word 'Kandha' is derived from the Telugu word *Konda* which means a small hill as well as the hill men. Originally they were hill dwellers. The non-tribal people have given them the name Kandha and in course of time, the tribesmen have accepted the name. But they identify themselves as '*Kui loku*' "*Kui enju*" or "*Kuinga*" because they speak '*Kui*' or '*Kuvi*' language belonging to Dravidian linguistic group. '*Kui*' and '*Kuvi*' are two regional linguistic variations. While '*Kuvi*' is spoken by a majority of the Kandha of undivided Koraput, Kalahandi and Bolangir districts, '*Kui*' is spoken by the Kandha of Phulbani district. *Kuvi* appears to have original structural composition while *Kui*, an acculturated and transformed form of *Kuvi* language. (Barma,2016)

On the basis of the socio-cultural characteristics, the Kandhas are divided into several sections such as; *Desia Kandha*, *Dongria Kandha*, *Kutia Kandha*, *Sitha Kandha*, *Buda Kandha*, *Pengo Kandha*, *Malua Kandha*, etc. Among the several sections of the Kandha communities, two sub-sections such as *Kutia Kandha* and *Dongria Kandha* have been identified as Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups. The name of *Kutia Kandha* refers to their house floor which is about 2ft. below the level of the village road and this low lying floor of the house is known as *Kutti*. ' Accordingly, they are named as *Kutti-dwellers* or *Kutia Kandha*. They mostly inhabit the Tumudibandha Block of Kandhamal district and Lanjigarh Block of Kalahandi district of Odisha. The word '*Dongria*' in *Kuvi* language means 'Hill'. As *Dongria Kandhas* inhabit the high altitude hilly terrain of Odisha, they are popularly called as *Dongria Kandha*. They are mostly found in Bissamkattack and Muniguda blocks of Rayagada district of Odisha. Other sub-groups of the Kandha tribe like *Sitha Kandha*, *Buda Kandha*, *Desia Kandha* and *Malua Kandha* inhabit in Koraput, Kandhamal and Bolangir districts of Odisha respectively. The *Sitha Kandhas* (*Sitaranga*) are basket makers. The *Malua Kandhas* are well-known for their patterns of living in groups in hilly areas for which they are called so. On the other hand the *Desia Kandhas* are found in '*desh*' or plains area for which they are called *Desia Kandha*.(Behura, 1978) A group of Kandha people is also found who

incorrectly pronounce the word 'Bengo' (frog) as 'Pengo' and relish the flesh of frogs. They are locally known as "Pengo Kandha."

The Kondhas have good physique. They are not much dark in complexion. Among them some fair skin persons are also noticed. The men are slim, active and of average height. The women though short are robust and sturdy. The Kodhas are very simple, frank, naïve and credulous by nature. Their behavior is pleasant and they are extremely hospitable. They are found to be very courageous before the fierce wild animals but extremely sober before an unarmed stranger.

The dress pattern of the Kandha is very simple. The women of the community used to wear two pieces of clothes (*sinda*), one around the waist up to the knees and another for the upper portion of the body. But now they prefer to wear one piece saree which is available in the local market. They prefer to adorn themselves with various types of ornaments like coloured bead necklace (*sursuria mali*), silver bangle (*bala*), neckband (*gogla*), nose flower (*naka putuki*), hairpin (*pujupaka*), ear ring (*kichedka*) etc. Traditionally Kandha women are very fond of making different tattoo (*tikanguhpa*) designs on the face. However, now-a-days tattooing (*tikanguhpa*) is not preferred by the women of younger generation. The Kandha men wear dhoti (loin cloth) and ganji (banyan). On special occasions, a headgear is also worn. Moreover, a coloured turban is worn by the groom during his marriage ceremony. (Behura, 1983)

In the village there are a number of footpaths crossing each other. Generally a village consists of a number of hamlets, which are locally known as *sahi* or *pada*. The Kandhas cremate their dead body in the cremation ground (*tunenji*) which is situated in groves adjoining the village. In every village there is an altar for the Earth Goddess (*Darni penu*) located at the side of the village. The Kandha houses are identical with regard to design and building materials used for construction. Their houses face almost every direction. Generally a new house (*edu*) is constructed in the month of February (*Mag*), March (*Paagan*), April

(Baisaak) and May (Jeset). Before selecting a place for construction of a new house, the male elders of the household go to the proposed site at night (*nadangi*). They carry with them some rice (*pranga*), mahua liquor (*irpi kalu*) and few cups made of siali leaves (*paeri aaka*). At the site, they keep those leaf cups (*chaukuni*) containing a few grains of rice. In each cup they pour the liquor on the rice and offer it to their ancestors (*pideri penu*). After the ritual is over, they themselves enjoy the surplus liquor (*kalu*) and return home. Next morning (*beea diesi*) they again visit the same site to verify whether the grains are in order and intact or not. If not found intact there is presence of some evil spirits (*doi pideri*). Hence, the place is considered inauspicious and unsuitable for house construction. If the grains are found to be intact, then it is considered to be an auspicious place by the ancestors. They sacrifice hen (*kaju*) at that place to mother goddess (*darni penu*) and build the house (*edu*). The construction of a Kandha house (*edu*) is very simple. The walls of the house are made of planks of sal trees (*jargi mrahanui*) covered with mud and trellis made of bamboo splits and its roof is thatched with wild grass. The house is of very low height, not exceeding 10ft. and its entrance is at a height of about 4ft. from the ground level. A typical house consists of one or two rooms with a separate kitchen room (*baja edu*) and a cowshed (*goheli*) at its backside. A narrow verandah (*pinduli*) is found in the front as well as at the backside of the house. In each house paddy husking pedals (*dhinki*) is installed on the verandah (*pinduli*). The front verandah is always kept clean and used as a meeting place where leisure hours are spent for recreational activities. They stock and store fire wood (*erpa beska*) and forest products on the backside of the house. Each house has two doors (*dara*) one at the front side and another at the backside. The front door is made-up of wood with different carved designs and the back door is made-up of bamboo (*mani pata*). Inside the house one room is used as kitchen (*bajaedu*) and storage of household utensils (*muta mand*) and the other room which is comparatively large is used as living room (*dopa edu*). In this portion one or two mortar holes for husking grains are embedded on the ground. On one side of the living room a large wooden shelf is

built for keeping household objects and the grain bin (*duli*) is kept on the wooden platform (*dadi*). Their wall (*kudu*) is coloured with red soil and verandah is polished by smooth stone. Their agricultural and household implements such as plough (*nangeli*), yoke (*jueli*), spade (*rapa*), leveler (*patasingh/kurli*), sickle (*kele*), winnowing fan (*sesi*), measuring pot (*tambi*), gourd (*laka*) etc. are kept inside their house along with their hunting weapons such as bow (*wilu*), arrow (*ambu*), axe (*tangi*) spear (*garka*), gum stick (*sindu nala*) etc. and fishing implements. The Kandha also keep different Dhokra (*linga/darba*) objects. (Behura&Panigrahi, 2005)

Family is the smallest social unit in Kandha society. Nuclear family is common and joint family is rarely found. The members of the partilineage help their head of family during birth, marriage and death rituals etc. They use surname like Kanhar, Mallick, Pradhan, Majhi etc. As soon as a boy gets married, he builds a new house of his own and lives there separately from his parents. In their society the Kandha people call daughter-in-laws by name of (clan) *Mutha*. There are fifty *muthas* in Kandha society namely *Saiti, Paba, Jurapi, Bongodi, Baka, Bidu, Teriki, Damsing, Pira* etc. (Kalia, 1959) As per the rule of exogamy, a man cannot marry within his clan or *mutha*, because members of a *mutha* consider themselves as brothers and sisters. The Kandha lineage is exogamous and marriage within the lineage group is strictly forbidden. It comprises a number of blood related families living in different hamlets or in a group of villages. They trace their decent from common ancestors and occupy a distinct territory belonging to their *mutha*.

Pregnancy and child birth are welcome events in the Kandha society. A new born child is considered as a gift of nature. During pregnancy women observe many taboos against going to the cremation ground (*tunenji*) and eating food offered to the deities. Even they don't allow her to come out at the time of solar eclipse or lunar eclipse, because they believe that the baby may be affected by the eclipse and become *garna khandia (kanduna)*. The delivery is attended by an old and experienced lady. It takes place in a secluded room or near the

verandah (*pinduli*). It is the duty of the father to cut the umbilical cord (*pudenji bahi*) of the child. In case of a male child it is cut with an arrow head or oyster (*samuka*) and in case of a female child it is cut with a small knife (*kude*). Then the new born baby is given a thorough wash in lukewarm water mixed with turmeric powder. On the sixth day, a ritual called *sana handi* is observed. In that ritual, a chicken is sacrificed to the dead ancestors. The blood is smeared on the wall using a piece of bark from a mango tree. A portion of it is hung at the entrance door to avert the eyes of the evil spirits. Till twenty days, both the child and its mother remain confined in the back side of the house (*edu*). On the 21st day, the head of the blessed family conducts a ritual again with sacrifice of chicken to the dead ancestors, which is known as *handi sara*. On that day they wash their clothes, plaster their house with cow dung (*goberi*) and use new earthen pot (*teki*) for cooking. Naming of the child is also performed on this day. (Mahapatra, 2011) These rituals are performed in different ways at different places. In the Kandha society their children help their parents when they grow up to five or six years of age.

A Kandha girl on reaching her first menstruation stays in seclusion in an isolated room. During that time she is not allowed to talk to her kins and eat worshipped food. After that period she takes bath with oil and turmeric to get rid of pollution. Marriage (*rdanja*) is one of the important social functions in the Kandha community. Marriages are conducted by either negotiation or service. Adult marriage is practiced among them. An adult boy marries at the age of 20 to 21 years and girl at 15 to 18 years of age. In negotiation marriage, first the groom's family visit the bride's house with a basket of rice. If the bride's family accepts the gift, it indicates that they agree for marriage. Next time the groom's father with other male members visits the bride's house to fix the date for marriage. They go with some country liquor (*irpi kalu*) which is called agreement liquor (*gati kalu*). Next day the groom's party pays the customary bride price (*suhupa*) of Rs. 101/- in cash, two cows or buffalos, brass vessel and an axe to bride's father to finalize the matrimony. On the marriage day the groom's kinsfolk

present gifts to bride such as rice (*pranga*), goat (*aada*), and utensil etc. which are required and used for wedding feast. During the marriage the bride puts vermilion mark on the bride's forehead. After marriage, the newlywed couple set up new residence. Another type of marriage is marriage by capture (*dripa sedi*) in which the groom's friends help him to capture the bride of his choice, after an offer of liquor and food. Then the girl's father visits the groom's house with his villagers. That matter is decided in the bride's village. This village council levies a fine of Rs. 300/- in cash and a buffalo to the groom's party. Then the captured bride is brought back to her father's house and later she is taken back to the groom's village. In the Kandha society, sororate, widow remarriage, cross-cousin marriages are prevalent. Polygyny is allowed in case the first wife is barren. (Pasayat, 2006)

Divorce is allowed on the ground of misunderstanding between couple; barrenness etc and such cases are finalized by their traditional panchayats. The bride's side has to return the bride price in case she leaves her husband for her own fault. Divorced (*sadri*) persons are also allowed to remarry.

The Kandhas believe that death is a natural phenomenon. When a person dies his family member start crying before the deceased person remembering his day-to-day activities and what he had done in his life time. Dead body is kept in the north- south direction with the head towards north. Their lineage members remain present there and carry the dead body covered with a new cloth to the burial ground. Then fire is set to it. After cremation is over their relatives take bath and return to home. The family of the deceased and the lineage members observe death pollution for 11 days. On the 12th day they observe mortuary ritual, which is locally known as *mana*. In that day they clean their house, clothes and all other materials used by them. They cut their hair, beard and nails. A feast is arranged on this occasion. The family members of the deceased and their relative's take part in the feast and the ritual comes to an end.

The Kandhas are agriculturists. They practice both shifting cultivation (*dahi*) on the hill tops and hill-slopes and plough cultivation (*nela*) in

valleys and low lands. They cultivate on three types of lands namely *dhupa*-upper land (*depa keta*), *Berena* (*jodi keta*) and *Sarada* (*suruda keta*) for paddy cultivation and they cultivate *Kandala* (*kanga*), *Jununga* (*judungaga*), *Biri* (*masangaga*) etc in their hilly areas. They cultivate different kinds of crops such as paddy (*Kudinga*), ragi (*tedi*), maize (*jaylaka*), black gram (*biridi*), horse gram (*kadpaka*), sesamum (*rasi*), mustard (*saras*), bean (*sainga*), etc. Also they cultivate vegetables in their kitchen garden (*akali bada*) for their own consumption and also for sale in the local market. They collect important forest produce like timber (*beska*), fire wood (*erpa beska*), bamboo, *siali* creepers, *kendu* and *sal* leaves etc. They use timber and bamboo for house construction and making their hunting implements and fishing traps. They collect fire wood for their own use and also for sale in the local market. Collection of *kendu* and *sal* leaves is an important source of their income. They make leaf cups (*chaukuni*) and plates (*khali*) for their own use and often for sale. They collect different seeds and flowers such as *Karanja* (*ponagamia glatera*), *Kusuma* (*Keheli*), *gora* (seed) for extracting oil and *mahua* (*irpi*) flower for making wine (*kalu*), which is important for ritual and ceremonial offer to the Earth Goddesses. They also collect juice from different trees such as Sago-palm (*salap*), Date-palm (*tadi*) and palm (*tala*) and also gather edible roots, tuber (*tasa*), lac, *jhuna* (*tadili*), tamarind (*nedi*) from the forest (*gosa*). Therefore, the Kandha consider forest as their treasure house. They go for hunting when they are not busy with agricultural work. Now as hunting is being prohibited, they only go on hunting during rituals. Fishing is an occasional pursuit. The Kandhas are also working as daily wage labourers and doing business to maintain their livelihood at present. (Patnaik, 2005)

Watered rice is their staple food. Generally the Kandhas take meals thrice in a day. In the morning (*diesi*) they take watered rice (*pakali eju/basi eju*). After ploughing land they take boiled rice (*tilabela eju*) during the day. In the evening they take meal (*benda eju*) with curry (*kusa*) and in dinner, they take boiled rice (*nadang eju*) or (*pala*) with curry (*kusa*). They take seasonal cereals, pulses and vegetables like maize (*jayalaka*), mustard (*sarsa*), *Kandul* (*kanga*), *Jhudunga*

(*jhudangakasa*), Beans (*sainga*), green leaves (*kusa*), mushrooms (*kutka*) etc. which are cooked and consumed. Sometimes they eat non-veg items like fish curry(*minka- kusa*), chicken (*kajunga*), mutton (*ada unga*), and the flesh of wild pig (*braha kusa*). They are very fond of different liquors (*kalu*) such as *mahua* liquor (*irpi kalu*) and juice from sago-palm (*mada kalu/salap*) and date palm (*gajuri*). *Mahua* liquor (*irpi kaluor ago kalu*) is used as medicine and also as ritual offering to appease deities (*penu*) and ancestors (*pideri penu*) in different ritual and festive occasions. They also chew (*dua*) and smoke (*kaheli*) tobacco.(Panda, 2006)

The Kandhas are very religious minded people who believe in animism, animatism and totemism. Their belief system is centred around nature. They worship a number of gods, goddesses, spirits (*Pideri*) and various natural objects. To appease Gods and spirits, they perform various magico-religious practices which include sacrifice of different animals. In their settlements certain symbolic structures like wooden poles, stones with vermilion markings (*baddi*), leaf plates, bamboo baskets (*boga*) etc. are found representing their ritual objects. Each spot has its own supernatural significance because it provides shelter to spirits and deities of certain special power. (Sinha, 1981) The Earth Goddess (*Darni Penu*) is their supreme deity. Other deities namely *Saru Penu* (mountain god) *Suga Penu* (stream god), *Piju Penu* (rain god), *Naju Penu* (village deity), *Pideri Penu* (ancestor god), *Bela Penu* (sun god), *Pilanu Penu* (hunting god), *Jakeri Penu* (sister of earthgod), *Jori Penu* (river god), *Burpi Penu* (first fruit god), *Ruju Juga Penu* (calamity god), *Sande Penu* (border god) and the village deities like *Budi Maa Thakurani* , *Baral Devi*, etc. are worshipped in different occasions and festivals.(Tripathy, 2010)

Every village has its own magico-religious specialists namely *jani*, *jhankar*, *dehuri*, *bahaka*, *mati guru* who worship their deities. *Mati guru* (priest) worships only the Earth Goddess (*darni penu*). In his absence, *jhankar* worships the *darni Penu*. In their magico-religious practices, there are some taboos for women. They are not allowed to touch the sacrificial food and pregnant women

are not allowed to eat that food. Their magico-religious performance is associated with several types of sacrifices and observances. These are followed by dance, music and drinking. These occasions give an opportunity to enhance the unity and integrity of the village. During the observance of rituals necessary sacred articles like wine (*kalu*), *arua rice (pranga)*, egg (*tola*), *jhuna (tadali)*, turmeric (*singa*), *gourd (loka)*, etc. are collected and kept by the villagers. Observance of *Meria* festival is considered as a symbol of Kandha cultural identity.(Sahu, 2001)

The Kandhas perform different dances like marriage dance, *Dhangidi- dhangada* dance etc. to grace their festive occasions by using horn trumpet (*singa*), *dhol (dhula)*, *dola,clarinet (maheri)* and circular drum (*sangu*). At the time of *dhangadi-dhangada* dance, they wear their traditional costumes and young girls and boys dance together with small membrane drum (*kandra*), clapping and singing songs. It provides an opportunity for them to choose their life partners.(Mahapatra, 1961)

The Kandhas are very straight forward and they express their feeling before the people whom they trust. Their intimate relationships emerge from the core of their heart. They are kind, open hearted, honest, bold, trustworthy and ready to sacrifice life for their true friends. They are emotionally attached to nature and natural resources like land, deities, spirit, mountain, river, forest etc. which are precious for them. They believe in work and worship and never disregard or misbehave anybody unless they are very seriously hurt. They dislike people who cheat and betray them and are afraid of evil spirits, black magic and taboo. They hate people who take bribe and exploit them by grabbing their land and by depriving them of their rights. They are very sympathetic and helpful at the time of crises. They give equal importance and respect to the women. The Kandha women consider their husband's elder brother's children as their own children. Under the impact of western culture, modernization and spread of education, the practices, beliefs, customs and traditions of the Kandhas have been diluted and acculturated.

REFERENCES

1. Barma Padmalochana (2012) *Educational empowerment of the Tribal women of Odisha*, A study of the PGTs of the Nuapada district of the KBK, Odisha Review, pp. 59-64
2. Behura, N.K. (1978), *Peasant potters of Odisha*, New Delhi, Sterling publication
3. Behura, N. K. (1983), *Structural Continuity of Tribal Culture and Indian Civilization: An Analysis of Odishan Situation*, Journal of Social Research, , 26 (2), 1-25
4. Behura, N. K., and Panigrahi, N. (2005), *Development of primitive tribal groups (ptg) and the role of government in Odisha*, In Sarita K. Chaudhari and Sucheta Sen Chaudhari (eds.), *Primitive tribes in contemporary Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal of India: Concept, ethnography and demography* (Vol. 2) (pp. 227-258), New Delhi: Mittal Publications
5. Kalia, S.L. (1959). *Sankritization and tribalization*. Bulletin of Tribal research Institute, Chindwara (M.P.), 2(4),33-43
6. Mahapatra, Bhagyalaxmi (2011), *Development of a primitive Tribe*, concept publishing company, New Delhi, pp. 47-49
7. Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2010), Statistical profile of STs in India, Statistics Division, Govt. of India, New Delhi, www.tribal.nic.in
8. Mohapatra, *Tribes of Odisha* ,Marriott, McKim (ed.) (1961) Village India, Bombay, Asia Publishing House
9. Panda, Nishakar (2006) *Tribal Development: Imperatives and compulsions*, Orissa Review, December, pp. 37-42
10. Pasayat, Chitrasen (2006) *Development of Tribal women's problems and potential*, Anmol publications, Orissa
11. Patnaik, N.(2005) *Primitive tribes of Orissa and their development strategies*, D.K.print world, New Delhi
12. Rath, S.N.,(1986), *Tribal Development Programme, An appraisal*, in L.P.Vidyarthi (Ed), Tribal Development and its administration, New Delhi, Concept publishing company
13. Sahu, Gopalakrishna (2001), *Tribal development through communications*, IASSI Quarterly, January-March, 19(3), 113-122
14. Sinha, S. C. (1981) *Tribes and Indian civilization: Transformation process in modern India*, Man in India 11(2)
15. Tripathy, Ajit (2010) *Strategies for educational empowerment of tribals in Odisha*, unpublished Ph.D thesis, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, India.