



HIDAYATULLAH NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY
RAIPUR

TRIBES OF CHHATTISGARH

LAW & LIVES

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TRIBES OF CHHATTISGARH: LAW & LIVES

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HIDAYATULLAH NATIONAL LAW UNIVERSITY

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School of Law & Humanities
Centre for Law & Indigenous Studies

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FOREWORD

India's tribal communities represent some of the most vibrant, resilient, and culturally rich segments of the nation. Among them, the tribes of Chhattisgarh stand out for their deeply rooted customs, unique legal traditions, and time-honored way of life—systems that have sustained them for generations amidst changing socio-political landscapes.

Tribes of Chhattisgarh: Laws and Lives is a compelling and much-needed contribution to the understanding of indigenous legal systems and cultural frameworks. Authored by students of Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur—many of whom belong to the very communities they write about—this book offers an authentic and deeply personal exploration of the laws, lives, and lived realities of tribal groups such as the Koya, Agaria, Gond, Halba, Kawar, Abhujmaria, and Oraon.

What makes this book particularly significant is not only its scholarly depth but also its rooted perspective. By bridging legal analysis with cultural narration, the authors preserve a body of indigenous knowledge that is under increasing threat from the forces of globalization and modernization. Through the lens of customary laws, they invite the reader into worlds where law is not merely written in codes but lived through rituals, social norms, and collective memory.

The chapters—richly supported by photographs—delve into each tribe's social structure, economic practices, spiritual beliefs, and unique legal traditions. From birth and marriage rites to conflict resolution and political organization, each section captures the distinct identity and resilience of the communities it represents. This book challenges us to rethink our understanding of law and justice, urging us to recognize the coexistence of customary and statutory systems. In doing so, it appeals to policymakers, legal professionals, educators, and the public to ensure that tribal voices are heard, respected, and integrated into broader conversations about rights, governance, and equity.

I would like to congratulate Dr. Ayan Hazra and the dedication of the student-authors in reflecting a deep connection to their heritage and a commendable commitment to amplifying indigenous narratives. Their work will no doubt serve as a foundational text for scholars and practitioners alike—and, more importantly, as a bridge between tradition and contemporary legal thought.

Prof. V.C. Vivekanandan

Vice Chancellor - Hidayatullah National Law University
President - Consortium of National Law Universities

PREFACE

India is the site of one of the world's oldest and most diverse native populations. Indian tribal groups in the country, which are called Adivasis or Scheduled Tribes, have managed their affairs by means of self-governed customs, traditions, and unwritten rules comprising their social and legal systems for many centuries. Known as customary laws, these practices have governed rites of marriage, divorce, inheritance, property ownership, and many everyday activities in their lives.⁹⁰ Customary laws are adaptable and exist within the socio-cultural structure of the community. Unlike the formal legal system where laws are set in writing and applied uniformly, these laws respond to changes in social, political, and environmental contexts.

Customary law is essential while analysing the unique self-governing systems of the tribal peoples of India. It offers understanding of the distinct approach that is invariably directed towards social harmony, environmental protection, and community life. In addition, customary law violators is not as stringent as legal law and therefore retains cultural identity and self-rule. The rules are not static but susceptible to change through oral transmission from one generation to the next. India's problem is figuring out how to keep the need for legal consistence while satisfying the requirement of preserving the distinct customs of tribal societies in the country sprints forward.

According to the Article 371 of the Indian Constitution, special provisions have been made to protect the practice of customary laws given the unique status of tribal groups. Constitution of India's Fifth and Sixth Schedules — guarantees the right to self-governance through Scheduled Tribes and Empowerment through Autonomous District Councils and Tribal Advisory Councils. The rights of tribal people to preserve their customs and manage their resources themselves are also reinforced by the Forest Rights Act of 2006 and the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act of 1996 (PESA). Despite these constitutional and legal frameworks, the implementation and recognition of customary laws remain inconsistent, often leading to tensions between customary legal systems and state law.

One of the primary objectives of the study is to analyze the scope, problems, and evolving nature of the application of customary law in India today. There is sometimes a clash of legislative and customary rules which becomes complicated in matters of gender issues, land alienation, and justice administration. While customary law has always sought to maintain sociological stability in tribal societies, its application does bring doubts about its congruence with modern constitutional values of justice, equality, and human rights. The Indian legal system needs to tread cautiously and assimilate tribal customs into the national

legal framework to prevent these communities from becoming culturally and legally disintegrated.

This paper reveals the ability of tribal foundational laws to withstand the effects of economic transformations, state intervention, and globalization. Some tribal ethnoses make use of ancient self governing structures in order to control disputes and avoid the disintegration of these sociological units. In many Indian regions, tribal councils alongside elders and customary courts remain prominent because they are inexpensive and culturally appropriate and address the local issues promptly.

Another principle that stands out is the perception of natural resources and real estate from the standpoint of indigenous law. Unlike the modern legal system which tends to commodify everything, the overwhelming majority of indigenous peoples regard land as a vital sacred resource which is integral to their identity. Customary land policies stand in stark contrast to current legal system as they focus on communal and altruistic concepts and not private property and business activities. The rampant state and market infections of aboriginal lands have caused conflict, displacement, and socioeconomic dysfunction of tribal peoples. As a result, there is a need to assert and protect indigenous land rights to sustain indigenous livelihoods and ecological balance.

As an academic pursuit, the study of the customary law also advocates for a jurisdictional framework which integrates various features of India's customary law. As a consequence of legal standardization and socio-political marginalisation, it is highly likely that these legal traditions will vanish. Before they do, there is a need for them to be recorded and preserved. The challenge incorporated within customary law of India's legal system can rather be an opportunity for achieving a more equitable and pluralistic legal regime.

This study is aimed at the legal community, legislators, social activists, and other stakeholders interested in the issues and affairs of the indigenous peoples of India. This study seeks to enhance understanding and appreciation of the processes of the functional maintenance of tribal customary laws vis-à-vis the protective guarantees of the fundamental rights of citizens and the provisions of the constitution considering their intricacy and depth.

To conclude, Indian tribal communities consider the past, identity, and self-governance encompassed within a tribal law which is more than just a set of rules to be followed. Their rights are bound to the legal frameworks of their cultures, which need to be preserved and renewed. Striving for a just and multicultural legal order in India requires a blend of established and customary practices. This is not only possible but imperative. We plan to focus on customary legislation in

order to promote further debates on legal pluralism and the role of indigenous heritages in building a fairer society.

Dr. Ayan Hazra

Centre Head, Centre for Law and Indigenous Studies

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The current research on customary law of the tribes of Chhattisgarh is possible because of the support and guidance of Dr. V.C. Vivekanandan, Vice Chancellor of Hidayatullah National Law University (HNLU), without his support and vision the idea of establishing the Centre for law and Indigenous studies would not be possible. His unwavering encouragement has played a vital role in the success of this initiative. We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Hidayatullah National Law University, Raipur, for granting us the opportunity and resources to undertake this project.

The tribal stories and their sagas covered in this book would not have been possible without the student's commitment and effort which are evident in their extensive research, fieldwork, and teamwork they have undertaken to study the cultural practices and customary laws of different tribal communities which provide a unique and unpolished perspective to the book.

I would like to express our gratitude to Akansha Sharan, Nandana Arun, Rishika Mahapatra, Suhana, and Yashasvee Jain, for their valuable dedication in formatting the book. We are also appreciative of the several institutions and people—such as community leaders, interpreters, and local guides—that made the fieldwork research possible.

Special thanks go out to Dhruvi Aggarwal, Dalaisha Aggarwal, Pranav Kumar Verma, Khyati Sinha, and Aditya Shah, who have been crucial to the Centre's success.

We would like to express our gratitude to all stakeholders for their valuable contributions to this book. This project has been a team effort, and each one of you has contributed their unique viewpoints. We as the authors take full responsibility for any mistakes and omissions about how we have represented the indigenous communities, although we have tried our best to portray the stories with authenticity and respect. Our hope is that this book will make a meaningful contribution to the understanding and conservation of indigenous customary laws in India.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

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KOYA, KOYTURS AND KOKATTA: A GLIMPSE INTO THE WORLD'S OLDEST LIVING CULTURE

Karnpriya Dhruve

INTRODUCTION: UNVEILING THE WORLD OF THE KOYA TRIBE

India's rich cultural tapestry is woven with the traditions of its diverse tribal communities. According to the 2011 Census, India's tribal population stands at 104 million, making up 8.6 % of total population.¹ Among these indigenous communities, the Koya tribe has preserved its distinct identity despite the rapid encroachment of modernization.

Primarily residing in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh, the Koya people are one of the largest indigenous groups in the central India, with a population of 779854.² Their way of life is deeply rooted in sustainable practices, intricate social customs, and vibrant spiritual traditions, reflecting a harmonious relationship with nature. This chapter explores the multifaceted world of the Koya tribe, including their birth, marriage, and death rituals, economic organization, religious beliefs, and governance structures. The field survey was conducted in the village of Gumdha (population: 2000) Javanga (population: 2100), in the Geedam Block of Dantewada District, Chhattisgarh.³

LIFE IN HARMONY: THE KOYA WAY OF LIVING

Birth Rituals

When a child is born in the Koya tribe, the umbilical cord is buried in the ground with a pot of water is placed over it symbolizing the child's future fate. The umbilical cord is severed using an arrow and presented before the newborn as part of the ritual. The mother remains outside the house until she undergoes a purification ceremony involving a black thread. After a month, she re-enters the

¹ Gov't of India, Office of the Registrar Gen. & Census Comm'r, Census of India 2011, (2011) Available at

http://censusindia.gov.in/Tables_Published/SCST/dh_st_andhra.pdf.

² Gov't of India, Office of the Registrar Gen. & census Comm'r, Census of India 2011, Primary Census Abstract: Chhattisgarh, available at file:///Users/akanshasharan/Downloads/PC01_PCA_IND_ST_DH_26.pdf.

³ Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Gov't of India, Annual Report 2019-20, at 126-129 (2020) available at <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/AnnualReport/AREnglish1920.pdf>.

house following a ritual offering of *Mand Salfi* (local alcohol) and chicken are offered to the *Wadde* (spiritual leader).



Tappar: A traditional ring-like ornament used by the Koya tribe in ceremonial practices such as birth and death rituals

A significant purification ceremony, *Natan Katla*, involves the use of 12 chickens, pigs, vulture feathers, and bird nests. The parents immerse themselves in a river, exiting from the front without looking back, symbolizing a spiritual cleansing. The *Chatthi* ceremony follows, where the key community figures, such as swing-makers, *Mitanin* (nurse), and *Wadde-Gunia* (traditional healer), participate. These customs are believed to ensure the child's prosperity and well-being.

Marriage Customs

Marriage among the Koya tribe is a deeply symbolic and communal affair. The groom's family visits the bride's home three times before the wedding⁴, presenting gifts such as cloth, mats, *Landa* (local alcohol), cocks, pigs, 20 bowls (*payli*) of rice, and a saree. Before the bride leaves for her husband's home, both she and the groom are bathed on a *Pidha* (wooden stool) in a ritual accompanied by singing and dancing.

A unique custom involves the groom 'running away' with the bride to their farm, known as *Veda*, signifying union. Upon returning, the bride undergoes the marriage rituals again at her husband's home, a process known as *Yermihtrna*. These customs reinforce community bonds and the sacredness of marriage.

Death And Beyond

⁴ Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Tribes ode to India: The Struggle for Survival*, pg 127-139, (Orford Univ. Press, 1982).

The Koya practices both cremation and burial. While most individuals are cremated, village heads (*Sirha and Wadde*) are buried as a mark of respect⁵. Upon death, the Wadde is informed first, followed by a communal announcement through drum beats. The deceased is adorned with a *Tappaar* (ceremonial object) before the funeral.

The funeral rites are performed by designated individuals known as *Aana-Guna*. Before burial or cremation, a symbolic offering (pen) representing a deity is placed near the body. The final ceremony, *Antim Kadla*, includes exorcism rites to ensure the soul's peaceful departure.

Language

The Koyas believe they originated from caves, which they consider the womb of the earth. They speak the Koya language, also known as *Koya Bhasha*, a Dravidian language related to Gondi and influenced by Telugu⁶. Many Koya people also speak Telugu, Hindi, or Chhattisgarhi, depending on their region and exposure to other communities⁷.

THE ECONOMY AND SURVIVAL

Agriculture And Its Significance

The Koyas were historically shifting cultivators but now practice settled farming. They primarily grow paddy, maize, mandia (millet), and tobacco⁸. During the harvest, families move to their various *Ketuls* (field huts) to guard their crops. They also forage for roots, tubers, and fruits such as *Tumid* (Kendu fruit), *Mahul* flowers, and seasonal wild greens like *Kusir*. Tamarind trees are communally harvested and sorted. These agricultural and foraging practices sustain their economy.



Gathering place: villagers come here to have their lunch after farming

⁵ Nadeem Husnain, *Tribal India* 256-270, (Palaka Prakashan, 2015).

⁶ K. S. Singh, *Tribal Ethnography, Customary Law, and Change* 187 – 192, (Concept Publ'g Co. 1997).

⁷ IJRSET, *Ethnography of Koya Tribe in Eastern Ghats – Holistic Approach*, 8517, (2017).

⁸ R. R. Prasad, *Encyclopaedia of Sceduled Tribes in India* 233-245 (Discovery Publ'g House 2001).

One of the Koyas' primary sources of livelihood is the collection of roots, fruits, leaves, tubers, herbs, and other forest produce. They harvest *Tumid* (Kendu fruit) in large quantities when ripe, sun-dry it, and store it for use during periods of food scarcity. *Mahul* trees grow abundantly in the Koya region, and during March and April, vast amounts of *Mahul* flower are gathered, dried, and preserved for later consumption. From July to September, various types of roots are foraged from the forest and used as food. Another significant food source for the Koyas is roots gathered from the jungle, which serve as both staple food and traditional medicine. They also consume young green bamboo shoots. Women collect a variety of wild greens from fields, forests, and water's edge, referred to as *Kusir*, which are typically cooked and eaten with rice. Seasonal wild fruits, such as *Marka* (mango), *Edka* (Kusum), and *Nendu* (jamu), are gathered and consumed fresh but are not preserved. Tamarind trees are commonly found in the region⁹, and households with these tree store extra tamarind, which is then shared and enjoyed together in the community.



Plate made of Dona leaves used to have food by Koya Tribe

Hunters and Gatherers

Hunting and gathering are deeply intertwined with the Koya tribe's spiritual beliefs and cultural practices. Before embarking on a hunt, Koya hunters perform rituals to seek the blessings of their deities and ancestors. These rituals reflect their belief in the sacredness of nature and the need to maintain harmony with the environment. Similarly, gathering is accompanied by expressions of gratitude to the forest spirits, highlighting the tribe's deep reverence for the natural world¹⁰. The Koya people celebrate their connection to the land through festivals and ceremonies that honour their hunting and gathering traditions. For instance, the "*Pus Punna*" festival marks the beginning of the hunting season and is celebrated with music, dance, and offerings to the gods¹¹. Gathering is cornerstone of the Koya tribe's subsistence strategy, particularly for women and children. The forests surrounding their settlements are abundant in edible plants, fruits, nuts, roots, and medicinal herbs, which are collected for food,

⁹ Sest research institution Bhubaneshwar, koya,12.

¹⁰ Fürer-Haimendorf, C. von. (1945). *The Reddis of the Bison Hills: A Study in Acculturation*. Macmillan & Co.

¹¹ Singh, K. S. (1994). *People of India: Andhra Pradesh*. Anthropological Survey of India.

medicine, and trade. Commonly gathered items include wild mangoes, tamarind, mushrooms, and tubers like yams. The Koya people possess extensive knowledge of their natural environment, allowing them to identify and utilize hundreds of plant species. This knowledge is passed down through generations, ensuring the preservation of their traditional practices. Gathering is not only an economic necessity but also a social activity, as women often work together, sharing stories and strengthening community bonds.

Crafting Heritage

Although the Koya people engage in various handicrafts, they specialize in making Kokatta and Dhol, traditional musical instrument unique to their community. These instruments hold both cultural and religious significance.



Traditional musical instrument dhol with kokatta

The process of making drums follows a distinct method. Typically, wood from two to three specific trees - *Kursmada*, *Vengurmada* or *Amamada* – is used. Cow and goat leather are preferred for making the drumheads and thread. The crafting of *kokatta*, involves the use of bamboo, rooster feathers, *Bhimad pitte* (a type of shell), *Gaur Sinh Kavadda* (kaudi/sea shell) and peacock's beak. The entire process takes about a month, requiring collective effort, and is passed down through generations. If someone wishes to purchase one, it is sold at a price of approximately Rs 120-130. These instruments are not only a part of the

traditional Koya dance performances but they also hold deep religious importance, helping to maintain and support the cultural heritage of the tribe.

THE SPIRITUAL TAPESTRY

Nandraj

Nand Raj Pahar, situated in Kirandul in the Bailadila area of Dantewada district, is of deep spiritual importance to the tribal people. It is not just a mountain – it is a sacred centre of religion. The hill is said to harbour the wood of Anga Dev, a holy symbol of tribals' ancestors. In a gesture of paying homage to their ancestors, residents of 84 villages around here assemble every year to celebrate *Jatra* or *Dev Mela* and indulge in dance and rituals in traditional style. The hill is also inhabited by several gods and goddesses of the tribes, who are venerated by pilgrims from all over the region, further establishing its position as a sacred place in Koya tribal cultures.

FESTIVALS

Amus Pandum

Amus is the first festival of the tribal region in Chhattisgarh, marking the beginning of festivities in the region. Celebrated throughout India during the month of Shraavan, the festival is known as harelip in most parts of Chhattisgarh. In Hindi, it is referred to as Hariyali, and in Chhattisgarhi, it is called Hareli Tihar. This festival, observed in rural areas, involves taking preliminary measures to prevent diseases and epidemics. It is celebrated with great reverence by people of all communities and classes, including the Koya tribe¹². From the day of the festival until Nag Panchami, herbalists teach their colleagues the art of making medicines. On Amavasya, farmers worship their agricultural equipment.

Korta

The Korta Festival, also known as Nava Khai, is a significant agricultural and cultural celebration observed primarily by the tribal communities in the Odisha and Chhattisgarh regions of India, particularly by the Koya and Dongria Kondh tribes. This festival is observed to celebrate the harvesting of fresh crops and as an occasion for thanking nature, gods, and ancestors for a good harvest. It is done with great zeal and traditional fervour. The main ritual consists of offering the first crop of the season to the gods, particularly the Earth Goddess and village gods. This act represents gratitude for the land's fertility and bountiful harvest. Families and communities unite in preparing meals cooked from the freshly harvested

12 Amus Pandum Festival: A Tribal Agricultural Celebration, Chhattisgarh Gyan (Oct. 2019), available at <https://www.chhattisgarhgyan.in/2019/10/amus.html>.

crops, like rice, millets, and vegetables. Besides commemorating the harvest, the festival involves rituals in honour of ancestors, who are asked to grant blessings for prosperity and good health. Other than the celebration aspect, it is also a reminder of the harmonious sustainable interaction between man and nature. The festival lays stress on the maintenance of traditional farming techniques and environmental balance. It is a moment of happiness, togetherness, and cultural festivities for the tribal populations, highlighting their rich culture and lifestyle.

Bija Pandum

The Koya tribes conduct Bija Pandum as their main celebration because it represents their agricultural heritage together with their spiritual connection to nature and their ancestral faith. Bija Pandum functions as the “Seed Festival” when it takes place at the start of annual planting time. At this time the Koya community plants seeds while praying to their gods to receive blessings that will bring abundant harvests. Bija Pandum serves as a symbol of future farming prosperity and represents the time when fields become ready for seed planting. The Koya people conduct different religious ceremonies throughout Bija Pandum to receive divine protection and blessings which will lead to a successful agricultural season. Traditional dances and music along with communal feasting fill the celebration with Koya traditions. The main attraction of Bija Pandum consists of the Rela dance where male and female dancers perform together in a harmonious and perfectly timed routine. The Koya people maintain their cultural attire through male dhotis and turbans and female vibrant sarees with jewellery.

KOYA TRIBES AND THE TOTEM SYSTEM

The Koya tribal culture maintains an essential totem system that establishes spiritual and cultural bonds between members, animals, plants and other natural elements. Totems not only function as key aspects to maintain social order but also aim to protect identity while strengthening spiritual connections. Each totem typically relates to particular clans or family groups.

Key aspects of the Koya Totem System include:

- **Clan Identity:** The unique totems each Koya clan uses for identity serve as natural objects from trees and rivers to animals like bear and tiger. The totem maintains clan identity across multiple generations because it is passed from one generation to the next.
- **Spiritual Importance:** Totems are considered to have spiritual significance as they contain spiritual power that connects people to ancestral or divine entities. According to Koya traditions, their totems serve as protective entities which generate prosperity for the clan members.

- **Restrictions and Taboos:** The members of each clan must refrain from any action that would endanger their specific totem plant or animal. For example, the members of a clan who have tigers as their totem avoid both hunting and injuring these animals. The Koya people develop their reverence for natural integrity because taboos actively strengthen their relationship with environmental balance.
- **Social Unity:** Through the totem system Koya people create social unity because it defines how different clans connect with each other. The system controls marriage traditions because members belonging to the same totem clan tend to choose each other as spouses.
- **Cultural Customs:** Koya people organize their cultural events including festivals, rituals and dances to honour their totems. The Koya people observe Pusaka festival by honouring their ancestors as well as their totems through ceremonial musical dance along with sacrificial offerings.

Koya Totem Examples

The Koya tribe recognizes four kinds of totem animals which include tigers, bears, deer and peacocks together with four totem plants consisting of tamarind, neem, bamboo and other species. The Koya tribe also recognizes totemic elements in natural rivers, mountains and particular landscapes. The Koya tribe uses totem animals to express their spiritual connection with nature while maintaining their belief in human-environment independence. Through the totem system the cultural heritage of the tribe remains protected together with its traditional practices which are successively transferred to upcoming generations.

LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

Disputes

The Koya tribes follow indigenous dispute resolution systems to maintain social harmony along with their traditional methods. The dispute resolution mechanisms of the Koya tribes stem from their established cultural traditions together with their communal decision-making practices. The Koya society now experiences dispute resolution changes due to modernization and external influences and legal frameworks.

Common Sources of Disputes in Koya Tribes

- Land and property conflicts
- Marriage and family disputes
- Criminal offences (such as theft, violence, etc.)

- Social misconduct (violations of customs and traditions)

The Role of the Tribal Council (Wadde) In Koya Tribe

The Koya tribe uses their indigenous community system to handle social order maintenance along with dispute settlement inside tribal organization instead of Western court institutions. The governance system exists as an essential part of their traditional heritage which combines their oral history and religious values. The village council functions as the base unit of this system through its Wadde headman and Gayta-Parma council of elders. As the main decision authority and community representative the Wadde manages governance functions as well as dispute settling and external relations. The Wadde leadership position typically passes through heredity but elders can select another person for this role based on their leadership abilities and accumulated wisdom and experience. The Wadde fulfills his responsibility by leading the village council to maintain tribal customs and traditions during meetings. Through their mediation role, the Wadde work to resolve disputes and create peaceful conditions throughout the community. The Wadde acts as representative of the Koya tribe to protect tribal interests when dealing with both government officials and outside organizations.

Dispute Resolution Mechanism

Within the Koya tribe dispute resolution process they choose reconciliation and community well-being above punishment. The Wadde and Sirha (traditional priest) lead the organization of village meetings for conflict resolution through oral hearings that enable both parties to share their complaints. Community participation leads to fair decisions because the Koya tribe makes choices collectively. The tribe prefers restorative justice practices over harsh punishments because restoration of harmony happens through compensation or public apologies as well as personal reconciliation. The Koya use religious traditions to resolve disputes through oaths and ancestor rituals because they believe divine powers will respond to dishonest actions. The tribal system implements justice through reparative measures instead of detention because it operates differently than state legal frameworks. Compensation payments for crimes require offenders to submit grains or cattle or monetary funds to the victim. When violations are severe the offender faces social exclusion or temporary isolation which prevents them from taking part in community activities. When an offense is considered spiritually impure the person must perform cleansing rituals to restore spiritual equilibrium. The tribe uses public apology ceremonies together with reconciliation meetings to build relationships and preserve peace between tribe members.

CONCLUSION

The Koya tribe, with its deeply entrenched tribal legacy in India, is a perfect example of harmonious coexistence with nature through ceremonies, spiritual traditions, and ecological practices¹³. Festivals like Karsaad and Bija Pandum, along with distinctive customs surrounding birth, marriage, and death, reflect their reverence for the land and agrarian way of life. Their otem system and community-based governance, led by Wadde, reinforce social unity and environmental stewardship.

However, their traditional way of life faces growing threats from industrialization and external influences. Preserving the cultural heritage of the Koya tribe is crucial, as it offers invaluable insights into sustainable living and showcases the resilient spirit of India's indigenous communities.

¹³ Bose, Nirmal Kumar, *Tribal Life in India* 276-282 (National book Trust 1971).

FROM SPARKS TO SURVIVAL: THE ENDURING SPIRIT OF THE AGARIA

Alice Alpana Lakra



“Jai Johar/Jai Bihan, Greetings from people of Agaria Tribe”

The Agaria Tribe is a significant indigenous community known for its rich cultural heritage and traditional iron-smelting and metalworking practices. Often referred to as the “sons of fire”, its name has been derived from the Hindi word “aag” which translates to fire, reflecting their historical occupation as iron-smelters. The Agaria tribal community, identified as casteless people, belongs to the "Proto-Australoid" group of human ancestry. This is a small Dravidian tribe which is considered a branch of the Gond tribe.¹ As per the 2011 Census,² the Agaria tribe in Chhattisgarh has a total population of 67,196, comprising 33,384 males and 33,812 females. The tribe's literacy rate stood at 38.22%, with male literacy at 76.93% and female literacy at 38.08%. This study focuses on the Agaria Tribe from Khunsi Village, Khunsi Gram Panchayat, Block Pratappur, District Surajpur, Chhattisgarh, highlighting their ancestral practices and beliefs as well as the changes they have undergone. A total of 14 families living in close proximity were observed. The commonly spoken languages among them are Sadri and

¹ TRIBAL RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE, *THE AGARIA AN IRON-CRAFT TRIBE*, https://cgtrti.gov.in/upload/eng_handbook/Agaria/Agaria.html (last visited Jan. 2, 2025).

² Ibid

Sargujiya, as they do not have a distinct tribal language of their own. Even if they once had one, the present generation has forgotten it.

ORIGIN



A furnace for iron smelting made of mud and wood.

The Agaria tribe is regarded as an offshoot of the Gond tribe, with a history that intertwines their cultural and occupational practices.³ Initially, it was a sub-caste of the Gond tribe and later it was considered a separate tribal group. The people belonging to this tribe are called Asur or Asur Agaria in Surguja region, Khantia Chok or Mahali Asur or Mahali Asur Agaria in Bilaspur region, Gondook Agaria in Raipur region and Kelha Agaria in some other areas. They also refer to themselves as Lohar and belong to the Dravidian language family. Their status as a separate caste can be attributed to their specific occupation of smelting iron. Like the Gonds, they are divided into many exogamous totemic clans.

A man, skillfully forging a sickle, heating and hammering the metal into a sharp, curved blade.



There is no concrete historical evidence about the origin of Agaria Tribe. The Agarias maintain their ancestral connection to legendary heroes of their tribe which ancient myths have handed down through time. The members of

³ VERRIER ELWIN, AGARIA 155 (Rajkamal Prakashan Pvt. Ltd., 1st ed., 2007).

Agaria claim that their ancestry stems from twelve brothers who participated in the mythical Lohasur. The descendants of Lohasur were divided into three distinct groups namely Lohars, Agarias (or Asuras) and Birjias. The Agarias practice their religion by honoring tribal deities and mythical figures starting with Lohasur, Koelasur and Agyasur who are thought to come from the ancient Asuras. The mythology of this community includes other well-known heroes such as Jwala Mukhi, Kariya Kuar and Logundi Raja. Legend states that the Iron City along with Logundi Raja's former kingdom underwent destruction after enemy forces invaded them. According to another popular folklore, a dispute which arose between two brothers of the Gond caste marked their origin. The younger brother, angered by the conflict, left his home and built a hut in the forest, where he subsequently lived. Struggling for food, he struck a fire in frustration and started throwing nearby stones into the flames. These stones turned out to be iron ore, which melted and got separated into metal. He consequently adopted the work of melting iron ore and separating iron as his livelihood. His descendants were called Agarias because they earned their livelihood from fire. The Agarias believe that their caste has existed since the beginning of the world and that the first agaria crafted the ploughshare used by the foremost bullocks to till the primordial soil. The cast is divided into two endogamous subgroups, Patharia Agaria and Khutia Agaria.⁴



Equipements used for crafting tools.

The Patharia Agaria⁵ are traditionally associated with extracting and smelting iron ore from the rocky terrains, explaining their name which is derived from “pathar,” meaning stone. They are skilled in the art of mining and converting raw iron ore into usable iron through indigenous smelting techniques. Their expertise lies in crafting essential agricultural and household tools such as ploughshares, axes, sickles, which are vital for the rural communities they serve. Those Agarias who

⁴ R.V. RUSSELL, THE TRIBES AND CASTES OF THE CENTRAL PROVINCES OF INDIA, PROJECT GUTENBERG (2007), available at <https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/22010/pg22010-images.html#d0e1053>.

⁵ Supra note 3

used stone with Dhokni in the initial stage of their community were called Pathariya Agarias.

The Khutia Agaria, on the other hand, are primarily known for their work with iron that has been refined. They focus on shaping and fine-tuning iron products into specific tools and items required for daily use. The name “Khutia” is believed to refer to the finishing or polishing aspect of their work, as they refine and enhance the utility of iron tools. Thus, those Agarias who used Dhokni to melt iron ore by digging a wooden peg were called Khutia Agarias.⁶

Together, the Patharia and Khutia Agaria represent the continuum of the traditional iron working practices of the Agaria tribe spanning from extraction of raw materials to creation of finished tools. These subgroups highlight the specialized skills within the tribe and their significant contributions to local economies and agricultural practices. They have honed their methods of livelihood and specific skills over generations.

LIFESTYLE

The skill of iron smelting exists as a result of the fusion between traditional wisdom and accomplished craftsmanship that is present across multiple generations. The Agaria tribe considers iron smelting to represent their way of life because of its connection with their cultural heritage and ancestral customs. The tribe demonstrates mastery in the production of tools, utensils and decorative items while showing their dedication to cultural preservation and economic sustainability. The traditional practice of iron smelting faces an uncertain future because economic challenges and changing aspirations of the younger generation threaten to erode this ancient practice. The survival of this singular cultural legacy depends on unified actions to document support and promote Agaria tribal artistic traditions towards perpetual transmission. Now, the life of Agaria tribes can be divided into three major phases beginning with birth. In this phase, the Agarias perform ceremonies like *Chhathi*, that is, giving name to the newborn and finding Pitter, the ancestral linkage with some elder member of the family like grandfather, grandmother, uncle, or aunty. The community members on the day of Chhatti take water in a bowl and drop grains in the name of the newborn and elder members. The grain that connects to a particular name determines the child’s ancestral link. Based on this practice, the community declares that the baby has inherited the **Pitter** of a specific ancestor. The other ritual is Annaprashan which is common across various tribes but varies in terms of belief, time and situation. *Annaprashan* means feeding the baby cooked food/ grain at a certain age, usually 9-12 months based on the growth of the baby.

⁶ Supra note 2



Children of Khunsi village, Dist. Surajpur

The second phase of their lives relate to marriage. Marriage within the Agaria Tribe traditionally occurred within the community but has become less restrictive in modern times. The proposal of marriage is initiated by the bridegroom's side. The marriage ceremony is generally conducted in a manner similar to that of other tribal communities in the area. While they have their own traditional practices and beliefs, these are not followed as strictly as those of other tribal groups. The head of the community and other members sit together and take collective decisions to conduct the marriage ceremony in accordance with their customs. After marriage, the wife's name is customarily linked to her husband's name.

The typical marriage age is currently 18-19 years for girls and 22-23 years for boys. In the past, underage marriages were common due to lack of awareness among the communities. Now, as one's consciousness grows with spread of information, the community members have moved away from their traditional ways of performing marriage ceremonies and have joined hands with the mainstream communities of the area. While the dowry system is not explicitly practiced, any gift or essential item given to the bride is regarded as a wedding present. Earlier, the tribal communities used to give whatever they have in the community, be it animals, vessels, cloths, birds or ornaments as wedding presents. On the contrary, the community members are becoming more educated as a result of which they provide household things as marriage gifts. The tribal communities were believed to be bound with each other with marriage preordained by their ancestors and deities. Hence, there prevailed a superstition that in case one spouse passed away, the surviving partner should remain alone. However, the community, over time, started to acknowledge the pain and agony of losing a spouse due to which the surviving partner is now allowed to remarry

and start a new family. The entire community supports the family in conducting the remarriage ceremony, which, in most cases, is performed following traditional customs only. Most of the families predominantly live as joint units, although some adopt a nuclear family structure depending on their place of residence. This is due to the settlement and the ownership patterns of land. The ancestors of the Agaria Tribes have mostly settled in one place as they served the communities through various agricultural equipment. Thus, in most villages, communities offered them land in return of shelter but they gradually began to develop the unoccupied lands surrounding of the village. Later, through the process of land registration, they obtained legal ownership of the land and started to live as joint families. These tribes have never been scattered among themselves though they move from one place to another in search of land and livelihood.

Lastly, the Agaria Tribe follows the practice of burying their dead and observes a mourning period of ten days. Rituals such as *Teejwa* or *Pani Nahaan* are performed on the third day, while Dashkaram is conducted on the tenth day. Unlike the practice of other tribal communities to take the body to cremation center to either burry or burn it, the Agaria Tribe identifies a certain place or land where the deceased members could be buried. This place is also known as a sacred place where their ancestors had been previously buried. They further build a small cemented concrete similar to a tomb in the memory of the deceased.

POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS

Their political organization includes within its ambit an integrated system of village panchayat with a dispute resolution process as discussed below. The Agaria Tribe follows the self-governance system with the help of Panchayati Raj institutions. But when it comes to taking decisions of a particular community, the members follow a distinct way, especially on the occasion of ceremonies, cultivation, and celebrations. The community gathers together and consults other members before making any decision. The head of the community is decided among themselves and they follow the patriotic system. The community head is the key person to pass the messages and take decisions collectively through consultations with men and women. There is no gender bias in the decision making and the community doesn't deprive women from participating in the same. The groups formed by women (*Mahila Samooh*) have their own way to gather and take decisions which are to be abided and followed by all. The community members also follow the Panchayati Raj Institutions rule, and the process of attending Gram Sabha. Additionally, they are active members of the latter and reap advantages of all government schemes. They actively participate in the election of the Sarpanch and ward members. Further, to settle disputes, the head of the community and other members sit together to discuss the disputes in order to maintain peace and harmony. However, in adverse situations where the

community is unable to solve the disputes themselves, they approach the village assembly, particularly the Sarpanch and the secretary.

ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

Agriculture has become the major source of income for the livelihood of the Agaria tribes. Though most of them are marginal farmers depended on rainfed agriculture, they manage to grow sufficient crops for their survival. The major crops cultivated are paddy, oil seed, gram, groundnuts, and other seasonal vegetables. They also depend on non-timber forest and livestock for additional support. Earlier, the Agaria community was mostly engaged in providing services to the community. In return, they received support in the form of grains while also earning a small income by selling their handmade agricultural equipment. However, over time, they acquired land and gradually shifted to cultivation as a means of livelihood.



Binding dried grass together to craft a traditional broom



A member of the Agaria tribe heading to the market to sell his produce

Presently they do not engage with iron smelting work and are mostly dependent on agriculture along with MGNREGA, Majdoori, Loha Pharigna, Pashu paalan, and Kheti. According to the villagers, they rarely engage in loan or mortgage systems among themselves. The only financial support they seek is for agricultural purposes. The produce from their fields is primarily for self-consumption, and they do not focus much on profit-making or marketing their agricultural products. The literacy rate in the village where the fieldwork was conducted was quite low. With the elders being illiterate, others had only received education up to middle school. When asked about their views on educating their young children, they responded that they would provide education as far as their financial means would allow them. Beyond that, they would prefer if their children take on the household and farming responsibilities. The villagers also mentioned that the quality of education in government schools was poor with the teachers being inconsistent in their tenure, negatively impacting the children's learning experience. Furthermore, the economic landscape for the Agaria tribe has shifted. While iron smelting and agricultural practices still play a major role in their livelihoods, there has been diversification of work. This shift has been facilitated by exposure to new forms of employment and training programs that equip tribe members with skills relevant for the modern job market. Government schemes and policies aimed at the development of tribals have further helped integrate the Agarias into mainstream economic activities.

LAW & SOCIAL CONTROL IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

Currently, the Agaria Tribe does not have any specific laws or formal control over their community. Instead, they follow the common laws and practices that prevail in the larger communities, as well as those observed by other tribal communities in the district and state. They do have a samajik sangathan at National and state level but the most common social control platform for them is through the Panchayat set up in the village. All the disputes related to any matter ranging from divorce to land or rituals are decided there and then followed by all. In some cases, compensation is also imposed if an act is against the social order of the society.

TRIBAL RELIGION & COSMOLOGY

This section delves with the religious beliefs of the Agaria tribe related to nature, the gotras present and the festivals celebrated by them. Two Gotra communities were observed during the field research: 'Ranha' and 'Aheend'. Other Gotras mentioned included 'Sonha,' 'Pradhan,' 'Ran Chariya,' and 'Bornga'. The most common surnames used within these communities were 'Rante' and 'Aheend'. Like other tribal communities of the district and state, the Agaria community also practices beliefs related to nature. While the influence of Hinduism is common among them, they still continue to believe in worshipping nature on various

occasions. The deities worshipped by the Agaria tribe are Budha Dev (Chief God of Gonds), Lohasur (the Iron demon), Thakur Dev, Dulha Dev (Family God)⁷, Shitala Mata, Bagh Dev, Jogni, Dhurlapat, etc. The main deity of the Agaria tribe is Lohasur, whose abode is believed to be in a blazing furnace.⁸ They also worship Hindu gods and goddesses, sun, moon, tree, mountain, river, snake, etc. Their primary place of worship is Devdham. The major festivals of the Agaria tribe include Navakhai, Dussehra, Diwali, Holi, and Karma Puja. The former is celebrated when the new crop arrives whereas a black rooster is sacrificed to *Lohasur* on Dussehra. They have unshakable belief in ghosts and witchcraft. They perform dances such as Karma during Karma Puja, Padki during Diwali, and Vivaah Naach at weddings. They sing folk songs like Karma, Dadaria, Sua, Vivaah, Phaag, and Bhajan, among others. The villagers also celebrate festivals like *Sarna*, *kathawri*, *Baisakhi*, *Tihar*, *jeevatiya*, *Hariyari* and *Gudi*, offering coconuts, and animals as a sacrifice to their gods and goddesses (Nature – Sarna). The traditional drink made and consumed by them is ‘*Mahuwa Daaru*’. Urad daal, prepared during special festivals and guest receptions, has a special significance in their society.⁹ The food items during their festivals are mainly made up of rice flour like other tribal groups.

EMERGING EVOLUTIONS

The Agarias are gradually moving away from their traditional methods¹⁰ of iron-smelting and artifact-making, and are instead using readily available iron from the market. The traditional “*Kothal*” mud furnaces are rarely seen and modern fans have replaced their traditional air-blowers known as ‘*Chapua*’. Iron-smelting is slowly disappearing owing to its strenuous nature. Additionally, the availability of cheap, factory-made farming and household tools has reduced the demand for their craft. Because of this, many Agarias are turning to other jobs, mainly farming and labor work, to earn a living as discussed above.

TESTIMONY

This section features the testimony of a young villager, Shivam Agaria, s/o Shri Naval Sai Agaria, belonging to the *Kayat* Gotra, from the village of Bargai, Thana-Darima, District- Sarguja, Chhattisgarh. The Agaria tribe traces its origins to the villages of Motinala and Parora in the Mirzapur district. Over time, the tribe expanded across various regions of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Historically, the Gonds are believed to be descendants of the Agaria tribe. As recorded earlier, the Agarias initially smelted stones to produce metal and began

⁷ Supra note 4

⁸ Supra note 5 at 159

⁹ Supra note 7

¹⁰BYOMAKESH TRIPATHY, D.V. PRASAD, ETHNOSCIENCE AND TRADITIONAL TECHNOLOGY IN INDIA 121 (Aayu Publications 1st ed., 2016).

crafting iron tools such as axes (*कुल्हाड़ी*), shovels (*फावड़ा*), hatchets (*हसुवा*), knives (*चाकू*), ploughshares (*हल लोहा*), mills (*चक्की*), and more. These tools were exchanged with farmers for grains like paddy and rice, which helped them sustain their families. Eventually, this barter system evolved into a full-fledged occupation, giving rise to the Agaria identity.

1. Lifestyle: The Agaria people build their homes as basic huts from date palm or mud materials which they cover with white or yellow mud plaster and cow dung floor coating. Short garments and loin cloths served as their traditional clothing before modern times when they resembled primitive human appearance. Their traditional clothing has evolved during recent times to match contemporary dress styles in society. The Agaria community maintains social traditions including religious Surdevta deity invocation before exchanging greetings with "Johar."
2. Marriage: The bride and groom wear traditional wedding crowns at marriage ceremonies where the groom uses Kanan made from date palms or millet and the bride wears a yellow or red paper crown. The marriage ceremony is conducted by an elder from Sonwani Gotra who leads the festivities with traditional dancing and singing that use *Mandar* and *Mridang* as musical instruments. *Hadiya* (a local rice beer) forms part of the celebration together with sharing joy as the main festivities.
3. Childbirth Rites: When a child is born, the maternal grandfather organizes Chhatti on the sixth day and Barhi on the twelfth day.
4. Festivals: Nawa Khani stands as the Agaria's principal festival because they practice cock sacrifices to their family deity. Every 3 to 5 years the community performs a goat sacrifice and they make offerings of pigs to their deity Surdevata.

CONCLUSION



A group of villagers gathered together – Khunsi Village, Pratappur Block.

The Agaria tribe alongside numerous indigenous groups encountered substantial developments through time which led them from their ancestral customs to contemporary lifestyle methods. The Agaria people during previous periods concentrated on iron smelting and farming alongside traditional practices which were rooted in their ancestral territory and skills. The Agaria community maintained their traditional social organization together with cultural traditions and daily activities that stemmed from their tribal heritage. The traditional customs of the Agaria people existed separately from mainstream society which restricted their social connections to broader opportunities. The Agaria tribe of today experiences significant progress across educational institutions as well as healthcare facilities and economic development. The Agaria people have achieved increased participation in the wider societal structure throughout the years. The tribe has evolved to adopt mainstream practices but it keeps essential cultural traditions intact. This transformation emerged because of both modern technology and government support along with sustainable development schemes. The current age brings forward a major advancement through better access to educational institutions and healthcare facilities. Before, education held little importance for Agarias so they did not receive formal schooling which restricted their chances of moving up socially or economically. The Agaria tribe currently sees more children attending school as members understand education serves as a tool to escape poverty. The availability of healthcare services has improved thus minimizing the effects of diseases which can be prevented. The progress made has not resolved all existing issues. Agaria tribe members encounter ongoing challenges because of discrimination along with problems regarding land ownership and cultural heritage protection. The Agaria tribe has advanced considerably in areas of social inclusion, economic development and resource access compared to their initial founding period. The Agaria people demonstrate their strength of adaptation to modern changes through their continuous development which preserves their distinct cultural traditions.

ECHOES OF ANCESTRY - THE CUSTOMARY LAWS OF KOITURS

Shweta Netam

INTRODUCTION

Nestled in the heart of Central India is the Gond tribe, the second largest tribe in India after the Bhil. According to the 2011 census, Gonds have a population of around 12 million residing across the states of Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Chhattisgarh has been home to this prominent tribe for centuries. Gonds are primarily settled in the districts of Bastar, Dantewada, Kanker, Sarguja, and Jashpur.

They are further divided into various sub-groups. In southern Chhattisgarh, the Muria, Bisonhorn Maria and Abujh Maria are the significant Gond tribes. Meanwhile, the Dhur Gonds, Khatola Gonds, Mokasi Gonds, Nagwanshi Gonds, Gaita Gonds, etc., are spread throughout the state. Among the Gonds, the Raj Gonds stand out as once ruling class. They are the descendants of the Gond dynasties that once ruled the Gondwana region, now parts of modern-day Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. The Gonds primarily speak the dialect of Gondi, a Dravidian language somewhat related to Telugu. Over time, many Gonds have lost their Gondi language to Hindi, Chhattisgarhi or Telugu, depending on which is dominant in their area. Efforts were underway to revive a standardized script, and in 2016, the Gondi script and font were unveiled in Hyderabad.¹

The term “Gond” itself has been taken from the Dravidian word “kond” meaning hill². But the Gonds call themselves “Koitur.” The Gond way of life revolves around agriculture, collecting forest produce and making traditional crafts. Both men and women engage in farming and collecting mahua flowers, tendu leaves, tamarind, etc. Days are spent labouring under the sun and evenings with some mahua drink, a local alcoholic drink distilled from mahua flowers. “Jai Badadev or Jai Seva” is how they greet each other. Being recognized as a Scheduled Tribe opened new doors for them. Education among the tribe is progressing steadily, with

¹ Gondi script and font unveiled, THE HINDU, Feb. 21, 2014, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Hyderabad/gondi-script-and-font-unveiled/article5714329.ece> (last visited Jan 06, 2025).

² Gond | Tribal Art, Music & Culture | Britannica, (2025), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gond> (last visited Jan 07, 2025).

government schools opening in tribal regions and many members migrating to cities for education and jobs. Nevertheless, they remain well connected to their kins, known as their “*Saga*.”

As one of the oldest tribes to survive through ages, the Gonds have not been spared from challenges. From land displacement and encroachment by outsiders to facing extreme poverty, exploitation and being treated differently for being an Adivasi, they have faced it all. Yet, they stand tall and continue to fight for their rights.

BIRTH

In every tribe, birth is a communal affair celebrated with joy and rituals. In rural areas of Chhattisgarh, many Gond women had home deliveries than hospitals as they trust the midwives more than the distant Primary Health Centers (PHCs).³ Child delivery is typically assisted by a *dai* (birth attendant) and household members. After the delivery, the umbilical cord is cut with a new blade and then burned in a clay warming pan known as a “*gorsl*”, which is also used to keep the newborn warm. This practice ensures hygienic disposal and also symbolizes the protection of the baby from negative energies or illnesses, as the umbilical cord is seen as an essential part of the infant. After five days, the mother and newborn are given their first bath, which is prepared with a mixture of medicinal herbs such as neem leaves, amarbel, and turmeric. This bath helps soothe the mother’s muscle aches and prevents infections. Such a purification bath is an important part of post- natal care among the Gonds. On the sixth day, the *Chhathi* ceremony (community feast) is organized to celebrate the birth, to which the entire community is invited. The naming ceremony should be held between the 21st and 30th day after birth. Children should not be named immediately after birth. This is an established practice among Gonds.

³ A Study of Reproductive and Child Health among the Dhur Gond Tribal Community of Mahasamund District, Chhattisgarh, India, RESEARCHGATE, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321218094_A_Study_of_Reproductive_and_Child_Health_among_the_Dhur_Gond_Tribal_Community_of_Mahasamund_District_Chhattisgarh_India (last visited Jan 07, 2025).

MARRIAGE

The Gonds are a broad, endogamous group that is subdivided into various clans. They follow the ancient system of Gotra or Kur, which represents the lineage and descent of clan members. There is a total of 750 Gotras found among the Gonds, and marriage within the same Gotra is prohibited. However, intermarriage between members of different Gotras is the norm. After marriage, the wife bears the Gotra of her husband. The 750 Gotras of the Gond tribe trace their origin to their 12 “*ga*.” According to the Gondi tradition, *Mata Kali Kankali*, a revered maternal figure, gave birth to 33 children who were referred to as “*Kond Dev*.” These *Kond Dev* were seen as the divine progenitors of the Gond clans. During the reign of Sambhu- Gaura, a son was born to Gond chief, Pulsheev. The son was called *Pahandi Pari Kupar Lingo*. He became the leader of the Koya race. These 33 children became his disciples. *Kupar Lingo*, the lawgiver of the Gond culture, organised these 33 *Kond Dev* into 12 *Saga* (phratry). Sagas are exogamous units. Out of the 33 *Kond Dev*, the first 28 were divided into the first seven Sagas (1 to 7) in a sequence of 1+2+3+4+5+6+7 totaling 28. This means the first Saga would have one *Kond Dev*, the second Saga would have two *Kond Dev*, the third had three *Kond Dev* and so forth. Each of these Sagas has 100 gotras, which sums to a total of 700 gotras within these 7 Sagas.

The remaining five *Kond Dev* were assigned to Saga numbered 8 to 12 and were called the *Bhumka Saga*. Each *Bhumka Saga* had only one *Kond Dev*. Unlike the first seven, these *Bhumka Saga* were smaller, each comprising of 10 Gotras and collectively a total of 50 gotras across the five *Bhumka Saga*. This division followed the sequence $1+2+3+4+5+6+7+1+1+1+1+1 = 33$ ensuring that all 33

Kond Dev were included. Each Saga has its own designated number. In this way, the 33 *Sagadevs* were systematically divided into 12 sagas which comprises of 750 Gotras.

Table 1- The first Seven Sagas (Phatries) of the Gond tribe

| Saga Number | Name of Saga | Kond Devs | Flag Colour |
|-------------|-------------------------|---|-------------|
| 1 | Undam or Undiwen Saga | Taral Gongo | Sky blue |
| 2 | Chindam or Randwen Saga | Saral Gongo & Maral Gongo | Orange |
| 3 | Kondam or Mundwen Saga | Jugal Gongo, Mulal Gongo, & Sukal Gongo | Purple |
| 4 | Nalwen Saga | Mal Gongo, Lal Gongo, Kal Gongo & Pal | Red |

| | | | |
|---|-------------|--|-------------|
| | | Gongo | |
| 5 | Sewen Saga | Aha Gongo, Maha Gongo, Reka Gongo, Meka Gongo & Doyanka Gongo | Light Green |
| 6 | Sarwen Saga | Ahedal, Mahedal, Apayidal, Tipaidal, Bhanddal, & Koyindal | Green |
| 7 | Yerwen Saga | Dhanwa Gongo, Dhanthai Gongo, Penda Gongo, Rai Gongo, Chitka Gongo, Bhanta Gongo & Bhuinda Gongo | Yellow |

Table 2 - The Five Bhumka Sagas of the Gond tribe

| Bhumka Saga | | |
|--------------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Saga Number | Saga Name | Kond Dev (one Bhumka each) |
| 8 | Arwen Saga | Narayan Sur Gongo |
| 9 | Narwen Saga | Kola Sur Gongo |
| 10 | Padwen Saga | Heera Jyoti Gongo |
| 11 | Parduwen Saga | Manko Sungal Gongo |
| 12 | Pardhwen Saga | Turporay Gongo |

Gotra Arrangement

For forming marriage alliances, a system of even and odd is followed. Members of odd-numbered Dev Saga (1,3,5,7,9,11) can only marry those from even-numbered Dev Saga (2,4,6,8,10,12) and vice versa. For example, members from the 1 Dev Saga can marry only those from the 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 or 12 Dev Saga. An even-numbered Dev Saga cannot marry another even-numbered Dev Saga as they would be considered siblings. Similarly, an odd-numbered Dev Saga cannot marry another odd-numbered Dev Saga. This division is designed to protect the tribe from any genetic abnormalities and birth defects.

In the Gond tribe, marriage is a major communal affair, with the typical age of marriage being 20-21 years for boys and 18-19 years for girls. The Gonds are known for their relatively late marriages. For marriage, receiving the consent of the father and mother is paramount. Unions approved by parents or the community are considered ideal. However, there exist other forms of marriage within the tribe such as:

- “*Chad Marmi*” (regular): The groom takes the procession to the bride’s home to marry her.⁴
- *Lamsena or Seva Marmi*” (by service): The boy provides service in his in-laws’ house (*ghar jama*) in case he is unable to pay the bride price.
- “*Kotavalda or Ata Sata Marmi*” (by exchange): A brother gives his sister in marriage to another man and in return, marries the other man’s sister.
- “*Poyse Ottur or Kals Ottur*” (by capture): A girl is captured and is made to marry her captor. This marriage must be legitimized by the parents and village council of the partners.
- “*Arwitana or Haiwar Marmi*” (by elopement): The girl runs away to her in-laws’ house after which the marriage ceremony takes place and her family is also invited,
- “*Pat or Tik Tasana Marmi*” (Widow Marriage): Widows & widowers are allowed to remarry, etc.

Marriage between blood relatives is strictly prohibited. While monogamy is the norm and widely practiced, polygamy is permitted in certain unavoidable cases, such as infertility. The instances of polygamy are low. If the boy and girl do not agree to the marriage, the alliance can be broken before any ceremonies occur, and no compensation is required from either party. The Gond marriage system is pro-women, and it allows widow remarriage, divorce and remarriage. The grounds of divorce are neither technical nor rigid. For instance, a man may divorce his wife if she is infertile or quarrelsome, and a woman can divorce her husband if he is not a provider, a drunkard or a beater. However, the approval of the village council is needed. The practice of bride price prevails in the tribe, while the concept of Dowry is banned.⁵ Moreover, the Gond community shuns marriage by capture, intrusion and elopement and considers these as anti-social. Cross-cousin marriage is common. Levirate (a man marries the wife of a deceased brother) and Sororate (a man marries the sister of his deceased or infertile wife) marriages are practiced with Saga approval. At present, Gonds prioritize marriage by proper settlement by ensuring appropriate age, Saga and Gotras compatibility, and parental or community consent.

⁴ Culture & Heritage | District Gariaband, Government of Chhattisgarh | India, <https://gariaband.gov.in/en/tourism/culture-heritage/> (last visited Jan 16, 2025).

⁵ Chhattisgarh’s Gond tribe decides to bury dead to save trees, HINDUSTAN TIMES (2021), <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/chhattisgarhs-gond-tribe-decides-to-bury-dead-to-save-trees-101615391110524.html> (last visited Jan 14, 2025).

There are certain rituals that a Gond perform to receive the deity's blessing and those are called "Neng." The essential rituals and practices performed for solemnizing the union of the bride and groom in the Gond tribe are as follows:

Mandap or Madwa - The first day begins with the men of the family collecting jamun leaves, fig leaves, mango leaves and bamboo to build a mandap, known as "Madwa." This is a temporary canopy made of bamboo and leaves usually set up in the house's courtyard. Madwa serves as a sacred place where all rituals are performed. The installation of this mandap marks the commencement of marriage.

Chulmati - *Chulmati* is the first ritual where everyone except the bride and groom participates. The family members visit a nearby temple of a Goddess in urban areas with music and dance to dig mud, and in rural areas, this is done where the Clan deity resides or where Holika Dahan takes place. The collected mud is then used to make a four-cornered boundary (*chawki*) around the Mandap. Prayers are offered, and blessings are sought from the deities to ensure a smooth and trouble-free wedding.

Devtala - *Devtala* is an important ritual where the village deities are offered ground turmeric along with coconut in a bamboo tray (*paraat*). After this, the turmeric paste is applied to the bamboo of the Mandap. Later, the bride or groom is seated in the Mandap and turmeric paste is applied on their bodies.

Hardiyahi - *Hardiyahi* is the "haldi ceremony" where everyone in the village is invited to apply turmeric paste to the bride and groom. The paste is made using grounded turmeric, sandalwood, water and oil.

Nahdori-Before leaving for the procession (*Barat*), the groom takes a ceremonial bath called *Nahdori* to wash off the turmeric.



Barat Parghauni – When the procession (*Barat*) arrives at the door of the bride's house, a welcome ceremony called "*Samdhibhet*" is held. The bride's father greets the procession, hugs them, applies colour (*gulaal*) and presents them with a piece of cloth called "*Gamchha*."

Bhanwar Lagan – The bride and groom then sit in the mandap and make offerings to the deities together. The groom presents the bride price to the bride in a bamboo basket, which typically contains sarees, jewellery, rice, lentils, and other items. *Bhanwar Lagan* is the seven anticlockwise circles that the bride and groom take together around the mandap. Anticlockwise circles are taken because they align with the Earth's rotation. Four of these circles are taken at the bride's mandap, and the remaining three circles are completed at the groom's mandap after the bride's farewell (*Vidai*). It is worth noting that Gonds do not take circles around fire.

DEATH

Gonds have their own beliefs about death and view it as a transition. The funeral rites performed for the deceased have a metaphysical significance. Among the Gonds, it is believed that the soul of the deceased has a keen interest in staying connected to the living. Funeral rites are performed to prevent the soul from finding its way back home or village and help it reach the realm of spirits where ancestors reside. Burial has been the general custom of the Gonds, but due to the influence of Hinduism, some Gonds adopted cremation.⁶ Hence, after death, a Gond is cremated or buried.

Funeral Rites

There is no uniformity of funeral rites among the Gonds. Each Dev Saga has its variation of funeral rites, but some practices are common across the tribe. When the news of the death is sent out to all villagers, relatives and friends of the deceased, the funeral is postponed for a day or two to give time to assemble. Clan folk bring some pieces of cloth to wrap the body. The dead body is never left on a cot and is placed on the veranda (*parchi*) or courtyard on a rough wicker bier. The deceased is buried or cremated with the clothes and jewellery they wore at death. The sister(s) of the deceased prepares food for funeral rites. If a man predeceases his wife, oil and *haldi* are rubbed on his body and limbs, and if the wife predeceases the husband, she is adorned like a bride and turmeric is rubbed. Women do not go to the funeral ground. Amongst the near relatives, four of them carry the bier on their shoulders to the graveyard (*marghat*). They carry away the head first. For burial or cremation, the feet are placed towards the west and the

⁶ Robert Vane Russell, Hira Lal, *The Tribes and Caste of Central Provinces of India*, Volume III, Page 94 (1908)

head towards the east, symbolizing the directions of sunrise and sunset. The burial rite as discussed above is called “*Kriya Kam*” or “*Kiriya.*”

The funeral rituals last 10 to 12 days. During this time, women of the household offer a little meal and water to the departed at the grave or the door of the house as an offering. A meal is first offered to the deceased, after which everyone eats. On the 3rd day, a rite called “*Tij Nahavan*” takes place, the bones of the deceased are collected from the cremation ground and are kept at home temporarily before being immersed in some river. The 10th day, known as “*Dashgratra* or *Bada Kam*”, is the most important. It is believed that this is when the soul leaves the realm of the living and joins the ancestors. Family members of the deceased take communal baths in a nearby pond. Male members of the house shave their heads, beards and moustaches. The entire community is invited to pay reverence, and a community feast (*bhoj*) is held. One significant ritual is “*Bhancha daan,*” where the

Maths built on the grave

sister’s son is given rice, clothes, utensils, bedding, and other essentials. The son (*bhancha*) using these items is believed to symbolize the deceased’s use of them. When there is more than one son, all share the *daan* equally. After this day, the family is free to consume non-vegetarian food which they couldn’t have done earlier.

Gonds have a tradition of erecting memorial stones, called *menhir* in Bastar, or building markers to honour the deceased. Menhirs are monolithic pillars and are



vertically erected. They can be 1 to 5 metres in height. Currently, three tribes of Bastar – Marias, Dorlas and Murias continue this practice. Gonds who bury the

dead place a stone memorial on the grave or build a marker (math). These maths are usually built alongside the maths of their other ancestors. Gonds usually worship this memorial stone (*menhirs*) and *maths* on several occasions such as marriage, childbirth, death anniversaries, illness, before crop cultivation, during hardships, etc. to seek blessings and show respect to the spirit.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

Jati Panchayat

The Gonds do not live in exclusive villages but coexist harmoniously with other tribes, such as the Agariya, Bhatra, Dhimar, Halba and several others. Historically, the entire Gond tribe never had a political unit, and solidarity was confined only to individual clans (*Saga*). Each Saga has its responsibilities and traditions. Today, the role of Saga exists mostly in the sphere of ritual. However, in present times, the Gonds are starting to unite under the Gondwana Samaj. Currently, the basic political unit within the Gond society is the village council (*Jati Panchayat*). Each village has a council, with a headman (*Mukhia* or *Sian*), a village watchman (*chhadidar*) and all the adult members. The council has a say in matters of the village. Decisions are taken based on the consensus. The headman (*Mukhiya*) is appointed by the collective preference of the members and is generally an elder who is respected for his rapport with the community. The *chhadidar* is a traditional role in the Gond village council, which is similar to a guard or assistant. He ensures the safety and security of the village from external threats or disturbances, patrols at night, and announces communal events like marriages, funerals, gatherings (*baithak*), and communal feasts (*bhoj*) to everyone. There are no initiation rites for membership of the *Jati Panchayat*.

The primary role of the village council is to ensure compliance with the set norms and settle disputes among members and outside the village. Specific day-to-day norms that every Gond must follow are:

1. No inter-gotra marriages – marriage within the same gotras is strictly prohibited
2. Marriage with outsiders is strictly prohibited.
3. Members are expected to contribute to communal activities like festivals, feasts, marriages and funerals.
4. One's *Sagadev* (Clan-God) must be honoured.
5. Disputes within the village must be first brought to the village council for amicable resolution.

6. Anti-social behaviour like theft, intrusion, bride capturing, or elopement is discouraged and is liable for punishment and fines at times.
7. Discourage the practice of dowry.

Hence, the *Jati Panchayat* plays an important role in the lives of Gond by regulating their personal lives and ensuring they follow their customs. They resolve all those disputes associated with marriage, divorce, adoption, and inheritance. Women, too, have a say in the community panchayat. Currently, the influence of the Jati Panchayat is gradually declining due to increasing cultural contact with other traditions, migration and the growing powers of statutory Panchayat. *Jati Panchayat* finds itself incompetent to deal with members who care less about their community panchayat. It is no longer as strong and active as it used to be, with even some places not having their *Jati Panchayat*. However, the elders of the *jati panchayat* share their persuasive powers with the Panchayat officials in decision-making. At least this way, they can ensure their concerns are being heard and social control over the members is maintained. They simply contest in the Gram panchayat elections.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Gond tribe is largely engaged in agriculture and agro-based activities. They typically grow two sorts of crops. These are grains such as kodo, kutki, rice, maize, ramtil, wheat, and millets, and pulses like red lentil, Bengal gram, etc. These crops are mainly produced for trade and are sold in *Mandi* (government market) and surplus produce, if any, is used for self-consumption. Gonds households usually have a patch of land called “Badi” where seasonal vegetables are sown for self-consumption and sale in weekly *haats* (local market). They practice horticulture, cattle herding, fishing and settled agriculture. However, their traditional practices of hunting-gathering and shifting agriculture are restricted due to forest lands being declared as government property. Those who don't have land work as agricultural labourers. Agricultural practices are linked to certain customs and cultural practices. Before cultivation, a hole is dug in the field and offerings like crop seeds, mahua liquor, coconut and flowers are made to the village deity to protect the crops. This is performed once a year. To cultivate paddy, Gonds use the flooding technique. In this method, the saplings are first grown at home and then transplanted into waterlogged fields. Collection of sal leaves for making leaf plates, firewood, tendu leaves for bidi production, mahua, raisins, tamarind, etc. gives them supplementary income.

Recently, there has been a noticeable shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture. This change shows the changing economic priorities of Gonds. However, access to formal markets is a persistent issue because of the high logistic cost of transporting goods to the nearest market which is mostly located in cities, low bargaining power and problems of middlemen who purchase goods at low prices from the Gonds and sell them at high rates in markets. As a result, their trade is largely limited to small-scale transactions in weekly markets and festivals.

Loan And Mortgage

The Gonds rely on many informal systems to source loans, such as near relatives or *sahukar* (local moneylenders), who usually belong to the *Thakur* clan. Borrowing is generally done within the village, and no formal contracts are signed, and the whole transaction is based on trust and amity. Generally, land, livestock, or

gold is mortgaged in case of larger loans. Unlike today's economic system where activities are done to reap profit. The Gond economy is not profit-driven. Their primary motive is to meet their needs and earn some money by selling crops. Commercialization is minimal.

Inheritance

The laws of Inheritance in the Gond tribe are not governed by the Hindu Succession Act 1956, Indian Succession Act 1925 or any laws enacted by the state government. As the Gond society is patrilineal, property devolves from father to son and continues through the male line. So, all movable and immovable property, whether ancestral or self-acquired, is inherited exclusively through the male line. The whole point of daughters being excluded from inheritance is because upon marriage they leave their father's house and property must stay intact within the male line. However, there exist certain exceptions where women inherit limited rights:

1. If the deceased has no son but is survived by daughters and a widow, the property goes to the widow, not the daughters, regardless of the daughters' marital status. The widow can keep the property only for her lifetime, and upon her remarriage or death, the property reverts to her husband's brothers or their sons. Generally, Gond customs do not allow the widow to sell, gift, or mortgage land. The widow holds property as a limited owner and cannot execute a will.
2. If the deceased is survived by many widows and no children, the property is divided equally among widows.

3. Daughters cannot claim their father's property.
4. In some cases, an unmarried daughter inherits property if there is no son or widow, but the property remains with the daughter only until her marriage.

Gond women should have the right to inherit property equally with men, especially in these modern times when every aspect of life is progressing. It is high time to revisit the customs and align them with principles of equality. Even the Supreme Court has called for property rights parity of tribal women.⁷

LAWS AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN GOND SOCIETY

In the Gond tribe, the *Jati Panchayat* oversees the social behaviour of its members. There exists an elaborate system of sanctions and penalties for violating community rules. The headmen (*Mukhia*), along with some elders of the council, are responsible for identifying and punishing offenders. Guilt is found through eyewitness, divination, or ordeals such as placing one's hand in boiling oil or swearing on sacred pillars. Moral and sexual lapses are highly condemned. Offenders are punished as per the nature of the violation and can involve various ordeals & punishment. Excommunication is the severest form of punishment within the Gond community, where the offender is forcibly kicked out of the clan. The offender is expelled, and all ties are cut, even daily social interactions. Folks deliberately exclude the offender from all social gatherings, relations and participation in the community. This social ostracism can extend beyond the offender to their family members, creating a strong pressure on all members to conform to rules. In Bargawan, a small village near district Janjgir-Champa, the entire family was excommunicated because one of the sons eloped with a girl from the *Satnami samaj*. Gond accepts the need for such sanctions to keep the community together. Excommunication is imposed in cases of clan exogamy, taking another man's wife or daughter, committing adultery, incest, engaging in blasphemous acts, murder, etc. Fines are imposed on people who have gone wayward and are levied when members engage in anti-social behaviour such as fights, public drunkenness, vandalism or when someone fails to take part in communal rituals. Fines can range from Rs. 100 to 10,000, depending upon the nature of the violation and loss suffered by the community. Does the excommunicated person remain an outcast forever? There are ways to get re-admitted to the *Samaj* by seeking redemption. This can be done through taking

⁷ SC bats for law tweak to give tribal women property rights | India News - Times of India, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/sc-bats-for-law-tweak-to-give-tribal-women-property-rights/articleshow/96119450.cms> (last visited Jan 15, 2025).

an oath before the community, performing rituals, or acts of penance like hosting a communal feast.

TRIAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

The Gond leader, *Pahandi Pari Kupar Lingo*, established the code of conduct, “*Gondi Punem*” which dictates the lifestyles, norms, values and religious beliefs that a Gond must follow. The teachings of *Gondi Punem* have been passed down orally through generations. The Koitur religion is called “*Koya-punem*.” The philosophy of *Koya-punem* is that nature was created from nothing and gave human beings the power of the brain to navigate life on the earth in harmony with nature. In Gond cosmology, all-natural elements, both animate and inanimate, exhibit energy that is eternal and never dies. The energies that exist in plants, animals, stones, rivers, mountains or celestial phenomena are therefore worshipped. *Koya Penum* states that when a person is alive, the energy exists in the form of “*Wen*”, and when they die, the energy transforms into “*Pen*”, i.e., an energy to get transformed into another energy. *Pens* are the energies of the ancestors. Maternal energies are called “*Budhida*”, and paternal energies are called “*Budhadev*.” This is why Gonds remain connected with their ancestors and seek their presence to overcome hardships and illness and ensure crop prosperity. The supreme deity of the Gond tribe is *Persapen* or *Badadev* – it is the energy that operates the earth and its elements like air, water, sky, land, fire, and geological phenomena.



The Stambh of Persapen or Badadev. It is shaped like a trident, the blue globe represents the earth, and above it, the orange globe symbolises the sun. The number ७५०, written in Hindi, signifies the 750 gotras of the Gonds.



Temple of Manka Dai (wish goddess)

Various energies that reside in natural elements are worshipped, such as *Dulha-Pen* (bride-groom deity) is invoked and invited during marriage, *Hardul Pen* (God of Cholera), *Marai Mata* (life protector), *Kankalin Dai* (evil protector) *Matiya-Pen* (child deity) etc.



Worship of the Persapen or Badadev involves five oil lamps, five coconuts, and five leaf offerings to honour water, soil, sky, fire, and air.

Since the Gond tribe is divided into *Sagas* (phatries) and each *Saga* is subdivided into *paris*. These *paris* have their unique totem (*Bana*), colour, and deity that they

have to protect and worship for life. For instance, the 4 Dev Saga has 4 Dev and is subdivided into 18 brother clans which are the Netam, Tekam, Aayam, Korram, Kariyam, Sindram, Malgam, Tilgam, Ledam, Pusam, Pochi, Marpachhi, Dandavachi, Jhikram, Jhukram, Kovachi, Kindram and Parchaki (18 brothers) Each brother-clan is a *pari*. Their animal totem is turtle, plant is Baheda tree and bird totem is Myna which they have to protect and worship for life. Gonds worship their *Saga* Devs (from 1 to 12 *Saga* Devs) and their *Saga* Priest is called *Bhumka* or *Baiga*, who officiates offerings and sacrifices to the Devs in the village. The *Saga* Devs are symbolized through tridents and iron tools.



Temple of Budhadev in the village of Bargawan, district Janjgir Champa

Certain duties that Gonds must perform as dictated in *Koya-Punem*: respect maternal and paternal energies, honour dharma gurus, fulfil one's duties towards wife and children, maintain good relationship with friends and companions, serve the *Saga Samaj*, service to *Persapen* should be the first service and live life according to principles of *Koya Punem*. Gonds celebrate various festivals, and some of the prominent ones are Dusshera, Diwali, Holi, Pola (honours cattle), Naukhai (Harvest festival), *Saga Pen Pooja*, Naag Panchami, and Navratri.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Gonds hitherto have unique customs for leading their lives primarily established by *Kupar Lingo*, who gave them the code of conduct, *Gondi Punem*, and the importance of living among their people, *Saga*. Their customs have been greatly influenced by urbanization, modernization, Hinduism, etc. The Gond tribe was once considered one of the most cultured communities. Did you know that Gonds have their clock, which operates in an anticlockwise direction, which is the

same direction in which the earth revolves? Their religion is deeply rooted in astronomy, but since they never integrated into the dominant culture, their astronomical knowledge was never passed down. Unfortunately, a lot has been lost due to the passage of time and no documentation of the customs. Gonds living in urban areas have accommodated themselves well with the non-Gonds so it has become difficult to distinguish them. However, the rituals and customs at the core differ greatly. The gradual encroachment of external influences in the forms of government policies, migrant settlers, expansion of market relations, and cultural forces of Sanskritization and religious conversion are some threats to their Gondi way of life. The loyalty of the Gonds to their tribe, customs, and organizations is admirable. Much has been lost, but whatever remains is held dearly and truthfully as it once was.

HALBA TRIBE: GUARDIANS OF TRADITION, WARRIORS OF THE LAND

Gourav Bhoyar

INTRODUCTION

The Halba tribe, also known as Halbi, is a tribal community inhabiting central and eastern parts of India such as Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha. In Chhattisgarh, the tribe is divided into two sub-groups based on geographical regions: those living in the northern region of the state are known as Chhattisgarhia Halba and those living in the southern region are known as Bastaria Halba. In Chhattisgarh, they inhabit districts such as Bastar, Dhamtari, Kanker, Kondagaon, Sukma, Bijapur, Balod, Dantewada, and Rajnandgaon.¹

The term 'hal' in Halba describes ploughing or farming, which highlights their livelihood in agriculture. Their language, Halbi, is a blend of Odia, Marathi, and Chhattisgarhi, which reflects the social integration process with other communities. Halbas have managed to retain their cultural values by practicing their original cultural activities

They have a distinct cultural identity reflected in their various ceremonies, festivities, and rituals connected with the earth. The tribe is not organized hierarchically although leaders are appointed and it works in units by providing mutual assistance. The birth, marriage, and death ceremonies reflect altruistic and spiritual values which are a core part of their value systems.

This study focuses on the Halba tribe of Chhattisgarh, highlighting their ancestral practices and beliefs along with the changes they have undergone.

¹ TRIBAL RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE,
https://cgtrti.gov.in/upload/eng_handbook/The_Halba/The_Halba.html (last visited Jan. 4, 2025).



'Dankul', a traditional singing band in Halba tribe

BIRTH AND POSTPARTUM PRACTICES

Rural villages organize childbirth as a group activity which experienced women lead using their knowledge of traditional birthing practices. The women who serve as 'needles' maintain a safe cultural environment during childbirth. The healthcare services focus on the physical needs of both mother and child post delivery to both protect their health and uphold cultural customs. The following sections reveal the procedures which take place after child delivery.

A medical professional uses a clean sharp blade to cut the umbilical cord before using sanitized thread for closure. The practice of burying the umbilical cord takes place in the courtyard where it represents religious ties between the home and natural world. After purification rituals the mother and child receive baths before the mother receives prescribed jaggery, garlic and ghee mixture. The combination of jaggery and garlic with ghee provides mothers with pain relief while decreasing contractions to restore their strength.

The postpartum period is marked by traditional practices that heal and provide care to the mother. For three days, the mother drinks an herbal concoction containing plants such as bael leaves. The child's aunt and other women of the community prepare dry ginger, child kanda, and peepali, which help with the healing process and support both mother and child. On the 30th day, a special occasion is observed where a decoction prepared from jaggery, garlic, cereals,

sesame, and medicinal herbs is consumed. Sesame laddus are offered to the mother, with portions shared among the community. These rituals not only aid in the mother's recovery but also strengthen social bonds.

The journey of birth and renewal continues with the Chhathi ritual. It is performed when the newborn's umbilical cord falls off (8–10 days after birth), marking a significant milestone. Scheduled between the 9th and 12th day, it serves as both a rite of purification and a naming ceremony. Clothes bought by relatives are cleaned by the washerman, and the baby's head is shaved by an elder to purify him/her from birth and washed with turmeric-infused water.

On the evening of Chhathi, a ritual is observed where a basin with some herbs is immersed in a river near the house. Upon returning home, a sacred square is drawn on the floor using flour. The mother, depending on the child's age, holds the child on her lap while breastfeeding. Prayers are offered, and the baby's name is formally announced, accompanied by blessings from the community and a celebration to welcome the new life.²

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

A wedding in the community is not just the union of two individuals but a carefully woven tapestry of traditions, culture, and celebration. It involves three stages: engagement, pre-wedding preparations, and the wedding ceremony itself. The engagement begins with mutual consent between families, a moment marked by the sharing of jaggery and flattened rice (chivda). As the process unfolds, the couple's consent is acknowledged before the community and sealed with a social certificate.

The stage known as Kur Bandhana focuses on wedding planning which includes discussions about ceremonial items along with musical instruments and additional arrangements. The wedding day arrives to bring the most sacred moments of the entire celebration. The wedding ceremonies start with Chir-Choli Puja that includes the exchange of turmeric rice and wedding clothing between families.

Multiple rituals take place beneath the sacred Mahua tree which people call Mando Pargani. The couple performs joyous rituals before the ceremony includes both body oiling and walking around the sacred fire to symbolize their marriage. Family members carry the newlyweds in a bamboo basket called the 'supa' during the mandap procession. The event receives its energy from both traditional singing performances and dancing acts. The dowry system, though not practiced, is a

² *Id.*

system in which certain gifts or essential items, regarded as wedding presents, are given to the bride.



Haldi ceremony where the groom sits on a relative's lap.



Mandopargani, mahua plant collected from local area/forest for making the mandap.

DEATH RITUALS AND LAST RITES

Death is not considered just an end but a transition, marked by customs that preserves the dignity and respect of the deceased. The deceased is draped in new clothes, offered by members of the family, society, or even other communities. However, rituals vary based on the deceased's marital status. For those who were married, oil and turmeric are applied to the body as a part of the shrouding ritual, symbolizing purification and sanctity, whereas these are not applied on bachelors. In cases of contagious diseases, safety takes precedence, with only family members carrying out the preparations to limit community involvement.

The mourning period lasts three days, during which the community supports the grieving family by providing food, water and other necessities. The family refrains from daily activities, focusing solely on honoring the deceased. Rites begin with the shaving of heads by a barber or elder of the community. At the riverbank, offerings are made, where the deceased's soul is bid farewell. A feast follows, marking the end of the mourning period.

A particularly poignant moment comes with the Mund Bandhani (turban ceremony), where community members tie a turban on the head of the family to offer emotional support, symbolizing societal solidarity. On the second day, the family donates items to their nephews as a gesture of goodwill and continuity.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE



Local Gathering of the Halba Tribe

The Halba tribe combines traditional leadership systems with contemporary structures which showcase their past heritage together with modern

administrative methods. Community involvement plays an essential role together with collective decision-making and cultural enforcement and justice practices form the basis of the system. The basic political organization of the Halba tribe exists as the Gram Panchayat which functions as the village council. The village council comprises respected elders together with key community members who include one named Gaon Bura or Mukhiya who acts as the village head. Through consultation with council members the Mukhiya makes joint decisions that lead to judgments. Both male and female members participate in council membership which grants each person independent standing.

The council deals with matters related to land disputes, quarrels between siblings and spouses and other problems in the community. It also handles cases involving superstition as the community is socially backward. Penalties for violating tribal customs may include fines, social boycotts, or restorative justice measures. The Council prevents the involvement of a third party and thereby maintains order and harmony. It assists in building the community by discouraging deviant behaviour through restrictive laws.

According to the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1966³ Halba Councils have authority to adjudicate cases involving parties who all belong to tribes residing within such areas. This Act helps to resolve disputes between tribal members, preserve autonomy and reinforce traditional practices within the modern legal framework.

ECONOMIC PRACTICES

Most members of the Halba tribe earn their livelihood from agriculture, followed by wage labour, animal husbandry, fishing etc., due to high illiteracy, lack of education facilities and proper infrastructure. The forest also plays a vital role in their economy, with produce like mahua and tendu leaves providing an additional source of income for families. Halba tribe has an informal borrowing system, as most loans are taken from family members, friends, and community members. The interest rate is decided by the parties at the time of borrowing, and if a debtor fails to repay, the creditor can appeal to the village council to settle the debt. However, in recent years, there has been a gradual shift towards formal financial institutions, with more community members seeking loans and mortgages from banks.

³ Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, No. 40, Acts of Parliament, 1996 (India).

Halbas embrace collective resource ownership. The members of the tribe pool some of their resources for the benefit of the community at large including resources such as land, houses, utensils, goods, etc. as these are utilized by the community. Even fines collected for rule violations are not kept by individuals but added to a community fund. These pooled resources are then used to help everyone in the tribe, whether it's for projects that improve the community, for helping those who are struggling, or for supporting special events like cultural celebrations. This is how the tribe's resources are used for the good of the whole community.

The tribe's very name, Halba, is derived from Hal, meaning plough, which plays a crucial role in their lifestyle. Earlier, they practiced shifting cultivation (known as podu cultivation) where small forest patches were cleared for crop cultivation. However, as they have now settled in one place, most farmers are marginalized farmers and rely on rainwater for harvesting. Nowadays, due to modernization and top-down development, people are excluded from the indigenous systems. Despite such challenges, the Halba tribe continues to sustain themselves by cultivating sufficient grain for their families.

LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

Social Crimes Related To Birth Rituals

Conservative communities view several childbirth situations as social crimes even though people normally celebrate birth as a happy event. The actions which stem from strict cultural requirements and societal demands result in both penalties and intense public investigation. The social community views childbirth outside marriage and childbirth after the death of a spouse as deeply shameful. The Indian judicial system considers any relationship between castes without marriage to be a social crime. When such situations occur, they test established family honor principles and bloodline purity standards thus causing both mother and child to experience social rejection and public disgrace. When a woman gives birth outside of marriage society often brands her with enduring disgrace that damages her social position and the reputation of her family in the community.

Inter-Caste Relationships and Birth

The tribal society views childbirth between individuals from different castes as a major social violation. The Halba tribe holds endogamy based on caste system as a fundamental cultural tradition to protect both their identity and social relationships. Inter-caste relationships create more than individual offenses according to tribal traditions because they challenge the social structure of the community. Such cases usually trigger lengthy conflicts and social tensions while meting out severe punishments to the individuals involved.

Situations involving these penalties and societal judgment cause extensive damage to both, the individual and his/her family. Women face the most severe consequences because stigma results in negative effects on their mental health which further destroys their career opportunities. The process of public humiliation affects families who also face disgrace as well as possible barriers to arranging future marriages. These penalties create additional financial burdens which create problems mainly for families with limited resources.

To deter such perceived transgressions, the community imposes financial penalties. A fine of ₹20,000 is levied on each party involved in childbirth categorized as a social crime. In cases where no formal relationship exists, the penalty increases to ₹40,000. A portion of the collected fine—₹11,000—is directed toward societal welfare projects, with additional penalties based on the specific circumstances. While these measures aim to restore community harmony, they often disproportionately impact marginalized families.

DIVORCE

The rules for divorce are divided into two main categories: adultery and health-related problems. Adultery, the most common example of immoral behaviour, involves one spouse cheating on the other with someone else. In such cases, the matter is referred to a Local or Central Assembly, such as the Garh Sabha or General Assembly for a decision. Alimony is also paid after the divorce has been granted to support the individuals so that they can have the means to start a new life. For farmers, the relief amount is ₹50,000, while working men are required to pay ₹75,000.

The second category relates to health or personal problems. An application for divorce can be filed where the spouse has been missing for a long time, suffers from mental illness, has no source of income, is afflicted with gonorrhoea or any other type of venereal disease, is a drug/alcohol addict, or has a communicable disease or terminal disease. These cases are decided by the council, which dissolves the marriage after considering the circumstances of the marriage.

These rules also make it easier for people to know how to dissolve a marriage if it cannot be salvaged anymore. The system involves community bodies or courts to ensure fairness for both parties. Financial assistance opportunities are crucial as they provide support to people who may face numerous challenges following a divorce. By doing so, it considers not only the legalities of the process but also its social and financial implications, which could be beneficial for everyone going through a divorce.

Adoption

Among the Halba tribe, which consists of various gotras such as Bhandari, Besra, Chanab, Raut, Nayak, Belsariya, Nagra, Dehaari, Manjhi, Kosma, Shandilya, Rana, Pekar, and Ganwar, the childless couple can adopt only from within their gotra. This is because of religious as well as social functions that the child performs after adoption.⁴ Kinship relationships like devar- bhabhi, samdhi-samdhan, jija- sali, dada- dadi, nati- natin between members of family strengthen family bonds.

Inheritance

The Halba tribe follows a patrilineal system where property is passed down from fathers to sons. The son inherits a portion of the family property because he is responsible for family traditions, supporting his younger siblings, and maintaining household in the absence of their parents. Daughters generally do not inherit the family property, as their share is provided through dowries or gifts at the time of marriage, ensuring their support as they join their husband's family. However, they are entitled to a share in the property if they formally demand it.

Societal practices, such as those related to education, maintain order and preserve cultural traditions but are also a tool for upholding patriarchy and casteism. There is nothing inherently wrong with cultural practices as long as the community engages in dialogues and educational sessions to adapt them to modern contexts.

TRIBAL RELIGION



Shakti pooja where elders pray and chant to the goddess danteswari(which is at the centre) consider has major deity to the halbas.

⁴ *Id.*

The Halba tribe is largely Hindu, with a small percentage of Christians. The religion of Halbas is more than a set of prayers and chants; it shapes their relationship with the environment, preserves the memory of ancestors, and involves the worship of deities. Since they seem to respect nature, they perceive trees, rivers, mountains and animals as spirits or manifestations of the divine. This showcases the naturalist ideology of the tribe. They worship deities such as Kundumtula Hing Mata, Bhandarin Mata, Rehna Deo, and Raatmai Mahua. Among the many deities they worship, Maa Danteshwari, regarded as a protective mother of Halbas, is worshipped in all social and religious events. The Danteshwari Temple, a 600-year-old heritage pilgrimage center built by the Chalukya kings in the 14th century is a testament to this reverence.

The Halba tribe celebrates various festivals like Navakhani, Aama Tevar, Hariyali Diwas, etc. Shakti Diwas is celebrated on 26th December to honor Goddess Trireshwari, who is considered the chief deity of the Halba tribe. This festival symbolizes the power and security of the villages. In the Halba community, rituals and services (Shraddha) dedicated to particular ancestors are an integral part of village festivals. Before starting these rituals, permission is taken from ancestors by offering lemons. The members of the tribe have a separate room in their houses known as Kholi, dedicated to the happiness of ancestors. This is a holy place for every member of the family but it is considered forbidden for women to enter it during their menstrual cycle.⁵

CONCLUSION

The Halba people demonstrate their willingness to uphold societal rights and traditions through their use of customary regulations. Community-wide laws that address birth, marriage, property and justice matters constitute the universal regulations of this community. The preventive laws which derive from traditional practices demonstrate adjustments toward modern societal standards. The Gram Panchayat functions as the primary political institution of the tribe because it serves as both a judicial body and a regulatory authority for the village. The justice system at this institution focuses on participatory justice through restorative methods which help society unite. Birth-related cultural laws together with marriage rituals and death traditions provide valuable insights on maintaining cultural practices. Through ceremonial speech which symbolizes important acts

⁵ Ramdev Jurri, *Ethnographical Study of Religious Significance of Mahua in Tribal Community*, 7 No. – 8 I.J.S.S.M.S,3 (2021), https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ramdev-Jurri/publication/369184370_Ethnographical_Study_of_Religious_Significance_of_Mahua_in_Tribal_Community/links/640eb274a1b72772e4f210b9/Ethnographical-Study-of-Religious-Significance-of-Mahua-in-Tribal-Community.pdf.

these rituals both validate societal positions of individual members and reinforce overall social standards. Communal rites during childbirth and marriage unite the community through social, religious, physical and spiritual practices which create lasting unity. Customary laws enforced by the tribe represent their belief system about ecology. Their religious beliefs together with their resource management approach within the community demonstrates their avoidance of environmental exploitation. The tribe follows these customs throughout difficult periods including cases of land loss and shifts in their economic situation. The Halba tribe maintains its social and economic development which enhances member welfare and strengthens tribal unity. Through their natural connection to the environment the Halba people guard their cultural roots and protect the societal continuity of their customs for those that will follow.

KAWAR TRIBE: THE PEOPLE OF NATURE

Anurag

The Kavar or Kanwar (कंवर) tribal community resides mainly in Central India throughout Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Bihar regions. The Kavar tribe stands behind the Gond tribe as the largest tribal group in central India. For numerous centuries the Kavar people have lived in Chhattisgarh's dense forests and hilly regions according to their oral histories and local folklore while keeping their natural connection strong. The Kavar people communicate through Sadari language together with Chhattisgarhi dialect elements. Historical documentation alongside anthropological evidence shows that Kavar began their existence as hunter-gatherers before adopting agricultural practices which aligned with their natural surroundings. Several scientific theories connect the origin of the term Kavar to Kaurava which links them to the royal family featured in the Mahabharata. Traditional stories describe how Kaurava survivors from the great battle fled to forests where they merged with tribal populations. The Indian government officially classified the Kavar community as a scheduled Tribe in modern times.

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

The Kavar tribe follows a clan-based social structure, with kinship playing a crucial role in maintaining social cohesion and identity.

Clan And Kinship System:

Clans, known as “gotras,” are the fundamental units of the Kavar social organization. Each clan is associated with specific ancestral totems and deities, influencing marriage rules, rituals and social behaviors. The Kinship system emphasizes respect for elders and collective responsibility, fostering unity within the community.

The Kavar family unit is patriarchal, with the eldest male typically serving as the household head, responsible for decision-making, resource management, and maintaining social order.

Totemic Septs

The kawars recognise both exogamous and endogamous septs. Their totemic septs, known as **Gadh Chinh**, are named after animals, plants, and natural elements, including:

Baghwa (tiger), Chita (leopard), Bilwa (wild cat), Bokaar (goat), Bichhi (scorpion), Bhainsa (buffalo) and Sua (parrot).

Other septs include Adila, Bhandari, Chandrama (moon), Chanwar (a whisk), Champa (plumeria flower), Chua (well), Daharia, DhanGuru, Dhenki (Pounding-lever), Darpan (mirror), Fulbandhia, Gobra (dung beetle), Hudra (wolf), Kothi (store-house), Khumri (A leaf- umbrella), Lodha (wild dog), Gonga Cochar (snail), Sanwami, Manjhi, Nahna, Samund, Kodia Dudh, Son Pakhar and Sikta(fox).

In contrast, the tribe has eight major endogamous subdivisions, including:

1. **Tanwar or Nagvanshi** -This subcaste is known as “omraon” which means the class of landlords. They believe that they originated and belong from the kings' dynasty and introduced themselves as “tomar” Rajputs and opposed wine and chicken and the widow marriage as well.
2. **Rathiya Kavar**- They are mainly found in Raigarh of Chhattisgarh, came from the forest region, and the “Rath” means rath of Ramgarh.
3. **Cherwa**- They are found in Sarguja, Chhattisgarh, and it is said that their origin is from male Kavar and Chera female.
4. **Paikra**- Here, “paik” means those who supply food-stuff and they are used to serve as soldiers for supplying food-stuff in the army of the kings and nowadays their main occupation is farming.
5. **Dudh Kavar**- It is called the cream of the Kavar tribe and the nomenclature “dudh” represents superior among all Kavar.
6. **Kamal Kavar or Kamalvansi**- They are very primitive. They are much associated with lotus with a faith that the creator of the nature lord Brahma also originated from the lotus.
7. **Rautia**- They are also likewise Cherwa originated from the male Kavar and Rawat.
8. **Chanti or Cheti**- It is placed as the lowest among the Kavar society.

The *Dudh Kawars* employ Brahmins for religious services, whereas the *Paikra* rely on *Nais* (barbers) for priestly duties. The *Paikra* community continues to venerate the double-edged sword *Jhagra Khand* during Vijaya Dashmi.

MARRIAGE CUSTOMS

Marriage negotiations in the Kawar community begin with the groom's father initiating contact with the bride's family. If the bride's family accepts the proposal, they symbolically prepare *pej* (rice-water), signifying their consent. The betrothal ceremony involves the exchange of gifts such as bangles, clothes, and rice cakes. The groom's family also provides *suk*—a form of bride price involving monetary compensation, grains, and culturally significant items. Kawar marriages follow exogamous principles, requiring spouses to belong to different totemic septs.



A tribal cultural marriage held under a madwa roof, beautifully decorated with mango leaves, and supported by four pillars. These pillars represent the stages of life, adding a deeper cultural significance to the setting. The entire structure reflects the rich traditions, and connection with nature and creativity of the community.

A wedding ceremony occurs inside the sacred four-pillared structure known as madwa which represents both family connections and life progression stages. During the wedding rituals the couple engages in Saat Pheras (seven vows) while carrying out foot-washing ceremonies and the groom performs an archery rite which involves shooting arrows above his bride's shoulder to protect and empower her. After three months of marriage the Gouna ceremony welcomes the bride into her husband's household.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The Kavar tribe of Chhattisgarh is structured and governed by a unique hierarchy of panchayats, each with specific roles and responsibilities to ensure the community's social order.

Lower level (basic level)

At the basic level of Gram-stariya Panchayat the community selects a leader called Gowtiya to manage daily village operations. The panchayat resolves village issues by enforcing traditional laws while imposing penalties which may trigger monetary fines alongside community work obligations for violators.

Middle level

The Chak Panchayat functions at an intermediate level through its ability to unify between 7 and 8 villages. The panchayat deals with significant matters that span across multiple villages including land disagreements and joint celebration events. The Chak Panchayat has the authority to enforce more severe penalties through community activity restrictions for those who perform serious violations.

Upper level

At the highest level stands the Satgadhiya Panchayat which unites every Kavar tribe subdivision through its council. The Satgadhiya Panchayat maintains the most powerful position while its council ensures large-scale social and cultural cohesion for the Kavar tribe. The council establishes fundamental rules which must be enforced at every organizational level. Extreme violations including theft and violence lead to extreme consequences which include social rejection and expulsion from the tribe. A leader selected by the council directs the wider community council while elder members provide guidance to support all panchayat system levels in their operation. Mediation of conflicts and maintenance of order is mainly accomplished through the support of elder members. The tribe's elders receive respect because of their mature understanding and their decisions support traditional tribal values along with maintaining tribal customs. The traditional organizational framework of the Kavar tribe serves a vital function to protect both their social structure and governance mechanisms which preserve justice and harmony throughout the community.

Meetings typically conducted at each level of the panchayat system within the Kawar tribe:

1. Gramstriya Panchayat Meetings

- **Frequency:** Monthly and according to circumstances.
- **Purpose:** Address local issues and disputes within the village, such as family conflicts, land disputes, and maintenance of social order.
- **Location:** Village Choupal (open gathering space) example- beneath the big tree of the village.

2. Chak Panchayat Meetings:

- **Frequency:** Quarterly
- **Purpose:** Discuss matters affecting multiple villages within the cluster, such as shared resources, inter-village conflicts, and joint cultural or religious events.
- **Location:** Central location within the host village, rotating among the villages. It is decided by the leaders (“gowtiyas”) themselves.
-

3. Satgadhiya Panchayat Meetings:

- **Frequency:** Biannually
- **Purpose:** Deliberate on major issues impacting the entire tribe, including enforcement of tribal laws, larger socio-economic matters, and overarching cultural or religious directives.
- **Location:** A designated sacred site or a historically significant place.

These meetings ensure that all levels of the panchayat structure are actively involved in the governance and social cohesion of the Kawar tribe, addressing issues from the most local to the tribe-wide scale in a systematic and culturally resonant manner.

ECONOMY

Over the centuries, the Kawars migrated within the region, seeking fertile agricultural land. These areas are characterized by a mix of forested land and agricultural fields, which support the Kavar's traditional livelihoods. Mainly they are farmer and cultivators but other than that they are highly dependent on forests for their additional income. The tribe's settlements are typically small, consisting of clusters of households that form close-knit communities.

Utilization of Forest Resources: The Kavar tribe has a profound connection with the forests of Chhattisgarh, which play a critical role in their subsistence and cultural practices. The tribe relies on forest resources for a variety of needs, including food, medicine, and materials for building and crafting. Gathering wild fruits, nuts, tubers, and vegetables supplements their diet, while medicinal plants collected from the forest are used in traditional healing practices. The sustainable use of forest resources is guided by indigenous knowledge and customs, ensuring the conservation of these vital ecosystems. Additionally, the collection of non-timber forest products, such as honey, resin, and bamboo, provides supplementary income for many Kavar families.

Traditional handmade goods form a central part of Kavar economic practices because they showcase tribal artistic traditions and creativity. Traditional crafts of the Kavar tribe encompass beadwork together with basket weaving and pottery production and textile creation and bamboo mat making. The tribal artists create their traditional work using traditional methods with local resources to maintain their artistic heritage. The tribe generates vital financial resources through the local sales of their handmade products at markets and fairs. Through trading with surrounding communities the Kavar tribe maintains its economic stability by exchanging goods and cultural traditions thus strengthening its financial resistance. This study investigates Kavar economic practices which stem from their agricultural work alongside their livestock management and forest usage together with their skilled craftsmanship and trading activities. The tribe depends on these activities as fundamental components for survival alongside necessary economic stability and cultural preservation which also proves their success in their native habitat.

GENDER ROLES AND AGE-BASED HIERARCHIES

Traditionally within Kavar society men and women maintain separate roles which distribute particular duties between them. The Kavar tribe assigns different responsibilities to men who work in farming and hunting and lead their community and women who handle domestic duties and care for children along

with cooking tasks. Traditional gender roles exist in the Kawar tribe but women maintain strong leadership positions throughout family and community matters especially regarding cultural and religious practices. Members of the community respect elder individuals because they possess both wisdom and extensive experience. Kawar social life centers on the respect for elders because all younger members must ask for their wisdom before accepting their counsel. Through their hierarchical system cultural values together with traditional customs pass from one generation to the next. An investigation into Kawar social organization identifies the multilayered community system which preserves tribal culture through clan organization and kin connections and family relationships beside age-based authority ranks.

TRIBAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

Deities and customs of the Kawar tribe

1. Karam Devta

Karam Devta stands as one of the most revered deities within the Kawar tribe. Associated with youth, power, and fertility, Karam Devta is worshipped during the Karma festival. The celebrations include various rituals, songs, and dances around the Karma tree branches, which symbolize the deity himself. The tribe believes that Karam Devta blesses them with prosperity and good fortune, especially during the harvest season.

2. Dulha Deo

Another key figure in the pantheon of the Kawar tribe is “Dulha Deo”, often regarded as a protector of the village. Dulha Deo’s worship involves offering grains, flowers, and sometimes animal sacrifices. This deity is believed to shield the community from misfortunes and ensure their well-being, which is why rituals dedicated to Dulha Deo are laden with gratitude and reverence.

The story behind this protector “Dulha Deo” is a revered guardian deity of the Kawar tribe in Chhattisgarh, known for his protective and moral guidance. According to legend, Dulha Deo was once a mighty warrior who defended the tribe and continued to safeguard the village after his death. His presence is believed to have brought rain during a severe drought and banished evil spirits from the village.

Annual festivals honoring him include grand feasts, traditional songs, and dances, recounting his heroism and miracles. Dulha Deo's stories emphasize

bravery, honesty, and selflessness, serving as a moral compass for the community. Sacred sites associated with Dulha Deo are visited during rituals and prayers, reinforcing his enduring legacy and cultural significance.

3. Bahan Deo and Thakur Deo

Bahan Deo together with Thakur Deo act as spiritual protectors over both land ownership and agricultural production. People conduct religious ceremonies to Bahan Deo and Thakur Deo in order to gain their blessings for a productive land and abundant harvests. The rituals are led by farmers and elders from the village and they include the first harvest offerings of fruits and grains. The Kavar tribe considers Bahan Deo and Thakur Deo to be the protectors who look after their land and harvest. The local population worships these deities to obtain their blessings that protect crops during planting and harvest times. Before planting seeds and before harvest farmers dedicate their first produce while offering seeds water and grains as part of their religious rituals. Through such ceremonies tribal members practice both sustainable agriculture and strengthen their relation with their native land. Every year the community holds festivals to worship Bahan Deo and Thakur Deo through sacred rituals combined with musical performances and dancing which bring blessings for agricultural abundance.

4. Shikar Deo

Shikar Deo is the deity associated with hunting and forests. With the tribe's deep connection to nature, "Shikar Deo" is honored through rituals that thank the deity for successful hunts and for the protection of their forest lands. Worship of Shikar Deo includes offering portions of the hunt and prayers to maintain balance and harmony with nature.

5. Sagai Devi, Matin Devi, and Banjari Devi

The goddesses "Sagai Devi, Matin Devi, and Banjari Devi" are central to the spiritual life of the Kavar tribe. These deities are revered for their protective and nurturing qualities. Rituals often involve women leading prayers and offerings, which symbolize the nurturing aspect of these goddesses. They pray for the health and prosperity of their families and the community at large.

Worship in Dhankothi

The Dhankothi is a sacred granary and a focal point of many rituals. During the Nawa Khana festival, male members of the family take on the role of performing

rituals within the Dhankothi. These rituals involve offering the first harvested grains to the deities, signifying gratitude and seeking blessings for the coming year. Only family members are allowed to consume these sacred grains, emphasizing the importance of familial bonds and tradition.

Community and Celebration

The combination of these deity worships and rituals fosters a strong sense of community and shared cultural identity among the Kawar tribe. Through Nawa Khana and Karma festivals the community unites to commemorate their heritage while demonstrating their spiritual connection to earth as well as the divine powers. The Kawar tribe protects their antiquated customs to preserve both their ancestral values and their cultural fundamentals in current times.



Traditional attire, worn on special occasions, it features exquisite ornaments made of beads and shells.

CULTURAL PRACTICES AND TRADITIONS

Traditional Attire, Art, and Crafts

The Kawar tribe reveals its cultural identity by using traditional clothing alongside artistic and handmade creations. Traditional Kawar clothing follows the local climate requirements and uses locally obtained materials for its creation. Men choose dhotis combined with turbans as their traditional clothing alongside women who wear sarees and lehengas decorated with colourful patterns and detailed embroidery. Jewellery pieces that combine beads with silver materials

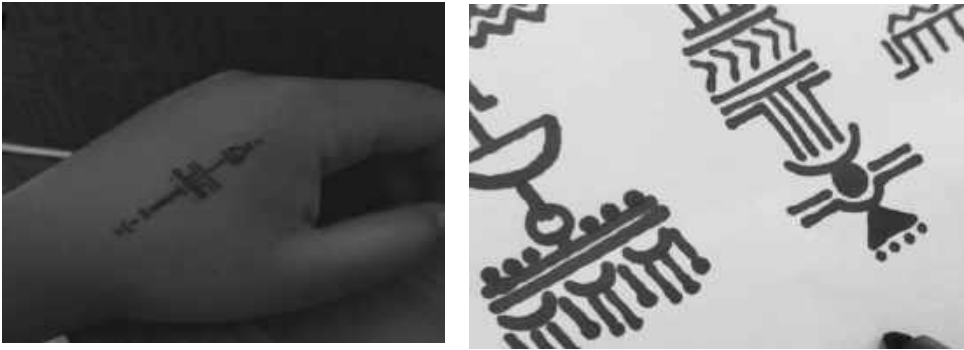
together with hasli and kada and bajubandh and chhadu and knee length and additional natural items are frequently worn by the Kavar tribe because they showcase their cultural heritage and personal style choices. The artistic productions of Kavar people showcase their profound cultural background. The tribe demonstrates mastery in three artistic traditions including beadwork and basket weaving and pottery production. Their creative works serve both practical and cultural symbolic purposes. Nature-inspired motifs together with animal and spiritual elements commonly appear in these craft items. The art tradition gets transmitted from one generation to the next to safeguard traditional artwork methods and design elements.

Role of Shamans and Religious Leaders

The Kavar tribe known as Baiga people consider their shamans and religious leaders as key figures who lead their spiritual practices. Members of this group serve as spiritual bridges between human beings and spirits where they perform rituals and provide healing services and conduct divination practices. Shamans have complete traditional medical expertise combined with spiritual understanding and tribal cosmological wisdom to treat physical and spiritual health problems. Shamans execute vital spiritual duties at festivals and rituals to perform sacred rituals properly while satisfying spiritual entities. Religious authority figures actively perform two essential tasks: first they protect cultural heritage then they teach next generations about tribal myths among other sacred traditions and moral standards. These indigenous teachers protect social unity as well as spiritual health inside their tribal community. This part illuminates the complex Kavar spiritual convictions which integrate festivals together with religious leaders plus ceremonies into their cultural fabric. The tribe's cultural identity together with its social structure depends on these elements which enable tradition transfer and preserve spiritual balance.

Traditional practices

Tattooing as a traditional practice known as "Godna" exists within the Kavar tribe together with other indigenous communities throughout India. The Hindi word "godna" means "to mark" or "to tattoo" and it serves as the origin of the term "Godna." Godna tattoos hold both cultural value and protective meanings. The people of the Kavar tribe along with other indigenous communities view tattoos as both rituals of passage and body decorations which also display their cultural identity and artistic heritage. Women traditionally create these tattoos that display elaborate artwork from both natural elements and myths as well as day-to-day activities.



Patterns used in Godna inspired by nature and mythology

Additionally, Godna tattoos were historically practiced to protect daughters and girls from hierarchical superior communities. The tattoos served as a deterrent against harassment or abduction, thereby safeguarding the honour and dignity of the women. Godna is not just a form of body art; it's a vital cultural tradition that embodies the tribe's history, beliefs, and social structure. The community aspect of Godna enhances social bonds and ensures the continuation of this ancient art form through generations.

FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES

Festivals and ceremonies play a crucial role in the social and spiritual life of the Kawar tribe. These events are occasions for communal gathering, celebration, and the reinforcement of cultural values. Major festivals include those dedicated to agricultural cycles, such as **harvest festivals**, which are marked by elaborate rituals, feasting, and communal dancing. Ceremonial practices are deeply rooted in Kawar spirituality, often involving offerings to deities and ancestral spirits. Rituals are conducted by religious leaders (shamans, baiga) who play a central role in maintaining the tribe's spiritual well-being. These ceremonies are essential for marking life events such as births, marriages, and deaths, ensuring the continuity of cultural traditions and social bonds. Music, Dance, and Folklore Music and dance are integral components of Kawar cultural expression, serving both entertainment and ritualistic purposes. Traditional music is characterized by the use of indigenous instruments like drums, flutes, and stringed instruments, dafli. Songs often narrate historical events, legends, and moral tales, reflecting the tribe's collective memory and values. Dance forms, such as the traditional "**Raut Nacha,**" are performed during festivals and special occasions. These dances are highly symbolic, often reenacting mythological stories or depicting aspects of daily life. The rhythmic movements and vibrant costumes enhance the communal spirit and cultural pride of the Kawar people. Folklore and

oral traditions are vital in preserving the Kavar tribe's heritage. Storytelling sessions, led by elders, pass down myths, legends, and moral lessons to younger generations. These narratives not only entertain but also educate and instill a sense of identity and continuity. This exploration of the Kavar tribe's cultural practices and traditions reveals a vibrant and resilient community, deeply connected to its heritage through attire, art, festivals, music, dance, and folklore. These cultural expressions are crucial for maintaining their identity and fostering a sense of belonging.

Some main and important festival-related agriculture

Karma Fest:- The Karma festival is an important cultural celebration for the Kavar tribe of Chhattisgarh. This vibrant festival, also known as "**Karam**," is held during August and September, corresponding with the Ekadashi tithi (eleventh day) of the Hindu lunar month of Bhado. It is a harvest festival dedicated to Karam Devta, the deity symbolizing youth, power, and fertility.

- **Preparations:** Leading up to the festival, unmarried girls collect sand from the riverbed to sow seven types of grains, such as rice, barley, maize, and wheat, in small baskets. They take care of these seedlings for 7-9 days.
- **Karam Puja:** On the festival day, villagers venture into the forest to bring back branches from the Karma tree (*Nauclea Parvifolia*), carried by unmarried girls who sing and dance in praise of the deity. The branches are then ceremonially planted in the village's central courtyard, decorated with flowers, and worshipped. The celebrations include traditional rituals, dances, and music, with drummers adding rhythmic beats to the festivity. Villagers gather to listen to the Pahan or Dehuri (village priest), who recites the legends of Karam Devta while offering grains and sacrifices like fowl to honor the deity.
- **Immersion Ritual:** After the puja, the Karma branches are immersed in a nearby river or pond the next morning, which symbolizes the conclusion of the rituals and seeks blessings for a good harvest and the community's well-being. The Karma festival is not just a religious occasion but a time for

strengthening community bonds, celebrating nature's bounty, and honoring the cultural heritage of the Kawar tribe.



Kawar tribe celebrating Karam Festival

Nawa khana

The Nawa Khana festival is deeply intertwined with many of the Kawar tribe's unique practices, including the concept of “**Dhankothi**” and their worship rituals. The Dhankothi is essentially a special granary where the first harvested grains are stored. This granary holds significant cultural importance as it symbolizes abundance, prosperity, and the blessings of their deities on the harvest. During the festival, the community gathers to perform rituals at the Dhankothi. Worship practices include offering the first grains to their deities and ancestors, who are believed to protect and bless the tribe. The villagers then share the new produce among themselves, promoting a sense of communal harmony and gratitude. It's a custom that only family members eat the grains during the Nawa Khana festival, with a special emphasis placed on this sacred act, and they eat their first harvested rice and ingredients made up of rice like Farra, Chila, Pua (sweat puri), rice idli, saag and many more.

In addition to the communal rituals, there is a tradition where male family members take on the responsibility of worshipping in the Dhankothi. This involves performing specific rituals to honour their deities and ensure the protection and prosperity of their harvest. The men's role in these rituals underscores their position as the providers and protectors of their families, reinforcing the cultural values of the Kawar tribe.

ABHJUMARIA TRIBE: A CIVILIZATION TO EXPLORE

Bhumika Usendi

While the rest of India embraced rapid modernization, the Abhujmaria tribe remained a living testament to the harmony between humans and nature, thriving through their culture, untouched by time. This chapter covers the Abujhmaria tribe native to the Abujhmar region in Narayanpur district of Chattisgarh, from which they derive their name. Recognized as a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)¹, the government restricted outsider access to this region from 1980 to 2009. Their isolation from the outside world eradicates their connection with nature and preserves their unique practices, religious beliefs, economic and political organisation, and lifestyle. The story and essence of the Abujhmaria identity are captured in their holistic approach to life, which seamlessly blends ecological conservation, communal harmony, and spiritual reverence. The customs, ranging from pre-marriage rituals like *Mahala* to their political system led by the *ghotul*, demonstrate their devotion to preserve cultural authenticity. Additionally, practices like *Penda Kheti* (shifting cultivation) and a barter-based economy showcase their ingenuity in resource management and sustainability.

CUSTOMS PRACTICED BY ABHJUMARIA TRIBE

Starting with the marriage rituals, the Abhujmaria tribe follows various forms of marriage – love marriage within their own caste, arranged marriage, marriage by conquest and blood relation. In these marriages, the boy takes the girl from *bua* (paternal side) or *mama* (maternal side) at *kaksar* or *jatra*. Notably, this tribe also recognizes live-in relationships since ancient times. The section specifically delves into the customs followed in arranged marriages.

After finding suitable partners, a unique pre-marriage tradition known as *Mahalang* is performed. In this ceremony, both families meet three times for confirmation, each meeting representing the intention to create a bond between them. In the initial meeting, the groom's side brings *kark* (small earthen pot), filled with *phulli* (homemade liquor). During the second meeting, they bring 25- 30 litres of liquor, and in the third meeting, families bring 60-70 litres of landa, *phulli* (liquor) and pour it into a *kark*. The family consumes the drinks symbolizing prosperity and effort to build a strong bond. In this ceremony, the date of marriage

¹ State-wise list of Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups, Minister of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, <https://tribal.nic.in/DivisionsFiles/SwLPVTGs.pdf>.

is fixed with the consent of both the families. The groom provides a bride price based on his capabilities as per tradition. On the bride's side, several rituals are performed as part of the wedding traditions. The day before the wedding, the bride visits every house in the village to seek blessings from the community. Once back home, the bride dresses in a new white saree and goes to fishing along with other family members. The bride carries a copper pot in which she fetches water for the house, while everyone enjoys singing and dancing. Upon returning, the *haldi* ceremony begins, where the bride's uncle pours the mixture of turmeric water. Following this, the bride is sent away from her house for a night, while the members of the community eat, dance and sing at the bride's house till dawn.

The next morning, the bride is carried on her uncle's back and taken around the *ghotul* of her village three times. The bride accompanied with family member is taken to the groom's house. It is believed that now the bride has become a part of the groom's family. On the groom's side, the *kamka er* (haldi ceremony) begins, where both the groom and the bride, dressed in white, have turmeric water poured over them from the rooftop of the house. The ceremony is accompanied by drumming, singing, and dancing. A part of the rituals also includes burning of *horra* (dry bamboo), around which community members perform traditional dance, symbolizing the completion of the marriage. The celebrations are communal, with members of the *Ghotul* and the larger tribe coming together to prepare and share meals. Food arrangements are informal, and there is no structured seating. Non-vegetarian dishes are a mandatory part of the feast, reflecting the tribe's dietary customs. As a part of the post-marriage ritual, the bride grinds paddy using traditional methods. Three days after the marriage, the couple visits the bride's house which is called *Malayang galkku*. The groom's family in honour of the new bride shows gratitude by providing food in the *Ghotul*. Secondly, the Abhuj Maria tribe also has some distinct childbirth cultural practices. A separate house (*kurma*) is constructed for the woman where she gives birth to the child. The delivery is assisted by the elder women and on the first day the woman stays alone in that house. On the next day, the father enters the house with essentials and prepares simple food for the woman with rice and salt. After the completion of eight days, when the umbilical cord naturally detaches, the parents move to their house with the child. Since, it is believed that the ancestors' spirit returns through newborns, the child during the naming ceremony is given to hold a stick of *shiyari leaf* and the names of both maternal and paternal deceased elders are recited. The child is believed to be the reincarnation of the deceased elder whose name the child keeps the stick on. The name of the child is kept based on his/her appearance and the day on the which child is born such as *Manglu* (born on Tuesday), *Kohla* (kosra), *Budhru* (born on Wednesday).

Lastly, the death and funeral practices in this tribe are unique in their own way. In the event of a person's death, all family members are informed and gathered before any rituals commence. The body is prepared for the funeral by applying a mixture of turmeric and oil. In the Abujhmaria tribe, only two individuals are responsible for carrying the body, which is taken to the burial site without being carried on the shoulder but on hands.

The cremation of the body in Abhujmaria tribe depends on the circumstances of death. If the deceased suffered from swelling (indicative of illness), the body is cremated. Otherwise, it is buried. The tribe does not use cement for constructing graves but instead places stones to mark the burial site.

The second day after death is marked by a series of significant rituals, including settlement of the debt. The family members visit the matt and upon returning, the houses to whom the deceased owed money publicly declare the remaining debt. The deceased's son then repays the debt according to his convenience.

The installation of the *duma* or *hanal adka* (spirit pot) involves placing an earthen pot in the name of the deceased elder, which holds spiritual and religious significance and is worshiped. Every house has two *duma* where all the deceased of the family reside. On every special occasion the male and female members offer foods and drinks as *prasad* to *duma*. Not all the *duma* are brought in house; if the body was buried, the *duma* is kept inside while for those cremated, the *duma* remains outside the home. On the same day the achievement of the deceased is shared among the family bloodline and the belongings of the deceased are distributed to the members of the bloodline as tokens of remembrance. Unlike some other cultures, the tribe does not practice shaving heads (*mundan*) as a part of mourning. However, after three to five years, family members commemorate the deceased by erecting a memorial stone at the burial site.

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The *Ghotul* is recognised as a political institution in the Abhujmaria tribe. It is a traditional system that has existed since ancient times and later coexisted with the introduction of the panchayat system. The *Ghotul* is a place where the people discuss the problems of the village and try to resolve them.² It holds supreme power in the village and functions as a law-making and decision-making body. It addresses discussions like dates of the festivals, and imposition of penalties. Earlier it served as an education institution as well. For travellers, it serves as a shelter and facilitates social functions like marriage and dance.

² Bastariya, Abuj Maria Tribe (February 5, 2018), <https://bastariya.com/abuj-maria-tribe/>.



Ghotul : place where all the decision for welfare of village is taken.

It functions as a political and cultural institution where roles are bifurcated among *Gaitha*, *Manjhi* and *Patel*. The head is *Gaitha* and is responsible for the decision-making on critical matters. *Manjhi* is responsible for the spiritual and religious rites during festivals, and for carrying *pen purka* from village to village for *kaksar*. *Patel* functions as a mentor for the boys and girls in *Ghotul*. He directs the social functions like marriage, funerals, and other events in the village to ensure their smooth execution. Villagers who face any kind of problem can approach *Ghotul* such as property disputes, theft, murder, land allocation, marriage etc. If a meeting is to occur in the village, a drum is beaten to inform everyone about the same. An investigation is conducted and the head delivers the decision and imposes a penalty of a certain amount. In case of property dispute, the parties are made to submit 100 Rs each in *Ghotul*. This amount is either used for the welfare of the community or as expenses in festivals or saved for calamity. The decision taken in *Ghotul* is absolute with non-compliance leading to penalty or exclusion from the community.

If someone enters into an intercaste marriage, the couple offers pigs and cows as a penalty to seek forgiveness from the *Hanal adka* or *pen purka* or the *Ghotul*. They also pay a fine and provide food for the entire village. After the *Sirha* chants the mantra, the couple would be accepted. The *Gaitha* allocates land to outsiders, on the basis of how the individual can contribute to the welfare of the village. For example, if an outsider can provide employment opportunities or meet the essential needs of the villagers, they may be allowed to reside in the village. The *Ghotul* system reflects how governance in the Abhujmaria tribe enjoys supremacy and its absolute nature exemplifies the notion of true government. The distribution of roles reflects their balance in power by explaining the working of the social order in the Abhujmaria tribe.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

The Abujhmaria tribe rely on agriculture for their livelihood.³ Their traditional farming method is known as *penda Kheti* (shifting cultivation). The tribe primarily cultivates paddy, kosra (a type of millet), and urad (black gram).⁴ They eat forest produce such as chapra (red ant), siyadhi, amla, zeera, etc. After harvesting the land, it is left for 5 years and is burned to revive the soil fertility for future use. Forest produce serves as their primary means of livelihood, which they sell to moneylenders. In return, the moneylenders provide them with essential goods and services needed for critical life events such as marriage ceremonies or death rituals. This immediate exchange system allows the tribals to meet their urgent needs without monetary transactions, reflecting a unique socio-economic interdependence. In addition to this, the Abujhmaria community also practices a primary form of the barter system. They exchange goods such as tamarind for salt and promote a traditional exchange other than money transactions.

The women of the Abujhmaria tribe are engaged in seasonal businesses such as making brooms at a minimum price for their livelihood. Another communal resource are the local ponds, where either government or any private individual harvests fish. It is compulsory to provide 25% to *Gaitha* as he keeps this in the community fund for any religious rite or to serve *Sirha* who performs religious duty. The remaining 75% is distributed among the individuals in exchange for money. Similarly, people who rear goats, and pigs earn from selling these animals and dairy products.

These traditional practices show the cooperation between the community, dedication for the welfare of tribe, cultural rituals, sharing of resources and the overall harmonious relationship.

³ Ibid

⁴ Ratish Srivastava, Population Anthropology Researches Among the Abujhmaria of Bastar, Madhya Pradesh, Indian Anthropologist 12(2) (1982).

TRIBAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

Tribal groups associate their spiritual belief with nature. According to them, nature is created by the *devudh vanjtha*. Their utter belief in the *pen (devta)*, plants, animals, and trees affirms their spiritual and cultural stances.⁵ They begin their work with the worship of the deity and if they don't, it reflects on their family members in the way of illness.

A. Totemism

As the tribe doesn't have a proper shape or structure, their *pen purka* lies in a specific tree or animal. So, as every village has *pen*, every house has *hanal adka/duma*. In the Abujhmaria tribe, the *Hakum todhi* (shown in the image) has the most prevalent role. Totemism is a religious belief where specific clans are associated with particular animals, trees, or natural elements considered sacred and a reminder of their ancestor. People from the same clan do not marry. In tribal groups, the relation among them is recognised by *katta (surname)* and *pen (deity)*. For example, members of the *Usendi* clan venerate a specific bird i.e., *ussi chidiya*, while the Gota and Vadde clans refrain from eating goats as spiritual beliefs. The *dorpa* clan worship *dodpak kike* fish. *Korram* worship the *khasi* tree. It is believed that carrying pigeon curry from one's house brings debt, as it is offered in *pen purka*. This debt cannot be repaid. Each of them represents a spiritual belief and also indirectly protects the ecological balance by refraining from consuming this species.

kola hakkum or mulyang in madiya has its religious faith in village.



B. Hunting

Hunting in every tribal society is essential for both the sustenance of life and the preservation of cultural traditions.⁶ Hunting animals is associated with some rituals that the tribes of the *Abhujmarh* region follow. The hunters or the tribal people of this region gather at the *Ghotul* in the morning where every person is

⁵ Parivesh, Abujhmadiya A Primitive Tribe: Their Livelihood, Department of History, Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya.

⁶ Ibid

equipped with weapons such as bows, arrows, etc. From there, they proceed towards the forest and the boundary which they call *handh*.

The *Sirha* – one who performs religious functions – assigns each person their direction for the hunt. If the *pen* (deity) wishes, the hunters will be successful in obtaining the animal. If they catch a peacock during the hunt, it is considered lucky, as the feather of a peacock is used in the *Singhar* of *pen* (*Prithin Devan of Orchha - Abhujmard*). After the hunt, everyone assembles at a common place and together they make the soup seasoned with salt and red chilli. The meat (mutton) collected during the hunt is divided among the members and taken back to their homes. However, this mutton cannot be sold to anyone. This restriction is based on a traditional belief that selling the meat, which is meant to remain unaltered with additional spices, would lead to unsuccessful hunting trips in the future.

FESTIVALS CELEBRATED BY THE ABHUJMARIA TRIBE

The *Kaksar* Festival of the *Abujhmaria* tribe is an important cultural event, celebrated as a gesture of gratitude to the *pen* (deities). The festival involves offering rituals and ceremonial dances to "entertain" and show reverence to the deities and seek their blessings.⁷ A meeting is held in *Ghotul* to decide the date and day for *Kaksar*. A week before the festival, the villagers go hunting to serve the cousins of deities who come from the neighbouring villages. The occasion begins with the *turhi* (an instrument made of brass) being played loudly, three times, as a gesture of invitation by village leaders, including the *Gaitha*, *Majhi*, *Patel*, and *Sirha*, extending invitations to all community members and neighbouring village. All members of the village heads towards *Raudhi* (place with spiritual belief) where they carry non-vegetarian food to offer the *pen*. After offering the divine, the males and females separately prepare food and enjoy it. A group of three people, along with rice, mand (liquor), meat, and pork, is sent to invite the cousins of the deity from neighbouring villages. The next day, early in the morning, the *Sirha* undertakes the ritual of bathing the deity's idol, symbolizing purification. For each bathing ritual, there are different *Sirha*: one for thread ceremony, one for *dev pujari*, and one for offering *mand*. The idol is then taken to a designated sacred space within the village, where all the deities are ceremonially "entertained."

The women of the tribe perform the traditional *pasknaag* dance by singing melodious songs, which have their *pen purka* names on the song while men are engaged in beating dhol. These dhols are crafted using bull skin or cow skin. The

⁷ TRIBAL RESEARCH & TRAINING INSTITUTE, ABHUJMARIA,
<http://cgtrti.gov.in/abhujmadiatribes#:~:text=The%20Abujhmadia%20tribes%20reside%20in,to%20more%20than%2022%20thousand> (last visited Feb 9, 2025).

bamboo sticks are used to beat this dhol, which shows the tribe's artistry. One of the traditional taboos observed during the festival is that daughters and sisters of the household are not permitted to visit the central place where the deities are kept. Women in their menstrual cycle are also excluded. This practice is rooted in the belief that, after reaching puberty, these women are considered part of another household due to marital customs. Another unique ritual is observed for newly married individuals. For three consecutive years after their wedding, they must offer a sacred ring, known as Challa, to the deities as a mandatory part of the festival. This act symbolizes their integration into the community and their gratitude towards the divine. The Kaksar Festival thus reflects the tribe's deep spiritual connection, social customs, and artistic expression, making it an integral part of their cultural heritage. After the completion of the *kaksar* festival, the *gorong* ceremony is performed by girls and boys wherein they gather at the river bank near an Adam tree (a tree with sacred belief) to worship that tree. Only after this ritual does any work commence.

The second important festival celebrated by them is the Vija Ayanang. The seed-sowing occasion is celebrated by the villagers with the blessings of Pen, the village deity. The Sirha (priest) and Gaitha are the first to sow the seeds, followed by the villagers. Crops such as paddy, kosra, urad, vegetables, and fruits are planted on agricultural land using *Penda Kheti* (shifting cultivation).

Next is the Vangh Kortang, also known as the "Naya Khai", which is the celebration of the completion of harvest and to show gratitude to nature, ancestors and the deity. This celebration revolves around the worship of kosra, rice, and urad, symbolizing abundance and gratitude. The rituals begin with the male members of the community performing purification rites by taking a bath. They then proceed to *Raudhi* sacred spot where villagers worship their *pen* and also the *Hanal Adka*. At this site, they light incense sticks, offer coconuts, and begin the ceremonial worship of the first harvested rice. Once the ritual is complete, all family members come together to share a meal prepared for the occasion, which traditionally includes dish made of urad, paddy, and other locally harvested ingredients.

Additionally, they celebrate the Koding festival which relates to the worship of land which is in the care of *Gaon Dai*. On the first day, villagers go fishing together, and later that night they gather in *Ghotul* to make the meal. The next day all villagers assemble in *Dev Gudi*. This festival is a symbol of religious tribal belief to purify the *Gaon Dai*. It is believed that when she absorbs all the negative energy, the land symbolizes metaphoric blood. To honour *Gaon dai*, villagers perform a ritual called *Katlang* in which the umbilical pig is sacrificed and offered to the *Gaon dai*. It is believed that she will safeguard the village from future calamities.

After the festival, the tribe consumes only soil-based foods such as amla, shiyadi, and khandha. In adherence to their shifting cultivation (*Penda Kheti*), they burn the land after harvesting. During the festival month, those who wish to get *Godna* (traditional tattoos) may do so as part of the cultural practice.

The last major festival in their culture is the Markang kortangh/ Miching. It is also known as the *Aam Tevhar*, where the word 'kortang' means festival and 'markhang' means Mango (*aam*). The festival begins when all male members visit the ritual site *Raudhi*. The worship of *pen purka* becomes the focal point of the worship. Here, they light incense sticks, offer coconuts, and adorn the sacred space with mango wood and mangoes as offerings to the deities. It is only after the members consume the mangoes as part of the ritual that others in the community are permitted to eat them. Until this sacred act is completed, the consumption of mangoes is strictly prohibited for everyone and if anyone eats a mango before the ritual, they must wash themselves before entering the house. Additionally, bringing mangoes inside the house before the ritual is strictly prohibited.

THE IMPACT OF MODERNISATION ON ABHJUMARIA TRIBE

Over time, the Abhujmaria tribe has adapted their tradition in various ways. The naming convention for tribal children has evolved; earlier, the names were connected with their physical appearance, day of birth or resemblance to natural elements. Now, names are often based on zodiac signs. Additionally, the tribe has discontinued the ritual of making *Godna* (traditional tattoo).

Their attire has changed with time; previously they wore clothes that only covered their private parts, not the whole body, whereas today they wear modern garments. Tribal hunting, once a primary means of livelihood, is now reserved for special occasions like *kaksar*. The education system has transformed. Earlier, the children were educated through *Ghotul* system but now the government has launched a free education system for tribal students through EMRS (Eklavya Model Residential School) and Kasturba Gandhi in collaboration with many government schools. The people of this tribe have become more self-independent by starting small businesses and are now not completely dependent on forest goods. Schemes like ration cards have benefitted the people of *Abhujmard* by providing rice and other cereal grains at very low prices. Moreover, many of them have adopted Christianity, taking away their identity and culture.

CONCLUSION

The *Abhujmaria* tribe reflects a simple life, marked by cultural resilience and deep connection with nature. Their unique festivals, from *Kaksar* to *Markang Kortang* mirrors their devotion to deities and their commitment to ecological conservation

embedded in totemism, signifying their respect for nature and their ancestry. The tribe's political organisation ensures social justice and social control, with the decisions taken in *Ghotul* being considered as supreme and absolute which signifies the law-making body in the tribal community. Their lifecycle customs, including distinctive marriage rituals, childbirth practices, and funeral rites, reflect a continuity of ancestral knowledge and spiritual beliefs. The economic model, characterized by *Penda Kheti* and communal resource management, serves as a testament to their sustainable practices, harmonizing human needs with ecological preservation. Even though, the customs are still prevalent in the *Abhujmaria* tribe it is observed that children of present generation are more inclined towards the new era and somewhere they are lagging behind their own culture. As the population of the tribe is less it is important to protect their culture, identity by educating the youth about their culture and if these efforts are not undertaken it may not be long before this tribe will extinct.

ORAON TRIBE: KEEPERS OF CULTURE, STEWARDS OF NATURE

Tasleema Toppo

INTRODUCTION

The Oraon tribe, also known as the “Kurukh”, is an ethnic group belonging to the ‘Dravidian family’, tracing its origins in southern India. Historically, the Oraons resided in the Konkan region along the banks of the Narmada River in Maharashtra which they consider their ancestral homeland¹. Over time, they migrated to the banks of the Sutlej River in Harappa, contributing to the Indus Civilization. Later, they moved to Rohtasgarh along the banks of the Son River, marking another significant chapter in their history.

Approximately 500 – 600 years ago, the Oraons had a well-organized social, political, economic, and cultural life. However, conflicts, particularly wars with the Mughals, forced them to migrate further. The tribe split into two groups: one settled along the banks of the Ganges, while the other moved to the Son River’s banks in the northwestern part of the Chotanagpur Plateau. Today, the Oraon tribal communities are found in Chhattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Assam, and Maharashtra². Their native language, ‘Kurukh’ is considered to be a branch of the Dravidian language family.



House of Oraon tribe covered with 'khapra' (mud tiles).

LIFECYCLE

Marriage

¹ S. C. Roy, *The Oraons of Chotanagpur* 1-5 (1915).

² Gov’t of India, Ministry of Tribal Affairs, *Census Report on Scheduled Tribes in India* (2011). available at https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/3-STinindiaascensus2011_compressed.pdf.

Oraon marriage traditions are deeply rooted in their customs. The process begins with **Danda Kherra**, where the groom's family visits the bride's home to seek her hand, followed by **Lota Pani**, the engagement ceremony. Upon arrival, the bride's family welcomes the groom's family with traditional music, dancing and rituals, including the ceremonial sprinkling of water using mango leaves (*Aamba Dahuda*). A purification ritual involves washing the guests' feet with *Maani isum* (mustard oil) and water.

This picture is of 'madwa day' of groom. The groom is carried by a family member on his back and dancing on the beats of drum. A thick paste of raw turmeric mixed with oil is applied on the groom's body by his family and friends. People dance in joy around the central pillar of the "madwa".



Before the ceremony starts, guests are seated and served snacks and drinks. At the center of the house's courtyard, under a **Jhalar Madwa** (a decorative canopy), a *Kinda Pitri* (a mat made with Palm leaf) is placed for the groom and bride, accompanied by a friend of both. The couple hold a brass pot filled with water and a brass bowl in their hands, standing face to face. The Panchs from both sides instruct the bride and groom to look at their son/daughter if they like them and agree, then take three steps forward and take the bronze pot. They then pour water from the pot into a bronze bowl and feed it to each other, while the guests sing their traditional folk songs, completing the engagement ceremony.

Fire is lit at the base of central pillar of 'madwa'. These earthen lamps are tied by thread together. There is a bronze 'lota' containing turmeric water. Little bit of 'dhan' (paddy) is kept as offering to their holy deity which is symbol of wealth



When the groom's family visits the bride's family with guests, the groom's family welcomes them by performing traditional dances and singing songs, which is called *pierghoni* (welcome). Snacks and drinks are served to the guests, and then the groom serves *Airsa asma/roti* (a sweet made

of rice flour and jaggery). Some guests place him on their lap and give him new clothes or money in the meantime, people sing folk songs and dance. Meanwhile, the panchs sit together under the *Madwa* making a circle laughing, joking, singing, and chatting while drinking *Jhara* (rice beer).

The next Ceremony is *Bada Mehman*, which takes place at the groom's house. There is a ritual of Dura Khundoni, where the bride goes to the groom's house for the first time after the marriage has been fixed. The groom distributes *Jhara* (rice beer) to everyone. The panchs sit together and decide the *Neg* – items which are to be given on the wedding day to the bride's family by the groom's family which includes *Maisari* (saree) given to the bride's mother, *Barka* (piece of cloth) given to the bride's father, *Sara Dhoti* given to the bride's brother, and *Sari Luga* (saree) given to the bride's sister and the quantity of them. The marriage date is also announced on this day. This exchange of *Neg* is known as ***Dali Dibha***, and is not a practice of dowry.

At last, they give Bida (farewell) to them by folk dancing and singing songs. These were the Pre-marriage ceremonies. When the relationship is finalized, the groom's side gives 7 rupees (the bride's price) to the five representatives of the bride's side, which is then given to the bride's family after the marriage.



During Sindoor Tikawan, a long piece of cloth is used to cover the 'madwa' to forbid non-family members from viewing the vermilion.

The first day of the Wedding Ceremony is known as the ***Madwa day***, begins with men going to the forest to cut down the *Madwa* tree, which they carry back on their shoulders. The courtyard is smeared with cow dung *Madwas* are inserted. Unmarried girls make a canopy in the centre and light lamps. A rangoli is made with rice flour, and grains are scattered all around. According to Oraon customs, after the Barat arrives at the bride's house on the wedding day, they are welcomed.

The wedding rituals take place in the courtyard of the house under *Madwa* (a type of temporary shed), with the ritual being performed by the village panchs.

The groom and bride are made to stand on Sil Lorha (a stone slab), and they hold sindoor(vermilion) in their hands. The groom's brother holds the groom's hand to apply sindoor on the bride. After the wedding is completed, the Panchs give the gifts for the bride's side to the bride's family.

Birth

Following childbirth, the newborn is bathed, and the mother purifies herself with lukewarm water. The family observes a ten-day period of ritual impurity, during which they do not host visitors or perform religious ceremonies. A hen is scarified to the Oraon Priest to protect the newborn from misfortune.

Once the umbilical cord stump falls off, a purification ceremony called '**Chhati**' is performed. Homes are cleaned, and all family members' clothes are washed. The traditional midwife (*Kursen*) bathes the mother and child with oil and turmeric paste. The father and male relatives trim their hair and clip their nails before bathing. A priest sprinkles *tulsi*-infused water to purify the household. A feast with rice beer is served to those who assisted during the birth.

The name-giving ceremony takes place on the fifteenth or twenty-first day, sometimes a year later. Names are selected from ancestral lineages using rice divination. The baby's first cereal meal, rice porridge, is prepared and fed in a new clay pot.

Death



This is a picture of the grave (kabar) of the Oraon tribe.

During the final rites, the deceased is given a last sip of water before passing. The body is placed on a *Kinda Pitri* (palm leaf mat) with the head facing south. The family gathers, and the body is covered with a *Kafan* (shroud). Burial follows traditional customs, with essential personal belongings placed in the grave. A

brass plate is also buried with the deceased. A water pot and twig are placed on the grave. On the tenth day, *Gami (Nahavan)* is performed, symbolizing the soul's reunion with ancestors.

Certain Oraon families believe the spirits of those who died peacefully remain in the home and are honored during festivals, a practice known as ancestral worship. However, spirits of murder victims or those who died by suicide are excluded.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The Oraon tribe has a centuries-old village council governance system called the *Padha*. The *Padha* is divided into three tiers:

1. The first tier is the lower panchayat, where a dispute is presented. If a decision is not made here, it is sent to the middle panchayat.
2. The middle tier - If the dispute is not resolved in the middle panchayat, it is sent to the upper panchayat.
3. The upper tier is the highest unit.

Village-level officials:

1. *Mahto*: The head of the Gram Panchayat.
2. *Pahan*: He is the village's religious leader, a position only given to a married man.
3. *Majhi*: The assistant and messenger of the Mahto.
4. *Baiga*: The assistant to the Pahan, who performs rituals to appease the village deity; he is also referred to as a Vaidh(healer).
5. *Godait*: The Lawyer who conducts hearings for both parties involved.

Padha Level Officials:

1. *Padha Deewan*: The Padha deewan is a higher-ranking minister. Their decision is final. They operate like the Supreme Court (they are above the kings).
2. *Padha Raja*: The land given to the Padha Raja is called Manjhiyas land. The Padha is the head of the Panchayat.

Chief Officers-

Deewan: Prime Minister

Panwar/Paner: Head of Welfare activities.

Kotwal: Responsible for Security

Villages of Padha:

1. Raja Village
2. Diwan Village
3. Paner Village
4. Kotwal Village
5. Praja Village

The primary role of the village Panchayat was to uphold law and order and resolve disputes related to family property division, marriage violations, divorce, breaches of social norms, suspected witchcraft, sexual offences, physical assaults, and theft, among other things. The village officials, typically elected from the *Bhuinhar* families (the original inhabitants of the village), often held their positions through hereditary succession.

Beyond the village level, 10-20 neighbouring Oraon villages form a *Parha*, led by the *Mahto* of a prominent village. The *Parha* has an inter-village council called *Parhapanchayat* that addresses issues that remain unresolved at the village level.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION

1. Loan: The loan system for the Oraon people are as follows:
 - a) *Paincha* (the exchange of goods does not occur at interest rate).
 - b) The interest Rate: *Dedha* (50% interest per annum) and *Baadhi* (100% interest per annum)
1. Mortgage: Interest was not added to the Pawn. Those who gave money in exchange for the pawned item would use the pawned property and return it when the value was repaid.
2. *Sikmi*: In this system, land or things are used, and the owner is given a certain value for a specified period so that they can use the land by paying that value, which is mutually agreed upon by both parties in the presence of five witnesses.

Production by Self-Consumption

Their traditional economic model is based on Production by self-consumption is the foundation of their traditional economic model. A subsistence economy is one in which the main objective of production is to satisfy the immediate needs of the home or community. This system maintains their social and cultural fabric and also reflects their close relationship with nature.



An Oraon tribe girl carrying a baby on her back. This style of carrying a baby by tying her with the help of cloth is known as 'Bay-te'.

Agriculture

The Oraon tribe primarily cultivates rice. There are different types of rice cultivation, such as field cultivation (*Khet*) and *Dand Bhata*. The Oraon community also grows *kodo* (millet) and *kutki* (little millet) crops. *Kodo* is used to make chappati and rice beer. Pulses like *Urad*, *Kurthi*, *Arhar*, *Baitra*, *Tiura*, *Masur*, and *Chana* are grown. *Bari* is also made from Urad Daal, which is later cooked as a Vegetable. The Abhujmaria tribe extracts oil from various seeds, including *Jatangi* (Niger seed), *Til* (Sesame seed), *Sarso* (Mustard), and *Dori* (Mahua seed).

LAW AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN TRIBAL SOCIETY

In tribal societies such as the Oraon, law and social control are essential in preserving harmony and order. These systems are designed to manage natural tendencies, regulate human instincts, and enforce mandatory behaviours that are not instinctive, thereby promoting stability and unity within the community.

Natural Propensities and their Regulations

In the Oraon community, inherent tendencies like self-interest, aggression, and competition are moderated by communal values and established traditions. The

group's welfare is prioritized over individual wants, which are kept in check by customary laws and practices.

Control of Human instincts

In the Oraon society, instincts such as aggression, and desire for power are managed through various cultural practices and social norms. Rituals, taboos, and sanctions are utilized to ensure these instincts are expressed in socially acceptable ways.

Non-Spontaneous Compulsory Behaviour

The enforcement of non-spontaneous compulsory behaviour in the Oraon community is largely carried out through the application of traditional norms and the authority of tribal elders and councils. These groups serve as mediators in conflicts, uphold law and order, and ensure compliance with customs. Penalties for violations are not solely punitive but also aim to restore offenders to the community. Common methods of addressing misconduct include fines, public apologies, and ritual purifications.

TRIBAL RELIGION AND COSMOLOGY

Animistic Beliefs

The Oraon Tribal people are nature worshippers and their supreme god is 'Dharmesh', called the Sun King (*Bidi Belas*). They believe in the spirits of their ancestors and practice ancestor worship (*Purkha Puja*). After the death of a family member, they believe that the spirit of the deceased should not be left to wander. The deceased's spirit is kept in the *Oola* (a room where paddy is stored) and on every occasion or festival food is first served to them. Their daily religious beliefs and practices are closely tied to their environment. Additionally, they recognize many powerful spirits that they believe protect and support their community.

Naturist Belief

Flag of the Oraon tribe placed at 'Sarna'. Their flag consists of red and white colour. The red colour signifies 'revolution' (kranti) and the white colour signifies 'peace'

In the Oraon Tribe, people worship nature, which they call *Sarna*. In *Sarna*, there is no form of God, no idol; they worship everything in nature, such as the Sun (*Dharmes/ Bidi Belas*) and the sal tree (*Sarna Grove*, which people call *Chala Aayo*). Every Oraon village has a sacred



grove of Sal tree known as *Sarna*, where their significant deities are located and worshipped collectively during major festivals and rituals. They also perform religious ceremonies related to economic activities and significant events. These occasions are marked by communal dancing and singing. They believe that God exists in every element of nature, which can only be felt. They do not practice idol worship. In *Sarna*, a flag is hoisted which has red and white colours. The white colour represents 'peace' and is a symbol of *Singbonga*, while the red colour represents 'revolution' and is considered a symbol of *Burumbonga*. There is *Chala Aayo* also known as *Sarna Maa* in the *Sarna*.

Totem Beliefs

A totem can be described as a symbol of gotras. A gotra is a group of several clans, which all blood relatives form from the paternal side of the Oraon community. Generally, all members of a gotra consider themselves to be descendants of a common ancestor. People of the same gotra establish a brother-sister relationship with each other. Thus, if the actual or imagined descendants of ancestors are included, we refer to it as a gotra. Gotras are associated with naturally given living beings, trees, plants, fruits, and flowers. The names of the living beings are used to derive the gotra. They are revered by them. The meaning of clans can vary based on language. The classification of the Oraon clan is as follows:

Animal Clan:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|--------------|
| Lakra | Tiger |
| Bando | Wild Cat |
| Barwa | Wild Dog |
| Tigga | Monkey |

Bird Clan:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|----------------|
| Toppo | Partridge |
| Tirkey | Falcon |
| Khakha | Crow |
| Kerketta | A type of bird |

Fish or Aquatic Clan:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Ekka | Turtle |
| Khalkho | A specific type of fish |
| Linda | A type of long worm (Earthworm) |
| Minj | A specific type of fish |
| Kindo | A type of fish |

Vegetation:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|------------------------------|
| Bakhla | A type of intoxicating plant |
| Bara (Barla) | Banyan tree |
| Khess | Paddy |
| Kindo | Date Palm |
| Kujur | A fruit and Vine |

Place Clan:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|-----------------|
| Kispotta | Pig's Intestine |

Metal Clan:

| Gotra | Totem |
|--------------|--------------|
| Panna | Iron |
| Beck | Salt |

Hunting

Hunting is an important aspect of the Oraon community, intertwining cultural traditions with their survival requirements. It is traditionally a communal practice associated with rituals and festivals, which helps strengthen social connections and represents abundance. The Oraons utilize handmade tools such as bows, arrows, and spears, drawing on their extensive understanding of the local ecosystem to track and hunt animals.

As a key source of nutrition, hunting supplies vital protein and supports their economy through the use of animal by-products. However, modern issues like legal regulations, environmental challenges, and shifts in culture have affected these hunting practices. In response, there are efforts to implement sustainable hunting techniques and preserve traditional knowledge, aiming to harmonize cultural heritage with current conservation needs.

FESTIVITIES

1. Sarhul

Sarhul is celebrated during the spring season when new flowers bloom on the branches of the Sal tree. It is a worship of the village deity, who is considered the protector of these tribes. People dance and sing joyfully when the new flowers bloom. The deities are worshipped with the flowers of the Sal tree. The village priest, *Pahaan* or *naya*, observes a fast for a few days.

In the morning, he takes a bath and wears a new dhoti made of raw thread. On the evening before that day, three new clay pots are taken, and freshwater is filled in them. The next morning, the water level inside these clay pots is checked. If the water level is low, it is predicted that there will be a drought or loss of rainfall, and if the water level remains normal, it is considered a sign of good rain. Before the worship begins, the priest's wife washes the priest's feet and seeks his blessings.

During the worship, three young roosters of different colours are offered first for the Almighty God, the second for the village deities, and the third for the village's ancestors. During this worship, the villagers surround the place of *Sarna*. When the priest chants the mantras for the worship of deities, traditional musical instruments like the *Dhol*, *Mandal*, and *Turhi* are also played simultaneously.

Flowers are considered a symbol of brotherhood and friendship between the priest and the villagers. The village priest distributes flowers to every villager. Moreover, he throws these flowers on the roofs of every house, which is also referred to as *Phool Khosi*. Hadiya is distributed among villagers as prasad.

2. Maghe

This festival is celebrated at the beginning of the month of *Magh*, which falls in January-February, and it is a celebration of the original religion and culture as well as the origin of humanity, that is, the creation of the universe.

3. Karam

This festival is dedicated to 'Karam-Devta', The deity associated with power, youth, and vitality, and is celebrated to ensure a bountiful harvest. During the event, nine types of seeds, including rice, wheat, and corn, are planted in a basket known as 'Jawa'. Young girls tend to these seeds for 7 to 9 days while fasting throughout the day.



Oraon tribe celebrating 'Karam' in the 'Akhara' (a place where the Oraon tribe dances). Women are in traditional 'motha' saree dance in sync with the beats of the 'mandar' (traditional drum') played by the men of the tribe.

As a part of the rituals, participants head into the forest with drummers, where they worship the Karam tree and cut one or more of its branches. These branches are typically carried by unmarried girls who sing praises to the god. Once back in the village, the branches are planted in a central area that has been coated with cow dung and adorned with flowers.

A village priest, known as Pahan or Dehuri depending on the region, offers sprouted grains and liquor to honor the deity, who is believed to bestow wealth and children. A fowl is also sacrificed, and its blood is offered to the branch. The priest then shares a legend with the villagers about the significance of the Karam Puja. The next morning, the Karam branch is immersed in the river.

4. **Tusgo (Nawakhani)**



A winnowing basket made from bamboo containing rice flakes made from newly harvested rice. The elders of the family feed the younger family members on 'Tusgo'.

This is a tradition of consuming new grains after the harvest. Nawa means new and Khani means food. People fast and worship by offering new grains to the Sun (*Surya*) and ancestors. It is celebrated in the courtyard. The head of the family sacrifices animals (especially roosters) to the Sun and ancestors. Then, the cooked meat and *tapen* (a fermented rice drink) are distributed among the family members. During this festival, people make sweets and *chura* (flattened rice) from the new rice that grows in the plain fields, which is called *Godda* rice.

5. **Sohrai**

Sohrai is a festival celebrated after the harvest. This festival is observed on the new moon (*Amavasya*) in the month of October-November. It is celebrated in honour of livestock, especially bulls, buffaloes, goats, and sheep. On this day, people fast throughout the day, and earthen lamps are lit in homes, livestock enclosures, kitchens, and gardens. On the day of the festival, those animals are bathed, and a mixture of oil and vermilion is applied to their horns and foreheads.

CONCLUSION

The Oraon tribe stands as a testament to the resilience and adaptability of indigenous communities. Their cultural traditions, from marriage and birth rituals to governance and economic practices, reflect a deep-rooted connection to their heritage. The structured political system of the *Padha* ensures communal

harmony, while their belief in nature worship and totemic practices highlights their spiritual reverence for the environment.

Despite the pressures of modernization and legal restrictions on traditional practices, the Oraon people continue to preserve their identity through their customs and values. Their way of life offers valuable lessons on sustainable living and cultural preservation. By acknowledging and respecting the traditions of the Oraon tribe, society can foster greater appreciation for the diverse indigenous cultures that contribute to the rich tapestry of human civilization.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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ABOUT THE BOOK

This book is authored by students of Hidayatullah National Law University (HNLU), Raipur, who belong to various tribal communities in Chhattisgarh, it serves as a comprehensive exploration of the customary laws and cultural practices of tribes in Chhattisgarh. Its primary objective is to document and analyse the unique legal, social, and cultural frameworks that govern indigenous groups such as the Koya, Agaria, Gond, Halba, Kawar, Abhujmaria, and Oraon tribes. By focusing on these communities, the authors aim to preserve indigenous knowledge and culture, which is increasingly threatened by globalization and modernization. The Book delves into each tribe's social structure, economic practices, spiritual beliefs, and unique legal traditions. From birth and marriage rites to conflict resolution and political organization, each section captures the distinct identity and resilience of the communities it represents. This book challenges us to rethink our understanding of law and justice, urging us to recognize the coexistence of customary and statutory systems, as sometimes a clash between legislative and customary rules becomes complicated in matters of gender issues, land alienation, and justice administration. While customary law has always sought to maintain sociological stability in tribal societies, its application does bring doubts about its congruence with modern constitutional values of justice, equality, and human rights. The insights from the book will make it appealing to students, professors, policy makers and the general public who wish to know about the Tribes of Chhattisgarh.



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