

# The Kandha Society and Culture of Odisha

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## **Abstract**

*Odisha is the homeland of the tribal. Here we can find as many as sixty two type of tribes among them the Kandha tribe is considered to be the major tribe. They found in the Rayagada, Koraput, Kandhamal, Kalahandi and also all over the Odisha. They speak the Kui/Kuvi language which belongs to the Dravidian linguistic group. Agriculture is their main occupation. They dwell in the brick and mud house which their roof is covered with the tall grass. They eat Gruel, rice and roots of the forest. There are different types of Kandhas i.e. Desia Kandha, Dangaria Kandha, Sitha Kandha, Kandha dora, Kutia Kandha, Malua Kandha, Buda Kandha , Raj Kandha etc. Among the above the Kutia and the Dangaria are considered as the Particular Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG's).*

**Keyword:-** Society, Culture, Marriage, God and Goddess.

## **I. History and Legend of Tribal's**

India is regarded as the second largest tribal-dominated country in the whole world. For centuries the primitive tribes of India remained in oblivion, secluded in the dense forest attracting less attention than even the trees and animals of the forest. In cultural complexities, economic backwardness, and political primitiveness, they are differentiated from the rest of the people. (Beteille , Bombay, p.105) States where tribals largely reside are Assam, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, and Bihar. (Choudhury, 1966, p.176.)According to their physical features, Indian tribes are divided into three main groups by anthropologists. The three main groups are:

1. The Proto-Australoids, who are similar to Wadi group.
2. The Mongoloids, who are found among the Naga tribes of Assam, Nagaland etc.
3. The Negroid, with frizzy hair, who are found in the Andaman's. They seem to be the oldest (N.R.Patnaik,1986,p.2)

A primitive community is characterized by distinctiveness, smallness, homogeneity, and all providing self-sufficiency (Dube, 1968,p.2) All these qualities are not found in full form in all primitive tribes. They are found in different degrees in different communities. In the Indian religious scriptures like Ramayana and Mahabharata, there are references to the tribal's. There are references to Kirat, Nishad and Shabar tribal groups in Ramayana and the Mahabharata references to the tribal groups living in Sub-Himalayan regions. The legend

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of Ekalavya-a Bhil, as an expert archer who excelled in the art of archery, is well known in Mahabharat. (Dube,1968,p.2)The Gond, Bhil, Kandha, and Santhal are the most preponderant tribal groups in India. They are found mostly in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Gujrat, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bengal, Bihar, and Odisha. In Odisha, Koraput and Kandhamal are tribal-dominated districts (Mutatkar, 1989,p.109). The Kandha are numerically the most populous tribe in the district of Kandhamal and perhaps the only tribe thickly inhabiting in the Kandhamal.

## II. Origin of the word Kandha

There are different opinions regarding the origin or derivation of the name “Kandha”. In Telugu, the Kondhs are called “Kodu Vandlu”, in Odia “Kandha Loko” and the Kandha called themselves “Kui” which is “Kui laku” in the plural form (*Orissa State Gazetteers*, 1995,p.52.) According to Capt. Macpherson, Kandha is derived from the word Konda which meant hill in the Telugu Language. As such since they reside in the hill areas, they are hill people or Kandha people. But Sashibhusan Thiady did not agree with Capt. Macpherson. According to him. The Kandha people are otherwise known as “Kuis” or “Kuis” and their language is not Telugu but “ Kui”. He further argued that the Kandha people are, as a whole, a militant race and they are always having a sword in their hand. As the sword is called Khanda, so from the Khanda, the word Kondh is derived. In some of the old records of the Madras presidency, Kandhas are described as Khanda people. According to Risely and Thurston, the jungle roots are the favorite food of the Kandhas. Roots in Odia language is called Kanda. They had traced the origin of the word Kandha to Kanda. Like other tribals, the Kandhas had their own habitations in the forest and hill areas of Kandhamal. Some scholars believe that ‘Kandha’ is a kindred word with Gond. In that case, it should be written Kand, both being derived from the Tamil “Kandas’ a hill (Dalton, Calcutta, 1972,p.285)

It is supposed that the word ‘Kandha’ might be linked with the word ‘Skandha’ which means shoulder in Sanskrit. As the Kondhs used to carry loads of wood on their shoulders, so this is regarded as the principal limb of the body (Dalton, Calcutta,1972,p.285). According to another theory in Ramayana, the tribe of Asuras called Skandh Asuras are known to have ruled over the forest of Dandaka, the hill tract extending from the Vindhya hills to the river Krishna, and the Kondhs are supposed to be a remnant of this tribe. In the course of time, the initial ‘S’ has been dropped by phonetic corruption (Risley, Vol.I, p.398). In 1767 the collector of Ganjam district Mr. Cosford, making a report on his district, speaks of the people called “Kodulu or Kodulu Vandu”. He does not refer to them as Kandhas.( Maltby, Lemon, Madras, 1918, p.53) However, Macpherson’s opinion is more acceptable. The derivation of the name Kandha from Telugu “Konda”, a hill, appears to be more plausible. ( Hunter,1872, Vol.II,p.71)

## III. Origin of the Kondh Tribe.

According to the Lament of Kiribiri once upon a time, there were seven brothers went hunting in the jungle for the “*Chaiti Parab*”. While the “*Dai Kudnja*” younger brother was going to kill the Deer. The Deer

refused him not to kill and he told the news of “*Yamapuri*” that after two days there will be a flood. On the flood, the whole world will be destroyed. Nobody will alive. So I request that please go and spread this information to all accordingly he went and told all but nobody responded to him. After that, he went and makes a boat, and inside the boat, he put the essential goods to survive. Then along with his sister sat inside the Boat. After two days the flood occurred, on the flood water their boat started to flow. The whole world is full of water. Nobody alive, life is totally destroyed on the earth. After many years the god could not get worshiped so he became weak. So God made Crow and sent to find out the life on the earth, the crow moved around the earth and informed to God that God, there is no life on the earth but I have seen a boat near the beach. God again sent the Crow and Woodcutter there they went there and brought the Siali leaf and burnt for which with the contact of fire fog god became healthy. Then God again wants to create life on the earth. He showed that everywhere is full of water so he dried the earth by making seven suns in seven directions. With the contact of the Rays of Sun, the land started to dry. Then god thought that as there was seven sun life is impossible on the earth so he destroyed six suns. For this, the god told the moon to hide your stars and keep them until I was not informed you. And God told to the Sun that “hey, Sun the moon has eaten his Son and Daughter” to know the truth the sun went to the moon and asked about the son and daughter and the moon replied that I have eaten my son and daughters. Then the sun went back and started to eat the suns’ the seven sun are named as Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. After that, the earth feels comfortable from the hot. Then the moon freed the stars on the sky. As God wants to make life on the earth he told to the crow and woodcutter bird to go and bring the brother and sister. God sent the brother and sister in a different direction to find out the life on the earth. They went and came back and identified as brother and sister in this way continually sent them to find out the people but after meeting near to the god they could identify themselves as brother and sister. Then god critically thought that it would be difficult for me to create the new generation if both they identified as brother and sister. Then god again sent them to find out life and behind them, god sent Chickenpox while they return and meet in a god place they could not identify themselves as brother and sister with the contact of both of them the Kandha People came out and the life began to start on the earth(The Lament Kiribiri)

#### **IV. Different types of Kandha tribe**

According to the socio-cultural characteristics, the Kandhas is also divided into many teams like Desia Kandha, Dongaria Kandha, KutiaKandha, Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Pengo Kandha, Malua Kandha, etc. Among the many sections of the Kandha communities, 2 sub-sections like Kutia Kandha and Dongaria Kandha are known as significantly Vulnerable social group teams (PVTGs). The name Kutia Kandha refers to their house floor that is regarding 2ft below the amount of the village road and this low parturition floor of the home is referred to as ‘Kutti’. consequently, they’re named as Kutti-dwellers or Kutia Kandha. They principally inhabit the Tumudibandha Block of Kandhamal district and Lanjigarh Block of Kalahandi district. The word ‘Dongar’ in Odia language means that ‘Hill’. As Dongaria Kandha inhabit the high altitude cragged tract of Odisha, they’re popularly known as Dongaria Kandha. they’re principally found in Bisamcuttack and Muniguda Block of Rayagada district. alternative sub-groups of the Kandha tribe like Sitha Kandha, Buda Kandha, Desia Kandha, and Malua Kandha board Koraput, Kandhamal, and Bolangir districts. The Sitha Kandhas (Sitarange) ar basket manufacturers. The Malua Kandhas are well-known for his or her pattern of living in teams in cragged

areas that they're known as thus. On the opposite hand, the Desia Kandhas are found in 'Desh' or plain space that they're known as Desia Kandha. there's additionally another cluster of Kandha folks that pronounce the word 'Bengo' (Frog) as Pengo and relish the flesh of frogs and intrinsically, they're regionally referred to as 'Pengo Kandha'.

There are as many as fifteen types of Kandhas found in the Odisha among them only three to four types of Kandha are found in the Rayagada district they are known as Dangaria Kandha, Desia Kandha, Malua Kandha, and Jharania Kandha.

## **V. The Kandha society**

The Kandha society is different other societies because in this society many rule and regulation have to observe compulsory. Most of the Kandha village are liner type. Their houses are made from the direction North to the South. They made their home by the bricks mixing with the mud and the Bamboo and the forest grass. To make a new home they have to grant permission by the ancestors through the magician. For that, they put some uncooked rice where the new home would be constructed. On the next day, they will watch the rice if the rice would separate from each other then they thought that the ancestor does not allow them to make a home at that place. Thereafter they will choose another suitable place for the new home construction. If the above is not happen then that place is suitable for the construction of the new home. In the middle of the village, they will make the home for the goddess Dhartienu which is known as Jakeri.

The Kandha family consists of unmarried children, Husband, wife, old man and women. If anybody as soon as married he will make a new home in the family the older are considered to the head of the family. Whatever instruction by the head other members of the family have to observe compulsory.

### **Village leaders**

#### **Jani:**

Jani is the ritual head of the village. Each village has its own Jani, but at times one Jani may attend to functions in two to three villages. This post is hereditary, that is the office passes from the father to the eldest son. In case the Jani has no son, his younger brother gets the chance. He performs all village rituals and is given a special share of sacrificial animals.

#### **Lamba:**

Lamba is also another nomenclature for Jani, who especially officiates at the rituals of the Meria festival. Only male Lambas are found in Kandha society. For performing the Meria rituals, the Lamba does not charge exorbitant remuneration but only takes one-fourth of the total quantity of grains collected for the festival, four heads of the sacrificial animals like goat and lamb and a good share of the sacrificial meat. In return, the Lamba too feeds the villagers in any day during the Meria festival.

### **Ichan Jani:**

The assistant of the Jani is called Ichan Jani who sacrifices animals, arranges Puja accessories and if required, participated in the recitation of the incantations along with Jani. This post is not hereditary but one of the male members of Jani's lineage holds the post at the pleasure of the village council. For doing his job, he gets about 3 Kilograms of sundried rice and head of a sacrificial animal in a major ritual.

### **Pujari:**

This post is hereditary. In each village, there is a Pujari who presides over the Meria festival along with Jani. But he plays a different role. He prepares an umbrella out of a bamboo collected from the forest in the dead of night, unnoticed by anybody. In the Meria procession, he dangles that umbrella to ward off the evil eyes of the pernicious spirits. He too, chants spells with Lamba and other Janis of the Mutha in the Meria festival. He is the man who first strikes at the head of Meria (sacrificial animals) and then others follow. In other religious functions, the Pujari also presides along with Jani and Ichan Jani.

### **Bejuni:**

Bejunis are shamanins who are specialists in divination. In each village, there are two to three shamanins. There may be shaman also. But in the Kandha society, shamanism are more. Each shaman or shamanin has his/her own spirit to whom he/she regularly worships and appeases to get help during his/her occult practices. Through divination, prayer, and rites, the shamans/shamanins get into a trance, during which they are believed to visualize and talk to the spirits who are responsible for causing harm to the people. during trance, the shamans/shamanins talk with the spirits and request them on behalf of the victims to free them from troubles. When they regain senses, they adopt rice supplication process called Puchna through which they ascertain various types of sacrifices required to appease different spirits. Through rituals and sacrifices, the spirits are appeased and thereby the shamans/shamanins are supposed to save people from various odds and evils.

Thus the role of a Shaman/Shamanin is very important in the Kandha society. On the one hand, he/she acts as a religious functionary, by presiding both in individual as well as communal function; on the contrary, too he/she practices both black and white magic.

Generally, a woman becomes a shamanin who undergoes training for a long period systematically until she attains proficiency and spiritually marries to her spirit, leaving aside her own husband. When she attains the perfect stage of divination, she is called Pat Bejuni.

While practicing her art, she puts on a red Sari (Uchitrai Gandha) and uses a metal bell at her ankles. She waves a bundle of a peacock feather (Teyan) over the head of a sufferer to the accompaniment of dance and music.

### **Dishari:**

He is a medicine man. He applies herbal medicines which are charged with magical powers. His post is not hereditary. Anybody who learns the art may become a Dishari. He does not preside over any religious function but is considered to be a leader in the village. He charges a nominal amount of 25 paise for any type of

minor treatment. For prolonged treatment, he takes a lump-sum amount of Rs.5/- and about 5 kilograms of uncooked rice.

### **Marriage systems**

In the Kandha society, there are three or four types of marriage like 1. Arrange Marriage 2. Marriage by capture 3. Marriage by elopement 4. Love marriage.

#### **Arrange Marriage**

In this arrange marriage both the Bride and Groom side people will confirm by a mediator. This marriage is started with the Tine of wine and ends with the pouring wine during the marriage, ceremony by the Shaman and the head of the villager. During this marriage most of the Dhangda dhangidi will get a chance to express their love with each other. In the feast they cook the Rice, Dal, Chicken and some mixed vegetable food on the Last day of the marriage there would be song and dance by the youth of that village.

#### **Capture Marriage**

In this marriage the boy captures the girl from the festival, forest, river and market if the girl does not agree with the proposal of the boy then he will do so it. For this work, the boy also uses the medicine like *Mohini* (local medicine) which seen rare in the village. Except for the Dangaria Kandha this marriage seems rare in other sub-tribes of Kandha society.

#### **Elopement marriage**

The boy and girl will take decision when their parents will not allow them to marry so they will elope from the home or village. They will go far away from the village for which nobody can identify them where are they? If the girls parents came to know about them they will bring the girl to home. For this, I studied different villages and came to know that both the boy and girl are either going to their kin and kith or far away from the home.

#### **Love Marriage**

Love will start at the Festival, Market, Parab, etc. If it became strong then the boy will propose to the girl for the marriage. If the girl is accepted the marriage proposal then without the permission of the parents they will get married with the support of their kin and kiths.

However the above-mentioned marriage except for the marriage of Arrangement the other marriage result may be solved in the village panchayat or the Police Station and the fine may be imposed from them.

#### **Death ceremony**

The Kandh practice cremation, but burial is also undertaken when the death is due to infectious disease. After death, the corpse is taken outside after an hour to give the body a thorough wash. Female affine does this. The hair of the corpse is shaved and the body is covered with a new piece of cloth, after smearing it with castor oil. Men and women both follow the bier. The corpse is kept on the pyre, and one of the consanguine takes a

bunch of lighting grass and moves around the pyre for three-time then he burnt the firewood. Then they all leave the pyre still alight. On the way back they bathe in the stream.

On the next day morning again they went to the pyre and do their sacred work and came back to home in the evening the shaman will call the soul (Mahani) to the home and in the presence of their family he asks the secret things to the soul. And this day also there would be a feast. Then they will become free from pollution. But now with the influence of local general people, they are doing Dosah after eleven days.

The whole life of the Kandha economic, social, and political is pervaded by their religion. Their religion consists of regular propitiation of gods, spirits, and manes and performance of rituals. Propitiation is done through appropriate rites and sacrifices, charms and spells, they always remain submissive and dutiful to the supernatural entities, but invariably entertain some misgivings and mistrust towards the malevolent spirits.

#### **The Supreme gods and goddess:**

At the top of all the Gods, deities and spirits stand the Dharti Penu (Earth Goddess), the Supreme Goddess. She is respected with high esteem as the creator of the world and does not ordinarily cause any harm to men, and enlivens as well as protects them from pestilence, depravity, and evil. She is installed in a hut in the front yard of each village, called Kuddi. She is represented by three elevated stones placed horizontally upon them. Sixteen other small stones which cropped up automatically in due course after the installation of Dharani Penu represent her disciples. She is specially worshipped during the Bihan festival (Bihan Parbu) and Meria festival (Kadru Parbu) by Jani and Lamba respectively.

#### **Village Gods:**

Next, to Dharti Penu is the village gods who are being described hierarchically according to their position in the society.

#### **Kotebali:**

Kotebali penu a male deity, otherwise known as Kotiasal is believed to be the husband of Dharti Penu, installed just at the back of Kuddi, in the middle of the common front yard of the village. He represents a big stone about 22/1 to 3 feet long posted vertically with crossed wooden pole Munda at its back. He is considered to be the sentry of the village and is supposed to keep a constant watch on the villagers and protects them from any mishap. He too is worshipped whenever Dharani penu is worshipped on various occasions.

#### **Jatrakudi Penu:**

Next to Kotebali is Jatrakudi penu a male deity installed on the outskirt of the village. He resides under a bamboo shade (Chhamunda) at the western end of the village. He is considered to be very arrogant and even for a trifling error or negligence. He brings drought and other natural calamities to the village. To cool down his temper Shamanin worships him in each month with adequate sacrifices.

Apart from these gods and goddesses, some other deities are also worshipped within and outside the village. They are placed hierarchically by the Kandha. They are Bima Penu, Lahi Penu, Takrani

Penu, Niyama raja penu, Ladan Penu, Hire, penu, Sandhi Penu, Loha Penu, Haru Penu, Jada Penu (Sadaki ), Sita Penu and Chhatar Penu, etc.

### **Religious practices:**

The Kandha perform certain rites and rituals to appease the supernatural forces in order to achieve peace and progress for the individual as well as for the entire community. The religious functionaries worship the gods and goddesses on half of the community on several occasions. These rituals or ceremonies express their social solidarity, and thereby maintain the existing sentiments that are necessary for social cohesion.

Religious functionaries, in fact, are the representatives of the people to propitiate gods, deities, and spirits with a full sense of reliance. They invoke these divine powers through rituals, invocations, offerings, and sacrifices and thereby solicit their blessings for the people. The religious functionaries invoke and invite the deities to action through incantations and songs. Invocations are sung in chorus by the Bejunis. These are the praises for the supernatural powers.

Animals, such as buffalo cow, goat, lamb, pig, fowl, and pigeon are mainly sacrificed. The egg is also a sacrificial item. Lia (Puffed-rice), sweetmeats prepared out of molasses and wine of any kind are considered to be ritualistic food. Burning of incense powder and joss sticks are very common features in any form of ritual. The Kandha also quite often make a votive offering to various gods and goddesses for the fulfillment of desires or for curing of ailments. In any prolonged suffering, a vow is taken by the sufferer to sacrifice an animal. But the nature of sacrifice differs according to the gravity of suffering.

Religious shrines are purified with the application of or by smearing the floors with cow dung added with clay. In case there are no shrines, the temporary structures are decorated with mango twigs, banana plants as well as with various flowers collected from the forest.

The spiritual specialists get themselves purified after bath before attending to any sort of propitiation. They put on new washed clothes. It is essential for them to undergo fasting on the day of an important ritual.

### **Regulation and Divination:**

In religion proper, the attitude of the Kandha towards the supernatural powers is one of the reverential fear in the presence of certain mysterious supernatural powers. Dependence, conciliation, propitiation and playful submission are various means to appease such supernatural powers regularly to get food, remain healthy, live a normal life for themselves, their progenies and their livestock. The religious functionaries Lamba or Jani, Pujari, Bejuni are the specialists and intermediaries between gods, goddess, spirits and such other entities on the one hand and men on the other.

The materials and objects required in connection with all rituals are almost standardized. These consist of such simple materials, as turmeric powder, husked rice, vermilion, incense powder, wicks, molasses, liquor, leaf cups, flowers and birds and animals for sacrifice depending on the nature of the ritual.

The procedure and nature of the Kandha rituals are stereo types. This is amply proved by the materials used in rituals, the procedures followed and the personnel involved in each ritual.



## **VI. Different types of festivals**

### **Ghanta Parab:**

The Ghanta Parab can be observed personally and communally in the month of Baisakh for three days. The Ghanta means an earthen pot, and each such pot with four cake is offered to Thakurani penu along with a sacrificial animal by the vow taker. Accordingly, various ancestor spirits, like Hira Penu and Sita Penu are worshiped individually and Thakurani penu and Jatrakudi penu are worshiped communally. It observe for three days. In each days they worship the Ghanta penu. At the ending day of ghanta parab all guest are invited and there will be a feast.

### **Meriah Festival (Kadru parbu):**

The Meriah festival is observed communally for 8 days in the month of Magha (January-February) where all people of a Mutha and invited people too, participate. If there is no bumper crop, it may be postponed to the next year as it involves a lot of expenditure. The buffalo is being offered to the Earth Goddess in order to avoid disasters, to ensure the fertility of the soil and to secure general prosperity of the people. This sacrifice was a survival of the terrible of Meriah or human which had been going on for generations among the Kandha people till it was suppressed by Sir J. Campbell and Major Macpherson in the middle of the nineteenth century.

On the morning of the ceremonial day, the buffalo arranged for the sacrifice is put to intoxication and taken from door to door by the Jani with the Kandhas in his company. During this journey housewives felicitated the buffalo with lighted earthen lamps and incense and offered food on plates. The animal is finally brought to the altar accompanied by a band of musicians. The altar is cleaned with cowdung and a strong wooden post is planted in the middle of it. The animal is chained to the post with a strong rope.

The housewives bathe the buffalo with turmeric, garland it and mark kumkum and sandal on its forehead. The Jani starts the worship with kui slokas to beating of drum. Then he first cuts off a small piece of flesh from the back of the head of the animal and bury it at the shrine of the goddess. With the signal of Jani a number of people rush towards the animal with knives and cut the flesh from the body of the buffalo. In the afternoon the villagers kill sheep, goats and hens and entertain all the Kandha people of the neighboring villages. Then they engage themselves in the singing and dancing.

### **Dance and Song:**

The Dance and Song is the part of the Kandha life. During the festival, they will engage in amusement. The girls of the village will stand in a half-circle and start the song like:

“Simana sarire wai malo adele

Simana sarire wai malo delole

Simana sarire maa parbu watakilo

Simana sarire pusu lenju putaki.....”

The young boys beat the drum according to the song. The dance and song will continue for a long time. The girl's will sing-song regarding their village, people, month and also festival. Here the women also participate in the dance. Their dance is known is "Gurka".

However, we have seen that the Kandha tribe is such a tribe which stands different from other in compared to their social and cultural rule and regulations i.e. Marriage, Birth and festival, dance and song. With the march of time everything is changing but their rite and ritual remain similar as that was before i.e. initially they were sacrifice Human being in the Merria festival but know it has been changed into the animal sacrifice but other ritual remain similar. Everything is unique. Which will not be seen by any other tribe of Odisha.

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