

The Unique Jewelry of the Banjara Tribe: A review of Bargarh District, Odisha

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Abstract—This paper is based on the Banjara Tribe of Odisha with special reference to Bargarh District. Odisha is the land having various Tribal groups. Odisha is an Indian state in Eastern India known for its tribal culture. Tribal means a group of people who move from one place to another and their language and way of life are the same. The tribes constitute a major segment in the population map of Odisha. Odisha can be divided into the coastal plains and the hilly region or Western Odisha. It has 62 Tribal groups found in Odisha and 44 Tribal groups in Western Odisha. Among the Tribal groups of Odisha the Banjara Tribe have a unique culture and social patterns. The Banjaras and also called as nomadic Tribe, occupied an important position due to their culture and religion as compared to other tribal groups. The community migrated from Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telengana, and Rajasthan through Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha. The Banjara are a nomadic ethnic group in India, often associated with their distinct culture, language, and traditions. They are sometimes linked to ancient spiritual practices, and their lifestyle has often been considered distinct from mainstream religious communities in India. The Banjaras value community life and have collective property resources for common use. The Banjara people prefer living in groups, sharing their ideas and thoughts for economic developme9and they are always striving to help each other. They speak Gorbali language.

Keywords: Tribe, Banjara, Nomadic, Gorbali.

I. INTRODUCTION

Odisha is an Indian state in Eastern India known for its tribal culture. Tribal means a group of people who move from one place to another and their language and way of life are the same. The tribes constitute a major segment in the population map of Odisha. Odisha can be divided into the coastal plains and the hilly region or Western Odisha. Odisha is a highly tribal populated state with as many as 62 types which constitute 22.21% of the state's population. Western Odisha is home to a number of tribal communities, each with its own unique cultural practices, spiritual beliefs, and customs. The Banjara people's are found in the districts of western Odisha like Bargarh, Balangir, Boudh, Deogarh, Jharsuguda, Kalahandi, Nuapada, Sambalpur, Sonepur, Sundargarh and Athamallik subdivision of Angul district, etc. There are 44 types of tribes inhabited in Western Odisha like Banjara, Bhuinya, Binjhal, Goud, Kharia, Kandha, Kissan, Kolha, Munda, Saura, Santhala, Mirdha, Munda etc.

The Banjaras (nomadic Tribe) occupied an important position due to their culture and religion as compared to other tribal . The community migrated from Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telengana, and Rajasthan through Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha. The Banjaras are among the largest tribal communities in India, with a population exceeding 5 million, and they are spread across various regions of the country. Historically, they were known for their role in traveling caravans and transporting goods, engaging in trade across extensive areas of the Indian subcontinent. The Banjaras are also known by other names, sugroups as Lambaras and Lambadas, which represent different subgroups within the broader Banjara community. The specific group we encountered identifies themselves as Gor manus, meaning "Banjara people." The word Banjara has several possible origins and the most likely of these are: from "Ban", which means "forest" (people who go into the forest), or from "Baniya", which means "trader" or businessman. Their mother tongue is Banjari, Gor or Gorbali.

II. STUDY AREA

Bargarh is a district on the Western border of Orissa. Before 1992, was a subdivision of Sambalpur District. Bargarh District was formed on the 1st of April 1993 being divided from Sambalpur District. It is one of the illustrious districts of Odisha. Bargarh has been named after the headquarters town Bargarh situated on the left bank of the Jirariver. The town is on National Highway No.26 and is located 50 km to the west of Sambalpur district. It is also served by the D.B.K railway running from Jharsuguda to Titlagarh. The railway station is about 3 km away from the town. A meter gauge railway line connects Bargarh with the limestone quarry at Dunguri. The main Hirakud canal passes through the town and is known as the Bargarh canal. Bargarh District lies on the westernmost corner of Odisha between 20 degrees 43' to 21 degrees 41' north latitude and 82 degrees 39' to 83 degrees 58' east longitude. The district is surrounded by Chhatisgarh state on the north, Sambalpur District on the east, Balangir and

Subarnapur on the south, and Nuapada District on the west. The original place was called Baghar Kota known from the inscription of the 11th century AD. It was called Bargarh probably from the time of Balaram Dev the first Chouhan Raja of Sambalpur who made it his headquarters for some time and constructed a big fort for its protection. Narayan Singh the last Chouhan Raja granted this place in Mauzi (free hold) to two Brahmin brothers Krushna Das and Narayan Das, sons of Baluki Das who was killed in action by the Gond rebels led by Bandhy Ray and Mahapatra Ray. The grant is popularly known as the Sira-kata (head-cutting) grant. To know the history of the newly formed Bargarh district one cannot ignore the history of the undivided Sambalpur district, because Bargarh was one of the subdivisions of old Sambalpur district. The term flora relates to all plant life and the term fauna represents all animal life. The rebels led by Bandhy Ray and Mahapatra Ray. This grant is known as the Sira-kata (head-cutting) grant. To understand the history of Bargarh District, it is essential to consider the history of the undivided Sambalpur District, as Bargarh was once a subdivision of it. Additionally, the terms flora and fauna refer to all plant life and animal life, respectively, and are key in understanding the region's biodiversity.

Flora is the plant life occurring in a particular region or time, generally, naturally occurring or indigenous. Regions may have geographically distinct habitats like mountains or flatlands. Flora can mean plant life of a historic era as in fossil flora. Lastly, flora may be subdivided by specific environments. The Reserved Forest blocks Sareidamak-Budharaja, Papanga, Jhanjpahar, Borasambar, Adwal, and Gandhamardhan are the district's beautiful and natural fertility drained by the river Jira. The district has five waterfalls namely Papanga, Barabakhra, Nalichua, Aapkhola, and Nrusinghanath. Paddy cultivation is one of the most important cultivations on the low lands whereas pulses, sesamum, coarse rice, and cotton are cultivated on uplands. So, for its record paddy production and contribution of one-fourth of the paddy requirement of the state at present called "The Rice Bowl of Odisha". Besides, several types of vegetables are grown in different parts of the district. The most common wild animals found are Elephant, Leopard, Sloth Bear, Jungle Cat, Hyena, Wild Boar, Spotted Deer, Deer, Sambar, Fox, Jackal, etc. The common birds found are Peafowl, Jungle fowl, Green Pigeon, Grey Partridge, etc.

Bargarh district is consisting twelve (12) Tahasils under two sub-divisions. Under Bargarh sub-division, Tahasils like Bargarh, Ambabhona, Attabira, Barpali, Bhatli, and Bheden. Padampur, Bijepur, Gaisilate, Jharbandh, Paikmal, and Sohela are under the Padampur subdivision. Bargarh district has also twelve (12) blocks under two subdivisions: Bargarh, Ambabhona, Attabira, Barpali, Bhatli, and Bheden are under the Bargarh subdivision, and Raj-bodasambar, Bijapur, Gaisilet, Jarbandh Paikmal and Sohela under Padampur subdivision. Almost all the tahsils and blocks have Banjara people. There are thirty-six villages are found in the district. Khuntapali village (Tanda) situated in the Tahasil of Bijepur under the Padampur subdivision has a large population among all the Banjara villages in the district. The Banjara people have a committee called "Banjara Mahasabha", consisting of 36 villages in the district. Its meeting is held once a year at Lekha-Pathar near Sohela. But in some emergency, it is held twice in a year. It is headed by the president who is elected among them and under his guidance and supervision the meeting runs smoothly and effectively. He is also called as Naik.

III. TRADITIONAL COSTUMES

The Banjaras are an ethnic group within larger populations, distinguished by their unique culture and shared traits, such as physical characteristics, language, customs, cultural unity, social structure, and territorial habitation. Their communities are traditionally organized around family lineage, clans, and cultural and economic resources, remaining resilient even in the face of external invasions. The bonds between families or communities in the Banjara group are strengthened through shared socio-economic activities, religious practices, and customary laws. Their land, which includes forests, hills, valleys, rivers, and islands, holds significant importance to their cultural and economic identity. The Banjaras emphasize the importance of community, with collective property and resources shared for mutual benefit. They maintain a deep sense of loyalty, supporting one another and fostering an egalitarian economic system in which resources are distributed equally. With a distinct and rich culture, the Banjaras play an important role in India's cultural heritage. Their lifestyle is notably different from both the urban populations of the plains and the local tribes. The Banjaras are known by various names across India, such as Lambadas, Sugali, and Labhani, but they refer to themselves as a single community. The Banjara tribe is known for its distinct culture, which is reflected in their clothing, jewelry, art, dance, body tattoos, and various ceremonies, all of which stem from their cultural traditions. Traditionally, women wear vibrant and beautiful garments, such as phetiya (a type of skirt) and kanchalli (a top), and adorn their hands with mehendi (henna) tattoos. These outfits are considered ornate and appealing, especially by Western standards. The clothes are often decorated with mirror pieces and coins. Women also wear thick bangles (bandiya) on their arms and adorn themselves with silver rings, coins, chains, and intricate hair designs secured with chotla. Men typically wear a dhoti and kurta, a traditional outfit designed to provide protection from the harsh desert climates and to distinguish them from others.

However, more than 98% of Banjara men and women have shifted away from their traditional attire for two main reasons: one is to adopt mainstream, non-Banjara fashion, and the other is to avoid social discrimination in the face of globalization. As a result, there is an urgent need to encourage and support the Banjara community in reviving their traditional costumes, which are a vital part of their rich cultural heritage, through appropriate financial and institutional backing.

III.I. DRESS

One of the most distinctive and highly visible features of the Banjara community is their dress. Both men and women have different dresses which are more attractive.

III.II. WOMEN'S DRESSES

The dress of the females is found to be more attractive than those of the males. The dress worn by the Banjara women is generally red and also mixed with yellow, green, and other colors. It is mostly a patchwork of different cloth pieces. These dresses are also bedecked with small mirrors and shells and they will be nicely crafted through their craftwork. It is expensive too. Preparing such dresses needs considerable patience. Artistic sense and tradition go in the slow work of preparing the apparel. It is estimated that it takes a minimum of 4-5 months to prepare a pair of dresses. The Banjara women wore colorful dresses with rich embroidery, jewelry, and mirror patchwork. Their dress includes Phetiya (the skirt), kanchali (blouse), Kurta (the top), Chantiya (the veil) and Odhani.

III.III. KANCHALI (BLOUSE)

The term Kanchali is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Kanchuki' and refers to a traditional upper garment worn by women. This close-fitting piece of clothing covers the chest while leaving the back exposed, and is fastened with cords. The ends of the cords are often decorated with cowrie shells, beads, and tassels, collectively known as Phoonda. When examined closely, a Kanchali stands out from ordinary blouses due to its intricate design. It is usually richly embroidered with fine needlework and is typically red in color. The garment is made up of several distinct sections, including the chhati, petti, khadapa, khuppa, and bahi, with the front part being the most prominent. Bahi and khadapa colors have a contrasting combination. Khadapa is a heavily decorated portion of the Kanchali. Between two khadapa, have a piece called chhati. The sleeves are straight-cut and attached to the khadapa. The left sleeves feature a khaya- a decorated cloth with mirrors, coins, ghungroos, and metal beads. The right sleeves are adorned with white beads, mirrors, and tassels. Mandavs which protect the chest and shoulders, extend from the armhole to the neck. The blouse's back is tightened with decorative cords called Dori.

III.IV. PHETIA OR THE SKIRT

Phetia consists of Leo, ghero, and lawan and it is lower garments generally of red and blue color in coarse cotton cloth. Leo means a piece of cloth which six inches in width and long enough to go around the waist. Ghero means a piece of cloth attached to the Leo about 9 to 10 inches in blue or black color. The last one is lawan which is decorated in different ways. The Phetia is a highly embroidered garment worn by Banjara women, typically tied around the waist and covering the lower half of the body. It consists of four sections, with the top belt portion called the lepo, which acts as a cloth belt attached to the main part of the skirt, known as the ghero. The ghero is the central part of the Phetia, and it showcases the Banjara women's craftsmanship through intricate embroidery and appliqué, often featuring a variety of motifs. Below the ghero is the sabab, made from finely textured cotton fabric, and the bottom section of the skirt is called lawan, which is also known for its exquisite embroidery work. The skirt typically reaches the ankle, allowing the ornaments worn on the feet to be visible. Distinct from a ghagra, the Phetia is characterized by a wide belt with elaborate patchwork designs resting around the waist. Small round mirrors are often sewn into the skirt and belt, enhancing its vibrant and decorative appearance. The Phetia is either pleated or gathered at the waist, and a cord, hung from the right side, is used to secure it. This cord is decorated with cowrie shells and beads, further accentuating its beauty.

III.V. VEIL OR COVERING CLOTH (CHANTIYA)

The veil of covering cloth is also called tugri, pamadi, phadki chaantia, Odhani. It is a long scarf or shawl worn over the shoulders and head, usually richly embroidered with traditional designs and mirrors. It is a red cloth veil of five half arm's length on which five square pieces of the same size each with figures of lovers embroidered, two types of two inches width each patta, a heavy outer cover infer (Ghungatoo) all put together in an artistic design well embroidered - this is how the preparation of veil can be described. The border of the veil and the outer cover are punched with old coins. This is to see that the heavy veil does not fall

off the head. The falling of the veil before elders puts women in a tight corner. When a stranger or a visitor enters the house, no woman speaks to him without her veil. The veil is the symbol of prestige to the Banjara women.

III.VI. MEN'S DRESSES

The Banjara men wore simple dresses like Dhoti, Kurtha or long shirt and pagadi (turban) with multiple colours and rounds. The Banjara men wore a simple clothes likely Dhoti, Shirt and turban with multiple colours. Their clothing is usually white. The shirt or barkasi has a wide cut which is consists twelve ribbons to close and kept with belt which is worked as a monkey pouch. They wear a simple string around their waist, decorated with tassels and small, plumb-shaped pendants called kanadori or kanodoro. They also use a turban of pagadi on their head with multiple colors, basically they use red and white color turban. The educated Banjara young men wear trousers and shirts or slacks.

III.VII. ORNAMENTS USED BY WOMEN'S

The way how a Banjara woman adorns herself with ornaments creates a feeling of wonder on the lookers. They have a rich cultural heritage and are also known for their vibrant traditional Ornaments, which include:

1. **Chudi:** Bangles made of metals, glass, or plastic which worn on the upper arms.
2. **Gajra:** A flora garland worn around the neck or head.
3. **Hansli:** A metal or wooden necklace with a pendant.
4. **Jhalar:** A choker-style necklace with intricate designs.
5. **Kada:** A metal bangle worn on the wrist.
6. **Kamarbandh:** A waistband is worn around the waist
7. **Kandora:** A necklace with large pendants
8. **Khanchi:** A metal or wooden earrings
9. **Ladi:** A layered necklace made of metals or glass
10. **Mundari:** A metal or wooden nose ring
11. **Nath:** A nose ring worn on the left nostril
12. **Pacheli:** A metal or wooden armlet worn in the upper arm
13. **Putli:** A metal or wooden toe ring
14. **Rakhdi:** A metal or wooden forehead band
15. **Tali:** A metal or wooden necklace with a pendant

These ornaments are an integral part of the Banjara culture and are often worn during festivals, weddings, and other celebrations

III.VIII. ORNAMENTS USED BY MEN'S

The Banjara men also wore simple traditional ornaments which included:

1. **Kalgi:** A forehead ornament, typically made of metals or silver worn during special occasion
2. **Kada:** A bangle worn on the wrist, often made of metal or ivory
3. **Hansli:** A necklace with a pendant, often featuring a small bell or charms
4. **Jhalar:** A choker-style necklace with intricate designs
5. **Mundari:** A nose ring worn on the right nostril
6. **Nath:** A nose ring worn on the left nostril
7. **Bichhua:** A toe ring worn on the toes
8. **Pacheli:** An armlet worn on the upper arm

9. **Kamarpatta:** A waistband is worn around the waist
10. **Phenta:** A metal or wooden earrings
11. **Churmani:** A metal or wooden finger ring
12. **Birla:** A forehead ornament, typically made of metals or silver, worn during special occasions

These ornaments are an integral part of the Banjara culture and are often worn during festivals, weddings, and other celebrations. They are believed to possess spiritual significance and are thought to bring good luck and protection to the weather.

III.IX. DHAGA

In the Banjara culture, a Dhaga is a sacred thread of cord worn as an ornament for religious and spiritual purposes. Here are some traditional Dhaga ornaments worn by the Banjara infant boys and girls.

III.X. FOR BOYS

1. **Kalava:** A sacred thread worn around the wrist or neck, believed to bring protection and good luck
2. **Mauli:** A red or yellow thread tied around the wrist or neck, considered auspicious and sacred
3. A black thread and mother's hair together form a cord that protects against evil eyes. It is worn by boys on the right leg.

III.XI. FOR GIRLS

1. **Mangal Sutra:** A sacred thread worn around the neck, symbolises good fortune and marital bliss
2. **Kumkum Dhaga:** A red thread tied around the wrist or neck, believed to bring prosperity and happiness
3. A black thread and mother's hair together form a cord that protects against evil eyes. It is worn by boys on the right-hand arms.

These Dhaga ornaments are often blessed by priests or elders and are worn as a symbol of spiritual and religious significance. They are believed to offer protection, good luck, and blessings to the children.

IV. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Their traditional costume will help the future generations to know and preserve our local heritage and traditions. The study of the traditional costumes of the Banjara people holds significant cultural, historical, and sociological value:

1. **Cultural Preservation:** The Banjara costumes are rich in symbolic meaning and craftsmanship, reflecting their cultural heritage and identity. Studying these garments helps preserve and promote an understanding of their traditional practices and values.
2. **Historical Insights:** Traditional costumes provide insights into the history and migration patterns of the Banjara people. Changes in clothing styles can reveal shifts in social, economic, and cultural influences over time.
3. **Sociological Understanding:** Analyzing Banjara costumes can shed light on social structures, gender roles, and community norms within their society. It helps in understanding how clothing reflects social status, religious beliefs, and community cohesion.
4. **Artistic Appreciation:** The intricate designs, embroidery, and use of colors in Banjara costumes highlight the artistic skills and aesthetic preferences of the community. This appreciation fosters respect for their craftsmanship and encourages the preservation of these art forms.
5. **Economic Impact:** Understanding traditional costumes can also have economic implications, such as promoting tourism or supporting artisans who create these garments, thereby contributing to local economies.

Overall, the study of the Banjara traditional costumes provides a holistic view of their culture, helping to maintain their heritage and enrich a broader understanding of diverse cultural practices.

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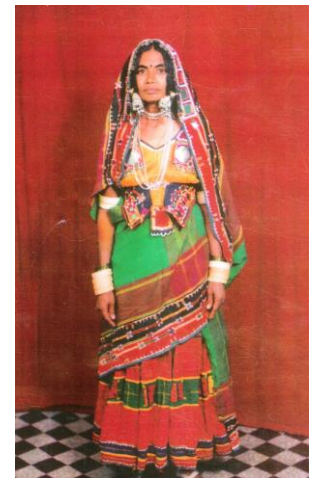
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Banjara woman & man



woman dress



woman dress



Ornaments



Hasli Ornaments



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