



## Social Life of the Kudmis of Mayurbhanj

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### Abstract:

The Kudmis of Mayurbhanj represent a unique and historically significant agrarian community with a rich cultural heritage and intricate social structures. Tracing their origins to the Chhotanagpur region, the Kudmis migrated to the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha, where they established themselves as a vibrant society. Historically classified as a tribal community during the British era, the Kudmis were later excluded from the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list in 1950, a decision that continues to shape their identity and socio-political struggles.

This study explores the social life of the Kudmis, focusing on their traditions, cultural practices, economic life, and challenges. The Kudmis are primarily agriculturalists, deeply connected to the land, and their festivals and rituals revolve around nature and the agricultural calendar. Celebrations like Karam Puja and their folk arts, including Jhumar songs and Panta-Salia dances, underscore their harmonious relationship with the environment. Their language, Kudmali, an Indo-Aryan dialect, serves as a cultural marker that binds the community together, preserving their heritage.

The Kudmi society is patriarchal, with a clan-based structure locally known as "Gasthi," organized around symbolic representations of animals, birds, or trees. Social harmony is maintained through the leadership of village heads (Pradhan), who oversee community affairs. Despite being agrarian, the Kudmis also engage in animal husbandry and local trade through weekly markets (Haats), which play a vital role in their economic life.

Their cultural expressions are reflected in their traditional attire, jewelry, and housing, characterized by intricately decorated mud cottages. Kudmi women are known for their ornate gold and silver jewelry, which signifies their cultural identity. The community also takes pride in their culinary practices, including the preparation of rice-based dishes, Handia (rice beer), and Mahua liquor.

Despite their cultural richness, the Kudmis have faced historical marginalization and

discrimination. They were once perceived as untouchables by higher castes and excluded from mainstream society. Additionally, their exclusion from the ST list has left them in a liminal space, fueling their ongoing struggle for recognition and rights.

The study highlights the Kudmis' resilience in preserving their cultural identity amidst socio-political challenges. It also explores their similarities with other tribal communities, such as the Santhals and Kolhas, while emphasizing their distinctiveness. The Kudmis' folk beliefs, centered on nature worship and spirits, reflect their spiritual connection to the environment and underscore their harmonious way of life.

By examining the social, cultural, and economic dimensions of the Kudmis, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of their community life. The study also throws light on their historical journey, current struggles for recognition, and efforts to preserve their heritage in the face of modern challenges. It calls for an nuanced approach to addressing the Kudmis' socio-political demands and a deeper appreciation of their cultural legacy.

This exploration of the Kudmis' social life not only contributes to the understanding of their unique identity but also highlights the broader narrative of cultural resilience among marginalized communities.

**Keywords-**Kudmi Community, Cultural Practices , Language, Social Structure, Folk Arts, Traditional Cuisine, Festivals, Clan System, Historical Discrimination

### I. Introduction:-

The Kudmi communities are found in the state of Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha of India. In Odisha this community belongs to Mayurbhanj and Kendujhar. The Kudmis known by the title Mohanta or Mahanta. The Kudmi are classified as a notified tribe by British Raj under the terms of the Indian succession Act introduced in 1865 as they have customary rules of succession. In



1913, they were classified as a primitive tribe despite being a tribe they were omitted from the list of communities listed as tribes in 1931 census. 1950 the Indian government omitted from the scheduled tribe listed in the Kudmi community for the reasons that are unknown.

#### **Origin of Kudmi Community:**

The Kudmi caste of Mayurbhanj represents one of the prominent cultivating communities of the state of Odisha. They are primarily found in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Sundargarh. Kudmi is considered one of the tribal castes or jatis and was classified as a primitive tribe in the 1913 Census. The Kudmis are regarded as one of the ancient agricultural communities of the Chotanagpur Plateau.

Kudmis are the people who are described as a yellowish-brown colored native, of an average height regular build and good looks. The Kudmi found out in Jharkhand, west Bengal and Odisha. They generally speak Kudmali, Hindi and Odia. The Kudmi people believe in Karma or action and service to humanity.

#### **Geographical Location of Mayurbhanj District:-**

The District of Mayurbhanj of Odisha has a total population of 2,519,738 and the density of population in the district is 240 per square kilometers.

The District of Mayurbhanj covering a geographical area of 10,418 square kilometers. The Mayurbhanj district lies between 21°17' North to 22°34' North latitude and between 85°40' East to 87°10' East longitude. The Mayurbhanj District is bounded by Medinipur of West Bengal to East, Singhbhum District of Jharkhand to north west, Baleswar District in South-East and Keonjhar in South-West. The District of Mayurbhanj is one of the significant administrative districts of Odisha. The town of Baripada is the district headquarter of this district. The district has four subdivisions namely Sadar Baripada, Bamanghati, Panchpir and Kaptipada.

#### **The arrival of the Kudmi race in district of Mayurbhanj in Odisha:-**

Today between three hundred years ago, the Kudmi race came to Singhbhum, Manbhum, Shikharbhum, Shadheikala, Kharasuan, Sili, Halda and Medinipur in West Bengal came from these districts and entered in Mayurbhanj district.

The Bhanja ruler Maharaja Shreeram Chandra Bhanja Deo gave sympathetic towards Kudmis and provided all kind of facilities and took this opportunity to clear the forest and prepare agricultural field in their own name. The Kudmi tribe was loyal to the king. The king gave land to the village chief of this tribe and entrusted him with duties of collect taxes. It brought a golden opportunity to the Kudmi race. Before came to Kudmi, the many castes named 'Saunti', 'Bathudi', 'Gouda', 'Bhuyan', 'Tanti', 'Kolha', 'Ganda', and 'Teli' stayed in Mayurbhanj district. These people were not hard working and skilled in agriculture and work like Kudmi cast. These castes did not show any affection towards the Kudmi caste. South to 'Bamanghati', this race faced east community.

The Kudmi community gradually advanced and settled in the Rairangpur region. Today, areas such as Jashipur, Karanjia, and the Thakurmunda block of Mayurbhanj district have a significant Kudmi population. Since the Kudmi caste in these regions originates from a common ancestral stream, strong matrimonial relations exist between the Kudmi communities of Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts.

#### **Kudmi caste consider as a untouchable caste in Mayurbhanj district:-**

The Kudmi caste being migrants. They belong to very poor class. Their clothing attire was of a very low standard. So the 'Gouda', 'Bathudi', 'Ganda' and 'Khandayata', who used this to live in this area and these are people were looked at this nation with hateful eyes. They thought that, the Kudmi caste belong to untouchable caste. They did not accept water from the Kudmi caste hands. When the shadow of this community fell they became impure, they did not even allow this caste to sit on the veranda of their house. They did not want to join the event and duties like marriage, purification, worship and ablution of this caste. This community was left as kind of thorn. All these workers began to do the work with the help of the caste Brother or head of caste (*Pradhan*) and according to the various rule of the caste.

#### **Old habitat of Kudmi tribe:-**

In the first generation, the Kudmi tribes lived near the forest, hills and bank of river of the region, in which region they named in their own language. For example:- the Kudmi people said that, a small river is called (*Julia*), a big mountain called (*Pahal*), a moderate hill is called (*part*) and a small hill is called (*dungri*). The mountain of Himalaya as



(*Bal Pahal*) (ବେଲ ପାହାଳ). The Kudmi people have been worshiped by the '*Bal Pahad*' and '*Kulhu Part*'. The monsoon air is flowing in the Terai region of Kulu Part. The monsoon forest is seen in that area. Beel, Mango, Karam and Ash trees are founded in the forest and worshiped by the Kudmi caste people. This tribe believed that, Jaraballey or 'KudumJara' or kudum valley' and they called themselves 'Kudmi as they lived there.

#### **Kudmi caste consider as a scheduled tribe:-**

The Kudmi caste is one of the original primitive inhabitant's caste of this Chottanagpur plateau. A primitive class like *Kolha*, *Kandha*, *Munda*, *Banda*, *Ganda*, Santhal are many similarity of this Kudmi caste. It is seen that people of *Kohla*, *Kondha* and *Santhal* caste do not eat at anyone else house or they eat at the house of Kudmi caste. It seems that Kudmi community lived close to these tribes. They used to help each other in agriculture. These seem to be people lived one region. The Kudmi caste is found among many religious devout tribes just as the said tribal's drink, '*Handia*,' and '*Mohili*/wine' to relax their bodies the Kudmi caste also drink *Handia* and *Mohuli* wine. The *Kolha* and *Kandha* worship *Era-Banga* (ଏରା ବଙ୍ଗା). The tribe worship by setting a "*Jahila*" (the village goddess) inside the village and Kudmi caste also worship with these Goddess and they named that place as '*Jahira*'. They are also observe their agricultural based festival like '*Flower-Breaker*'. (ଫୁଲ ଭାଙ୍ଗିଣି), '*Ashadhi*', etc. while the Kudmi also observes the '*Karam puja*' at that time the *Kolha* and *Kandha* also observe *Karam puja*.

There a lot of conflict with tribal's in the cultural work order. In the folk dance of these tribe, the women hold hands and dance in a line. In the center at the dance circle men sing and play instruments. The women cover or repeat last part of the song sung by man and dance to the beat of the barrier. The Kudmi caste folk dance also same. The dominant of the Kudmi race also lined up holding hand together tied dance. The dancer of the circle and cover the last part of the sung *Jhumar song* by the men. In the middle of the circle there are man who sing *Jhumar song* and play the *bajas* or instrument. The tribal women wear a "*Iron Bangal*" or (*LuhaKhadu*) on the left hand as a sign of marriage. This '*LuhaKhadu*' or '*Iron Bangal*' is not worn by women of any caste other than the tribal and Kudmi caste. The tribal are able to purify themselves without need of Brahmin or Priest in marriage Purification, Shradddha and ablution similarly the Kudmi caste people purify in marriage,

purification, shradddha and ablution with the help of caste brother without the need of a priest.

#### **Body Structure of Kudmi people:-**

The man of Kudmi community are well built and tall. These are Krishnavarna or dark skinned to see. The women were also very beautiful and dark skin and have good nose. Women were almost equal to men in agriculture Men are ambitious and unselfish.

#### **Surname of Kudmi community:-**

The Surname of Kudmi community known by the titled '*Mohanta*' is a Family name in the Indian state of Odisha. The surname of *Mohanta* is believed to be originated from sanskrit word '*Mahat*' which mean village cheif.

#### **Society of Kudmi Community in the Language:-**

Kudmali language is the mother tongue at the Kudmi. The Kudmali language is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Mayurbhanja and kendujhar of the Odisha. Kudmali is linked with the *Mohanta* community of Odishaspecific region name Mayurbhanj.

#### **House Pattern:-**

At first, the Kudmi people lived in tree trunks and caves. From the beginning, they stayed in these places and kept animals. Later, they started building small mud houses called *kumba*. They kept animals like cows, goats, and sheep in clay shelters called *guhala* to protect them from cold and wild animals. At night, they lit a fire near the house or shelter for safety. These shelters were made with clay and surrounded by leaves or dry branches. Soil was spread around the edges to make them strong. Leaves were used to cover the roofs, and "*siali*" leaves were used to protect from rain. Every woman in the evening gives pure lamp or (*Dipa*) grain store room named '*Dhanghar*'. Cow dung directly sprinkles with water in *varandah* in every morning. While decorating the walls and doors of the house with the help of three fingers, he gives a three cornered show like a pyramid. Then every Thursday the Kudmi people clean the house, *verandah* and *Danda*.

#### **Food habit:-**

The Kudmi people are agriculturist by profession. Their important food is water rice and boil-rice. They eat mainly three times in a day. They eat seasonal Vegetables, Fruit, Milk and Dairy Products, Brinjal, Pumpkin, Papaya, Ladies Finger,



Tomato, Sweet Potato & etc. The non-veg food like Fish, Meat, Crab, Snail and Dry Fish. During the festivals and rituals they make many type of 'Pitha or Cake', like 'Arisha Pitha', 'Cakara Pitha', 'Chitau Pitha' or 'Khapara Pitha', 'Chicken Pitha', 'Simaba Pitha', 'Bandhakobi Pitha', 'Manda Pitha' and *Dumu* or *Undipitha* are specially made by them.

#### Haat:- (weekly Market)

The local weekly Market or *Haat* occupies an important place in the socio-economic life of the Kudmis. This is the place where they purchase their necessities by selling their surplus agricultural and Forest products.

#### Drink :-

The Kudmi people prepare drink of homemade rice beer which is locally known as *Handia*. The rice beer (*Handia*) is a very popular drink among the Kudmis. The women usually prepare *Handia* out of fermented rice. During festival and ritual the male love to take *Handia*. As a matter of tradition they entertain their guest with this drink. They also drink 'Mahualiquor' or (*Desi Mada*) and date palm Juice.

#### Smoking Habit:-

The Kudumi people are taking Tobacco (*Dukta*) and the male person are using *Kenduleaf* by rolling into shape of cigarette and smoking. The male of Kudmi are also using Khaini, Gutukha and Gudakhu. They are mainly depending on nature based smoking product which are available in the local forest.

#### Family:-

The Kudmi caste belongs to patriarchal family. In this family the elder person or the father is the head of the Kudmi family. The family runs under his orders. Father, Mother, Husband, Wife, Son, Daughter, Grandson and Granddaughter live in the family if a person is unable to work due to any reason the burden of maintenance of the family is fulfilled by the head of the family.

**Clan :- (Gasthi-group)** The meaning of the word "clan" is not always clearly understood. However, when we use terms like "gasthi" or "group," the concept becomes easier to grasp. These words are believed to have originated from the word goth, which refers to a herd of animals such as cows or oxen and is associated with a nomadic lifestyle. The Kudmi people named their clans based on such groups. These clans were often named after animals, birds, reptiles, or trees. Below is a list of some such groups categorized by their source of inspiration:

According to Birds:

Pecha (owl)

Kesiar

Shua Kesiar

Chilbindha

Chilbesra

According to Animals:

Kaluar

Katiar

Shankhuar

Chhanchmatuar

Bansiar

According to Trees:

Glemram

Manuar

Animal Husbandary:-

The Kudmi people started keeping animals in groups the people started keeping animal like Cattle, Cows, Seeps, Goats and Pigs. The grass ran out from the one place. They were taking animals to another place in search of grass. Cattle of different group while herding animals in groups the cows. Merges with other groups, it becomes difficult to identify it, so the Kudmi caste used to mark their cattle and cows to identify them. As this mark is given by fire, it remains forever on the skin of the cow bodies. At this time this race may have been dressing in animal skins and eating their meat.

#### Religious worship of Kudmi:-

Every caste of Kudmi believes in 'the worship of nature'. It is the same as worshiping the divine some say that nature is divine itself that the Land, Sky, Air, Fire, Water, Tree, Mountain.

#### Boghut or Tiger Ghost:-

The cow is grazing in the forest; the cow is hunted by a tiger or tiger ghost. This tiger spirit, the people of Kudmi caste sacrifice a hen named *Bara Varnia Kukuda* worship on the *Guhul Puja* day of his *Bandana festival*. From the time when cow are grazing in the forest a new branch of the forest bends by itself gets stuck to the tail of cow or ox, a cow is stuck there. By cutting a branch of tree or wire or organizing a 'Baghut' worship. After this the spirit leaves the cow and ox.

#### Dress:-

The Kudmi males wear dhoti and Panjabi and the women wear saree and blouse. But now, many male also wear Jean pant, Shirt and Lungi. Even the elders put turban on heads.

#### Jewellery:-

The Kudmi women use a good number of ornament named gold and silver. These women use the gold Chain, Ring, Bangles, Earring and the





silver Anklets, Toe rings and silver Finger ring wear the people of Kudmi community. And the man also use to wear chain and finger ring.

#### Festivals:-

Kudmi caste celebrates thirteen festivals in twelve months. These festivals are base on agriculture. This caste considers Magha as the first month of the year and the Pausaas the last month of the year. After completing the old work or cultivation in the month of Pusha he bids farewell to the old year. No auspicious work is done in the month of Pusha for example marriage, digging a well, establishing a house, and starting a house etc. They do not perform any auspicious deed. After saying good bye to the old year, the New Year awaits its arrival. The last week of Pusha month, the door of house starts to be cleaned. Beds and clothes everything is cleaned. The last dated Pusha month called *Boundi*. The new festivals are celebrated with joy. These festival are *Maker Sankranti*, *Halpunha*, *Kundakhia*, *Chaitra festival*, *FulaBhangini*, *Akhaytritiya*, *Ashadhi*, *Nuakhia* these puja worshiped by Dehuri, Pradhan and worshipper in the village. *Karma*, *Jitua*, *Bandana* and *Makara* which are important festivals celebrate by the Kudmi people.

#### Dance:-

The main performers of this dance are professional singers, lyricists, musicians and dance director. The '*Panta-salia*' dance is performed by Kudmi Mohanta community in the occasion of '*Karam*' festival. This dance is a group dance performed on '*Bhadraba month Sukla Pakhsa Ekadasitithi*', and they also performed this dance on *Bandana Parba* and *Makar or Tusu Parba*.

Example of song:-

*"Ajterekaram raja Ghareduare  
Kaltarekaram raja  
Kanshnadipare"*.

(Today, you are the king of the palace. Tomorrow you are the king of the Kanshai river.)

#### Song:-

Kudmi people perform Jhumar song in every festival like Karam festival, Makar or Tusu and Bandana festival. This song Perform by female and male both singers.

A collection of Tusu songs reveal the mood of the people in Mayurbhanj:

*Bangalaisekangalkorilo  
Hamadersabkichukairenilo.  
Partite aerjabonakollekata  
Hamrahbonabhojer shalpata"*

(After coming here Bengalees made us pauper, taken away everything from us. We won't go to Calcutta for the meetings; we would not be used as a dinner plate.)

A collection of Bandana songs reveal the mood of the people in Mayurbhanj.

*Jago Ma Lachhmi  
Jaga Ma Bhagabati,  
Jago Sustain  
Amabashya Rat,  
Jagoke re Pratiphal,*

(Oh Mother Lachhmi, Oh Mother Bhagabati; keep awakening, the night of Amabashya. The cost of awakening will give you five sons and ten cows.)

## II. Conclusion:-

The Kudmi community represents a unique and rich cultural heritage deeply rooted in India's diverse social fabric. Their traditions, social structures, and practices reflect an intricate balance of historical legacy and adaptive resilience. Despite their significant contributions to agriculture, local economy, and cultural vibrancy, the Kudmis face persistent challenges due to socio-political marginalization and exclusion from the Scheduled Tribe category. This lack of recognition impacts their access to constitutional rights, welfare programs, and opportunities for socio-economic advancement.

The study of the Kudmis underscores the importance of preserving and promoting indigenous knowledge systems, cultural practices, and community identities. It also highlights the urgent need for inclusive policies that address the community's aspirations and challenges while ensuring their rightful representation in India's socio-political framework. By exploring their cultural traditions, socio-economic conditions, and contemporary struggles, this research serves as a call to action for policymakers, scholars, and civil society to acknowledge and support the Kudmis in their quest for equitable development and cultural preservation.

Ultimately, the Kudmis' story is one of resilience and hope, emphasizing the broader need to celebrate and uplift marginalized communities to build a more inclusive and equitable society.

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