



# Tribal Tradition and Bhumija Culuture of Odisha

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**Abstract--** Odisha is home to 62 tribal groups speaking 34 dialects, forming the foundation of the state's ancient civilization. These communities live in harmony with nature, sustaining themselves through agriculture and forest products while preserving unique traditions in music, dance, and social organization. A significant focus is placed on the Bhumij tribe, known as the "Sons of the Land". Residing primarily in districts like Mayurbhanj and Balasore, the Bhumij maintain a structured society led by a Sardar (village head) and a Dehuri (priest). Their history is rich with legends of royal lineages and migration, reflecting a resilient culture that balances indigenous roots with evolving external influences.

**Keywords--** 62 Tribes of Odisha, Bhumija Identity, Social Leadership, Nature Worship, Cultural Heritage.

## I. TRIBES OF ODISHA

Odisha is well known all over the world for its rich art, culture, and tradition. When it comes to culture, the talk of other tribes comes to mind. The role of 62 types of tribes living in different languages, cultures, and traditions in our state is important. These are the foundation of the development of civilization. Since ancient times, these primitive inhabitants, who live in nature and love nature, have been living in various hills, mountains, and forests of Odisha. The inhabitants who live in the beauty of nature and live in unknown places are called tribals. So what comes to mind is tribal or tribe? A social group based on one language, one culture, and one way of life is called a tribe. Since ancient times, their lifestyle, traditions, language, food, and customs have remained uninterrupted. They live together with their group in a language that is not written. They keep these traditions and customs within themselves and celebrate them in a unique way. Whether it's women, men, children or the elderly, everyone dances according to their own customs and traditions, gathers together, has fun and enjoys their lives.

Among the 62 tribes or tribals living in 314 blocks of 30 districts of Odisha, they speak 34 dialects. The 'Kandha' tribe is the largest tribe in the state in terms of population. They are mainly found in Kandhamal and the surrounding districts (Rayagada, Balangir, Boudh). The 'Santhal' tribes generally live in Mayurbhanj district. They also have their own language and script. Which is called Alchiki.

A Santali writer and educationist Raghunath Murmu created this language in 1925 and the people of the "Ho" caste live in Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar or Keonjhar, Jajpur, Balasore, Bhadrak, Sambalpur, Jharsuguda, Dhenkanal, Angul, Sundargarh, Kandhamal districts. Similarly, the 'Saura' tribe is mostly found in Ganjam and Puri. The 'Banda' tribe, also known as the naked tribe, is found in Malkangiri district, which was a part of the undivided Koraput. The people of this tribe live entirely in a place called Bandaghati in this region. The 'Kisan' tribe lives in places like Sundargarh, Sambalpur, and Deogarh they are found in the district of Keonjhar. The 'Bhumaj' tribe mostly lives in the districts of Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh etc. Their primary language is Gundari and their script is Anal.

There are 62 types of tribes living in Odisha: (1) Bagata, (2) Baiga, (3) Banjara, (4) Bathudi, (5) Uttara, (6) Bhuyan, (7) Bhumia, (8) Bhumaj, (9) Binjhal, (10) Binjhia, (11) Birhor, (12) Bandaparja, (13) Chenchu, (14) Dal, (15) Deshua, (16) Durua, (17) Dibhai, (18) Gedbawa, (19) Gand, (20) Ho, (21) Ghara, (22) Halba, (23) Zatpu, (24) Juang, (25) Kandhagaud, (26) War, (27) Khadia, (28) Kharwar, (29) Kandha, (30) Kishan, (31) Kol, (32) Kohlodar, (33) Kohl, (34) Koli, (35) Mahlar, (36) Kondadora, (37) Koda, (38) Korua, (39) Kotia, (40) Koya, (41) Kulis, (42) Lodha, (43) Madia, (44) Mahali, (45) Makidi, (46) Mankiridia, (47) Matia, (48) Mirdha, (49) Munda, (50) Mundari, (51) Omantya, (52) Oraon, (53) Paranga, (54) Pentia, (55) Parja, (56) Santal, (57) Saura, (58) Shabar Lodha, (59) Saunti, (60) Tharua, (61) Rajuwar, (62) Gandia.

They are far from the external world. Generally, convenient roads, drinking water, education have not reached them. However, they worship nature without any complaints and live in the lap of nature... They depend on agriculture, animal husbandry, forest products for their needs. That is why they worship forests, hills, and jungles. The traditions of the hill tribes are mostly divided into two parts, namely – family and village. Family - different types of culture are seen in their groups in terms of birth, death, marriage. Which is celebrated by family friends. The entire village comes together to celebrate a festival in the forest to hunt, which is called village tradition.



In their festivals, traditional musical instruments, music made in their language, weapons are displayed, and different dance styles are seen, and in their dances, a uniform dress, a unique voice, rhythm, rhythm and dance style are seen. They are completely different from the original. They collect food from the forest and cultivate it, build walls on earth and straw for their homes. They weave their own clothes for their clothing and even do their own primary treatment. Without conflict, exploitation, complaints, without seeking help, they also protect themselves and their society, their traditions, language, and they live their lives with joy and happiness. For the tribal people, life is a joyful cycle of dance, song, duty and work.

## II. GEOGRAPHICAL POSITION OF BALASORE DISTRICT

In ancient times, Balasore district was central to the kingdoms of Utkala, Vanga, and Kalinga. Until the year 1568, it remained independently under the rule of Mukunda Deva, the last king of Odisha. Subsequently, it came under Afghan, Mughal, and Maratha rule. It established itself as a major commercial hub and was finally occupied by the British in 1803. Generally, Balasore district is situated in the northeastern part of Odisha. It shares its borders with: East: Bay of Bengal, North: Mayurbhanj and West Bengal, South: Bhadrak, West: Keonjhar district. Due to its coastal location, it is often compared to a "city of sand." During the colonial era, the British referred to Balasore as "Bareshwar." The total area of the district is approximately 3,809 square kilometers.

The geographical positioning of Balasore gives it a unique identity. It features a diverse landscape consisting of the sea, mountains, dense forests, and many major rivers and their tributaries, alongside plains and plateaus. This mixed geographical condition and climate significantly enrich its culture and heritage. The region experiences extreme weather: it is very hot in the summer, very cold in the winter, and receives heavy rainfall during the monsoon. This environment has fostered the creation of diverse cultures. In 1828, Balasore was recognized as an independent district. At that time, it was known as "Undivided Balasore," which included parts of present-day Bhadrak, Kendrapara, and Mayurbhanj.

## III. HISTORY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

The history of the creation of the tribals and tribes living in Odisha is observed. It is very important for us to know the history of every caste. So that we get a complete idea of the subject or issue about that caste. Among those castes, the history of 'Bhumaj caste' will be very helpful for us and will open the curiosity to know. "Bhumaj" is considered as the son of the land.

People of many castes, religions, and colors live in India. If we look at the history of India, we know that the creation and culture of man originated from prehistoric times. The history of the Bhumija tribe can be traced back to a brave patriot named Birsamunda. In the history of Jharkhand, India, we know that Birsa Munda was an ideal character who fought bravely against the British. Historical researchers have their own opinion that the Bhumija race originated from this Birsa Munda, and leading linguists have suggested that the language of the Bhumijas is Munda.

Bhumija means "one who is born of the earth"(2). This is because the earth is considered a source of pride. Historian Robert Hope Risley noted in 1890 that "the Bhumija live in the tract of country, which lies on both sides of the Suvarsharekha River". He claimed that the Bhumija have completely lost touch with their native language. In the past the Mundari language is a mixture of Bengali, Santali, Hindi, and Odia. According to him, they used to live with a group of Mundas and later adopted Hindu customs after non-tribals reached the area.

Later, the people living near the small Nagpur plateau maintained linguistic ties with the Mundari, while those living to the east and south respectfully adopted Bengali and Odia as their languages. During British rule, many of the Bhumijas became landlords and some even held the title of kings. The Bhumijas were not native to Assam and Bihar. However, in the 19th century, the Bhumijas migrated to the tea gardens of Assam and the coal mines of Bihar. Earlier, they lived mainly in western Odisha.

At the time of the arrival of the Aryans, the Bhumija tribes were living in the Indus Valley and were engaged in agriculture. The Aryans gave the title of Bhumija to the Mundas. Gradually, the Bhumijas were displaced by the Aryans and settled in West Bengal and the plains. They gradually expanded their settlement to the areas of Lohahardaga, Hazaribagh and Chhotanagpur.

If we analyze the history of the Bhumija caste further, we will know that there was a great king of Dhalbhum who belonged to the Bhumija caste. But at that time they were called Rajputs. The king's ancestor was a Dhoba who gave shelter to the goddess Kali. When Kali was taken away by a demon from the Panvet kingdom, she ran away. The goddess was grateful that the Dhoba helped Kali and gave the Dhoba a Brahmin daughter. Later the king married her and it is believed that the kings of Dhalbhum were born from her womb.

The Bhumija tribes are based on the foundation of their own culture. Although these tribes are flexible in protecting their independence in traditional customs, they do not hesitate to incorporate the traditions of the tribes they mix with in their own style.



Out of the 30 districts where the Bhumija tribes arrived in Odisha, Balasore, Mayurbhanj, Sundargarh, and Keonjhar are visible. The folk history of Mayurbhanj district says that the Bhumija king of the Tomak kingdom had three sons. The middle son was very naughty, so the king expelled him from the kingdom. As a result he came with his family and settled in the Mayurbhanj area.

Gradually, as the population of his family and clan increased, he gave them different clan names like Burudi, Jaranga, Kurkuta, Pandarani etc. and sent them to different areas for 'settlement'. Therefore, the Bhumi tribe lives in almost all areas of Mayurbhanj district and the villages in the Remuna block of Balasore district, which is famous for its hills, commercial center, sand trade, and salt, which I chose for my field study, are very beautiful in Nuapadhi and Phulkeri gram panchayats.

#### IV. LOCATION OF INDIGENOUS TRIBES

A lot of information about the location of the Bhumiputra Bhumija tribe is available from its history, mythology, legends, etc. But it will be easier to get to know them from a closer look by explaining more about the location of the Bhumija tribes living in Nuapadhi and Phulkeri gram panchayats in the Remuna block of Balasore district, which I have chosen for my field study.

The Bhumijas are always united and like to live together. Their dwelling and dwelling are of a simple type. Generally, the tribals of the Bhumija community prefer to live in areas near forests, hills, springs, rivers, canals, etc., especially in ancient times, because they collect all the elements for their livelihood from the lap of nature and agriculture is considered to be their main livelihood. From the forests and hills, all the house construction equipment, household appliances, daily use items for agriculture, the basis of earning money, food and drink, medicinal plants, herbs, grasses and creepers, etc., essential items are easily available. Therefore, there is almost always a water source near their settlement.

The tribes living in Phulkeri and Nuapadhi are very hardworking, generous, charitable, and very fond of agriculture. According to legend, they are called Bhumij because they are born from the land. Therefore, their relationship with the land is very close. They love farming. They grow all kinds of vegetables, corn, greens, fruits, etc. in Seth and they grow eggplant, bhendi, kohlara, jahnii pumpkin, tomato, etc. in their home gardens. Their favorite food is saag bhaja (sunga aloo).

Apart from this, they earn their living by cultivating koshla (kaka aha), neutiya (leper aja), palang (palang ala) etc., as well as fruit trees like harad (harali), mugi (mugi), biri (rambhaji), mango (bhari), banana (kadala) etc.

In the village panchayats, the Sarpanch establishes his own group house or club house. The house has two rooms and a small birch tree is located in the middle of the village. One of the two groups is used as a group house, while the other, known as the youth club house, discusses the happiness, sorrow, development of the village and also conducts active political discussions. All the villagers gather there and perform Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja, Ganesh Puja.

Of the 62 types of tribals or tribes living in Odisha, the specific land tribes are 2, 83, 999 and consist of a collection of 12 blocks, 365 village towns and 349 villages in Balasore district. From there, Nuapadhi Gram Panchayat is located in Remuna Block. The total number of villages is 2593, out of which 1331 males and 1262 females reside, as per the 2011 census. In which the number of children (0-6 years) is 309, 11.92% of the total population. Located in this Nuapadhi Gram Panchayat is a village named Phulkeri, which is near Fakirmohan University. Its population is more than 300. The number of houses of land tribes in the said Phulkeri village is 63. In which two types of land tribes live. (Halidaapokharia Bhumij and Tamudia Bhumij) We can appreciate the beauty of this village by considering the population of Halidaapokharia Bhumij with 55 and Tamudia Bhumij with 7.

Due to this scattered settlement of the Bhumijas, their language and culture have been influenced by various influences over time. They live scattered in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Balasore, Keonjhar and Sundargarh in Odisha. The sub-groups of the Bhumijas are Tamudiya Bhumijas, Halidiapokhariya Bhumijas, Telibhumijas and Deshua or Dehuri Bhumijas, among which the Tamudiya Bhumijas are more numerous. They show a conservative attitude towards their own culture, while the Deshua or Dehuri Bhumijas are more focused on becoming Aryans.

In Bhumija society, the head of the village is called Sardar. The judicial system is followed to maintain peace and order in the village. The head of this judicial system is Saddar. Like other tribes, various types of worship and festivals are held in Bhumija tribal society. They call the person who performs all religious and spiritual functions as Dehuri. In keeping with the changing society and in some areas, Bhumijas also employ Brahmin worshippers due to their adherence to Hindu culture.

#### V. LEGENDS AND MYTHS OF INDIGENOUS TRIBES

The legends and myths of the 62 tribal groups and tribes living in Odisha are somewhat visible. But it is not as strong and true as history.



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In Phulkeri and Nuapadhi Gram Panchayats, starting from the old people, young people, old women, brief accounts of the legends and myths that have been passed down since ancient times were given. If we mainly acquire knowledge related to the creation or origin, culture, tradition, style, ideals, emotions, dress, etc. of the tribal people of the land, it seems very important to know these legends and myths.

The legend of the Bhumija people says that the middle prince of the Bhumija-ruled and Tamad kingdom was expelled from the kingdom by his father due to his evil nature and settled in the Mayurbhanj district of Odisha. As the family's population gradually increased, he sent some of them to settle in different places by giving them different names. In another legend, if we look at it in ancient times, there were two brothers named Nath Barah and Kesh Barah. Once their father had a disagreement with the great king Virat and Vikramaditya's father resolved the dispute in his own court. Nath Barah's younger brother Kesh Barah was killed by being thrown into two chariots. Taking his blood, King Vikramaditya applied a tilak on the elder brother's forehead and gave him two umbrellas.

He said that whatever distance Nath Barah could travel in a day and a night, it would be his. Nath rode his horse and crossed the eight-jojan area which is known as today's Veer Bhumi. The people of Bhumi believe that the symbols in the southern part of the hilly region are the relics of Nath Barah. Horse Tapu Mark. The legend is related to the nearby Patakam king, who claims to be a descendant of Vikramaditya.

Another popular legend tells that a Bhumija chieftain of Dhalbhum, led by a Brahmin, stole the idol of the goddess Kali (Rankini) of Panveta and installed it as his own idol in his house. Sacrifices are offered at various times to please the goddess Rankini. The day on which the sacrifice is offered is known as Bandha Parva. According to the tradition, on this day, two buffaloes were brought into a small enclosure, with a gate for the king at a short distance from the enclosure. First, the king and his priests shot arrows at the buffaloes. In this process, others followed the king. While the two animals were running away from the arrow, they would kill the two buffaloes. This practice was stopped by the then British government in 1865. But during the British rule, most Bhumijas lived happily and paid less tax than other tribes.