

### Introduction

The Eastern Ghats are discontinuous range of mountain set along Eastern coast. They are located between 11°30' and 22°N latitude and 76°50' and 86°30' E longitude in a North-East to South-West strike. It covers total area of around 75,000 sq. km. Eastern Ghats are often referred to as “Estuaries of India”, because of high rainfall and fertile land that results into better crops<sup>1</sup>.

Eastern Ghat area is falling under tropical monsoon climate receiving rainfall from both southwest monsoon and northeast retreating monsoon. The northern portion of the Ghats receives rainfall from 1000 mm to 1600 mm annually indicating sub-humid climate. The Southern part of Ghats receives 600 mm to 1000 mm rainfall exhibiting semi arid climate<sup>2</sup>.

The Eastern Ghats is distributed mainly in four States, namely, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. The part of Eastern Ghats found in the Odisha covers 18 districts, Andhra Pradesh 15 districts and Tamil Nadu in 9 districts while Karnataka Eastern Ghats falls in part of Chamrajnagar and Kolar<sup>3</sup>.

Most of the tribal population in the State is concentrated in the Eastern Ghats of high attitude zone. The traditional occupations of the tribes vary from area to area depending on topography, availability of forests, land, water etc. for e.g. Chenchus tribes of interior forests of Nallamalai Hills gather minor forest produce and sell it in market for livelihood while Konda Reddy, Khond, Porja and Savara living on hill slopes pursue slash and burn technique for cultivation on hill slopes. The Malis of Visakhapatnam (Araku) Agency area are expert vegetable growers. Now vast changes have come in their traditional occupations, life style, etc., may be attributed to increase in number of educational institutions, health institutions, provision of electricity, drinking water and roads etc<sup>4,5</sup>.

In the past a large majority of the tribal population in the Eastern Ghats region activity participated in collection of minor forest produce items and

treated as primary source of income, but now it has become the secondary source of income because degradation of forests every day. But even now certain primitive tribes which inhabit in the interior forests mainly depend on the forest resources in Tamil Nadu, for instance the Katunayakans of Nilgiri forest area<sup>6</sup>.

For a large number of tribals, their livelihood is from the forest like plant materials for their daily needs as food, medicine, fiber, fodder, fuel wood and timber and various minor forest products. The usage of various plant species by the local tribes varies with the altitude and availability of resources. For e.g.

**Medicinal Plants:** A wide range of medicinal plants are used in Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic and Unani medicines by the local tribal people. Some of the medicinal plants are used internally / externally to treat various ailments.

**Food Plants:** There are a number of wild edible plants in the form of tubers, rhizomes, shoots, flowers, fruits, seeds, etc. are used from the forests to supplement their diet. The local tribes evolved sound techniques for the safe consumption of these forest products through ages. They have enough knowledge on poisonous or toxic plants that cannot be consumed raw and this information was passed on to the next generation also. Some edible plants consumed are the leaves and young twigs. They also get honey in plenty from the forest for consumption and also sell or exchange it with other people for getting other necessary commodities.

**Horticultural Fruits:** Naredupallu (*syzygium cumini*), Panasa (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*), Lemon (*Citrus limon*) mango (*Mangifera indica*) (Aam), Badam (*Terminalia catapa*), Usirikaya (*Phyllanthus emblica*), Sethaphal (*Annona squamosa*), Regu (*Ziziphus zuzuba*), Guava (*Psidium guajava*) etc are some of the horticultural fruits yielding plants used by the tribes.

**Timber, Fuel wood and Fodder Plants:** The tribes near the forest area are dependent on naturally growing trees, shrubs, herbs and grasses for the fodder requirements of their cattle and livestock as well as for fuelwood. In addition to these trees, some timber yielding plants are collected by them for house construction and making of agricultural wooden implements, furniture

and other articles for domestic usage. House-building materials are also collected from the forest. During the winter season, they warm themselves by burning bundle of sticks (faggots) and rests under its shade during the hot summer.

The tribals now and then participate in small hunting games in which they catch the birds, rabbits, dears and wild pigs.

Some tribes residing in the areas of forest and mountain tracts practice shifting cultivation also.

The Eastern Ghats are home to a number of tribal communities. Of all the states of India, Odisha has the largest number of tribes, as many as 62. Among them the tribes residing in the Eastern Ghats include Khonds (Kandho), Gond, Santal, Soara, Kolha, Shabar, Munda, Paroja, Bhotada, Bhunya (Bhuiyan), Kissan, Oraon, Bhumiya, Bhathudi, Kharia, Binjhal, Koya, Kol, Saunti, Gadabas, Mirdhas and Juang. A brief description about each tribe is given below:

## **TRIBES OF ODISHA**

- 1. KHONDS (KANDHO):** Khonds are the largest tribal group in Odisha and they are also seen in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and West Bengal. Their main divisions are the Kutia, or hill Khonds and plain-dwelling Khonds. They speak Kui. Amongst the Kondhs, Maliah Kondhs are the majority group. These tribals usually cook food with oil extracted from sal and mahua seeds. They are divided into different clans like Hansa, Beck, Hembram, Bedia etc. Traditionally they are hunter-gatherers, other occupation include agriculture and labour<sup>7,8</sup>.



**2. GOND:** Apart from Odisha, Gonds are also seen in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana and West Bengal. They speak Gondi languages and also Telugu, Hindi and Marathi. Their staple diet is two millets known as *kodo* and *kutki*. These are either boiled to a broth or cooked to a dry cereal. They grow tobacco for smoking and for celebrations make liquor from the mahua tree. Today, they are mainly farmers, some have risen to the status of landowners, but many are landless laborers. They enjoy singing and dancing and also enjoy cock-fighting. They have a rich arts tradition that includes pottery, basket making, body tattooing, and floor painting<sup>9,10</sup>.



**3. SANTHAL:** Other than Odisha, these tribes are also seen in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand and Assam. They speak Santhali, as well as Bengali, Oriya and Hindi. Their main occupation is hunting, fishing and cultivation. They possess unique skills in making the musical equipments, mats and baskets out of the plants. Their talent is safely passed on from one generation to the other<sup>11</sup>.



**4. SABAR:** Apart from Odisha, they also live in Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. During the British Raj, they were classed as one of the 'criminal tribes' under Criminal Tribes Act 1871, and still suffer from social stigma and ostracism in modern





times. They traditionally are forest-dwelling tribe and rely on the forests for their livelihood<sup>12</sup>.

**5. MUNDA:** Excluding Odisha, these tribes are also seen in adjacent parts of Assam, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Bihar and into parts of Bangladesh. They speak Mundari. The economy of these tribes is Basket work, weaving and agriculturist cultivators. These tribes have a rich range of folk songs, dances and tales, as well as traditional musical instruments. Mandar, nagara and kartal are the main musical instruments<sup>13</sup>.



**6. BHUIYA:** Bhuiya tribes are classified into a southern division, with Odisha as its centre, and a northern division, with Bihar as its centre. The southern division of this tribe is comparatively backward than that of the northern division. Earlier they were hunter gatherers and now settled as agriculturists and also work as labourers in Tea gardens. Many tribes still collect roots and tubers from the forest for their livelihood<sup>14</sup>.



**7. KISSAN:** Kissan tribes call themselves as Kunha, Nagbansis, Nagesar and Nagesia. They speak Kunha language. They erect houses with the help of mud, wood, bamboo, leaves, straw, rope and handmade fire baked tiles. The economy of these tribes is collection of forest produce, agriculture, and domestication of



animal, craft making and casual labour. Collection of these forest produce is not only for the purpose of consumption but, also for the purpose of getting money by selling them in market<sup>15</sup>.

8. **PAROJA:** The Parajas are the hill cultivators. There are seven classes of these Parajas, which differ from each other in points of language, customs and traditions. These tribes seem to have inhabited this country from about the second century of the Christian era<sup>16</sup>.



9. **ORAON:** The Oraons are one of the most progressive tribes. They speak kurukh. They make use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, improved varieties of seeds and modern techniques of agriculture. Economically better off when compared to other tribes and they are not shackled by debts and can afford a better quality of life. Their social life is remarkable in that they accept widow remarriage and permit divorce by either partner on grounds of adultery, bad temper, and laziness. These tribes have a rich and vast range of folk songs, dances and tales, as well as traditional musical instruments<sup>17</sup>.



10. **BONDA:** The Bondas are fiercely independent, stubborn and aggressive tribe. They easily murder on petty issues. They are known themselves as Remo (men). They speak a different Astro-Asiatic language. The inaccessibility of their



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abode separates them from other tribes. The origin and affiliations of the Bondas are obscure. They live on the mountains at the height of 3000 feet. They do Podu cultivation. In their community, the bride is older than the groom. The strange dress and ladies of this community are half naked. They still practice the barter systems, exchanging the produce of their fields for articles of daily use<sup>18</sup>.

**11. KOYAS:** The Koya belong to the great Gond family. They reside in low thatched houses and cultivate Tobacco leaf, Mandia, Maize, Bhatta Paddy. They rear Pigs, Goats, Cows and Hens. Mahula and Salapa is their ideal drink. They use very little quantity of milk in their daily life. In 1880 there was revolt against British rule by the great Koya



leader Tama Dora, which was famous as "Koya Revoulation" in the Indian history<sup>19</sup>.

**12.DIDAYEES:** Didayees are the important tribal race. They said to be the progeny of Bondas. They maintain their distinctive identity and have their own language. They construct the house with the help of wood and bamboo, color the walls and maintain neat and clean. They are engaged in hunting fishing and cultivation for their livelihood. They maintain a distinct cultural life,



hospitality and method of treatment of disease. For the development of these tribes, there is a Didayee development organisation formed by the Government<sup>20</sup>.



**13. GADABA:** The Gadava are a primitive tribe classified as mundari. They call themselves as Guthan. They speak a mundari dialect, called Gadava after tribal name. They usually opt to marry within their relations. Their main occupations are agriculture, labour, hunting, cattle rearing and also carry palanquins. These tribes change their culture, customs and language to suit the environment where they are residing and become difficult for the outsiders to identify these tribes among them<sup>21</sup>.



**14. MATIA:** Matia derive their name from two words, mati, meaning soil, and bhu, meaning earth, which denotes their long association with the soil and the land. These tribes lead a simple life. They cultivate Maize, tabbaco leaf and vegetables. They are treated as low among the tribes in many places. They consume alcoholic drinks and smoke cigars (pikha), beedis and chew betel leaves<sup>22</sup>.



**15. DHARUA:** Apart from Odisha, these tribes are also seen in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. This tribe has got their own language, culture and traditions<sup>13</sup>. These tribes are also known as the Dhur Gond and Naik. They speak an Indo-Aryan language, Kudmali, at home. Hindi, Oriya and Bengali are used for





inter-group communication and they use the Oriya script. Rice and wheat are their staple food, supplemented with roots, tubers, vegetables, pulses, seasonal fruits and milk. Rice beer (handia) and mahua liquor are their favorite drinks<sup>23,24</sup>.

**16. BATHUDI:** These tribes are mostly seen on the plains in the rural areas. They speak Oriya. Cultivation is their main occupation. Their houses are made up of mud walls and thatched roofs and love to decorate their walls with multi-coloured floral designs. Their dress is scanty and wore silver ornaments. Tattooing (Khada) is one of the popular among the Bathudi women and also, before marriage, a Bathudi girl tattoos one or two floral designs on her forehead or arm. Their marriage takes place either in the house of the groom or the bride. Both the systems are prevalent<sup>25</sup>.



**17. KOLHA:** Kolha tribes are generally timorous and mostly seen in the hills. They have their own language and also speak Oriya and Hindi. They eat all kinds of meat and are fond of Handia (fermented liquor). There are engaged in agriculture or field labourers. They like shooting animals and birds with the help of bow and arrow. In terms of education, they lack behind many other tribes<sup>26</sup>.



**18. JUANG:** Juang is a jungle tribe of Odisha. Their language belongs to the Munda family. They are skilled in making baskets, which is in demand



in nearby caste villages. These tribes sometimes exchange their baskets for food and money with the village traders. They slowly got mixed into the Hindu Caste system as a basket making caste group<sup>27</sup>.

**19. KHARIA:** Other than Odisha, they also inhabit Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. They comprise three tribes, the Dudh Kharia, Dhelki Kharia, and Hill Kharia. They speak kharia language. They survive in the midst of forest and are parasitic on forest produces. The Hill Kharia have preserved their traditional dress pattern and rest of the Kharia have been influenced by the modern contacts and changed their dressing style. The economy of the Hill Kharia is a food gathering, hunting and labour. The Dhelkis are agricultural labourers and agriculturalists, while Dudh Kharia's are agriculturists. These tribes are skilled in cottage industries<sup>28</sup>.



**20. MIRDHAS:** Mirdha means head coolie. They speak Kurukh, Mirdha and Oriya to communicate with others. They are non-vegetarians and rice and wheat form their staple diet. They smoke beedis, indigenous cheroots and consume alcoholic drinks. Both men and women use gudaku, a paste made of tobacco powder<sup>29</sup>.

**21. BHUMIYA:** Bhumia can be regarded as the most celebrated tribes in India. These tribes of Odisha are rich on culture and tradition. They speak Jabalpuri and Hindi. Their staple food is wheat and rice. These tribes are land owning agriculturists and labourers. Balijatra is the most important festival of these tribes. The usual practice of marriage prevalent amongst these tribes is the elopement of groom with his



prospective bride<sup>30,31</sup>.

**22. SOARA:** The Saora are one of the oldest and most numerous of the 62 scheduled tribes of Odisha in southeastern India. These tribes reside at steep hills by cultivating paddy and vegetables. They are dependent on forest-prod uce gathering for food. These tribes remain under the omnipresent threats of soil erosion and desertification, corruption, extreme poverty, lack of access to education and health care, forced migration, and nearly futile battles with government and the mining industry over land use and rights<sup>32</sup>.



**23. BINJHAL:** The Binjhal tribes migrated from the Vindhya, satpura and Aravalli hills of Madhya Pradesh and settled in Sambalpur district of Odisha. They speak sambipuri dialect of Oriya and use the Oriya script for both intra- and inter-group communication. These tribes can be identified by their dress, ornaments and tattoo marks. Their staple food is Rice and wheat and they are non-vegetarians. They chew betel leaves and use guraku. Men smoke an indigenous cheroot (pika), beedis and cigarettes<sup>33</sup>.



**24. SOUNTI:** The term Sounti means to collect some items. They speak Oriya. Their staple food is rice and they are also non-vegetarians. Mustard and sesamum oil are used for cooking. Both the men and women of the community consume home-made rice beer. They drink milk. Some of them smoke beedies and chew betel leaves<sup>34</sup>.

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