

SABARA TRIBE IN ORISSA

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Historically, there exists evidence indicating that the Sabaras have been gradually confined to their current geographical location from much broader regions. The Saoras of Vizagapatam Agency, as noted by Elwin, display limited resemblance to the Hill Saoras of Ganjam and Koraput. They have largely integrated themselves with the local populace, embracing its language, attire, customs, and deities(1). Contrary to the practices of the Hill Saoras, the Saoras depicted by Russell and Hira Lal follow distinct customs. They adhere to totemistic exogamous divisions, venerate deities like Bhavani and Dulha Deo, have women who refrain from wearing nose-rings, and are renowned for their magical practices(2). The Saoras analyzed by Risley exhibit further variations(3). The Bankura Saoras feature exogamous and totemistic septs, with Brahmins acting as their priests and advocating against widow-remarriage(4). The Orissa Saoras worship Thanpati and Bansuri or Thakurani. The Bendkar Saoras, as documented by Tickell in 1842, converse in Ho or Uriya, worship Kali, adhere strictly to food-related taboos, avoid collecting ashes from funeral pyres, and dance in the Bhuiya style(5). Dalton, in his depiction of the Bendkars as a secluded faction of Sabaras, identifies them as part of the larger Bhuiya lineage (6).

Verrier Elwin uses the term "Saoras" to refer to the Hill Saoras residing in the Agency Tracts of the Ganjam and Koraput districts within the contemporary State of Orissa for the sake of convenience. These individuals can be further identified based on their geographical location and cultural practices. A Saora is an individual who identifies as such and resides within a specific area above the Vamsadhara River, encompassing regions extending north from the Agency boundary near Parlakimidi for approximately forty miles, and east from Gunupur for about twenty miles. The most representative Saoras are found in the Gumma and SerangoMuttas of the Ganjam district, as well as in villages located within

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a ten-mile radius of Pottasingi in Koraput. Moving towards the north, one encounters additional Saora settlements through Peddakimidi and Chinnakimidi, which gradually undergo a transformation in characteristics as they near the territory of the Konds (7).

Not all individuals residing in this geographical area can be classified as Hill Saoras; specific cultural attributes set them apart. Saora villages are distinguished by their elongated streets where they construct small shrines and set up menhirs. Ritual sacrifices of buffaloes are performed for their deceased members. Both male and female shamans play crucial roles in addressing the community's religious requirements. Agricultural practices among the Saoras include both terraced and shifting cultivation methods. Men typically don long cloths, while women adorn hand-woven brown-bordered skirts and generally refrain from wearing additional garments. Women also engage in the tradition of elongating their earlobes and bear a tattoo on the center of their foreheads, utilizing tattoo ink derived from local blackberries. The Hill Saoras have preserved their distinct language, with only a minority being proficient in any other language.

Sitapati asserts that historically, the territory of the Hill Saoras likely encompassed the three talukas of Palakonda, Parlakimidi, and Tekkali in the south, until they were displaced by the Telugus, a more dominant and astute group. The remaining Saoras who stayed in these regions were absorbed into the Telugu culture, adopting their language and various societal and religious practices"(8).

The Sabaras, as is customary, have integrated into the adjacent communities and are recognized by different designations. Those who communicate in Telugu are identified as Kampu Sabara - with "Kampu" denoting Telugu, a term associated with a Telugu Sudra caste. Additionally, there are other 'civilized' Sabaras known as the Sudda and Sarda or 'reformed' Sabaras, the coastal-based Sabaras, referred to as "based" due to their proximity to salt, and the BimmaSaoras residing towards Jirango, potentially linked to the Bhima temple of Mahendragiri along with several smaller factions. While some groups have preserved their native language, a majority are either losing or have already lost it (9).

The Hill Saoras are identified by their Oriya neighbors as

LomboLanjhiaSaoras due to the distinctive long-tailed loin-cloth they wear (10). Ramamurti suggests that this epithet is viewed unfavorably by some Saoras. On the other hand, Verrier Elwin contends that certain Saoras take pride in being called Lanjhia, considering it synonymous with 'hillman' (11).

Further Elwin elaborates that LomboLanjhia stands out as the exclusive term encompassing all the Hill Saoras, distinct from the plains Saoras of the Kampu or Sudda category. Various names are utilized by the Hill Saoras themselves to denote different segments of their community. The primary division identifies itself as Jati. Jati, not being a Saora term per se, originates from Oriya language, adopted by these Saoras to emphasize their authenticity, representing the pure caste (jati) characterized by untainted lineage, traditions, and faith. The sole distinguishing feature setting them apart from other Hill Saoras is their public declaration of refraining from consuming beef. Another subgroup known as Arsi Saoras, despite the term "Arsi" translating to monkey, lacks any totemic significance, with the name likely chosen due to the peculiar connection many Saoras feel towards monkeys, along with the presence of long-tailed fabric. While the Arsi Saoras consume monkeys, this practice is common among other Saora groups as well. Certain Arsis engage in cloth-weaving, a skill exclusive to a few HillSaoras.

The Jadu Saoras inhabit hilltops and untamed territories north of Serango. The distinction between Jadu Saoras and Jati Saoras is minimal, as both assert their abstinence from beef consumption. However, Jati Saoras argue against this claim, contending that both the Jadu and Arsi Saoras lack genuine veneration for cows, thus categorizing them as inferior strains.

The Kindal and Takala Saoras engage in the craft of basket-making, in addition to practicing general bamboo work such as weaving mats, winnowing-fans, and crafting brooms. During Karja ceremonies, the Kindals participate in a ritualistic exchange of mats and baskets to receive a portion of the rice and meat offered during the feast.

The KumbitSaoras specialize in pottery, while the Gontaras are involved in working with bell-metal and brass. The Luaras, on the other hand, are known as blacksmiths, although they do not engage in iron smelting, and their forges are only capable of handling basic and rudimentary tasks. The social norms dictate

consequences if a Jati Saora marries an individual from the Arsi or Jadu groups. Although there are some barriers between the agricultural and occupational communities, instances like elopement between a Kumbit and a Jadu are not severely condemned and can be absolved with a nominal fine. It is believed that individuals from priestly lineages must adhere to stricter regulations, such as prohibiting a Jati Buyya from marrying an Arsi Buyya or Jadu Buyya, and certainly not a KumbitPoroja.

Despite the distinct occupations within these groups, the members exhibit similarities in appearance, attire, and behavior. Even blacksmiths and potters own agricultural land and livestock, making it challenging to differentiate them from others while they are farming. Frequently, they reside together on the same streets, like in Boramsingi where Jatis, Takalas, and Luaras are neighbors. In Alangda, Kumbit potters have a designated street, while Arsis have a specific area in Tumulu, and Takalas predominantly inhabit Karanjaju. Due to fire safety concerns, blacksmiths often have their forges located outside the village, with their residence in close proximity.

The Saora hills exhibit a high degree of homogeneity, with the only other residents being the Doms and, in the Ganjam district, the Paiks who serve under the authority of the Bissoyi and Patro landlords. These Doms and Paiks have their own distinct villages situated at Pottasingi, Nuagada, Gumma, and Serango (12).

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