Nearly more than a quarter of Orissa's population belong to sixty-two tribal groups, each with distinct customs and dialect. Kondhmal, which is situated at the centre of Orissa, created a special identification being inhabited by the original Kondh tribes. Like all other tribal groups, Kondhs also famous for their magnificent typical cultural heritage. According to their social traditions, customs, rituals, living style and standard Kondhs are categorised into three types in Kondhmal district.

1. Desia Kondhs
2. Dangaria Kondhs
3. Kutia Kondhs

The migrated peoples from different parts of Orissa to Kondhmal district are called as Desias by Kondhas and being influenced by the culture of Desias. The Kondhs of Phiringia, Tikabali, Raikia and G. Udayagiri region developed a mixed culture, and they are called as Desia Kondhs by Desias.

As Desia Kondhs are the successors of the original Kondh tribe, they inherited and practised the traditions, customs and rituals of their forefathers.

The marital tradition of Desia Kondha is very interesting. There are two types of marriage systems prevailing in Kondh society.

1. Khincha Biha or Tana Kania
2. Mola Biha or arranged marriage.

Before marriage the young boys of Kondha family (Dhangadas) choose their life partners from Hatta (Weekly Market) or from Dinda Ghar or Dangari Idu. If Dhangada selects a Dhangidi in hatta and decides to marry her so that dhangidi is forceably taken away (in modern terms kidnapped) or eloped with the help of his tanes (friends). Then message is sent to Dhangid's house that "your daughter is with us" and then the marriage settlement is made with understandings of two families.

But the "Dindaghar" tradition is something different. "Dindaghar" means the house meant for young unmarried girls (Dhangidis) of Kondha family. Each and every Kondh village has a "Dindaghar". The young unmarried girls (Dhangidis) are used to spend night in these houses.

According to the local tribal people of Kondhamal, following causes are mainly responsible for the development of such culture.

1. Traditional house building of Kondhas.
2. To break the monotony of exhaustion.
3. To choose and understand their life partner.

1. The tribal Kondha houses are two rooms having two doors like front door and back door. First room is of multipurpose use as bed room, drawing room and store room and the 2nd room is used as kitchen room as well as worshipping room. There is no door in between these two rooms so when the Kondh children stepped into the adolescent age, they are not allowed to sleep inside their own house with their parents, rather they are sent to "Dindaghar" or "Dindraghar".
Meaning:

"Come, dear friends the Dhangadas are inviting us by singing and playing musical instruments, let us make a line and dance with them.

They express their thoughts and feelings through different songs of their Kui language and also select their life partners. Dindaghar is a centre of art and culture of Kondh society. They develop their art of singing, dancing and playing of musical instruments in this house.

Dhangadas father with the help of a Kandaria or mediator goes to the house of selected Dhangidi and settles the marriage. The marriage ritual of Kandhas has several steps.

1. Paher Kalu or Salbane Kalu
2. Buhari mola
3. Gaati Kalu (Pindhani)
4. Kani Prarg (Bata Bhoji)
5. Niju Misba (Oil Massage)
6. Bal Kalu or Bal Prarga
7. Tana Penu, Saru Penu Lakera (Worship of Earth and Mountain)
8. Bahkalak
9. Sirmispa

1. Paher Kalu or Salbane Kalu: "Kalu" means wine. In each and every rituals of Kandha family Kalu is used. After the settlement of marriage a feast is being arranged by Dhangidi's father for Kandaria and the friends and relatives of Dhangada. Chicken and chicken products are not used in this feast because of a blind belief or a peculiar belief of Kondh society i.e. "Kalu Dehengi Uddine". The Kania or Bride may fly away like hen" or marriage settlement may be disturbed.

2. On this very day Buhari Mola is fixed. Dhangadas father assures to pay for Dhangidi in the terms of cattle, goat, buffalo, rice, hen etc.

3. Gaati Kalu (Pindhani): In order to finalise the settlement the bridegroom's father with some relatives visited the brides house with a basketful of rice, Kasta sari and with some ornaments for Buhari or bride. The date of marriage is fixed thereafter.
4. Kani Prarga (Bata Bhoji): To strengthen their relationship the parents and relatives of both the families exchange turmeric powder. At the time of departure brides father give some rice, Kandula dal, a goat and some wine for kani prarga or Bata Bhoji or a feast on their way to home.

Dress of Bridegroom:

On the particular day of marriage, Dhangada, the bridegroom dressed with the traditional marriage dresses of Kondha like:

1. Kadga - Aturbain having two horns on either side.
2. Gajinge - Lenguti
3. Ahapaka Bahapaka - Bow and arrow
4. Chhati - A decorative umbrella

Dress of Bride:

The dress of bride or Dhangidi on the eve of marriage is:

1. Kasta sarees
2. Topperi - Necklace
3. Gubia - Bracelet
4. Phasia - Ear rings
5. Nakaputki - Nose Stud
6. Kana Putki - Ear-stud etc.

The bridegroom started his procession with his friends and relatives to bride's house with traditional drums, tamki, singa and flute. After their arrival at the outskirt of the bride's village, the Dhangadas of brides village take the bridegroom on their shoulder to the ceremonial place with a grand procession.

After the marriage ceremony the bride departed her family weeping profusely with traditional lyrical songs like:

Marania Jongania
Enunenjuhain Loku Aati
Esoarajaide Nikalaniangi
Nembu gelangi anjani
Nambai Nee.

Meaning:

"O my dear mother and brothers I am departing from you, don't forget me and have a relationship as it is"

As there is no modern means of communication in remote villages of Kondhamal district, the bride being shouldered by her husband and by the friends of husband arrives to the skirt of the village. The newly married couple is welcomed in a grand procession to his home.

5. Niju Misba (Oil Massage): The new couple are massaged by their friends and relatives to relax from the exhaustion of journey.

6. On the other side, the Tana Penu or Dharani Penu and Saru Penu or Mountain God is worshipped by the parents of bridegroom and arrange a grand feast for the villagers.

7. Bal Kalu or Bal Prarga: It is a typical tradition of Kondh society that a basketful of rice, a goat, some Kandul dal and some wine, are sent for the female members of bride's family for a feast on this occasion.

8. Sir Mispa: The new married couples are massaged with turmeric paste by their relatives and have a bath.

9. Bahakalaka means the new married couple will go to the outskirt of the village and will perform a ritual sacrificing a hen and pouring wine on earth then on return they start their conjugal life.

Though the life style and standard of the Kondh families of Kandhmal district have undergone a lot of changes the march of time, yet they have not given up their tradition and custom of their own. So the art, architecture and cultural heritage of Orissan tribes have made this land a paradise for lovers of culture.

Reference:

Collected from the Tribal Inhabitants of Kondhamal District.

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