Chapter I

Bagicha Village and the Block, a part of Chota Nagpur Sarguja Tract - History, Geography, Social and Cultural Setting - Oraon land and Oraon People

The Name Bagicha and Oraon
Bagicha means a ‘garden’. The place is really a beautiful garden surrounded by mountains, hills, forests and rivers. If we stand in the middle of the area and we shall find small hills and mountains with thick forests and Oraon tribes residing there and leading a very simple life. It is like the description of creation in the Bible. God created Edam and Eve and placed them in the Eden garden to enjoy the natural beauties. The tribes live amidst hills and forest having a very simple and peaceful life. The tribes inhabiting this plateau are known by the name Oraon. They are also known as Kurukh because of the language they speak. The Oraons have dark and fair complexion. They are simple and peace loving people. Their lives are connected with the nature. They prefer to roam freely in the fields, rivers and forests singing songs and playing flutes. They sing and dance in different seasons. The cultivation is the main occupation. They also rear animals and birds. There are various clans with different titles or gotras in Oraon society but there is no feeling of high or low among them. They follow ‘Sama’ religion, i.e. the worship of the Supreme Being ‘Dharmes’ through the nature.

The Name Oraon and Kurukh
The Oraons call themselves as Kurukhs. They are also called as Kol to be distinguished form other indigenous people. They inhabit the Chota Nagpur territory where Mundas resided. The Hindu imagination found in Hindu legendary lore what it considered a fitting likeness, and naturally compared these Kurukhs to the progeny of the legendary monster king Rawan of Ramayana fame. For popular tradition represents king Rawan as having been blessed with one hundred thousand sons and one hundred and twenty five thousand grandsons. To the Hindus the Kurukhs appeared to be monstrously impure in their habits and their extra-ordinary prolificness, came to be called as they are often called to this day, ‘Raona put’ (putra or the progeny of Rawana). The name Rawan pronounced as some people do, with an arrested ‘O’ sound at the beginning gave us the present form ‘O-rawan’ or Oraon. It is worth mentioning that the Oraons never use this name in their tongue, but always call themselves the Kurukhs. 2 Rev. Dr. F. Hahn agrees in holding that the name Oraon was coined by the Hindus but he supposes that its base ‘orgora’, hawk, which is the name of the totemistic sept of the Oraon. Dr. Grierson compares the name with ‘Kaikadi Urapai’ man, Burgandi, Urapo man, Urang men. He observes, “the Hindus say
that the word Uraon is simply the Indo-Aryan Uran, spendthrift, the name being an allusion to the alleged thriftless character of the people to whom it is applied". The name Oraon applies to the people who are constantly moving from place to place. Dr. Dalton explains the name as a nickname ‘assigned to them possibly with reference to their many migrations and proneness to roam. 3

The ordinary Oraons have a different story to tell. Long-long years ago a Muni sat absorbed in divine contemplation in the heart of a dense forest. The ascetic remained in the same position for years in the same spot without food, drink or sleep till at length his body got rooted to the ground and was covered over with ant hill which actually spread to his chest. It so happened that a woodcutter who had been to the jungle mistook the ascetic for the ant-hill covered stump of a tree. The woodcutter stroke with the butt of his axe to remove the ant-hill. But to his astonishment the woodcutter soon discovered that it was a living man. The ascetic was rudely disturbed in his meditation, got up on his legs. As he stood up, the thorns sticking into his chest got broken, and blood began to ooze out of his chest. The ascetic not willing to allow a drop of his own blood to stain the mother earth took all the blood in the folded palm of his hands. As however, he had now to satisfy a call of nature, he put the blood in a cup improvised for the purpose out of a Korkota leaf, and placed the cup in a shady place close by, when the ascetic was about to leave the place, out of the blood there came into life a boy and a girl (Bhaya-Bhayin or brother and sister, and they called out to the ascetic and said “stop, pray, stop”. It is you who brought us into the world. And now if you leave us here what shall we do to get a living. The ascetic replied, “You shall be cultivators. Clear this jungle, and make agriculture your occupation. Your granary will be full of grains. And when people of different castes will approach you for alms, give a handful of grains to every supplicant.” Thus, then, the Bhaya-Bhayin, the first parents of the Orons having been born of the blood of the chest (Sanskrit, Uras or Ur) of the holy ascetic, their descendants came to be known as Uraon Thakurs or Uraons. This is similar to the creation of four castes of the Hindus from the different limbs of Brahma the Creator. The descendants came to be known as Uraon Thakurs. In those olden days they were quite as respectable as the Brahmans, and wore the sacred thread. When later, the Oraons fell from their high state and began to eat indiscriminately whatever food clean or unclean that came to their hand. They forfeited their claim to the name of Uraon Thakurs and came to be called simply Uraons. 4

We come to know from the Munda legend that the name ‘Oraon’ to Kurukhs was given by Mundas. It is said that the Kurukhs used to keep stale rice water in a 40 liters of earthen vessels. The stale rice water was used for drinking, medicine, and curry. Unfortunately a Muslim girl fell in the earthen vessel and died. The Kurukhs buried the girl in the cow dung pit. The body was decomposed with the cow dung and thrown in the low land field for manure. The Muslims found the bangle from the field, which was used by the girl. The Muslims condemned the Kurukhs and waged war against them. The Kurukhs ran to escape from the Muslims. The
Mundas were celebrating ‘barpahri’ (puja in which cow is sacrificed to deity and meat is mixed with rice and cooked) at the bank of the river. They had applied various colours on their body and after the Puja or worship they were cooking food. The Kurukhs who were running away out of fear of Muslims mingled with the Mundas. In order to save the Kurukhs the Mundas employed them for cooking. The Muslims who were chasing them asked the Mundas, ‘where are the Kurukhs who have come here, tell us?’ The Mundas had coloured themselves with different colours asked the Muslims, “what is the colour of Kurukhs, this colour (e rang) or that colour (u rang)? Muslims did not understand the language of the Mundas and went back. The Mundas jokingly called the Kurukhs, “aree erang ! aree urang !”. Slowly this ‘urang’ word was pronounced as ‘Uraon’ or ‘Oraon’. The word ‘Oraon’ is commonly used in the land documents and caste certificates. In the government documents only the word Oraon is written and the word Kurukh is not mentioned or recognized. Now there is a trend that many prefer to write Oraon as their caste instead of Kurukh and also write Oraon as title or gotras after their names like Mangal Oraon instead of Mangal Tirkey.

Original Habitat

We come to know from the legend that the Oraons belong to the Dravidian race and their civilization began at Harrappa and Mojenjodaro situated at the bank of Indus river valley. They lived peaceful lives for many years. It was Aryans who chased these peace loving people. They moved towards the east and settled at the bank of river Yamuna. The recent archeological discovery on the bank of ancient course of river Yamuna finds the similarity with the Indus-Saraswati Harrappa civilization, belongs to the era of Rigveda. But from here also they were chased out because of their simplicity and non-fighting character. They moved to the hilly area of Rohtas in Bihar. According to the legend the Oraons had built the kingdom of Rohtasgarh. This is known from the song the Oraons sing:

Namhae purkhar rahechar re (our forefathers were there)
Rohtas Patna nu rahechar-2 (lived in Rohtas and Patna)

1. Sindhu ghatiti itiyar (descended from Sindhu valley)
   Ganga Jamuna barechar (came to Ganga Jamuna)

2. Patnati itiyar (descended from Patna)
   Rohtas nu ukiyar (settled in Rohtas)

The destruction of the kingdom of Rohtasgarh is still spoken by the Oraons. On the occasion of Sarhul festival all men were drunk. At this time the Muslims attacked Rohtasgarh. It is said that the Oraon women dressed like men had fought courageously and defeated the Muslims for three times. The Oraon king had given three marks on the head of the women as a sign of victory, which are still seen on
the forehead of the women. Jani Sikar or hunting by women once in a twelve year is also the sign of victory of Rohtas. The milkmaid who revealed the secret to the Muslims by telling them to watch they are women who would wash their face at the river with both the hands. Muslims attacked again and defeated Oraon women warriors. The Oraons were chased away from Rohtasgarh to Chota Nagpur; the area consists of three districts of Chhattisgarh, four districts of Orissa, five districts of West Bengal and whole of Jharkhand. The three districts of Chhattisgarh are Jashpur, Sarguja and Raigarh.

In Chota Nagpur the Oraons after clearing the forest began to cultivate. They still preserve the unique cultures and traditions.

In 1585 AD Moghal emperor Akbar defeating the petty king of Chota Nagpur began to rule and gave the name of the area as Jharkhand. In 1765-1858 AD this was under the rule of East India Company. In 1781-1831 AD Oraon revolution began because the land, which they had cleared and occupied, was captured forcefully by the kings and their Jamindars. And in 1845 AD the missionaries from Germany, England and later from Belgium came who educated the Oraons and helped them to get back their lands. In 1947 AD India got freedom from British but the misery of the Oraons still continued.

They learnt about the art of cultivation and cattle breeding and the use of metal implements and utensils. Thus the Oraons got a lift in the art of modern life. Previous to their contact with the north Indian Aryans they led a nomadic pastoral life. A Raja of north India wanted to make a gift of five villages in return for their services, but the Oraons preferred to have a large herd of cattle instead. During this period they wandered in northern India and ultimately settled in Shahabar district (at Rohtasgarh) in Bihar and later on moved still south wards and established themselves in Chhotta Nagpur and from there to Sarguja and Jashpur areas.

### Geography of Bagicha

Bagicha is a plain land though the block comprises many hilly villages. It has a temperate climate with good rainfall in the rainy season. Due to its temperate climate both rice and wheat and other rabi crops are equally grown. There is no dearth of water. The fields are well irrigated. Drought is rare. A good number of outsiders, the people from the plains and other cites are also residing in Bagicha side by side with the Oraons. There are a number of big and small shops, hospitals, and various offices.

Oraons believe in ‘Jadu tona’ ‘tantra mantra’ like most of the villagers in India. They are also very superstitious, though the education and modernity is fast changing. They also believe that evil spirits affect their family the cattle and crops.
The Village Dormitories and the Training of Youth-Before Independence
The Oraons persistently struggled for material existence for mere food, raiment and shelter that the Oraon have to maintain throughout life. Even his children have to participate in this struggle as early in life as they can. Under such conditions of life, it is no wonder that the Oraon should have remained in the same low level of culture for centuries. It is only after their contact with the Britishers, the missionaries and after independence that they are improving their material conditions.

The Bachelors Dormitories
The only indigenous institution for the training of youth was the primitive Jonkh Erpa or Bachelors Hall as it is called. It was fit for the savage stage of the Oraon society when hunting was the principal occupation of the people, is now in many respects an anachronism.

Jonkh Erpa is better known to us as Dhum-kuria or Dhamgar-kuria, the hut of the Dhangars or young men. In the beginning it was an economic, social and religious institution. It was a useful institution for training young men for food quest, social and religious duties, customs and beliefs of the Oraons. It was also meant to train young men as good hunters.

The Dhumkuria House - it is a simple mud house with tiled roof. The house consists of a spacious rectangular room, or rather hall where the boys all sleep on a bed of palm leaf mat annually presented to them by the maidens of the village, with occasionally bundles of straw for pillow. In winter nights logs of wood kept burning at the end of the hall to keep it warm. Although the interior of the house is usually kept fairly clean and tidy, its surroundings are in a most filthy and unsanitary condition. Inside it there is a stinking drain for the boys to use as toilet and latrine. The Dhumkuria boys often use it but seldom clean it. In other villages earthen pot (gagri) is kept in the hall for the above purpose and the younger boys have to throw away its liquid contents every morning. In some Uraon villages this dirt and filth is mixed with the cattle feed in the belief that it will give strength to the cattle. Adjoining to Dhumkuria is the Akhra or dancing ground of the village. In western Chhattisgarh in the Bastar region there are ghotuls of Mariyas and Muriyas for young boys and girls.

Constitution and Management
(a) Age of the Dhangars
An Oraon boy is admitted into the membership of the Dhumkuria fraternity at about eleven or twelve years of age. Previously the age used to be higher. But coming in contact with the Hindu society, the age has been reduced, as among the Hindus who resided in their village's child marriage was common.
(b) Classes of Dhangars
The Dhumkuria boys are divided into three classes or grades (tuts) called respectively; (i) Puna Jokhars or novices who are dhangars of the first or lowest grade. (ii) Majh Turia Jokhars or members of the intermediate class of dhangars of the second grade. (iii) Koha Jokhars or the oldest Dhangars who belong to the third or the highest grade. The duration of the membership of each of the first two classes is three years, whereas the third or highest class of Dhangars are supposed to continue as members until their marriage. But as Oraon boys are now married quite young, they retain their memberships to all intents and purposes until they have one or two children by their wives. Thus the ages of the Dhumkuria boys range from about eleven or twelve years to twenty years and over.

(c) Supervision and Control
The supervision and control of the Dhumkuria fraternity rests in the hands of a boy who is appointed as a Mahato or headman of the Dhangars. He is called as Dhangar-Mahato. He is assisted in his work by another boy who is appointed as the Chalabu or Kotwar of the Dhangars. The Dhangar-Mahato has to instruct Dhumkuria boys in their social and religious duties and the Kotwar or Chalabu has particularly to attend to the Jatras and dances and to see the boys are properly decked with flowers and fineries for the Jatras. He has also to collect flowers for the purpose. He may compel unwilling boys to attend dances and Jatras, and for that purpose may punish disobedient members by lashing them with the bindi or plaited straw whip that is the insignia of his office. In fact something like military discipline is imposed. Even the Dhangar Kotwar is liable to be fined by the Dhangar Mahato if a boy is found absent from a dance without sufficient cause.

In a large village consisting of more than one tola (Muhalla) as many Dhangar-Mahatos as and as many Dhangar-Kotwars are appointed for the Dhumkuria, as there are tolas in the village. These officers are known as the Mukhias or leaders of the Dhumkuria fraternity, and are changed every three years. About half a dozen flags and flag staffs, three or four nageras (large drums), two or three dholaks (small drums) and in some villages, a narsingha (brass horn) or a Jhanj (brass cymbal) or both, form the property of the Dhumkuria, and are used at dances, festivals, hunting expeditions and Jatras.

(d) Election of Dhangar Mukhias or Headmen
The formalities connected with the appointment of these Mukhias or headmen of these Dhangars are very simple. In the month of Chait or Baisakh (April) and in some villages in Magh the village headmen through the messenger or Gorait, send round information to the villagers that on a particular day the Mukhia-handia ceremony (the drinking of rice beer) in honour of Mukhias will be celebrated and they must brew rice beers (handia) for the occasion. On the day thus appointed one female member from each Oraon family of the village takes a pot of rice beer to the place fixed for the ceremony and leaves it there. This ceremony is generally held on an open space close to the village (basti). There the men of the village assemble and take their seats on palm leaf mats. No women may attend the
meeting except old women. When old women happen to attend they sit a little apart from the men. The Dhumkuria boys serve rice beer in leaf cups (dona) to all present. The village headmen and the other elders of the village now hold a consultation amongst themselves as to which of the Dhumkuria boys should be elected Mahato and Kotwar respectively.

An elderly Oraon is also selected for the office of Pelo-Kotwar or watchman of the unmarried girls. His duty is to look after the conduct of the unmarried Oraon girls and to supply them with flowers to decorate themselves for the Jatras. He is also responsible for any improper relations between a Dhumkuria girl and a non-Oraon young man or an Oraon youth of prohibited degrees of relationship.

Mahto and Kotwar and the Pelo-Kotwar are called out by name and made to sit down in a line before the village elders. In some villages they are adorned with flowers. Now the outgoing Dhangar-Mahto and Dhangar-Kotwar and Pelo-Kotwar each hand over to his successors a leaf-cup (dona) filled with rice beer. When the newly elected Mahto and Kotwar have drunk this rice beer (the drinking itself constitutes them respectively Mahto and Kotwar) the outgoing Dhangar-Kotwar hands over to the new Kotwar his bindi or plaited straw-cord. Before parting with this insignia of the Kotwar office, the outgoing Kotwar takes care to give two lashes with it on the hip of his successors. The original idea that gave rise to this custom was probably to make a magical transference of his own power and authority to his successor. After this the outgoing Kotwar again hands over two donas of rice beer to the newly appointed Kotwar. Finally the new Kotwar salutes each member of the assembly and resumes his seat. The outgoing Mahto in handing over charge of his office to the new Mahto addresses him as follows: "Take care that no one may find fault with you or with the boys. When an offence is committed by any of the boys, deal out even justice to all parties concerned and when you feel perplexed as to what to do in any matter, refer the matter to the village Mahto. When relatives of any Oraon family of the village come to the village see that they do not find cause to complain of deficient hospitality. When presents of sacrificial or other meat (sandes) have to be distributed to the villagers or sent to other villages, see that the Dhangars do their duty properly."

(e) Admission into the Dhumkuria Sandhi-Sandra

Once in every three years new boys are admitted into the Dhumkuria. On the days of new moon in the month of Magh (January-February), the Dhumkuria boys go out after breakfast to some neighboring jungle, with their bows and arrows, axes and spears, sticks and cudgels. In the evening they return to the outskirts of their village with such games as they may have secured. The younger boys clean on open space and dress the meat of the animals or birds killed in the chase. In the meanwhile, the older boys hold a consultation amongst themselves and determine which boy of the village may be newly admitted into the Dhumkuria. When they have come to a decision, they keep apart for each boy to be newly admitted a few small pieces of flesh closed up in an envelope made of sal leaves stitched together with splinters of wood. The rest of the flesh is either roasted or fried and is eaten
by the party. They then enter the village and at the house of each boy to be newly admitted to the Dhumkuria, leave leaf-envelope containing meat and intimate their decision as to the admission of the boy. The eating of meat by the boy appears to be the first step towards effecting an ‘union’ of the boy with the members of the Dhumkuria.

(f) ‘Eda Mokhot or the Goat Eating’ Ceremony
This is celebrated in the month of Magh on the full moon day. The boy is formally admitted into the fraternity by being allowed to eat in company with the members of the Dhumkuria the meat of a goat sacrificed that day to Chandi the spirit who presides over hunting and war. That evening the newly admitted boy formally take part in the dancing at the Akhra and then sleep in the Dhumkuria together with the older boys. And this completes their unification with the Dhumkuria fraternity.

(g) Observances
The avowed objective of the Dhumkuria boys is their religious and magico-religious observances and to secure success in hunting and to ensure the multiplication of male progeny. From the day following their admission into the Dhumkuria, the novices are given instructions in their religious and social duties.

(h) Magical Jug of Water
Every Dhangar has on his admission to provide himself with three new earthen jugs (chuka) in his hands to the spring (dari) of some neighboring village. There he stealthily fills his jugs with water mixed with mud from the dari. He also picks up and puts into his jugs one or more torn bits of sal-leaves which are always found in and about village spring; for whenever a new bride or the mother of a new born babe first goes to a spring to draw water from it she must go there with a sal leaf containing vermillion diluted in oil to mark the stone of the spring with. The reasons assigned for taking water mud etc, from the spring of another village instead of their own village spring, are that this will enable them apparently through sympathetic magic to secure game from beyond the limits of their own village. That game from other directions will come towards them and that at the great tribal hunts they will be able to steal an advantage over huntsmen from other villages. Leaves of mango trees, which have not borne fruits, yet (dinda or virgin leaves) are also put into the Jug concealed in a place to avoid the eye of the mischievous persons falling on the Jugs. Every night he examines his Jugs to judge from their contents if Chandi (goddess) is pleased with him. The Dhangar Mahto himself similarly examines the Jug of each boy once a week to see the boy has been earnest in the sewa or service.

In the beginning of the Phagun or March month at midnight the Dhangar-Mahato with the other boys of the Dhumkuria goes to the twin or plot of upland where Chandi is represented by a stone. There the novices offer up the contents of the earthen jugs, water and all to the Chandi spirit. The water in the tank is poured over the stone, and the sal-leaves as well as the dead animals and insects in the jugs are buried underneath the Chandi-stone. It is believed that this serves to rouse the Spirit into activity. There the Dhangar-Mahato proclaims to the boys that the
Phagun-Sendra or the hunting excursion of the month of Phagun or March will be undertaken on that day week.

The Ideals of a Socialistic Society-Ancient or Tribal Communism

(Social Activities, Duties, Privileges, Dances, Songs, Customs, Festivals of the Oraon Youth)

The Oraon society was thus based on the communist of socialist ideal of each according to his ability to each according to his needs. The youth were to work not only for themselves but also for others; the children, the women, the old and infirm and those unable to work.

During such hunting expeditions a quarrel may ensure between the hunters leading to grievous hurt or even to death. The Oraons have their own courts to decide such matter. The elders of the Parha attend such courts.

An animals and fowls bagged by the hunters of a particular Parha are divided in equal divisions between such of the villages of the Parha as have joined the hunt. The Kotwar of the Parha is given a handful of meat out of each such division and the hunter who has actually killed a particular game gets a leg of such game. As each division of the meal is taken up, the man who takes it up receives from the Parha-Kotwar a stroke of his stick. This is probably meant to impart strength to the person by a process of magic transference of mana.

When the hunters from each village approach the limits of their village they subdivide their division of game into as many shares as there are families of Oraons in the village. Even families whose members consist of only women and old men and children who could not take part in the hunt, are each given a share of the meat.

(1) The spring hunt or Phagua sendra - On the evening before the appointed day, office bearers for the hunting expedition are elected in the following manner. The blind folded boy standing at the centre of the hall sets a lorha (a round stone used in grinding curry-spices) rolling. The boys throw grains of rice on the lorha invoking Chandi Spirit to find out the ‘flag-bearer’. The boy at whose feet the lorha stops is elected as the flag -bearer or Jhandi-dharoa for the hunting excursions of the year. By the same process they elect the Nindaru or sleeper whose business is to pretend to fall asleep on the jungle path. According to Oraons the Nindaru lies down in this manner so that deer and other game may, by sympathetic magic, be found lying asleep in the jungle when the party arrive there. The Khandua whose duty is to carry on his shoulders (Kandha) the game killed by the hunters. The Chekhel Uina whose duty is to place on the road stones which are supposed by a magical process to intercept all means of escape for the animals. The Chandi-Pahan or priest for the propitiation of the different Chandi Spirit i.e. the hunting (sikari) Chandi, the Mountain (pahar pat) Chandi, and so forth.
(2) **The summer hunt or Baisakh**—In the month of Baisakh (April-May) the Oraons have the greatest hunt of the year. This is known as the Koha Sendra or Great Hunt, and also as Bisu Sikar. The information is sent round beforehand on market days to the different market places. It is the Kotwar of the Parha who carries the information from village to village and is paid one anna or so by every village for his trouble. He goes wit his drum (nagera) and proclaims that it is the order of the Parha Raja that the Oraons of the Parha are to start on their annual Bisu-Sikar excursion on such and such a day. People of several Parhas with flags and drums (nagera) and bugles (narsingha) go out together to some distant forest or hill-range armed with their bows and arrows, spears and sword, axes and clubs of various shapes and sizes. A few hunters take trained dogs with them, which they hold in leashes. No woman is permitted to go about with pitchers for drawing water while the hunters start on their excursion. Before the hunters leave the village, the women must have returned home with water from the village-spring or stream, or else they may not go out for fetching water until the party has left the village.

When the men are out hunting the Oraon women of the village behave like men. Several of them dress like men go about with men’s lathis or sticks in their hands, and use the jargon of the males, they say to each other ‘gucha ho becha hol’ (come along let us dance) as men say, instead of saying ‘guchae bechae do!’ as women ordinarily say to each other. The before the party start on their expedition, the office—bearers are elected in the same manner as Phagua-Sendra.

(3) **Chandi as the giver of Progeny**—The Chandi is the chief deity of the Oraons. She is worshipped not only for success in hunting and war but also to give strong and powerful progeny so that the Oraon Society gets good hunters. Chandi is worshipped in various ways for the multiplication of male progeny.

(4) **Training in Social Duties**—Besides qualifying young men for the work of providing food for the family and of maintaining the stability of the community by increasing its numerical strength, the Dhukuria organization is further designed to make the young men otherwise useful and serviceable members of the community. When there is a wedding or other feast in the house of an Oraon of the village, it is the young men of the Dhukuria who have to dress the animals and fowls killed for the occasion and to act as cooks and otherwise look to the comforts of the guests. When guests visit an Oraons house, where there is no adequate accommodation, they are accommodated in the Dhukuria, and the younger members of the Dhukuria have to shampoo the legs of the guests. The younger boys serve the elder boys in various ways. Something like military discipline is enforced in the Dhukuria. They work for the Dhukuria house and see that fuel and provisions are well stored.
(5) **Rule of Fidelity** - The Oraon boys and girls are free to choose their partners but in the case of infidelity the boys are punished by a fine by the Dhangar Mahto.

(6) **The Farewell Feast** - On the day of the marriage of a Dhumkuria boy, his parents hand over one Kat of rice (about 60kg) to the maiden of the village. The girls pound the rice, boil it and make it into small round cakes. The bachelors fry these cakes in oil supplied by the parents of the newly married young man. Then one of the leaf-cup is filled with cakes and is handed back to the maidens of the village, and the rest of the cakes are distributed amongst the members of the Dhumkuria.

(7) **Other duties of the Dhumkuria Bachelors** -
   
   (i) **Gathering Karanj fruits** - The Dhumkuria boys are privileged to collect once in a year the fruit from all the karanj trees of the village to whomsoever they may belong. The karanj seed are pressed into oil for lighting lamps to illuminate the akhara during dances in dark nights.

   (ii) **Gathering Mahua flowers** - The Dhumkuria boys are permitted to collect Mahua flower from all the Mahua trees. The Mahua flower is dried and liquor is distilled out of Mahua flower that is drunk during the festival.

   (iii) **Penalty for absence from Jatras** - If young men omit to attend the Jatra the young men of the village in which the Jatra is held would visit the absentee village on the morning of Jatra and as of right kill and carry away the pigs from that village. It is the Dhangar-Mahato who has to make good the loss caused to the owner of the pigs, for it was his duty to have seen that the boys under his charge had joined the Jatra which by ancient usage they were bound to join.

   (iv) **The Dhangars duties at wedding** - It is the duty of the Dhumkuria boys to act as cooks on the occasion of the wedding. On the days of the marriage, the members of the family cook the meals for the friend and relatives of theirs and for the guests it is the Dhumkuria boys of the village who have to cook for them.

   (v) **Driving away cattle diseases** - The magical ceremony is performed by the Dhumkuria boys to drive evil spirits infesting cattle. The village Kotwar informs all the villagers of the date so fixed for the ceremony.

   (vi) **Bird driving or Ora-Khedna** - The Dhangars go to the paddy field to drive away the birds that eat up paddy grains.

   (vii) **Mandar Sala** - The house where the Mandar is kept which are for Jatra.

   (viii) **Kohra and Chiura Mokhna** - They are brought by every Dhangar boy to a place fixed after Pusjatra. The meeting is held to
discuss the important matters of the village. After the meeting they feast with the deliciously prepared kohra and chiura.

(ix) **Mice-catching** - One day in the month of Magh, at an appointed place all the dhungars assemble with the mice collected by him. The Mukhias weigh the mice collected by each boy. If this falls short of the required measure the boy has to pay a fine. When all the mice have been weighed and fines realized, the mice are roasted, and liquor purchased with the fines realized, and all the villagers have a merry time of it. This feast is like the feast of chiura and kohra considered as sacramental meals.

(x) **Bhaiyari (friendship)** - It is on this occasion that the young bachelors of the village have to enter into the ‘sangi’ form of friendship with the young bachelors of the other village. After the evening meal they all dance together until the following morning. The Mukhias or headmen of the Dhumkuria supervise the feast.

(xi) **Khaora (sandes)** - when a village Panchayat imposes a fine on any Oraon young man of the village for some sexual offence such as the abduction of a married Oraon girl, intrigue with a girl of the same clan or with a girl of forbidden degrees of relationship, the portions of the meat of pig or goat purchased with the fine are sent through the dhungars by Dhangar-Mahtos to the dhungars of the other villages is known as khaoro or sandes.

(xii) **The maiden’s dormitory (Pelo-Erpa)** - The dormitory for oraon maidens is not like the bachelors’ dormitory, a public building and its location on is not supposed to be known to any one except its inmates and to those of the bachelors’ dormitory. There are no office bearers but the elders of the village appoint an elderly Pelo Kotwar. This Pelo Kotwar is responsible for any of the scandal connected with the maidens of the village. He is paid by the village.

(8) **Duties and Privileges of the Maidens**

(i) **The maidens’ presents of mats to the bachelors** - Every maiden has to prepare a patia or palm leaf mat for the bachelor’s hall. These mats made by the maidens serve the Dhumkuria bachelors for beds for one year.

(ii) **The maidens’ present barley shoots to the bachelors** - In the month of Bhado (August) seven days before the Karam festival the Oraon maidens scatter handful of barely-seeds on the sand and sprinkle water every day. On the morning following the Karam festival the maidens take up these germinated barley-shoots to distribute to the young Oraons of the village at the akhra. When the young men have received these mystic presents, the youth of both sexes dance together at the akhra. This ceremony is designed to
(iii) **Preparation of wedding cakes** - The service of the Oraon maidens are indispensable at Oraon weddings to pound rice and boil it and make it into small balls which are dignified with the name of wedding-cakes (pithas). These pithas are distributed to all friends and relatives who attend the wedding.

(iv) **The duties of the maidens to welcome the bridal party** - The maidens as well as the young bachelors of a village where a bridal procession is expected, go in a body up to the boundary of the village singing and dancing to greet the bridal party. When the actual wedding ceremony is over and the bride and bridegroom are being anointed with oil and turmeric, the maidens of the village come to them in a body. The bridegroom’s party makes a present to them of a quantity of rice-flour brought with them from the village. If the quantity is not enough the maidens will have to be satisfied by the bridegroom’s people by paying them the appropriate price of the balance of rice-flour demanded.

(v) **The maidens Pancha** - An Oraon who requires the services of the maidens of his village to reap his paddy crops applies to the Barka Dhagrin (senior maidens) for ‘pancha’ service. All the maidens go in a group for cutting paddy. By the way of remuneration they are given one goat or pig and meals for the days they are employed. Besides this the maidens are given their share of rice beer.

(vi) **Women (Jani) Sikar or Mukka Sendra** - Once in twelve years the Oraon maidens go in for hunting expedition armed with lathis (sticks), spears and axes, and wearing pagris or turbans on their heads, and pechouris or cloth-sheets wound round their bodies in the manner of men. One female from each Oraon family must join the hunt. This expedition is the remembrance of the victory of Rohtas where women had dressed up like men and defeated their enemies.

(vii) **Women forbidden to touch the plough** - The women cannot plough if they are found to do so they are fined severely.

**Dances**

Oraons are great dancers, both male and female dance sometimes from the evening to the whole night. Ordinarily after their evening meals they start dancing. The Dhargar Kotwar and other elders train the younger in the art of dancing. Through these dances the Oraons express all the emotions and the feeling of their lives.

(I) **The winter and spring dances** - The most important incidents in the life of the Oraons are love and marriage, fighting, hunting and agricultural operation. In every season of the year there is appointed work for the Oraon so also seasonal
dances and songs. The Oraons year begins after the harvesting of his low land rice in November-December. The period from the paddy harvest till the phagu festival in March, when operations for growing the next paddy crop have to be thought of once more is the merriest season of the year for the Oraons.

(2) The summer dances - This is the season when the Oraons granary is generally full and he has comparative leisure from work in the fields and it is now that Oraon young men and women engage in love and marriage. The Jatra Kharia dances are famous in which the younger men are arranged in a group separate from the girls and the style of dancing is expressive of a longing for union of one group with the other. In the Jatra Kharia dances the male and female dancers are generally intermixed and arranged in column one behind the other, each dancer clasping with his hand the left hand of the dancer in front who holds the clasped hands.

(3) The war dance- Tradition speaks of frequent warfare in the past between the Oraons of one Parha and another. The most important reason for these inter Parha wars was disagreement as to the right to gune. And at the Jeth Jatras, even to this day the Oraons celebrate the memory of those days. Often as the young men of each Parha enter the Jatra arena, they dance a war dance waving their long tapering parha-flags high up in the air and brandishing their sticks and clubs as in actual warfare.

(4) The rainy season dances
   (i) The Karam dance - After the Jeth Jatra in June the Jatra Kharia dances are given up and the Karam dances are taken and continued till September. The peculiar feature of the Karam dance is the graceful stooping posture of the youthful dancers. As the Oraons appear to have learnt the art of agriculture from the Hindus, so the Karam festival as well as the Karam dances and songs, which are appropriate to the cultivating season appears to have been borrowed from the Hindus.
   (ii) The autumn dance - From the second half of Aswin (September-October) the paddy crops begin to ripe. The day of anxious expectation is over. The ripening sheaves of paddy that now wave with the breeze and adorn the bosom of Mother-earth, gladden the hearts of the old and the young, and men and women once more prepare to work merrily side by side

(5) The social dances - The Marriage dance, Circular dance, the Jadur dance, the Jhumar dance (borrowed from the Hindus), Jarga, the Matha dances and the Kharia dance.

(6) The Khaddi Or Sarhul dance - There is a politicization of this dance - During election time these dances are politicized. Recently the M L A of the area Shri Ganesh Ram Bhagat was present during Sarhul festival. People from all places crowded in Bagicha. The Sarhul festival (April) partakes of the character of both the Jadur and the Kharia dances. Now and again the girls unclasp each other's hands with rhythm. In another variety of the Sarhul dance the boys and girls are arranged in row parallel
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columns advancing in the same direction. In this way they dance round and round the Akhra.

**Oraon Songs**
The Oraons have songs appropriate to each different class of their tribal dances. These different classes of songs are distinguished from one another chiefly by the differences in interval, rhythm, and modulation of the voice, and also by the peculiar vociferation with which a song or portion of a song is introduced or ended. It would seem that all Oraon songs were primarily meant to be sung in accompaniment to dances. And the different classes of songs are named after the different kinds of dances they accompany.

**Karam Song:**
 Urbarhi tangda banna kichri, koe cloth)  
Pachri hedde iki railing!  
Randi pachcho tangeda ledera kichri (Standing beside the wall)  
Rajham-rajhamra bheja bichii! (Joyfully dancing together)  
Choyoe randi pachcho tangeda! (Awake old widow's daughter)  
Chunjia laasa ka-dika mala? (Are you not going for husking?)  
Komarkhan mokhdi ghoro lekha khandirdi! (You eat koinar leaves and sleep like horse)  
Choyoe chunjia laasa ka-dika mala? (Are you getting up for husking or not?)

**Marriage Song:**
 Enghai rana guti baba hoe! (I'll my stay dear father)  
Ninghai erpa jhal-manjur-lekhro! (Your house will look like peacock feather)  
Baba hoe nighai erpa jhal-manjur-lekhro! (O father, your house will look like peacock feather)  
Engon bisoe hole baba hoe! (When you sell me dear father)  
Ninghae erpa rai-suna mano! (Your house will become desolate)  
Baba hoe rai-suna mano! (O father, house will become desolate)

**The Use of the Jatras**
Just as the success of an inter Parha hunting expedition in the month of May (the Bisu Sikar) is believed to induce an abundant paddy harvest, so it is believed that a successful Jeth Jatra in which there is a large gathering of Oraons foretell an abundance of paddy crops. It may also be noted that it is not permissible for an Oraon to execute a dance or sing a song not appropriate to the season, and should be found doing so in a village, the elders of the village would impose a fine upon him for such untimely songs or dances. This bore ill omen for a village as it is believed in consequence of this either the crops will fail or an epidemic break out among men or cattle. In some of the more important Jatras a very large number of Oraons assemble to this day.

In fact the Jatras of old would seem to have been the great Social Congress of the Oraons the first and the last attempt to maintain the solidarity of the tribe. The use of the benedictory 'Karsa' and invariable accompaniment of a marriage ceremony
and the dancing of the marriage dance may appear to point to the origin of this Jatra in a recognized necessity for tribal union. At any rate this custom would seem to support the supposition that it was at these Jaturas that originally young men would choose and take brides from clans other than their own. The supposed magical influence of the tribal dances over crops and games is clear. The sticks and clubs carried by the young men at the Kharia dances in imitation of hunters appear to be designed to secure by a process of homeopathic magic, success in hunting. And similarly the gaudy tufts of peacock feathers, the bushy tail of the yak, and the leafy twigs of the wild Khijur (palm) waved about by the male dancers at the Karam dances in imitation of ears of corn waving in the breeze, and also perhaps the tufts of feathers sticking out of chignon of the female dancers and looking like ears of corn shooting out of the standing paddy stalks, appear to be intended to ensure good crop. Although at the dances at the village Akhra you do not see these sticks and clubs, sailos and chawars being regularly used by the dancers. At the tribal dances on occasions of the Jaturas which have for one of their main objects magical control or on stimulation of Nature for the benefit of the Parhas or village concerned. We see hundreds of young men carrying sticks on their shoulders as they dance the Kharia dances and hundreds of young people waving sailos and chawars in their hands and some wearing tufts of feathers on their heads all making a brave show as they dance the Karam dances. 11

The female dancers at the Karam dance who thump the ground to imitate Ken gatherers apparently aim at securing success in fruit gathering. Dalton appears to have been mistaken in supposing that they thus pat the earth to make her fruitful. According to Oraon ideas it is the proper function of men and not of women to impregnate the earth. And this appears to be one of the reasons why the sowing of seeds (and now a days the ploughing of the ground too) may not be undertaken by women. As men propagate the human seed do it is they alone who may plough and sow corn-seeds to any purpose. As however it is the proper function of the women to nurse human bodies, so it is their proper business to transplant young paddy seedling after men have grown them. 12

The observant visitor to one of the more important Oraon Jaturas get some insight into the socio-politico and magico-religious life of the Oraons, just as at an Oraon village market he gets an idea of their economic life. The Parha flags with their socio political importance, the wooden animals and other emblems with their magico religious significance and the council of Parha elders are discussing topics of tribal interest.

**Early Stage of Oraon Society**

The main features of the village dormitories, the village dances and the Jatra festivals of the Oraon Youth take us back to early stage of human society, which the Oraons have outgrown. The sight of Oraon women eagerly running about from house to house and washing the feet of the different Oraon families of the village, eagerly going in for their sharers of the game, and even the dogs joyfully
sharing in the spoil brings before you the vision of the hunting stage of Oraon culture, when great must have been the rejoicing of their women and children as the men return home with the eagerly expected food that was to save their families from starvation. To this day the belief persists that the ill success of an Oraon village at the great annual summer hunt bodes famine and starvation for that village. And to ensure a plentiful paddy crop, bits of flesh of the deer bagged at the Bisu Sikar are minced and dried in the sun and carefully preserved in many Oraon families and at sowing time this meat boiled with pulses is eaten as a sacramental meal by many an Oraon on the day that he first sows paddy in his field. In some places bits of dried meat are mixed with the paddy seed to be sown in the fields. The ceremonial fishing, bird chasing, mice catching and fruit gathering customs are survivals of the same ancient society, which is now no longer in existence. At that time agriculture was unknown.

Bagicha has little of that ancient past - Modernization, modern education, modern agriculture, cottage industries, the means of communications etc are fast changing the Oraon world.

Social Organization and Regulation of Tribal Life
The present social organization of the Oraons is the archaic organization of the ancient Oraon hunting communities adapted to the needs of the more complex agricultural village communities.

Totemism
Totemism which was the basis of the social and political organization of the Oraons in what may be roughly called the hunting and pastoral stages of Oraon culture still form the fundamental feature of the Oraon social organization in so far as kinship, marriage and relations of the sexes are concerned. For purposes of exogamy the whole tribe is to this day divided into a number of clans or gotras. Individual totems, sex totems or associated totems are unknown. The fauna and flora of their past and present habitats naturally supply the bulk of the totem names. With the acquisition of knowledge of agriculture and the use of metals, a few new totem names have been since added. The existing Oraon totem so far as known to us may be classified as follows:

1. **Beast Totems** - Addo (ox), Alla (dog), Bando (wild cat), Barwa (wild dog), chilra (squirrel), chiglo (jackal), Ergo (rat), Halman (baboon), Khoea (wild dog), Kissi or suar (pig), Lakra (tiger), Osga (field rat), Runda (fox), Tigga (a species of monkey), Hirk (young mice), Gari (common monkey).

2. **Bird Totems** - Bakula (paddy bird), Dhechua (a small black bird with a long tail), Garwa (stork), Gede (duck), Gidhi (vulture), Gislihi (a species of bird), Khakha (raven), Kerketta (hedge sparrow), Kokro (cock), Orgor (hawk), Tirkumar (the tithio charai bird), Toppo or long Toppo (a species of long tailed bird).
3. Fish and other aquatic totems- Aind (subdivision of the cel), Beah (a large fish with thorns on the back), Ekka (Tortoise), Godo (crocodile), Ken (a species of fish), Khalkho (a species of fish), Kinduar (a species of fish), Kosuar (a species of fish), Linda (a subdivision of cel), Lita (a species of fish), Minj (a species of fish), Sal (a species of fish), Tiru (a species of fish).

4. Reptile Totem - Khetta or Nag (Cobra)

5. Vegetable Totems - Bakhla (a species of grass), Bara or Bar (ficus indica), Basa (a kind of tree), Gondrari (tree), Kanda (sweet potato), Kaithi (a curry vegetable), Kendi (a kind of tree), Keond (a kind of fruit), Khoksa (a curry vegetable), Khes (paddy), Kinda (date palm), Kujur (a kind of fruit), Kundri (a curry vegetable), Madgi (the Mahua tree), Minjniar (a kind of creeper), Parsa (fruit of the Krum tree), Putri (a kind of tree), Rori (a kind of tree), Angal Toppo (a kind of bush).

6. Mineral Totems- Panna (iron), Bekh (salt).

7. Place Totems- Bandh (an embanked reservoir of water), Jubhi (a marsh or surface spring).

8. Split Totems- Amri (rice soup), Kis-potta (pigs entrails).

**Traditional Origin of Particular Totems**

The totemic animal or plant is believed to have helped or protected the human ancestor of the clan or been of some peculiar service to him. Thus it is said that while an Oraon had fallen asleep under a kujur plant, a flexible twig of the plant entwined round his body and protected him from being harmed. Accordingly the man took the kujur plant for his totem and his descendents now form the Kujur clan.

Some legends on the other hand refer the origin of a few other clan names to some help or protection extended by a man to some animal or plant. Thus it is said that while a certain Oraon of olden times was about to catch a tortoise the latter exclaimed, "I am your jat (caste fellow)" and so the Oraon desisted from catching it, and his descendents came to form the tortoise clan.

The origin of the kiss-potta (pigs entrails) clan is stated to be as follows. An Oraon killed a pig and ate its flesh and threw away its entrails but the slain pig was soon afterwards found moving about in actual bodily form. Henceforth pig's entrails became taboo to the slayer of the pig and his descendents and they came to constitute the kiss-potta clan.

The origin of the khalkho Fish clan is that an Oraon was fishing in a stream, a khalkho fish, which was caught in his net managed to escape. Henceforward the khalkho fish became taboo to the man and his descendents who came to be called khalkho clan.

(1) Totem Taboos: Sex Taboo

Although the members of an Oraon clan do not believe in their actual descent from their totem animal or plant, they regard themselves as descendant of a
common ancestor, and as such blood relatives between whom marriage or sexual intercourse is not permissible. Although an Oraon will strongly protest that such a union is an incest (a brother-sister union), which can never be permitted. But in such cases of union which are very few. You are sure to find on enquiry that some premarital intrigue leading to inconvenient consequences resulted in a permanent union, which was ultimately sanctioned by the village and the Parha to which the man belonged. After having paid a fine and provided a feast to the Parha brethren the offending pair are formally readmitted to the tribe and their union thus legalized. Their sons are considered as good as legal heirs born of lawful wedlock. The Oraons think that such a union cannot last long and that one of them will die within a few years of the union. Instances though rare have occurred in which a man has married a woman of his own clan in ignorance of her real gotras but when the real facts were discovered the pair were excommunicated and had to gain readmission into the tribe by a fine and a feast to the members of the Parha. As totemism is now a dying institution among the Oraons except in its relation to the marriage you will find many Oraons of the present generation ignorant of the gotras of such near relatives as their mothers’ father and the husband of either their mother’s sister or father’s sister. Although an Oraon may not marry into his own totem, he may marry into the totem of his mother.

(2) Food Taboo on Totem

As a general rule, an Oraon must abstain from eating or otherwise using, domesticating, killing, destroying, maiming, hurting or injuring the animal or plant or other objects that forms his totem; nor must he use anything made of it or obtained from it, and, when practicable, he will prevent others from doing so in his presence. In the case of tree totems the men of the clan will neither go under the shade of the tree or cut or burn its wood nor use its produce in any shape. When however, the totem is an animal or plant or other thing which forms an indispensable article of diet or household use, consideration of necessity or expediency appear to have introduced a modification of the taboo against using it. Thus instead of abstaining altogether from use of paddy, Oraons of the Khes or Paddy clan abstain only from eating the thin scum that forms on the surface of the rice soup. Similarly instead of avoiding the use of salt altogether, Oraons of the salt clan have only to abstain from taking raw salt unmixed with any food or drink but may take food or drink to which salt had been added in cooking or in which raw salt has been mixed before hand. In the same way men of the iron clan have only to abstain from touching iron with their lips or tongue but may use iron in any way they like, and men of the pig clan may eat all parts of the pig except only the head. Men of the Bara clan may not eat the Bara fruit by splitting it up in two but are allowed to eat it whole.

(3) Multiple Taboos

If in the cases of certain clans, the totem taboo has been thus modified to suit the convenience of men of the totem in a few cases, on the other hand the taboo has been extended by the law of similarity to other objects that have a real or fancied
resemblance to the totem or may happen to bear the same or even a similar name as the totems. Thus men of the tiger clans (lakra) besides the various taboos they have to observe in connection with the tiger and the wolf, have also to abstain from eating the flesh of the squirrel in as much as the squirrel skin is striped like the tigers. Men of the kerketta clan in addition to the usual taboos with regard to the kerketta, observe a similar taboo with regard to the Dhichua or king crow, which has a long tail.

In some localities again an Oraon of the tiger clan may not marry in the month of Magh (December-January) as the word Magh rhymes with Bagh, the Hindi name for a tiger. Similarly a man of the Monkey (Gari) clan besides observing the taboo against killing, hunting, domesticating or eating the flesh of a monkey, have also to abstain from sitting under the shade of a Gari tree, or cutting or burning its wood. Men of the Khakha (raven) clan, besides observing the usual taboo with regard to the raven of the crow, have further to abstain from touching with their lips or tongues the foam of a river, for such foam is also called khakhamandi in Oraon.

Men of the Tigga clan, besides observing the usual taboos regarding the baboon have also to observe similar taboos with regard to mice (Chutia-Musa) because they resemble the pig in its colour. Similar myths exist about other clans also.

(4) Religious Aspects of Oraon Totemism

Although the general attitude of the Oraon to his clan totem is that of a man to his equal as friend and ally. There is a practice still existing that appears to be a survival of a period. When at any rate a few of the more powerful among the totems were evolving if not in actual deities, at any rate in fetishes believed to bring success in hunting or war. Here and there, at an Oamon Jatta, we see the young men in a village carrying on their shoulders a wooden plank on which stands a tiger, or a pig, or an ox or other animal or a bird made of wood or clay or perhaps a wooden tortoise or a fish made either of wood or of brass. If we accompany alone such Jatra party from their own village up to the Jatta ground we will find that these supposed fanciful emblems are actually treated almost as deities and propitiated with sacrifices. Before such a Jatra party live at their own village, we see the village priest religiously putting vermillion marks on it, sacrificing a chicken and offering a little rice beer to this figure of a tortoise or bird, tiger or some other animal.

(5) Rule of Clan in Marriage

Marriage among the Oraons is governed by the rule of clan exogamy, genealogical or blood relationship upto three generations is now generally considered a bar to marriage even with a member of a different clan. The marriage is perhaps the greatest of occasions in an Adivasi life, says Dr. Philip Ekka. Marriage negotiations are conducted by parents through intermediaries. Omens are watched during these negotiations. After a number of exchange visits of the two families, the consent of the boy and girl to proceed with the negotiations is asked in the lotapani ceremony. At the central ceremony the
partners express their marriage consent publicly by putting ‘sindur’ marks on the partners forehead.

The Oraons practise adult, monogamous marriages within their tribe but outside their own clan and beyond three degrees of generation with collateral relatives. 14

(6) Rights and Privileges

The Oraon mother is considered to have very little right over her children. The father is the lord of the family has absolute right. But in case (his wife) the mother of his children deserts him and remarries she generally manages to take away the younger children with her. But when such a son becomes old enough to cultivate his lands (at about 14 years) he generally goes over to the father’s place and ask for his share of property and if the father objects to give him, the village Panchayat when appealed to by the son makes the father give him a share of the family land.

The mother has the right to receive cloth known as mothers’ cloth from the bridegroom. The grand mother also receives during the marriage a similar present of a cloth called ‘aji ledra’.

The father receives cattle or cash during marriage. The father may give his son in adoption to another man. But this practice is much abused nowadays.

(7) Rules Regarding Partition of Property

Should the father under certain circumstances refuse to partition the family property a contingency that rarely happens, the son convenes a Panchayat and the father generally submits to its award. In Partition made during the father’s lifetime, a share equal to that of a son’s in movable personal as well as immovable (real) property is allotted to the father. Generally when a partition is demanded by the sons on the father marrying a second wife. The sons generally take care to have the partition made before a son is born to the second wife, for unborn children even though in the womb are entitled to no prospective share.

The fathers’ share is on his death divided by the sons amongst themselves according to the rules of inheritance. But if the father lived with any of the sons in particular and such son looked after his comforts during life and paid his funeral expenses he inherits the fathers’ share to the exclusion of the other sons.

The Customary Village Panchayat is different from the Present Constitutional Panchayat

The common will of the community is when required, expressed by the village Panch. This Panchayat may be termed as the caste Panchayat or Panchayat of the Oraons. The authority of the Panch in all matters of public interest or private right was up till recently considered supreme. And to this day the orthodox formula for an oath amongst the Oraons is “I swear by Dharmes (God) in heaven and the Panch on earth”. Disputes about partition of family property, certain offences against marriage, suspected case of witchcraft and sometimes even cases of assault and theft are still submitted to the Panch for its decision.
(1) Procedure of Judgment
The aggrieved person verbally complains to the village Mahato and village Pahan. The elders of the village assemble at the village Akhra or some other appointed place. The village Gorait summons the disputing parties before the assembly. The Pahan or the Mahato informs the defendant of the substance of the complaint against him and hears his answer and if necessary takes evidence. In dispute regarding partition of property, the Panchs divide the property in accordance with tribal custom and each party pays two or three rupees to the Panch for their trouble. This money is spent in liquor.

In case of tort or crime fine and ex-communication are the only penalties that the Panch may now a days inflect. In cases of alleged witchcraft, however persons adjudged guilty have been severely thrashed and driven out with bag and baggage from the village, and sometimes even beaten to death.

Before the British courts were firmly established, a modified form of blood revenge was formally sanctioned by the Panch in cases of murder, grievous hurt, and the like. Thus when a man killed another or broke another's arm or leg the Panch would hand him over to the Khunt-brethren of the murdered or injured person to be killed or his arm or a leg broken, as the case might be. In case of theft, the thief is beaten as well as fined. Adultery is regarded as a form of theft and the adulterer is severely thrashed and fined as well. If the adulterer belongs to a different village the thrashing is generally severe and occasionally fatal. And the Panch of the offender's village on being complained to by the other village usually impose a fine on the adulterer. Fines imposed on a culprit are spent in a feast with plenty of liquor. Except cases relating to witchcraft and certain social or other taboos all offenses are regarded as private wrongs against the community.

(2) Contracts
On cases relating to contracts, specific performance is when possible, enforced or damages awarded. But the orders of the Panch now a day often disregarded. Contracts among the Oraons are even to this day generally not written but acted. Thus a lease of a land is made by the leasor handing over a clod of earth (which symbolizes land) to the leasee, a contract of sale of cattle is entered into by handing over to the buyer a few blades of grass (which symbolize so many heads of cattle) a contract of payment of bride price is made by the bridegrooms father or other relative handing over a number of baris (which symbolizes so many rupees) to the bride's father or other relative, and a contract of service is made by the mistress of the house anointing the head of the intended servant with oil and making a present of a few piece and entertaining him to a feast and thus signifying that he would receive food, lodging and some pay. Such contracts are naturally difficult to prove in a court of law. In case of desertion by a wife without sufficient reason Oraon custom allows the aggrieved husband to seize and carry away one or two buffaloes or bullocks from the house of the wife's parents unless the latter return bride price paid by the husband on the occasion of his marriage with their daughter.
(3) Breach of Taboos
Cases against sexual taboos or ‘caste’ taboo, which requires to be punished with excommunication, are decided by the Parha Panch. But offences against other taboos are decided by the village Panch. Thus when a female drives the plough, or thatches the roof of a house the village Panch inflicts such punishment as they think proper. Breach of certain taboos such as those against touching a baenali are expiated for in the family circle as it concerns only the family in question. And breaches of certain other taboos such as uttering the name of a certain persons, place or thing considered of bad omen are not punished at all as they affect only the offender himself.

(4) Ordeals
Certain methods are employed by the Panch or by private individuals to determine the guilt or innocence of an accused person when a person is suspected of theft. Cow dung is sometimes boiled in water and the suspect is made to dip one of his arms into the boiling hot liquid. It is believed that if a man is guilty his arm will get burned, otherwise it will come out unscathed. Another ordeal sometimes employed is to put successively three small ladlefuls of burning charcoals on the palm of the suspect's hand. If the man is guilty his arm will get burnt. In such a case the person is regarded as accused and his guilt is established.

(5) Oaths
The most effective oath administered by the Panch to a party or a witness in a case is to make him to take up in his hands a small quantity of paddy, a little cow dung and a clod of earth and place this on his head. It is emphatically impressed by the Panch on the deponent, and indeed it is firmly believed that a man deposing falsely with these things on his head is sure to suffer loss of crops or of cattle or of land. The paddy placed on the deponent's head symbolizes crops, the cow dung symbolizes cattle, and the clod of earth symbolizes land. Such are some of the social institutions that have helped in producing a genuine social and psychological unity, a common sacramental life in all the members of an Oraon village-community.

(6) Oraon Society a much better Peaceful Society based on Quick Justice
Modern societies are suffering from what Marx calls anonymity what other writers call alienation. The Oraon society or any tribal society imparts justice very quickly though the present day societies may think them as crude. The modern courts do not impart justice for years and courts are very costly, very delaying procedures are adopted. Thus the justice delayed is justice denied and costly justice is no justice. The courts rather sell justice and those who can afford can get any judgment they like. The tribals dispense justice with amazing speed and to the satisfaction of all.

The Parha Federation and the Parha Panchayat
(1) The Parha
In time the villages felt the necessity of working together in larger wholes for purposes of self-protection against natural and supernatural foes. And as a result
arose the Parha organization modeled on the Oraon hunting groups though formed not upon the principle of association of kindred but upon the basis of local contiguity. The Parha as it now exists is a confederacy of a number of neighbouring villages with a central organization known as the Parha Panch. In the Parha organization we find the ancient spirit of the clan group clothed in a new body suited to the new environment and changed conditions of life. Although in the outer form of the organization in the names of its different functionaries and the nature of their formal functions, we see the influence of the Aryan Hindu monarchical system in its inner soul, in its ruling idea, its aims and objectives and the methods of pursuing such objectives we recognize characteristic institutions of the Dravidian Oraons who is essentially a democrat and an animist.

(2) Constitution of the Parha

Each Oraon Parha consists of a number of villages. One of the village is called the Raja (king) village, another the Dewan (Prime Minister) village and third the Panrey (clerk of the Raja) village, a forth the Kotwar (Bailiff) village and so on. In the villages there are no denominations as such known as Parja (subject) villages. The Raja village is the head village of the Parha; some headman of this village presides at meetings of the Parha Panch. The Pahan of this village or in his absence the Mahato may act as the Kartaha, and in his absence any elderly Bhuinhar of the village may be chosen to officiate as the Kartaha at a social or a socio-religious ceremony of the Parha.

The Mahato or other headman of the Kotwar village officiates as the Kotwar of the Parha. An iron spear with a long bamboo handle is ordinarily carried by him to a Parha meeting as his insignia of office. Now a day sometimes only a thick bamboo staff is used instead of a spear. The Parha Kotwar, while distributing the game bagged during a hunt gives a stroke of his bamboo stick to each hunter as the latter takes up his share of the game and thereby would appear to mysteriously impart ‘mana’ to the hunter and the straw whip (koora) used by the Dhangar Kotwar to maintain discipline among the young bachelors during the dances, and the whip made of ‘sabai’ grass used by the spirit-doctor to maintain discipline among his disciples and also to induce spirit possession, would appear to have been in their estimation rods of occult power. The villagers use their own badges and flags distinct from other villages.

(3) Function of the Parha

The Parha system that grouped men of several clans together evidently marked a further advance on the former socio-political hunting clan groups or the later clan groups or the later village communities. It was a larger whole with a greater complexity of structure. The establishment and maintenance of law and order, and the settlement of disputes between one village and another, naturally comes to be added to the list of the recognized functions of the Parha council.

Each village would cooperate in the pursuit of the common objectives of the federation. These common objectives were broadly speaking the protection of the allied villages from human and non-human foes, from natural and supernatural
dangers that beset them on all sides and generally securing 'luck' for themselves. Each village was allotted special functions such as that of the 'Raja', the 'Dewan', the 'Kotwar' etc in the common work of the Parha. The different villages of the Parha still hunt together, fight together and on stated occasions meet together in dancing trysts, social feasts and the deliberative and judicial committees. But under present conditions there is little room for the existence of militant or even of law giving federations, and practically the only matters in which the authority of the Parha is still supreme are those relating to social and magico-religious taboos. The luck of the Parha is the main thing, which the Parha council has always had to look after and at the present day it is practically their only legitimate concern. It is the breach of certain social and magico-religious taboos that are believed to affect the 'luck' of the Parha and even of the tribe. Of such taboos the most important are those against sexual union between Oron and non-Oron or between Orons of the same clan of prohibited degrees of relationships and taking cooked food at the hands of a non-Oron. Again it is the proper observance of the Jatra dances and of the great annual hunts that ensures the 'luck' of the villages comprised in the Parha concerned. Besides cases of infringement of certain taboos, disputes regarding right to game, disputes regarding boundaries between two villages and such other matters as the village Panchayat cannot decide or in which their decisions are not accepted, are laid before the Parha Panch for deliberation and verdict. The Kotwar of the Parha has to execute the degrees of the Parha Panch. In recent times the tie that binds the different villages together appear to have slackened in our days.

(4) The Procedure to solve the Disputes
The Procedure followed by the Parha Panchayat in the hearing and decision of disputes is as follows. The headman of a village of the Parha submitting a complaint to the Parha Raja or Dewan Raja to inform the differing villages of the Parha that on a particular day the Parha Panch will meet in the village where the cause of complaint or dispute has arisen.

On the appointed day some representative from each or at any rate the majority of the villages of the Parha assembled at the 'hadri' or usual meeting place of the Panch generally some old wide spreading tree near the 'Sama' or 'the sacred grove' of the village. The Parha, the Mahato, the Panbhara and one or two Jeth rayats of most villages usually attend such a meeting. When the Panchayat is assembled the Kotwar spreads out in front of the representatives a sheet of cloth either his own chadar or that of any one present, which he may, if he chooses, ask for or take by force if necessary. On this sheet of cloth the Raja of the Parha takes his seat and close to him sits the Kotwar with his spear. Formerly it is said the flags of different villages of the Parha used to be planted at the meeting place but this custom has now generally fallen into disuse. The procedure as to explaining the substance of the complaint bearing the answer of the defendant, examining witnesses etc, is the same as in the case of a trial by the village Panchayat but sometimes more elaborate. Thus some Parha Panchayat now a day records the deposition of the parties and their witnesses. And in one instance a document was found written out
in Hindi and duly signed by the disputants by which they agreed to abide by the
decision of the Panch. The individual or village at whose instance the Panchayat is
assembled entertain with rice and pulse-soup to the representatives of the other
villages on their arrival and before they disperse a more sumptuous feast is given
for them with the fine generally imposed on the party against whom verdict is
passed.

(5) The Foot Burying Ordeal in Boundary Disputes

Until recently an orthodox mode of setting disputes regarding the boundary line
between two adjoining villages used to be the ordeal known as the ‘Khedhan-saja’
or ‘Gor-gari’ in which a representative of each of the two villages is made to stand
with one leg buried up to the knee in a hole dug by the boundary line claimed by
him. The hole is filled up with rice flour. The Oraons believe that white ants
attracted to the hole by the rice flour will eat up the leg of the false claimant. But
before that extreme consequence befalls on either party, one of them gives in
either through sheer exhaustion or through lack of fortitude to stand the biting of
ants and other insects that are attracted to the whole by the rice flour and the
verdict goes against his village.
The boundaries of the village in the past used to shift during fight between the two
villages, the village winning used to grab a part of the defeated village and this led
to a fight between the two villages in future.

(6) Socio-religious Function of the Parha (Readmission into the
Community)

Besides its judicial and deliberative functions the Parha Panch has an important
socio-religious function to perform. As the Parha Panch may excommunicate an
Oraon of the Parha, so also it may readmit into the tribe an Oraon who has been
excommunicated. An Oraon may be excommunicated from the community on the
following reasons; sexual intercourse with a non-Oraon woman or for having
eaten cooked food at the hands of a non-Oraon or for having been a Christian for
a time. The repentant outcast having approached the headmen of his village and
promised to perform the requisite ceremonies and provide a suitable feast to the
Parha-brethren, the parha-headmen are informed and a date fixed for the
restoration of the man to his tribal rights.

(7) Inter Parha Alliances

Stronger even than the bond between the different villages of a Parha is the bond
between a Parha and its ‘Dudh-bhaya’ village. Where as any village of Parha may
now a day sever its connection with the Parha and go over to another Parha, the
old bond between a Parha and its ‘Dudh-bhaya’ village is inalienable. A ‘Dudh-
bhaya’ village of a Parha is village, which though belongs to a different Parha
entered in the days of tradition into ceremonial alliances with another Parha of
which it thus becomes a ‘Dudh-bhaya’ (milk-brother) or foster brother. Every
Oraon Parha has one and sometimes two ‘Dudh-bhaya’ villages.
Conclusion
The Oraons have been driven by custom. But they have been solving all their disputes by customary ways and had the Panchayat system in the past. The Oraon tribe remained slaves of custom for a long time till we enter the modern period. The vital impulse that has hitherto regulated their tribal life and guided their social development has been the desire to secure alliance and concord wherever possible. In most of their institutions we have seen the social soul striving in its way for union and cooperation within the clan, the village, the Parha or the tribe. As for outsiders, Oraon tribe’s history, which we have brightly traced, has naturally made this people suspicious of all aliens.
The British rule changed this society to a great extent effecting its outmoded customs and bringing them in the modern period. 15

Footnotes
1. The Holy Bible: Genesis (Origin), Collins, 1980, P.2. (Chap. 2 vs. 7-23).
3. Reverend Dr. F. Hahn, quoted in Roy, p.16
7. Roy, pp. 24-25
8. Ibid, pp.128-179
9. Ibid, pp. 179-180
10. Ibid, pp.281-282
11. Ibid, pp.89-91
13. Roy, pp. 192-211
15. Roy, pp. 225-228