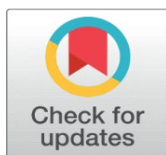
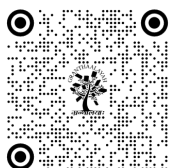


# STUDY ON ARTS, HANDICRAFTS AND DANCES OF THE KUTIA KANDHA TRIBE OF KANDHAMAL DISTRICT IN ODISHA

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of paper is to highlight the traditional arts, handicrafts and dances of the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal District in the state of Odisha. The Kutia Kandha, a primitive tribe primarily belongs to the Kandhamal district areas like Balliguda sub-Division, Tumudibandha Block area, Gumma, Belghar and Bilamala and Jhiripani Gram panchayats. The people of Kutia Kandha tribe live in the hilly region and identify unique culture and customs. The art form has a deep cultural significance for the Kutia Kandha people, who view it as a way to preserve their traditional way of life and express their cultural identity. The research delves into the unique art forms, traditional crafts and vibrant dance practices that are integral to the Kutia Kandhas' way of life. Through ethnographic research methods, this study documents and analyses the symbolic meanings, social functions and the processes of preservation and transformation of these cultural expressions in the context of modern influences. The findings aim to contribute to the understanding of the Kutia Kandhas' cultural identity and the broader discourse on indigenous art and traditions. The study employs a qualitative research approach, primarily using ethnographic methods. Fieldwork was conducted in various villages within Kandhamal District, where participant observation, in-depth interviews and visual documentation were utilized to gather data. The participants include tribal elders, artisans and performers who provided insights into the traditional practices. Additionally, archival research was conducted to compare historical records with current practices. Data analysis was done through thematic coding, focusing on recurring patterns and cultural motifs in the art, crafts and dances of the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamala in Odisha.

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**Keywords:** Arts, Handicrafts, Dances, Kutia Kandhas, Kandhamal, District, Odisha



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The study on traditional arts, handicraft and dances of the Kutia Kandha tribe of Kandhamal district are the fascinating aspects the tribal cultural heritage of Odisha in Eastern India. The Kutia Kandha is an indigenous tribe that primarily noticed in the forests of the Kandhamal district in Odisha. The Kutia Kandhas are recognized as one of the PVTGs in India due to their unique cultural identity, geographical isolation and economic and educational backwardness. The Kutia Kandhas are known for their unique cultural practices and traditions, including their distinctive arts, crafts, music, dance and dress. The Kutia Kandha art involves creating a wide range of decorative and utilitarian objects using natural materials

such as bamboo, cane and wood. The products are characterized by intricate designs, vibrant colours and a rustic charm. Some of the common items created by the Kandha artisans include baskets, trays, mats, boxes, toys and jewelry. The art form has a deep cultural significance for the Kandha people, who view it as a way to preserve their traditional way of life and express their cultural identity. From time immemorial, Kutia Kandha tribe people have chosen this inaccessible but beautiful land as their motherland. The Kutia Kandha tribe primarily belongs to the Kandhamal district areas like Balliguda sub-Division, Tumudibandha Block area, Gumma, Belghar and Bilamala and Jhiripani under Gram panchayat. They live in the hilly region and identify unique culture and customs. The state of Odisha occupies an important place in India having a high concentration of ST and SC population. The total population of the Kandhamal District (2011 census) was 7,31,952 comprising total 3,59,401 male population and 3,72,551 female population. Total ST Population is 2,81,000 and Kui population is 1,951,001 (Nayak, 2010, p. 19). The study area, Belghar, is a part of the Tumudibandha block of the Baliguda sub-division of Kandhamal district of Odisha. Belghar is a study area located in the Tumudibandha block of Kandhamal district of the Indian state of Odisha. It is situated at an altitude of 2255 feet above sea level and is located between 190 45' and 200 05' N latitude and 800 30' and 830 4' E longitude (Senapati and Kuanr, 1983, p.5). The Kandhamal district is located at 80.30° to 83.45° longitude and 19.45° to 20.05° N latitude, or 2255 feet above sea level (Senapati and Kuanr, 1983, p.4). Since the creation of the development plan for primitive tribal groups for the eleventh five-year plan, the Kutia Kandha population, households, and level of education have increased to 1325,5524 (2658 Men's and 2866 Females') and 25.25 percent, respectively, in the 68 villages in the Belghar region. The Kutia Kandhas are among the most ancient and indigenous tribes of Odisha, with a history deeply intertwined with the rugged and forested landscape of Kandhamal District. They are considered one of the original inhabitants of this region, long before the advent of external influences. The Kutia Kandhas of Odisha have a history marked by resilience and a fierce commitment to preserving their cultural autonomy. Culturally, the Kutia Kandhas have retained a distinct identity, deeply rooted in their Kui language and a rich tapestry of oral literature, music, dance and art. Their animistic spiritual practices, which emphasize a profound reverence for nature, have remained largely intact despite the pressures of modernization. This deep connection with the natural world is evident in their rituals, festivals and daily practices. Despite facing challenges such as displacement, deforestation, and socio-economic marginalization, the Kutia Kandhas have shown remarkable resilience (Patnaik, 2005, p.295). They have adapted to changing circumstances while striving to preserve their cultural heritage. Today, they continue to inhabit the Belghar Highlands and surrounding areas, where they balance traditional practices with the demands of modern life, ensuring the continuity of their rich cultural legacy. The arts, crafts and dances of Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal are very significant in the tribal culture of Odisha. Hence, a modest attempt has been made here to highlight the following points as objectives of this article.

### **Objectives**

- 1) To document and preserve the traditional art, crafts, and dance forms of the Kutia Kandha tribe of Kandhamal district.
- 2) To study the social and cultural context of the Kutia Kandha community and its impact on their art, crafts and dance.

- 3) To analyse the symbolism, motifs and themes used in Kutia Kandha art, crafts and dance.
- 4) To examine the role of art, crafts and dance in Kutia Kandha culture and identity.
- 5) To identify the challenges faced by the Kutia Kandha community in preserving their art, crafts and dance traditions.

## **2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The study employs both the primary as well as secondary sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis. Secondary data were collected from the Census of India, as well as from various official reports, records, documents and publications. These sources provided valuable contextual and historical insights, forming the foundation for the research. These sources provided valuable information for understanding the demographic, social and cultural life of the Kutia Kandha community of the Kandhamala district of Odisha. Primary data were obtained through field surveys, interviews, focus group and direct observations conducted in the Kandhamal district.

## **3. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

### **Arts, Crafts and Dances of Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal District**

The Kutia Kandha community relies heavily on the sale of Kutia Kandha products as a means of income and the art form has become an important source of livelihood for many families in the region. Kutia Kandha art has gained recognition for its unique beauty and cultural value and it has been showcased at various national and international events (Patnaik, 1992, p.33). The government of India has also taken steps to promote and preserve the art form, including providing training and financial support to Kandha artisans. The Kutia Kandhas were no less artists either of course the inconvenient atmosphere and general poverty had considerably discouraged their artistic achievements. So, in a pointer state of Kutia society, the variety, the variety and development of art was limited and stationary. Ever then there were a few of them who usually avoided. The custom to adorning the skin by tattooing had survived among the Kutia Kandhas. The sambhar bone hair ornaments worn by the Kandhas were exceedingly beautiful. Their other accessories, such as their necklace, anklets, bangles and earrings made of beads, showed their artistic talent. The Kutias' usage of tobacco tubes and tobacco containers is a reflection of their aesthetic sensibility. The bamboo tobacco cases were crafted from a single node and decorated with a sharp knife tip. They used to create brass figurines of elephants, peacocks, dolls, fish and other creatures. The masks made of wood or gourd were another specimen of the Kutia Kandha art. These masks were usually made of gourd and very often decorated with red and white beads. The style of Kutia Kandha's habitations had created a species Broom stick making of architecture (Ota, and Mohanty, 2008, p.2). The Kutia houses' wall paintings on the verandas and their paintings of Bhimul Pennu were fairly beautiful, yet they lacked perfection and geneses. Smooth, dark earth served as the paintings' background; occasionally, cow poo was scattered across it. White designs stood out dramatically on a red background that had been coal eyed. The wood carvings, especially those on these additional Kutia home doors, were excellent examples of the Kandha's style. Brick making was an important craft of the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal. Different types of traditional dances are found performed by the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal

district in Odisha. The traditional arts, handicrafts and dances of the Kutia Kandha tribe of Kandhamal district are briefly discussed below.

### 3.1. RATANG ARTS OF KUTIA KANDHAS

The Ratang art form is a rare and significant expression of the Kutia Kandha's creativity. Although there isn't widely available documentation on "Ratang," it likely reflects the tribe's connection with nature, spirituality and daily life. Tribal art forms like these often represent spiritual symbols, social messages or are used in rituals and festivals, often crafted with natural materials like bamboo, wood and pigments from the earth. The image depicts Ratanga art from the Kutia Kandha tribe, showcasing a geometric pattern in a vibrant red and white colour. The artwork consists of meticulously drawn symmetrical shapes, such as concentric triangles, diamonds and parallel lines. These geometric forms are arranged in rows, creating a sense of repetition and harmony (Rath, 2010, p.57).

The triangles and diamond shapes often symbolize aspects of nature, spirituality or tribal beliefs. The red background contrasts beautifully with the white lines, adding vibrancy to the design. Ratanga art likely holds cultural significance, with these patterns being used for decorative or ritualistic purposes, reflecting the Kutia Kandha's deep connection with their traditions and environment.

**Figure-1**



**Figure 1** This picture is showing the Ratang art of Kutia Kandha tribe of Kandhamal district of Odisha.

**Source** <https://static.wixstatic.com/media/mv2.jpg>

### 3.2. TATTOOING (TIKANGA)

The Kutia Kandha women traditionally use a hand-poking technique to create intricate tattoos, known as Tikanga, on the bodies of both men and women. These tattoos, which are often placed on the face, arms and legs, carry deep cultural and spiritual significance, with designs based on motifs passed down through generations. The tattooing process involves using a needle made from thorn or bamboo, dipped in ink and inserted into the skin, a process that can take several hours depending on the complexity of the design. While traditionally seen as a form of aesthetic expression, Tikanga also has historical roots. Regarding origin of the tattoo, they say that in the past kings, Muslim, Marahata and British soldiers, during their tour to Kutia Kandha village, indulged in sexual harassment and rape, believing that this would protect their honor. Over time, tattoos also became a mark of clan



**Figure -3**



**Figure 3** The old picture is showing the human sacrifice scene of the Kandhas of Kandhamal: a victim Meriah, (British India period).

**Source** <https://wellcomecollection.org/search/images?query=nxr24vzp>

### **3.4. JEWELLERY AND ORNAMENTS OF KUTIA KANDHAS OF KANDHAMALA**

The Kutia Kandha, an indigenous tribe from the mountainous regions of Odisha, India, have a rich tradition of using jewellery as a form of cultural expression and identity. Both men and women adorn themselves with ornaments made from natural materials like beads, shells, bones and metals such as aluminium, iron, silver and gold. Common accessories include necklaces, earrings, bangles, anklets and headbands. Body piercings, particularly of the ears and sometimes the nose, are also prevalent and often decorated with beads. These ornaments are not merely decorative; they hold deep cultural and spiritual significance, especially during festivals and ceremonies. While traditional attire and jewellery remain integral to the Kutia Kandha identity, modern influences have introduced some changes, with contemporary styles occasionally being adopted alongside traditional garments (Mohanty,1957, p.19).The ornaments used by Kutia Kandhas made of different metals and objects. These ornaments are 1.Sireni- made out of plastic and wood, 2. Vinanga- made out of aluminium or iron, 3. Motanga- made out of aluminium, 4. Jhaptang- iron hair clip, 5. Talmotang- leaf ball used inside hair knot, 6. Beni- made out of local grass worn on the forehead, 7. Taperi-is a around ornament made of thin silver plate and silver one-rupee coins hung by making holes and tied around. It is worn by the bride at the time of marriage as a headdress, 8. Kakadi-made of two or three narrow thin silver plates joined together at the bottom and four anna coins fixed on the top of it are worn by the Kutia Kandha brides on their heads, 9. Dipa or hair clip-of silver or iron are worn by Kutia Kandha women folk to keep their hair pressed on festive occasions and on the matrimonial ceremonies, 10. Kiu Kichadaka-made out for aluminium or iron, worn on the upper portion of the ear,11. Olanga-made out of aluminium, silver and gold, worn on ear lobe, 12. Saska- beads necklace, Kagdanga- brass or iron or aluminium ring, 13.Lebusikding- glass beads, 14.Rupees neck chain andPutuka(Bead necklace), 15.Baatanga- made of aluminium or silver, 16. Muapajanga- made out of brass, 17. Paola pajanga- made out of aluminium or silver, 18. Sadang pajanga- glass bangles, 19. Kaju mudinga- made out of aluminium or iron or brass, 20. Japi Saska- beads,21. Tedi Sikidinga- waist band made out of aluminium, 22. Toderi- waist band made out of aluminium, 23. Dumonaka- waist band made out of colon string, 24.JapeikaandGatadi - waist chain, 25. Koda baning-

made of brass, aluminium and 26. Kalu Mudinga- made of brass, aluminium. The above ornaments were worn/ used by the Kutia Kandha people(both male and female)of Kandhamal district of Odisha in India (Mohanty. S.C., 2015, p.658).

**Figure-4**



**Figure 4.** Kagdang (Neckband) was used by the Kutia Kandhas of Belgharin the Kandhamal district, Odisha.

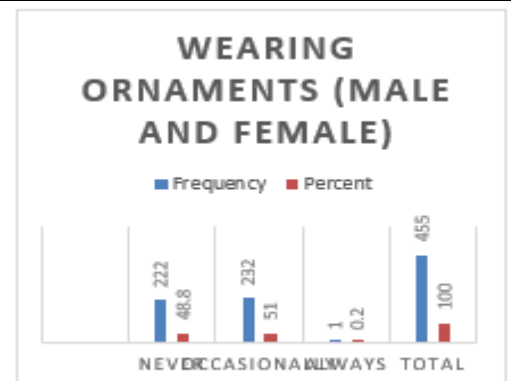
**Source** The photo was practically taken by the scholar from SCST&RTI Tribal Museum, Bhubaneswar.

**Table 1**

**Table 1.** Wearing Ornaments of both Male and Female of Kutia Kandha Tribe

Wearing Ornaments (Male and Female)	Frequency	Percent
Never	222	48.8
Occasionally	232	51.0
Always	1	.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Survey data



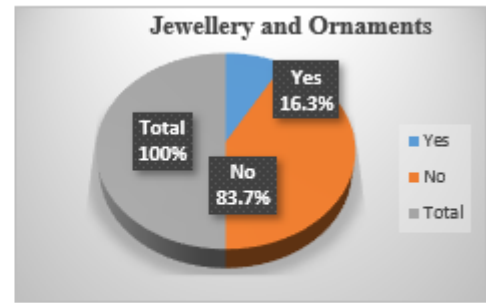
Graph: wearing ornament male & female

An analysis of ornament-wearing practices among the Kutia Kandha tribe reveals significant variation. Nearly 48.8% of tribe members reported never wearing ornaments, indicating a substantial portion of the community does not engage in this practice. The majority, at 51.0%, wear ornaments occasionally, showing that while regular adornment is not widespread, it is still observed on certain occasions. A small minority, just 0.2%, consistently wears ornaments, reflecting a strong adherence to this tradition. The data suggests a gradual shift in ornament-wearing practices, indicating evolving cultural traditions or preferences. Overall, the findings highlight the diverse approaches to ornamentation within the Kutia Kandha community, with some members maintaining traditional practices while others exhibit more flexibility.

**Table 2**

**Table 2.** Jewellery and ornaments of the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamala

Jewellery and Ornaments	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	16.3
No	381	83.7
Total	455	100.0



Source: Survey data

Graph: Jewellery & Ornaments

The data reveals a clear disparity in the possession of jewellery and ornaments among the Kutia Kandha community. Only 16.3% of individuals reported owning jewellery, while a substantial 83.7% indicated they do not. This shift suggests evolving cultural practices or socio-economic changes within the community. Understanding these trends is essential for evaluating cultural preservation efforts and adapting to shifting consumer preferences in the Kutia Kandha community.

### 3.5. HANDICRAFTS OF KUTIA KANDHAS OF KANDHAMAL

#### 3.5.1. CLOTHING

The Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal traditionally wear simple, handmade garments that reflect their deep connection to nature and their cultural heritage. They refer to cloth as “Sinda,” although they do not manufacture their own clothing. Instead, they purchase necessary garments from local markets. KutiaKandha men typically wear a loincloth known as a dhoti or langoti. This simple piece of cloth is wrapped around the waist and secured, providing essential coverage. KutiaKandha women wear a wraparound skirt called a saree, referred to as "Asasinda" or "Pata." They also use a cloth called “Dadedi” as an inner dress. Over this, they wear a towel-like garment around the waist called “Tauli.” For the upper body, another piece of cloth, known as “Gati Tuali,” is tied to the neck and draped over the left shoulder. The simplicity of their clothing underscores the Kutia Kandhas' close relationship with their environment and traditional way of life (Mohanty, 1996. p.43).

#### 3.5.2. MEN'S CLOTHING

The traditional attire of Kutia Kandha men centers on the dhoti or langoti, a long rectangular piece of cloth wrapped around the waist and legs, creating a skirt-like garment. Made typically from cotton or other natural fabrics, the dhoti is tied securely with pleats, and its length can vary based on personal preference. This garment, known as Batada, is a key element of their traditional clothing. Historically, Kutia Kandha men left their upper bodies exposed, but during colder months, they began covering themselves with a chaddar. They also wore a Kapdagaspa helmet and styled their long hair in a knot at the back. Adornments included a beaded necklace called Sasha, though finger rings were not commonly worn, with some men opting for rings made of brass or aluminium. In the isolated hilly regions of Belghar and Gumma Gram panchayats, traditional attire and accessories, including long hair, are still observed among a few older men and a small number of youths. However, most Kutia Kandha men today have transitioned to wearing full pants and shirts,

with cropped hair, and have largely abandoned the use of head, ear, or neck jewellery.

### 3.5.3. WOMEN'S CLOTHING

Kutia Kandha women traditionally wear a wraparound skirt known as a sari or "Pata," a long piece of cloth, typically six to nine yards in length, draped around the waist and pleated. The pleats are tucked into the waistband and the loose end is draped over the shoulder, creating a graceful appearance. Saris are usually made of cotton or silk, with colours and patterns varying based on regional and personal preferences. In addition to the sari, Kutia Kandha women wear traditional garments like Retang and Uromi. The Retang is a fabric band that extends from the upper leg to the waist, while the Uromi covers the front of the body, hanging from the neck to the abdomen and secured with a cotton string around the waist. Beneath the Retang, women wear a loincloth called Topa, which is worn by all females over the age of five or six, regardless of whether they are menstruating (Rath, 2010, p.100). Historically, the Retang and Uromi were hand-woven by the Kutia Kandhas themselves. Today, these garments have largely been replaced by two towels, especially among older married women. Younger girls, between the ages of six and ten, often wear dresses purchased from local markets.

**Figure-5**



**Figure 5.** Kapta Danda (women's wear) was used by the Kutia Kandha women of Belghar in the Kandhamal district, Odisha.

**Source** This photo was practically taken by the scholar from SCST&RTI Tribal Museum, Bhubaneswar.

### 3.5.4. WOODEN WORKS CRAFTS

- House Building in the Belghar Forest, Baggala and Gumma Gram Panchayat areas, most Kutia Kandhas construct their houses using wide planks of Sal (*Shorea robusta*) wood. These houses, referred to as "Pangadedu," feature walls made from Sal wood planks. The Kutia Kandhas also craft doors (dara) and door jambs (daraGoba) from Sal wood and use wooden beams and rafters in the construction of their homes (Nanda. Prabhakar, Mahapatra & Samal, eds., 1989, p.45).
- The Kutia Kandhas demonstrate skilled craftsmanship in building cowsheds, known as Kadingasala. They create a raised platform using wooden poles or manually hewn planks, elevating it about 3 feet. The roof is constructed with long pillars, while the walls are made from slender, long poles closely arranged, with a wooden or bamboo mat door.

- Wooden cowbells (kiredi) are prepared by curving a piece of wood are tied to the neck of cattle to trace them the forest while grazing.
- Plough (Nangeli), Yoke (Juelli), Clod (crusher), (patasi), Harrow (kurly) are used by the Kutia Kandhas for agricultural purpose.
- Kutia Kandhas make wooden cot (gate) sewn with Shiali plates for sleeping and sitting purpose (Patnaik, 2015, p.10).
- Small and big dug-out wooden container called (Danga) to feed cattle and domestic pigs are made by Kutia Kandhas.
- Mortar or punding hole (Seni) and pestal (kalu) for hand pounding of paddy and otter corns are found in the main room of every Kutia Kandha house.
- Small temporary huts (kudi) used while guarding crops are seasonally made of wood by Kutia Kandha.
- Sacrificial post (Darni Goba/ Munda) are made of wood and have geometric carvings. These are made by the Kutia Kandhas to worship Darani Penu, the Earth Goddess.

**Figure-6**



**Figure 6:** Meriah Wooden Sacrificial Post of the Kandhas of Kandhamal district, Odisha

**Source** <https://blogvirasatehind.wordpress.com/2019/11/16/kandhamal-heritage-in-wood/>

- During Poda Puja or the Buffalo Sacrifice Festival, two wooden posts of Sal wood are crafted to resemble buffalo horns and are joined by a small wooden beam at the top, known as 'Manga.' A new cloth is hung from this structure during the festival. Additionally, another post called 'Karu Gaba,' used to tie the buffalo for sacrifice, is placed near the 'Manga' post at the center of the village (Samantary & Swain, 1958, p.31).
- The house wooden pillar (Edumunda)crafts of Kutia Kandha are a testament to the skill and devotion of tribe artisans. This ancient craft has been passed down through generations and is an integral part of Kutia Kandha culture and tradition.

**Figure-7**



**Figure 7** The wooden pillar is noticed at Guma village of Kutia Kandha Community, Belghar, Kandhamal district.

### 3.5.5. BAMBOO WORKS CRAFT

- Basketery- The "Bhoga" is a large carrying basket and the "Taapa" is a smaller version, both made from thin bamboo plates for transporting corn. Wicker baskets, or "Dangeli," are used for harvesting paddy and ragi, while the "Sangeri," a sieve, is employed to cleanse harvested materials, all crafted from thin bamboo plates.
- Winnowing tray-(Shesi) made from thin bamboo plates is manufactured and used by the Kutia Kandhas for cleaning and fanning harvested crops and to clean rice, etc. for cooking (Sinha, & Behera, 1989, p.39).
- To keep fish during fishing creel (Deudi) is prepared from thin bamboo plates and used by Kutia Kandhas.

**Figure-8**



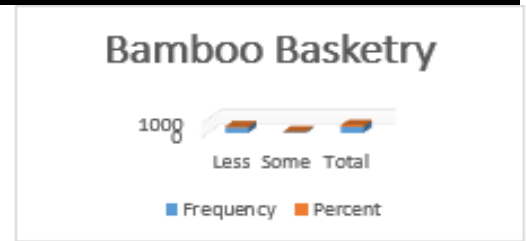
**Figure 8.** The picture showing Kutia Kandh women are working in Bamboo crafts in baskets making noticed at Mundimaska village under Bilamala, Kandhamal District, Odisha.

**Table 3**

**Table 3.** It presents data on the Kutia Kandha people are distribution in relation to bamboo basketry.

Bamboo basketry	Frequency	Percent
Less	384	84.4
Some	71	15.6
Total	455	100.0

Source: Survey data



Graph: Bamboo basket

The data reveals a distinct distribution in involvement with bamboo basketry among the Kutia Kandha community. A significant majority, 84.4%, show a lower level of engagement, while 15.6% are actively involved in this craft. These patterns highlight varying degrees of interest and participation in traditional bamboo basketry, offering insights into cultural practices and preferences within the community. Such information is crucial for cultural preservation and community development efforts, as it helps tailor initiatives to support and promote traditional artisanal skills among the Kutia Kandha people of Kandhamal.

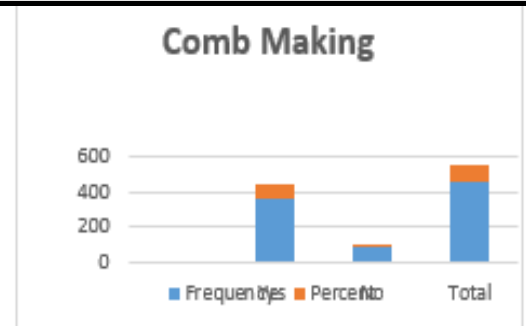
### 3.5.6. COMB MAKING

**Table.4**

**Table 4.** Kutia Kandha distribution based on their Comb Making

Comb Making	Frequency	Percent
Yes	368	80.9
No	87	19.1
Total	455	100.0

Source: Survey data



Graph: Comb Making

The data analysis of comb making among the Kutia Kandha tribe shows two distinct categories: involvement and non-involvement. In the Yes category, 368 individuals, or 80.9%, are engaged in comb making, while 87 individuals, or 19.1%, are not. The total frequency is 455, representing the entire sample of Kutia Kandhas surveyed. The Percent column confirms that the sum of percentages equals 100%, reflecting the complete distribution of involvement in comb making within the community. This data highlights that a significant majority of the Kutia Kandha tribe actively participates in comb making.

**Figure-9**



**Figure 9:** Jada Sirani(bamboo comb)was used by the Kutia Kandha women of Belghar in the Kandhamal district, Odisha.

**Source** The photo was practically taken by the scholar from SCST&RTI Tribal Museum, Bhubaneswar.

### 3.6. DANCES OF THE KUTIA KANDHAS OF KANDHAMALA

The Kutia Kandhas have a rich tradition of dance that holds religious and cultural significance. Dance plays an important role in their rituals and social gatherings, often accompanied by music. Both men and women participate in group dances, which involve undulating and vibrating body movements that gradually increase in tempo with the beat of the drums. The Kutia Kandhas use various musical instruments during their dances. The flute, typically played by young boys while tending to cattle in the jungle or fields, is a hollow bamboo instrument with holes for producing different tones (Mohanty, 2015, p.33). The Changu or drum is the most important percussion instrument in their dances. Drum beaters hold a special rank and status within the community, while other musicians also participate in celebrations and festivals. Group dances serve as a means for the Kutia Kandhas to refresh their minds after a day of hard work. A traditional Kutia Kandha dance is noticed to the scholar at Belghar on the occasion of Keduparav in the month of April-May.

**Figure-10**



**Figure 10:** The Kutia Kandhas perform a traditional dance on the occasion of Chaita Puja, a seasonal festival to honor their local deities.

**Source** [https://www.google.com/Kutia Kandha kbk.nic.in](https://www.google.com/Kutia%20Kandha%20kbk.nic.in)

The traditional dance practice has been ongoing for many years, but with the impact of modernization, some new members of the Kutia Kandha community are gradually forgetting their traditional Changu dance. However, the Jhumar dance, originally associated with the Kudmis/Mahata caste people of Kandhamal and Kalahandi Districts, has gained popularity among the Kutia Kandha community. Various types of Jhumar dances are now performed, including Jaana Nachia Jhumar, Panta Salia Jhumar, Kathi Nachia Jhumar, Bivabaha Kalina Jhumar (performed during marriage ceremonies), Chau Nachia Jhumar, Mahada Nachia Jhumar and Darbari Jhumar. There is a close relationship between Jhumar dance, Jhumar songs and Chhau dance (Majumdar, 1937, p.65). Chhau dance, also spelled as Chau or Chhaau, is a traditional martial tribal dance deeply rooted in folk traditions and performed in Eastern Kandhamal and other regions of India. In the Kutia Kandha community, both young boys and girls learn the art of singing in youth hostels called Dhangada or Dhangidi Edu, where they pass down songs (known as Gadi) through generations, occasionally adding new compositions. Boys and girls sing separately in their respective Edus and during village visits, they sing in the homes or Edus of the host village. During wedding feasts and major celebrations like Takukalu Dakina, Puni Kalu Dakina and Karubiha Dakina, young boys and girls participate in vibrant singing and dancing (Kundu, 1994, p. 178). Female participants clasp hands behind each other, forming a chain and marching forward and backward while singing, while male participants play musical instruments. The singing and dancing often continue for hours during festive occasions, with dancers engaging in conversation while performing.

**Figure-11**



**Figure 11** The traditional dance of the Kutia Kandhas of Kandhmala district, Odisha

These dances are not tied to any specific occasion but are performed in the evenings. Young boys and girls gather in an open field, forming circles or straight lines and away forward and backward while holding each other's hands. The dance's tempo changes with the rhythm of the drums and the colourful traditional dresses and hairstyles of the dancers, along with the reverberating music, create a captivating atmosphere. Several dances among the Kutia Kandhas hold ritualistic importance and are performed on festival occasions. Marriage dances are particularly interesting and unique, involving oral debates and competitions between bridal parties. Expert dancers and musicians showcase their skills and talents during marriage ceremonies (Patnaik, U.N, (1970, p. 84).

**Figure-12**



**Figure 12:** The picture showing the Kutia Kandha young men and women are found dancing in the street way. Courtesy: A.B Ota., Kutia Kandha Handbook, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Research and Training Institute (SCSTRTI), Bhubaneswar, 2010.

Hunting expeditions also commence with a dance that involves the entire community. Dance is seen as an expression of the Kutia Kandhas innermost emotions through bodily movements. It is believed that their mystic connection with nature stimulates beneficial forces, fostering fertility and abundance.<sup>23</sup> The religious and socio-religious practices of the Kutia Kandhas aim to connect with spiritual beings and higher powers, believed to influence individual and communal destinies. Their beliefs are deeply rooted in reverence for the natural world, with a particular awe for the sun symbolizing inscrutable providence (Sahu, Nayak and Dhal, 2013, p.176). Terms like "Dharm Raja" (Virtue-Lord) reflect their recognition of deities' roles in moral order. The Kutia Kandhas' religion includes veneration of the Earth Goddess and Mother Goddess, distinguishing it from simpler tribal faiths. They practice ancestor worship and recognize numerous spirits associated with natural objects and creatures. While communal worship is predominant, individuals with psychic sensitivity may experience visions of deities, influencing tribal rituals and spiritual practices. Overall, communal worship provides a profound religious experience and a sense of connection with higher powers for the Kutia Kandhas (Schuze, 1912, p.20). The religion of the Kutia Kandhas strengthens their emotional and social bonds, fostering a shared sense of tribal mana (power) believed to be enhanced by spirits and gods. Their beliefs center around various powers that influence their lives, and they incorporate deities from other cultures or recognize similarities with neighbouring communities' deities, reflecting parallel religious evolution.

**Figure-13**



**Figure 13.** The picture showing the Kutia Kandhas honor the Tiger Spirit, known as Bagha Penu, which they believe protects the forest and their community. This picture is noticed in the areas of Bilamal G.P. of the Tumbudibandha Block, Kandhamal District

The dance itself is also performed by a group of men and women who move in a circular formation, with the men typically holding spears and the women carrying small pots filled with rice or flowers. The movements of the dance are fluid and graceful, with a focus on hand gestures and footwork that are meant to mimic the movements of nature (Padhy, 2010, p.35). The lyrics of the Kutia Kandha song are usually sung in the Kui language, which is the native language of the Kandha tribe. The lyrics typically describe the beauty of nature and the importance of living in harmony with the natural world. The song is often accompanied by a call-and-response format, with the lead singer singing a line and the rest of the group repeating it back. (Sahu. 1969, p.127). Overall, Kutia Kandha is a vibrant and colourful celebration of the Kandha tribe's culture and traditions, and it remains an important part of Odisha's rich cultural heritage. Both young boys and girls acquire the art of singing in the youth hostel known as Dangada, Dangidi Edu. The songs have been created since the dawn of time and passed down from generation to generation (Vidyarthi & Rai, 1976, p.56). There are occasionally new songs written and added. Boys and females sing the songs (Gadi) in their respective Edus separately. When a party of boys and girls travels to another village, they sing songs in the home or in the appropriate Edu of the host village.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude from the above facts that the Ratang art of the Kutia Kandhas stands as a testament to their deep connection with nature, spirituality and cultural heritage. The wood carvings and wall decorations in the homes were distinctive elements of Kutia Kandha art. The Kutia Kandha house walls paintings on the verandas and their paintings of Bhimul Pennu were fairly beautiful, yet they lacked perfection and geneses. Smooth, dark earth served as the paintings' background; occasionally, cow poo was scattered across it. White designs stood out dramatically on a red background that had been coal eyed. The wood carvings, especially those on these additional Kutia home doors, were excellent examples of the Kandha's style. This rare art form, characterized by its use of natural materials and vibrant geometric patterns, symbolizes both the daily lives and rituals of the tribe. The intricate designs, with their repetitive symmetry and harmony, reflect the Kutia Kandhas' creativity and their profound respect for their environment. Preserving and promoting Ratang art is crucial to safeguarding the unique cultural identity of this indigenous community, ensuring that future generations can appreciate its significance. Tikanga, the traditional tattooing art of the Kutia Kandha women, represents a profound cultural and spiritual practice deeply embedded in their identity. Once a protective measure against external threats and a symbol of honour, these tattoos have evolved into a marker of clan identity and aesthetic expression. Despite the gradual decline of this ancient tradition due to modern influences, some Kutia Kandha women continue to uphold this practice, preserving their cultural heritage. The intricate hand-poked designs, passed down through generations, remain a testament to the resilience and continuity of their traditions. The jewellery and accessories of the Kutia Kandha tribe are more than mere adornments; they are a reflection of their cultural identity and connection to nature. Crafted from natural materials such as beads, shells, bones and metals, these ornaments serve both aesthetic and symbolic purposes for both men and women. The use of jewellery, along with body piercings, is deeply ingrained in the tribe's traditions, symbolizing status, clan identity, and cultural heritage. Despite modern influences, the Kutia Kandha people continue to embrace their traditional

ornaments, preserving a key aspect of their indigenous identity. The crafts of the Kutia Kandhas showcase their deep connection to nature and resourcefulness. Using locally sourced materials such as bamboo, wood and natural fibres, they create a variety of functional and artistic items, including baskets, tools and household objects. These crafts are not only practical but also serve as an expression of the tribe's cultural values and traditions. Through their craftsmanship, the Kutia Kandhas preserve their heritage, passing down skills and techniques from generation to generation, ensuring the continuity of their rich cultural identity. The wooden works crafts of the Kutia Kandhas reflect their ingenuity and mastery of natural resources, particularly the use of Sal wood. Their construction of houses (Pangadedu) and cowsheds (Kadingasala) demonstrates skilled craftsmanship, blending functionality with traditional design. These structures, built with precision and care, showcase the tribe's deep understanding of their environment and their ability to create durable, sustainable homes and shelters. The use of local materials and traditional building techniques ensures the preservation of their cultural practices and a harmonious connection with nature. The Kutia Kandhas demonstrate remarkable craftsmanship through their use of forest products in creating handicrafts and artisanal items. Skilled in bamboo and cane work, pottery, wood carving and blacksmithing, they produce practical and decorative items such as baskets, mats, tools and utensils. The religious dances of the Kutia Kandhas are a vibrant expression of their cultural and spiritual life. These group dances, performed during rituals and social gatherings, are characterized by rhythmic body movements and increasing tempo, reflecting the tribe's connection to their traditions. Accompanied by musical instruments like drums, the dances not only serve as a form of communal celebration but also as a means of reinforcing their religious beliefs and cultural identity, preserving the essence of their heritage for future generations. In fact, the traditional arts, crafts and dances of Kutia Kandhas of Kandhamal are the important aspects of the tribal cultural heritage of Odisha in Eastern India.

### **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

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