

Koya

Location : Malkangiri

Language : Koya (Dravidian)

Population: 147137 (as per 2011 census report)

Major festival & Rituals: Bijapandu, Kurumpandu, Dussera, Kartapandu, Ikkapandu, Markapandu, Ittapandu, Tadippandu, Sikudapandu, Bimudpandu



The Koya constitute the principal tribe of Malkangiri, and are most widely distributed throughout this area. They are an ancient tribe credited with a unique way of community oriented life and a rich cultural heritage. They call themselves 'Koya' or 'Koitor' meaning 'people'. The Koyas living in adjacent Bastar region of Chhatisgarh are called Dorla and Madia. Traditionally, the Koyas are pastoralists and shifting cultivators but now-a-days, they have taken to settled cultivation supplemented by animal husbandry and seasonal forest collections. They own large herds of cows and bullocks. In their traditional system, chom or wealth means cattle, because a Koya without cattle has no status in the society. Koya village settlements with typical palisade bamboo fencing all around are unique having houses quite spread out. Very close to their settlements one notices stone pillars and wooden posts erected in memory of their dead ancestors. The number of houses in a village varies from ten to thirty. Each house, its courtyard and adjoining kitchen garden are nicely fenced by bamboo splits. They have mud houses beautifully thatched by a type of jungle grass. Houses are rectangular giving shelters to their pigs and fowls. Herds of cattle are put or tethered in front courtyard open air. Koya society is divided into five broad social divisions, katta, such as, Kowasi, Sodi, Madkami, Madi and Padiyami. Each social division is further subdivided into several groups and sub-groups. Their kins (kutum) and affines (wiwalwand) are clearly distinguished. They observe rites de passage elaborately. Birth pollution is observed for seven days. Name giving ceremony of the new born is performed after 2 to 3 months of birth. Puberty rites are observed for the pubescent girl attaining her first menarche. Some of her relations go to the nearby forest, select an isolated spot and make two small huts over two adjacent trees. An old lady accompanies the girl and they both stay in two different huts on the trees out of the sight of the male folks for the pollution period of seven days. During these 7 days of pollution no puja or festival is observed in the village. The Koyas think that if the girl during these seven days walks over the earth it shall become barren; the trees which she shall touch will not bear fruits. The youth dormitories of Koyas play a major role for promoting their culture and tradition. The dormitories are the institution for unmarried youths. The Koya boys and the girls spend nights there in separate rooms. The girls' dormitory is called Pikin-Kudma. The girls gather there in the night for singing and gossiping and they sleep there together. But this practice is gradually being abandoned and in many villages Pikin-Kudma is not in existence. An open space left opposite the dormitory is meant for practising dance. It would not be wrong to say it as school of dance for the Koya youths. This dormitory also facilitates selection of life partner by the youth. It is indeed a democratic institution for promotion and propagation of Koya culture. Marriage termed as pendul is the most important and colourful

event in Koya life. Marriages by service, intrusion, and exchange are also practised. Koya parents have the liberty to select brides. Marriages by service, intrusion, and exchange are also practised. The custom of bride price or bride wealth is prevalent. In some cases the wife is younger to the husband. Marriage negotiation starts at an early age. The children are considered as gift of God. Well-to-do and influential Koyas used to acquire two or more wives. They generally cremate the dead and observe mortuary pollution for ten days. Secondary burial ritual is observed most elaborately by erecting menhirs in memory of the deceased. They have two important deities: Bijagudi, the house deity and Gudimata, the village deity. They worship Mother Earth as village deity. Marriage is termed as pendul. Koya parents have the liberty to select brides. The traditional village council is headed by pedda, the village headman, and perma, the priest. The posts of pedda and perma are hereditary. The shaman, magician-cum-herbal medicineman is known as wadde. Kotwal, hailed from the Domb, a scheduled caste community also acts as their messenger. The functioning of traditional institutions of social control among the Koya reflects that both secular and sacerdotal leaders play a major role in the village through the traditional village council which effectively manages inter inter and intra-village disputes and awards punishments and rewards. They maintain community funds and grain banks at the village level to help the needy families and provide food security. They have retained their rich and varied heritage of colourful dance and music which form an integral part of their festivals and rituals. The Koya dance is characterized not only by its originality and spontaneity but also for its wide range of movements. When happily inspired, they can coin a song then and there and sing it. When they see things of beauty and meet pleasantly, they express their pleasure and happiness by composing songs.