

BEADS AMONG THE JUANG OF INDIA

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The Juang comprise a major primitive community in the state of Orissa in east-central India. Until relatively recently, they had a rich material culture. In particular, their dress and ornaments were very important to them. Today, only very old women wear beads and other ornaments in the traditional way, except on special occasions. This paper seeks to reconstruct the traditional costume of the Juang, with emphasis on the beads, and notes the changes it has undergone over the past 130 years. The findings are based on a survey of the ethnohistorical literature combined with active participant fieldwork in 1995 and 1997, among the Juang of the Keonjhar District in general and of Gonasika village in particular.

INTRODUCTION

While research has been conducted on the beads of India for many years, those utilized by primitive communities have rarely been interpreted using a multidisciplinary approach incorporating anthropological, archaeological and historical evidence. This paper utilizes such an approach to investigate traditional bead use by one of the most primitive communities of India—the Juang.

The Juang comprise one of the major aboriginal communities of Orissa State. Inhabiting the forested districts of Keonjhar, Dhenkanal and Angul, they divide themselves into two groups: the *Thaniya* (those who stayed behind) and the *Bhagudiya* (those who did not).¹ According to the 1981 census, there were 30,285 Juang who claimed to be autochthons of Gonasika, a hilly region encompassing 12 villages which is considered to be the capital of the Juang. Gonasika has an elevation of about 1,000 m A.S.L., and is the source of the Baitarani River in Keonjhar District. The latter, which is home to most of the Juang, is 8,240 km² in extent, and consists of two quite distinct ecosystems. The eastern part has valleys and lowlands, while the

west is mountainous with extensive plateaus and peaks reaching nearly 1,100 m A.S.L.

Juang material culture, especially their costume, has undergone profound changes since the arrival of Europeans. Unfortunately, little is known about Juang culture before it began to degenerate. The accounts of Samuells (1856:295-303) and Dalton (1872:152-156) are the only ones that describe their traditional dress. Juang costume changed quickly after 1870, when Captain F.J. Johnstone, the Superintendent of Keonjhar State, induced the women to dress themselves in clothes (Elwin 1948:10-11; Hunter 1893:94; Risley 1891:353). Before that they wore only beads and the leaves of *Terminalia bialata* (Elwin 1948).

JUANG BEADS: A RETROSPECTION

E.A. Samuells published the first report on the Juang in 1856. He described the Juang of the undivided Cuttack District thus:

The dress of the men is the ordinary one of the native peasantry, but the women wear no clothes whatsoever. Their sole covering consists of two large bunches of leaves (or rather of twigs with the leaves attached) of which one is worn in front and the other behind. The twigs are sometimes fastened together generally loose, and are kept in position by a string of glazed earthen-ware beads passed twenty or thirty times round the waist and over the stems of the twigs. It is from this original costume that the tribe have obtained from their neighbours the name of Puttooa—quasi *the people of the leaf*. They call themselves Juanga. The leaves which I observed in use were those of the *sál*, the *jamoon*, the *koorye*, and the *chaldua*, but I was

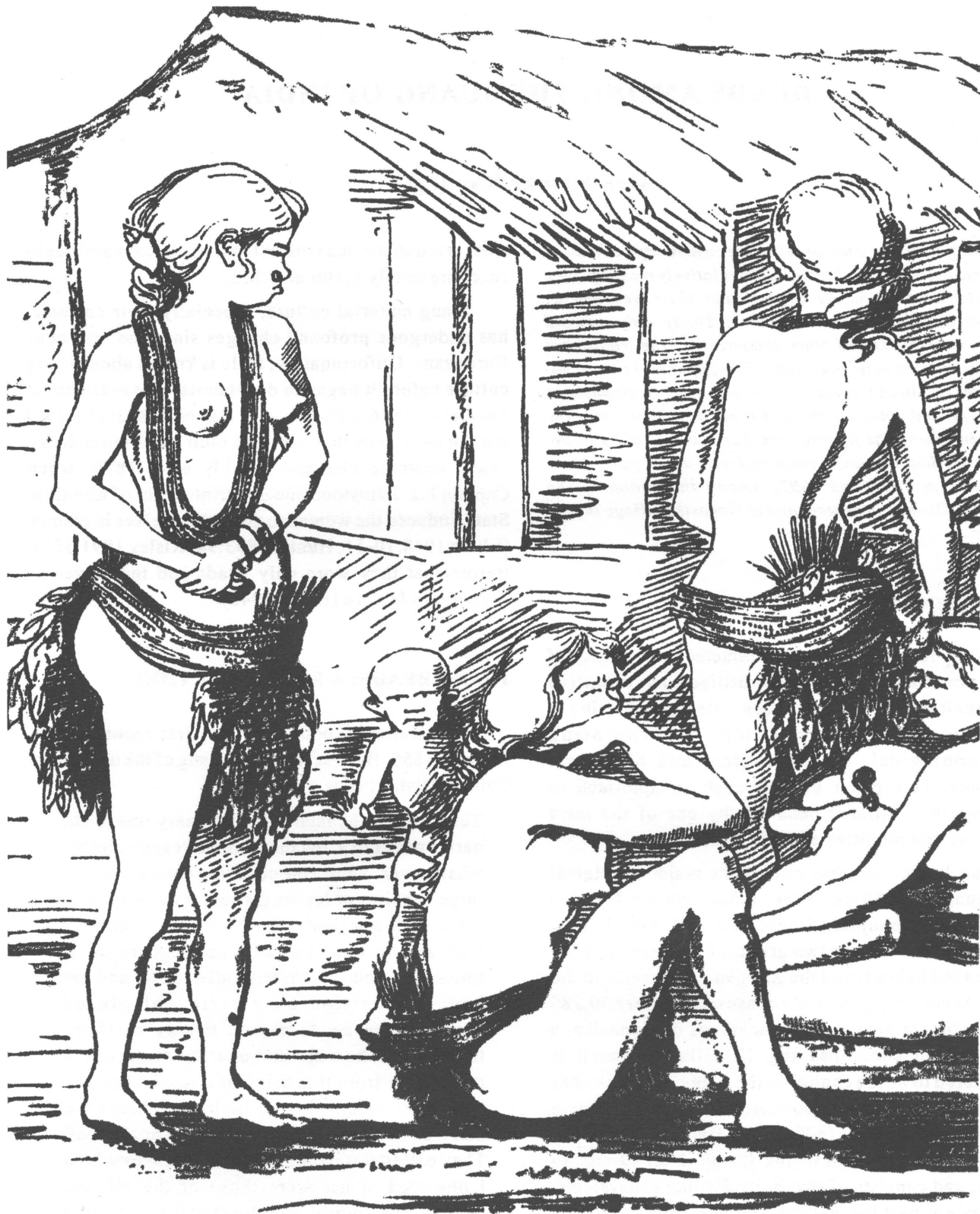


Figure 1. Detail of a drawing by Major Strange of "Kumlee and her friends" (Samuells 1856). They wear strings of beads about their necks and waists.

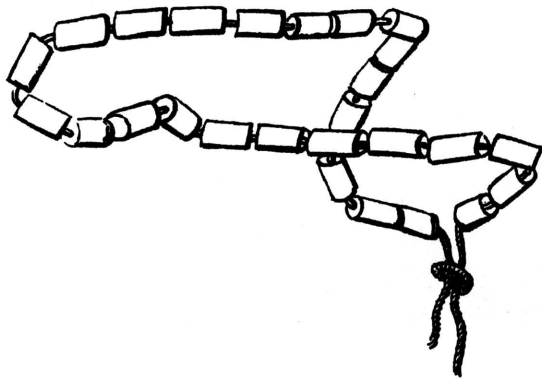


Figure 2. A “specimen of the beads of which the girdle is composed” by Major Strange (Samuells 1856).

told that the leaves of the bur, the peepul, the mhowa and the kendooa, in fact all large and smooth leaves are used indifferently. These leaves are changed daily, and are generally in consequence clean and fresh-looking.

No covering is worn on the upper-part of the person; but most of the females I have seen had necklaces of coloured earthenware beads (made by themselves they told me) which hung down to their waists in numerous folds; and nose, ear, and hair ornaments, sketches of which will be found in the accompanying engravings, were common amongst them.

Their hair was generally of the shock order, but was gathered rudely into a knot at the back of the head, and fastened by a string terminating at each end in a silver or brass button (Samuells 1856:296-297).

This is not only the first publication on the Juang, but also one of the first attempts to describe beads ethnographically. The study is illustrated with drawings by Major Strange which depict beaded Juang women (Fig. 1) and a bead string from a girdle (Fig. 2). In the above quote, Samuells describes various aspects of Juang culture, some of which are very important in understanding their beads. These include details about the material composing the beads, the shape of the beads, the mode of wearing them, the amount of beads worn by the Juang, and the makers of the beads.

Colonel Dalton was the next to document the Juang, at a time when cloth was replacing leaves under the direction of Captain Johnstone. Dalton’s

observations were made in Dhenkanal District in the late 1860s:

The females of the group had not amongst them a particle of clothing, their sole covering for purposes of decency consisted in a girdle composed of several strings of beads from which depended before and behind small curtains of leaves [Fig. 3]. Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. The Juáangs are not so far advanced; they take young shoots of the Ásan (*Terminalia iomentosa*) or any tree with long soft leaves, and arranging them so as to form a flat and scale like surface of the required size, the sprigs are simply stuck in the girdle fore and aft and the toilet is complete. The girls were well developed and finely formed specimens of the race, and as the light leafy costume left the outlines of the figure entirely nude, they would have made good studies for a sculptor.

The beads that form the girdle are small tubes of burnt earthen ware made by the wearers. They also wore a profusion of necklaces of glass beads [Fig. 4], and brass ornaments in their ears and on their wrists... (Dalton 1872:155).

Dalton not only mentions the use of both burned earthenware beads and glass beads, but also notes how differently the two were worn: the former to hold the lower dress and the latter for necklaces.

There are a number of legends concerning the origin of traditional Juang costume. The most common among them is as follows:

The river goddess emerging for the first time from the Gonasika rock, came suddenly on a rollicking party of Juáangs dancing naked, and ordering them to adopt leaves on the moment as a covering, laid on them the curse that they must adhere to that costume for ever or die (Dalton 1872:156).

The most exhaustive paper by far on the Juang was published by Elwin in 1948. Concentrating on the district of Angul, he had this to say about their costume:

The leaf-dress is a simple and natural one. So long as the Juang live to themselves in the recesses of their hills, so long as there are no out-

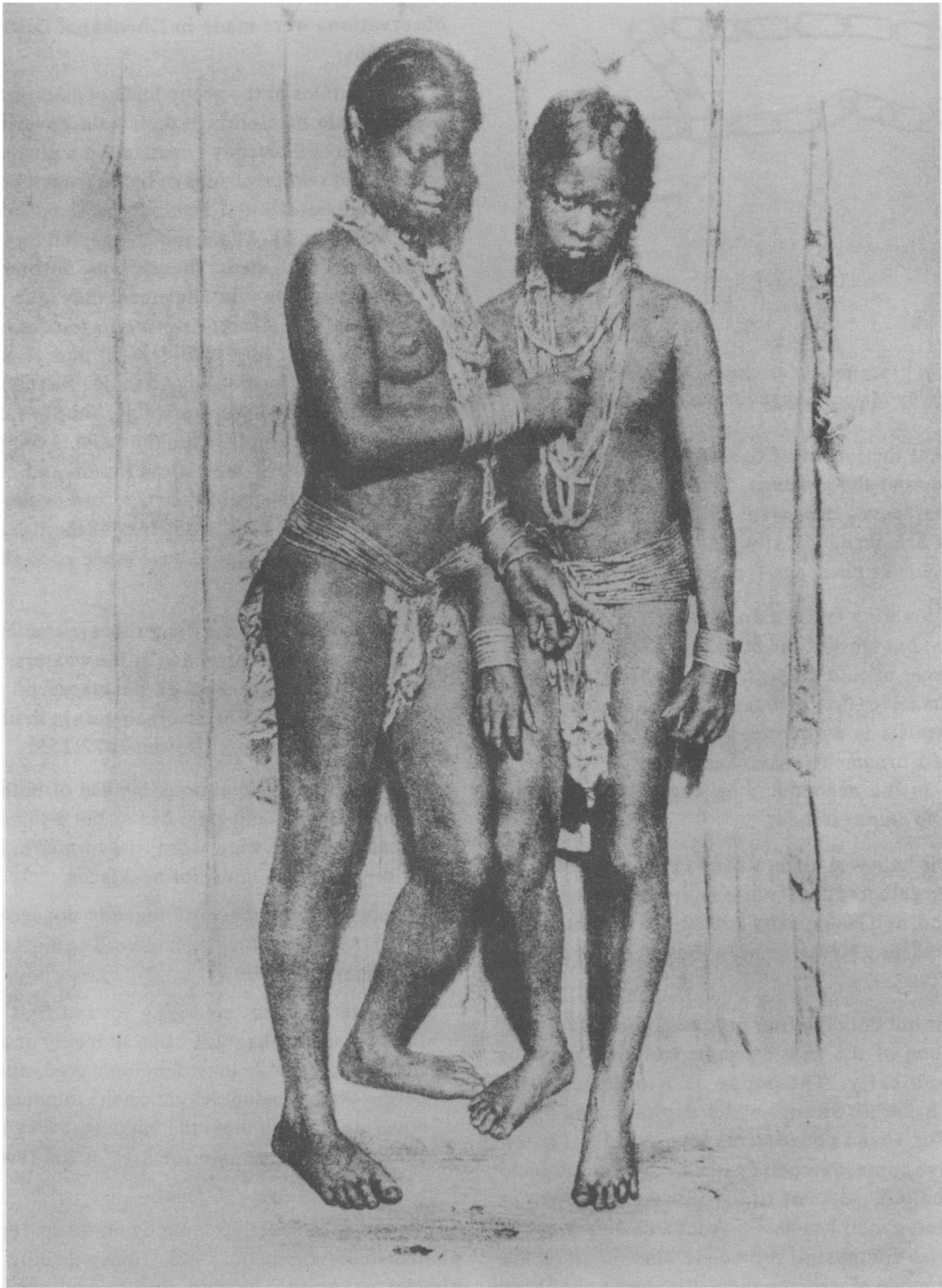


Figure 3. "Juang Girls. This illustration... was obtained at Gonásika in Keonjhar, noticed in the account of this tribe as the legendary cradle of the race. The beads or bugles forming the girdles are of fine earthen-ware made by themselves. The bracelets are of brass and the necklaces of glass beads or flowers. The rest of the attire is of leaves" (Dalton 1872:Pl. XXXIII).



Figure 4. “Very typical specimens of the Juang Tribe... at Gonásika in Keonjhar” (Dalton 1872:Pl. XXXIV). Note the different necklace styles.

side eyes to pry and stare, it is well adapted to the innocent ways of the people. Any kind of large leaf can be used. The leaves are brought from the jungle in the early morning, laid on the ground in rows and pressed flat with earth or stones. A girdle is made with a large number of bugles [tubular beads] of baked earth which are threaded onto strips of bark-cord; the girdle is a substantial thing, fairly heavy, sometimes as thick as a dozen or fifteen rows of cords and bugles. The leaves are stuck into this by the sprigs so as to form thick aprons back and front; the loins are left uncovered.

These leaves are full of magic, and have to be carefully protected. The previous day's leaves are thrown away very early in the morning while it is still dark, not even the husband knowing

where. They are thrown into a pit and the wearer spits on them. Great care must be taken to pick up any leaf or bit of leaf that falls from the girdle.... if a leaf is left on the ground and someone treads on it, the wearer may die. If the parents of a girl trod on the leaf or stepped over it, it would be a sin equivalent to incest. If a witch could get hold of the leaf, she could send a tiger to devour the wearer or a snake to bite her; she could make her barren or unclean (Elwin 1948:43).

Elwin not only details the procedure of preparing the women's daily dress, but also discusses the material used for threading the beads: bark cord which some traditional Juang and all the Bondo (a sister community living on the Bondo hills of the Malkanagiri District) still use for threading glass beads. It is interesting to note that while modern

Juangs no longer utilize the leaf dress, the beads they now use (like the discarded leaves in Elwin's account) are spat upon before they are discarded or new ones are worn to avoid black magic.

Elwin goes on to say that the traditional costume of the Juang is on the verge of disappearing. However, he notes that women continue to wear the leaf dress on religio-ceremonial occasions in general and in the interior regions in particular:

In Keonjhar and Dhenkanal the leaf-dress soon became a thing of the past. But it survived in Pal Lahara. N.K. Bose found women wearing leaves in 1928 and I did so also in 1942. And everywhere there are certain survivals. Many Juang women wear a few leaves under their cloth as a magical protection. At a wedding the bride is attired in her traditional leaf-dress. At dances the Juang put on their leaves with the utmost willingness and are evidently delighted to have any excuse to do so. The belief in the power of the worn leaf is as strong as ever (Elwin 1948:45-46).

The Juang have been the subject of a number of other studies as well, but none of them has stressed beads. No subsequent scholar has recorded either earthenware beads or leaf dress among these people.

At least one researcher (Peter Francis, Jr. 1998: pers. comm.) has questioned the accuracy of the early accounts which identify the girdle beads as "earthen ware" and "glazed earthen-ware," wondering—especially in the latter instance—if they might not have been composed of opaque dull-red glass instead. Unfortunately, none of the "earthenware" beads are preserved in any museum. Although both Samuells (1856:297) and Dalton (1872:153) were told that the beads were locally made, Dalton (1872:153) states emphatically that the Juang "neither spin nor weave, nor have they ever attained to the simplest knowledge of pottery." It is, therefore, possible that at least some of the beads were imported glass specimens.

Terracotta beads, including tubular varieties, are currently produced in the village of Panchmura in the Bishnupur District which is about 100 km northwest of Calcutta. As observed by the author, the potter-cum-beadmaker makes a long, thin cylinder in his workshop and cuts it into pieces before coloring them with deep ocher and firing them in a kiln. The

oxidation technique (air is allowed into the kiln during firing) is used to obtain a red color, while the reduction technique (air is not allowed to enter the kiln) is used to produce black beads. A lack of scientific investigation and excavation in the region of the Juang, coupled with the non-use of earthenware beads by the Juang for generations, presently make it impossible to determine if there was trade between the Panchmura beadmakers and the Juang in the past. However, it is important to note that most of the glass beads presently used by the Juang come from the Calcutta old market (discussed below).

MODERN JUANG BEADS

The Juang used to be one of the most ornament-loving peoples in tribal India. Now only the older Juang women maintain this tradition (Pl. IA), especially at Gonasika. The increasing price of beads, the disintegration of the folk arts, and the impact of modernization and poverty have all played a role in the extinction of this tradition. Just five decades ago, the Juang used to wear only beads and no clothes, like the present-day Bondo.

Traditionally, no Juang should be without at least a single bead string around the neck. For them it is a symbol of courage and fortune. One specific case is the single red bead worn at the neck of Srikant Juang, the only Juang to graduate from Keonjhar Government College Boys Hostel, which is for him the identity of Juang. When putting on any new beads, irrespective of the sex or age of the person, the tradition is to invoke the name of *thaniputi*, the village deity (Pl. IB).

On a child's first birthday, the parents present it with its first thread of beads, and such gifts continue irrespective of the child's sex until about the age of five. Thereafter, only girls continue to receive gifts of beads. The gifts increase with every festival until marriage. During the marriage proposal, a fancily dressed middleman (*madhyasta*) visits the bride's house with a sacred stick from the youth dormitory² and a number of variously colored bead strings from the groom's parents (*see cover*). On receipt of these beads, the bride's parents confirm the proposal. Richer suitors send more strings of colorful beads (Pl. IIA top) and *pohala* (large red glass beads of furnace-wound manufacture; Pl. IIA bottom). All the

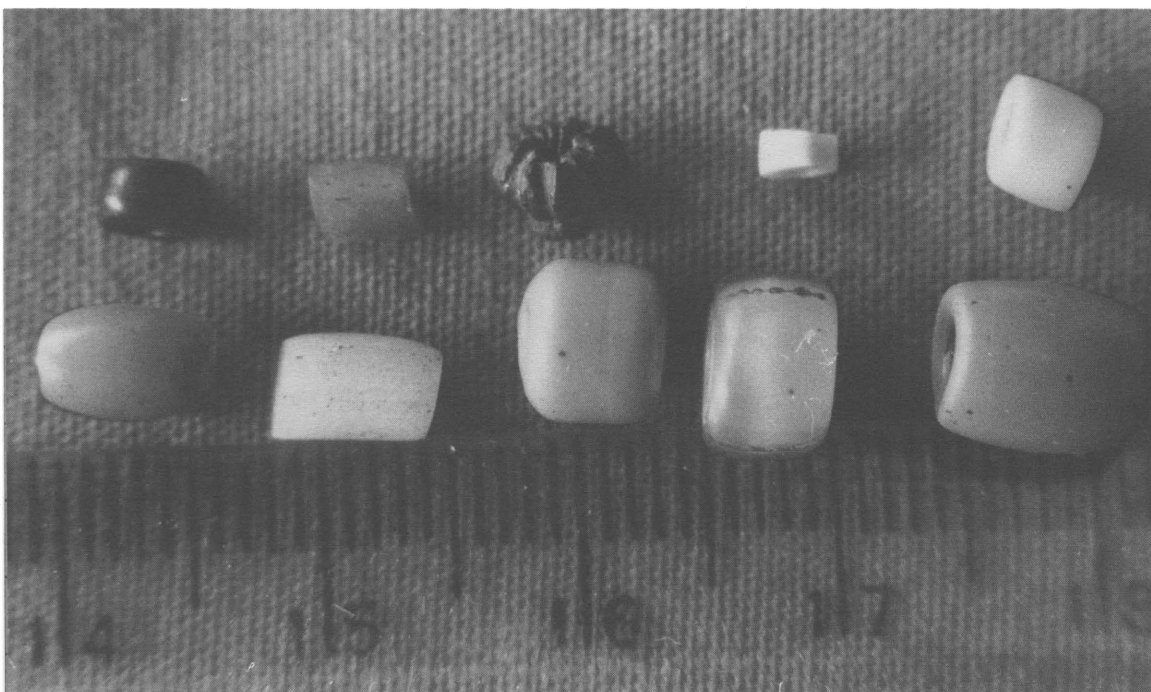


Figure 5. A selection of beads in current use among the Juang. The majority are glass and appear to be a mixture of European and Indian-made varieties; the exception is the seed bead (*bomo*) in the upper center (photo: A.K. Kanungo).

bride's beads are combined with other ornaments in preparation for her approach to the marriage platform (*mandap*). During the ceremony, the groom presents her with the marriage string (*ahuda mali*) which is fashioned of alternating white and reddish-brown glass beads (Pl. IIB). This is the beginning of her reornamentation as on her first visit to her parents' place following the wedding, the new wife brings back her old ornaments (Pl. IIC). At the end of the life cycle, all the beads worn at the time of death are generally burned with the body.

The Juang use mostly glass beads (Fig. 5, Pls. IID, IIIA top), followed in popularity by beads fashioned from seeds, silver and old coins. Bought from peddlers or obtained at the local weekly market, the glass beads usually come from the Calcutta old market (which sells beads produced at Agra) or from Andhra Pradesh (which sells beads produced at Papanaidupet).

The seed beads they make themselves. The most common seeds used for this purpose are those of *Symplocos cochinchinensis* and *Coax lachryma jobi* Linn., known locally as *bomo* (Fig. 5, Pl. IIIA bottom) and *erimindri*, respectively.

The silver and old-coin beads are produced by the local ironsmith (*kamara*). To make silver beads, the ironsmith melts some silver in the form of old coins and jewelry in an old can, and pours it into a mold which is sometimes decorated internally with traditional designs. The mold is generally of stone but is sometimes also made of clay by the smith. Coin beads are produced either by perforating a coin or by hammering a loop to one edge (Pls. IIA top, IIIB). Coins perforated by driving a nail through them are cheaper than those with drilled holes.

While performing fieldwork among the Juang, the author wondered why these people adopted red beads as their symbol. Two explanations are provided by legends current among the Juang. One relates that during a war between the Juangs and the tigers, only the red-beaded Juang survived. The red bead, therefore, became auspicious. The other legend states that the father of the Juang, a saint who lived on the Gonasika hill, used a string of red beads as a rosary. Following his preference, later generations adopted the color as well. From a scientific viewpoint, it is possible that the locally produced earthenware beads were consistently red (which is quite possible if the

beads were fired in an open fire or a kiln which allowed air to enter) and wearing them eventually became a tradition.

CONCLUSION

Modernization has brought noticeable changes to Juang culture. These people, who once bedecked themselves with strings of beads from neck to navel, now wear only 5-15 strings of glass beads of different colors, but mostly red and mostly in necklaces. Boys use a string of *bomo* beads and/or a single string of red glass beads. Elderly women prefer traditional ornaments and cover most of their body with beads. Middle-aged persons wear a mixture of new glass or plastic beads and traditional beads, but only during festive occasions. The young prefer plastic and metal beads because they are readily available and economical, too. They usually wear old red-glass beads only as a tribal symbol. However, during festivals they use all the glass beads they have at home. There is no evidence of the use of earthenware beads among the present-day Juang.

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ENDNOTES

1. The Juang believe that Gonasika is their original homeland, where they had a mythical origin. With

the passing of time, some Juangs moved away from Gonasika. At present, those who do not reside within the territory of Gonasika are considered *Bhagudiya*, while those who do are *Thaniya*.

2. A dormitory (*mandagarh*) well made of carved beams and pillars stands in the center of all the Juang villages of Keonjhar. This is the school of folk culture and the storehouse-cum-temple for the musical instruments. It is a big, comfortable habitation open along one side and with a high verandah. On the occasion of every important event in their corporate life, the males assemble here, encircling a continuously burning fire in the middle of the dormitory. Each and every auspicious event begins here. Visitors are entertained in the dormitory, including wedding guests.

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