

## Aspects of Tribal Culture in the Forest Environment of Bastar

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**ABSTRACT** The cultural pluralism in Bastar may be understood in terms of individual tribal life and culture with their territorial distribution. Life and culture of this tribal people are nurtured in the cradle of nature chiefly in the forest of *sal*, *sagun*, *mohua* and other forest timbers and plants. Ghotul—the youth dormitory is one of the famous social institutions and very common among the Muria tribe and as per their legend Lingo-pen is the chief deity of ghotul. *Chelik* and *motiari* of the ghotul perform their assign duty; during *pen-karsna* ritual tallurmutte-the earth goddess is appeased by ghotul inmates. The religiosity of Bastar tribes are manifested through the Danteshwari mata-the tutelary deity of royal family of Bastar, who acts like centripetal nature of religious beliefs, percolates in all section of the society. Along with this traditional wisdom in view of immediate environment is also discussed which clearly reveals the dependence of nature.

### INTRODUCTION

Bastar - the precious field of anthropological research is a forest-clad area. The approximate area of the district is 39,114 sq. km. and is only slightly bigger than Kerala state of India. In the late 90's the district was curved into Bastar, Kanker and Dantewada. (In the present discourse whole presentation will be made on undivided Bastar). The Indrawati River that bisects the district into almost two equal halves and the Sabri River, which flows along the southeastern boundary, bring the district in the Godavari basin. Till date 55% of the district is under forest.

We shall never forget empirical impression on the tribal villages at Bastar. Here were people living as they had always lived. They regarded their way of life, which would be considered weird, and surprising as well as amazing elsewhere, as perfectly natural. In one word they may be identified as 'simple children of nature'. Because in each facet of their life has a deep embedded touch as well as dependence on nature on which their survival strategy in such niche is cherished.

Bastar is the homeland of numerous tribal groups like Abujh Maria (or Hill Maria), Muria, Bison-Horn Maria (or Dandami Maria), Dhurwa, Dorla, Bhatra, Halba whose life and culture is nourished in the cradle of *sal* (*Shorea robusta*), *sagun* (*Tectona grandis*), *mohua* (*Bassia latifolia*)

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and others forest timbers and plants. About 74% population of the district is tribals. There are about 15% literate in the district. The tribals of Bastar are the descendents of the successive waves of primitive immigrants of more or less similar beliefs and customs of pre-Dravidian era. Tribal economy of the district has automatically created an institution known as '*Hat*' (weekly market), which performs basic function of the markets and serves the people in a given area (Sarkar and Dasgupta 1996). "The village is an agglomeration of production functions carried out by different producing families having a certain degree of mutual inter-dependence" (Singh Deo 1984). The most primitive organizational system is supposed to be in communities are-*communal control over land* and where villages are often shifted as per their need of cultivation (eg. especially among Abujh Maria). The means of production are treated communal but the material product of labour belongs to the family. Social life arising out of such economic organizations is necessarily community or clan oriented and as such is controlled by the society. In most cases villages are uniethnic organizations and their inter village social relationships are controlled and guided by their customary rule. The growing pressure on land forced these tribals to acquire different skills for maintaining their livelihood. This type of production organization does not even break the community in-group feeling but on the contrary, the community control on social life, economic life becomes independent. The various tribal people of Bastar who possess different individual ethnic boundary, live in an environment of mutual

inter dependence and co-operation and most interestingly all of them are tied through a single thread – the worship of *Danteshwari ma* – the tutelary deity of Bastar Raja. (Sarkar and Dasgupta 1996).

The cultural pluralism in the district may be understood in terms of individual tribal life and culture with their territorial distribution in the district. Before going into detail let us clarify the term ‘tribe’. “Tribe is a group of homogenous people, that is, with a common way of life and having an in-group sentiment of their own which differentiate from other, having a common geographical territory with a common dialect, usually backward, segmentary society (i.e. usually specialization is not rigid and generation wise), shyness in contact with outsiders, primitiveness in comparison to modern technology, lack of personal ethics in supernaturalism and presence of hierarchic sanction in their world view and have a belief in the transmigration of soul and reincarnation” (Sarkar 1995).

### CULTURAL PLURALISM

Bastar is the melting pot of cultural behaviour for a long period. Infact, this region has been the meeting ground of the historical, linguistic and ancestral traditions of the three states of Chhattisgarh namely, Orissa, Andhra and Maharashtra. The influx of population in the district is gradually increasing. The original inhabitants of the district are tribals, namely Abujh Maria, Dandami Maria, Muria, Bhatra, Halba, Dorla and Dhurwa (Fig. 1). Apart from these there are other tribal groups like the Gadaba, Oraon, Munda etc., which are very small in number and more so, they are not the sons of soil of Bastar. About 20% populations are either business community (from Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh), government service holder people and EastBengal (now Bangladesh) Refugees who are settled in various pockets of the district. Through empirical observation, the authors came to know that in general, economically these refugees population are lagging behind other non-tribal people in this area, could not improve themselves much in spite of their prolonged adjustment with the new geo-economic situation. These immigrant populations re-interpret several of their traditional cultural repertoires in the new environment. The cultural pluralism has also been noticed among immigrant population.

Now in the following lines the discussion will be on main tribal population of Bastar, their settlement and socio-cultural behaviour. In Bastar there are at least seven major tribal endogamous groups who are settled in various corners of the district and maintain their individual cultural entity. The empirical observation reveals that each of these tribal groups is distributed in a particular territory (one may see the enclosed distribution Map) of the forest-clad Bastar district. Each tribal community have their own cultural boundary and within this cultural framework each group used to perform their various kinds of socio-cultural behaviour, which is typically their own. The Bastar tribes are classified under the generic name-GOND and they represent certain primitive stages and levels of development.

### Abujh Maria

The Abujh Maria tribe lives entirely in Abujhmarh hills. This belt extends from Kutru to Barsur and mixed Hill Maria with Dorla characterizes southwards beyond Bhairamgarh west of Kutru, and this Hill Maria have almost become Dorla. Among the Abujhmaria, clans (*katta*) are unilinear descent group. Each clan has a clan God (*pen*) whom they worship. Infact under a clan God (*pen*) there are a number of clans who are tied by *bhaiband* relations. All the members of a clan (*katta*) are called *bhaiband* or *dadabhai* (brothers-clan) and marital alliance in those having *bhaiband* relationship is prohibited, and along with this they also practice clan exogamy. They are permitted to settle marriage only with a member of wife’s clan, called *akomama*. Therefore, all the clans have some *bhaiband* clans and some *akomama* clan. The situation cannot be understood by saying only clan exogamy or phratry exogamy system. Among the Hill Maria, they have knowledge about every clan, either brother’s or a wife’s clan. A person among them is allowed to acquire a mate from wife clan (*akomama*) only. They are patrilocal and prefer cross-cousin marriage. Bride price system is prevalent. Monogamy is the rule. Polygamy is also allowed. Marriage by negotiation (*pendul*) is the rule and marriage rituals are performed by their community elders. The other form of acquiring mate among them are *lamareh* (marriage by service), *gharjamai*, *vitte* (marriage by elopement), *koheberdan* (marriage by exchange),



Fig. 1. Ethnic map of Bastar District

*aeohundi* (junior leverate), *koyeyari* (sororate) and widow marriage are also allowed. The date of re-marriage is fixed adjusting with the local market day. Divorce is discouraged. They bury the dead and the belongings of the deceased are kept under a stone slab or menhir, locally known as *mengrahal*, is erected on the burial; they are mainly *penda* (slash and burn) cultivators, though they also practice incipient form of settled cultivation. Their traditional council is headed by *pargana manjhi* assisted by a village *patel*. It deals with the disputes between the members of the community. They believe in animism. They worship their clan deities. Kaksar is their chief festival when all clan deities are invited and is performed in the month of June, just before monsoon. The Abujh Maria considers Kaksar (a festival of dance) and Kudin as the harvest festivals and also a new eating ceremony for all the crops but its main purpose seems to be to honour the clan Gods before the beginning of the monsoon and resumption of hard labour in their cultivable land.

The Abujh Maria is the only tribal group in the district who are till date outside of external forces. They are among the primitive tribal-groups (till date their women are half-clad) and they have a distinct ethnic entity that differs from others. Actually their mental processes are not unlike ours because of their centuries of isolation. They believe that the area covered by Abujh Maria hills is their own domain that is actually owned by their *pen* deities of the celestial world. Again the *pen* deities divided and distributed the land among the Abujh Maria people of the terrestrial world and those are distributed through the *kattas* (clan like small social group) in which the Abujh Maria people belong. They are *penda* (Slash and burn) cultivators. They cultivate a piece of land for not more than successive four years and after that the land is left abandoned for a long duration (Dasgupta and Sarkar 2003). It is believed that the land in the Abujhmarh hills is under the control of their *pen* deities who are thought of as the actual owners. The *pens* among the *kattas* under their control mythically divide then the land and the Abujh Maria progenies of those *kattas* ultimately own those. Each *pen* has one or more villages under his/her control or has a particular territory, and the members of the said *pen* enjoy the right to utilize the land, in which their economic need for sustenance is operating and in view of maintenance of sustenance, the *kattas* under a *pen* (which Grigson 1991, referred

as phratry) of a particular area or a territory of Abujhmarh act as a corporate group (Dasgupta and Sarkar 2003).

### Muria

The east of Abujhmarh hills that is, the remaining part of Narayanpur tehsil including its southern portion is a belt of Jhoria Muria or Muria, they are low landers or plain Muria who are apparently belong to same stock of Hill Maria although they maintain endogamy. The abode of Muria tribe is Kondagaon tehsil, north Narayanpur and north central part of Jagdalpur. The Muria young boys wear white cloth above the knees and wear turban on their head. They tie a headband with long string of beads on it. Combs are tucked into the folds of the turban. They keep *chutta* (leafpipe) and *chunoti* (tobacco box) in its folds. They tie their hair at the back with a bunch of feathers or tassels or red wool. They wear various kinds of beaded ornaments.

Regarding their social organization and clan system it is very much similar with Abujhmaria. That is, they also possess phratry system. The clan of other parties with whom marital relations can be established is known as *akomama*. Each phratry consists of several clans, who have totems such as clan *buji* (bullock-a-totem), *dhurwa* (goat), *wika* (kassi tree), *sori/sodi* (tiger), *bod* (a kind of fish) etc. The phratry and the clans are exogamous in nature. Monogamy and adult marriage are the rule but polygamy is also permitted. They have a custom of bride-price. Marriage by negotiations (*ful kochna*) is most preferred and cross-cousin marriage is also preferred. Apart from these, several other ways of acquiring of mate are allowed among them, such as, *Ostasana marmi*, *talk dayna*, *arwitana*, *hai wark wat tika tasana and yer dosana amrmi*. Divorce is permitted. They have *ghotul* system, which they consider, as sacred place and they never do any sin there. According to their legend, Lingo pen was the creator of ghotul. They have a belief on the Supreme Being called – Mahaprabhu, Ispural and Bhagwan. *Songur mate* is one of the their important goddess. The earth is regarded as their mother goddess. Their rain god is known as Bhimul. The Muria priests and sacred specialists are *kaizer*, *gaita*, *pen gaita* and *pujar*. They have also *gunnia*. Their posts are hereditary. They have their own social council headed by *manjhi*, which is a hereditary post and he wears red turban and is assisted by *patel*.

### Dandami Maria

The Bison-Horn Maria or Dandami Maria are primarily the inhabitants of Dantewada tehsil which is an enclosed basin and extend over the surrounding plateau and lowlands for some distance like the Indrawati river of the north, Dubbatota on the south, Chittrakote, Tirathgarh, Tongpal and Sukma in the east and Bijapur, Basaguda on the west. The enclosed basin of Bison-Horn Maria was almost isolated from the advance people of the surrounding area but with the advent of NMDC (National Mineral Development Corporation) iron mining area, this area is becoming changed due to impact of industrialization. It is also observed that the central part of Konta tehsil i.e. from Basaguda to Dubatota form a transition belt between Bison Horn Maria on the north-east and Dorla in the south-west. Infact, this area is admixture of Dorla and Bison-Horn Maria, which is again exposed to Telugu influence. They do not have any Ghotul system. Their musical dancing instruments are 'dhol' for men and *jhumka lathi*-iron dancing stick for women. During dance the male wear a typical headgear of horn head on the head, for which they are called as Bison-Horn Maria.

They are divided into a number of exogamous, totemistic phatries or *bans* namely, Marvi, Kuhrami, Sodi, Markami and Kawasi. Again, each of them is divided into a number of exogamous, totemistic clan (*katta*). The main function of phratry and clan is to regulate marriage. The word *dadabhai* is used to designate kindered or brother's clan with whom marriage is prohibited. *Gudupal* or cross-cousin marriage is preferred. As per their customary law, marriage takes place at their early ages before puberty. It is known as *mangin*. After puberty, the actual marriage ceremony is performed. Divorce is permitted. Their economic life revolves around land and forest. A Pedda heads their own jati panchayat of social control, which is hereditary post. Para Mukhia, Kotwar and Aut Paharia assist him. Apart from this they have inter-village organization or *pargana* panchayat, headed by *pargana manjhi*. The outskirt of every Dandami Maria village is the abode of their clan god who is believed as a protector of the territory in which their clan members reside. They worship earth goddess-*Bhum*, regarded as their mother goddess who feeds and sustain her Maria children.

### Dorla

The Dorla, another tribal group of Bastar live in Godavari-Sabri river low-lands in western Bijapur tehsil and southern Konta. Their immediate neighbours in the south are the Koya (in Orissa) and the Hill Reddi (in Andhra Pradesh) and in the north and north-west are the Bison-Horn Maria and the Hill Maria. It is also reported that Dorla of Konta area often made marital alliance with Koya of Malkangiri, Orissa; often they are known as Dor-Koi or Koya. Infact, river Sabari is the demarcation line of two adjoining states, i.e., Chhattishgarh and Orissa, where Dorla settlement is found. Their house types is so typical, it is thatched with four slopes with a front verandah.

They are strictly endogamous group, having number of exogamous phatries or *gatta* Viz., *Paremboi*, *Paren*, *Muro*, *Aido* and *Erogatta*. Again each *gatta* consists of number of *inteperu* or clan and each *inteperu* possess a *pen* or clan god. Monogamy is the rule but polygamy is not discouraged. A married woman wears a particular kind of necklace as a symbol of marriage, known as *pustetadu*. They are basically settled cultivators. Personal possession of palm tree is a kind of status symbol in their society. They have their own traditional council of social control, headed by a Patel Manjhi and Dhurwa and a Bandhroth assists him. They believe in the existence of spirits of natural objects such as hills, jungle, water etc. and also on ghosts and other malevolent spirits. They also worship the souls of their ancestors. They believe in black magic. They also observe number of festivals or *pandums* which are closely woven with their agricultural activities, and other related things through which their subsistence pattern is deeply involved namely, *Bija Pandum*, *Tarn Pandum*, *Sukur Pandum*, *Kossra Pandum*, *Bhimin Pandum* etc. From Konta through river Sabri, bamboos are being transported to Andhra, which is typically indigenous. Many Dorla labourers are engaged in bamboo harvesting in the forest.

### Dhurwa

The Dhurwa or Parja live in the Southeastern part of Jagdalpur tehsil and part of Sukma circle. Their distribution also extends eastwards into the adjacent Koraput district of Orissa. They have assumed the name Dhurwa that is more prestigious than *Parja*-a synonym. Culturally, the

Dhurwa zone forms a transition between the backward Dandami Maria on the southwest and the relatively advanced Muria tribal region on the northeast as marked by the local dress and houses. They are highly skilled basket weavers. Etymologically, Dhurwa means headman of the village. They are divided into a number of exogamous and totemistic *bansh* or clan such as Bagh (tiger), Nag (snake), Dokda (goat), Kachim (tortoise) etc.

Among them *mangni* or marriage by negotiation is preferred. Among other ways of acquiring mates - marriage by elopment, junior levirate, and junior sororate is common. Monogamy is the rule. System of bride-price is prevalent.

Dhurwa settlement and villages are found mainly in the forest and it's neighbouring area of Darbha ghat where plenty of bamboo groves are found. Since they are basket makers, they collect the raw materials like bamboo from their immediate niche. Along with this they also practice settled cultivation. They also collect honey, resin, seeds, barks etc. from forest to sell those in weekly market. They have their own traditional council of social control headed by a Patel and assisted by Kotwar and an Aut Paharia. The post Patel is hereditary. Danteshwari mata is their principal deity. Other deities are *Maoli Mata*, *Telgin Mata*, *Jalni Mata*, *Pitore Deo*, *Dongar Deo*, *Hinglagin Mata* etc. Their religious heads are *Pelae* and *Pujari* whose post is hereditary.

### Bhatra

The Bhatra tribe is settled in a small area of Indrawati plain in northern Jagdalpur, that is, the Bakawand circle. Beyond the district they are also extended to Koraput district of Orissa. It is reported that they came to Bastar with the first Raja of Bastar from the Warangal. They are divided into three social groups namely, *Amnit Bhatra* or *Bade Bhatra*, *Sargimundi* or *Majhli Bhatra* and *Shan Bhatra* or *Pit Bhatra* or *Batamundi Masnimara*. Among them Amnit hold the highest status, Pit-Bhatra hold the lowest status among them and are derogatively called as Muria Bhatra. On the basis of economic criteria this division is formed. Amnit Bhatra is mainly concentrated in Orissa. Each group has a number of exogamous, totemistic clan. They are monogamous, however polygamy is also permitted. They have a system of bride price.

Cross-cousin marriages are allowed. Beside marriage by negotiation other ways of acquiring mates are *wdaliya* (marriage by elopment), *paisa mundin* (intrusion), *rajikhusi* (love marriage), marriage by service and *khilnwa dibar* (marriage by inheritance). Nowadays they are mainly cultivators. They also collect from forest various kinds of edible roots, tubers, leaves and mushroom for their consumption. They have their own jati panchayat headed by a *Naik* who is assisted by *Paik* and five members.

Religiously, Bhatra are divided into two sects viz, *Jagatlok* and *Bhagatlok*. The Jagatlok Bhatra practice their traditional religion while the Bhagatlok Bhatra are a group of converted Bhatra into Alekh Dharam, worship only one formless supreme authority called *Alekh Mahaprabhu*. They wear saffron coloured cloth and are vegetarian. All the Bhatras pierce their ear-lobe before marriage but Jagatlok only wear sacred thread.

They depend much on supernatural power. They worship their ancestors, their *Gotideo* (clan God), family deity etc. *Danteshwari ma* – the chief deity is believed as their protecting goddess. They also worship Bhima deo, Maoli mata.

### Halba

The Halba tribe lives in scattered small area in many villages of north and south Bastar, an old administrative center of the Bastar State like Bijapur where Halba men were posted as sepoys. The origin of the name of Halba is derived from Hal (plough). The Halba of Chhattisgarh claim superior status over Ghasi, Mahara, Maria, Gadaba etc. and are divided into two endogamous and territorial divisions, viz. the *Chhattisgarhia* and the *Bastaria*. Again the Bastaria Halba are divided into two endogamous division – (i) *Purit* or *Jat Halba* and (ii) *Surit* or *Nani Halba*. The Purit claim superior status over other. Each of these divisions are again divided into number of exogamous *bans* (clans) such as Nag, Bhagel, Netam, Kashyap, Kachim etc. Marriage by negotiation is common but marriage by elopment (*pisamundi*) and marriage by service occurs frequently.

They are agriculturists. They have their own mechanism of social control. The principal deity is *Danteshwari mai*. Along with this, they also worship several deities like *Maoli*, *Bhairam*, *Jhangda*, *Mahamai* and several village deities.

They also practice ancestor worship. Their eldest clan members in the village perform their own rituals.

The above discussion it reveals that different tribal groups of Bastar occupy a specific territory in which they practice all their socio-cultural behaviour and maintain their identity. If we consider the social organization of the above mentioned tribal groups it is found that more-or-less their social structure are same i.e. they have system of phratry, which is exogamous and totemistic. Due to territorial difference their name may be different. All are believers of ancestor worship, soul worship and have faith in spirits. In most of the cases they try to appease the deity, which again depend on their natural environment and resources, for the welfare of family and community. It appears that in spite of micro-level differences in their social organization, they perhaps belong to the same stock, who are settled in different corners and territory of district – Bastar (undivided) and in course of time and process of acculturation they formed an endogamous group.

#### GHOTUL- THE YOUTH DORMITORY

Ghotul is a famous social institution and very common among the Muria, it is nothing but a communal barrack where unmarried boys and girls assemble during night and they sing, dance, and play there. The Muria boys (*chelik*) and girls (*motiyari*) spend whole night in the ghotul. The Muria ghotul is bisexual in nature. When a child attains his/her age at the teen age, their parents send him/her to ghotul. In earlier days ghotul was found in almost all Muria villages while now the active ghotul among Muria is very few.

These children initially are not allowed to take part in dance, and singing activities till they get permission from the ghotul leaders – *sirdar*. The elder members teach them the customs, behaviours, etiquette, duties and obligation etc. The members of other castes and tribes are not allowed in their ghotul. The members of different ghotuls meet at festivals, marriages and dances. Sometimes they arrange dance competitions between the ghotuls. In general they have a friendly attitude with each other. A boy or a girl visitor is welcomed by the ghotul of the visited village. A boy can easily take temporary membership in the ghotul of the visited village. He even gets his partner there, but when a girl visits another village, she is allowed to go to the

ghotul, dance, and sing but not allowed to spend the night or to sleep in the ghotul. If she does so, the members of her ghotul heavily penalize her after her return to her native village.

According to the Muria legend Lingo pen, one of their deities is the founder of ghotul. The Muria show respect to the deity because not only he is the founder of ghotul but he discovered fire, gave them *mahua* liquor and introduced very attractive music for them (Most of the *cheliks* in the ghotuls are good flute musician).

It has been also observed that there are two types of ghotuls, namely, the *jodidar* ghotul or joking ghotul and the *bolda kiyana* ghotul. The former is regarded as single partner ghotul where a *chelik* and a *motiyari* are paired together till their marriage. It is a single partner ghotul. In *jodidar* ghotul, a *chelik* and a *motiyari* are formally married in the ghotul by offering *bidi* (country cigar) and a bottle of liquor to all the members of the ghotul. While in the second type of ghotul, that is *bolda kiyana* – the partners are changed after two days. They do not like a long attachment of a *chelik* with his *motiyari* because of that they have formed a rule of changing the partner after every two days. They believe that long attachment may bring social disharmony in their society. In fact, in such cases they are unable to identify the right person if the *motiyari* gets pregnant.

Muria believe that children come from god by means of mysterious, non-physical processes and that children consequently have *pen*(god) – like attributes. Children are commonly referred to a *pen*.

The ghotul boys and girls do not have this degree of sacredness. The religions duties of the ghotul members are to sing and dance prior to, and during, the *pen-karsna* (god play), rituals and to dance with the *anga* (log god) images of the gods, thereby becoming filled with their divine frenzy (Gell 1992). On the day of *pen karsna* not only the ghotul of the studied villages are active, but also all the neighbouring villages ghotuls either accompanying their own gods or participate en masse dancers and singers. During this major song and dance festival the ghotul boys and girls act as cultural ambassador of their own village. *Pen-karsna* is a ritual where earth goddess *tallur mutte* is appeased. In facts among the Muria, *tallur mutte* is the active feminine power in the world and material forms in the world and this material forms among the Muria are earth and its vegetation (Popoff 1980).

It has been observed that every *chelik* desires to have as his *jor* (partner), the most beautiful, cheerful, energetic and presentable *motiari* in the *ghotul* and on the contrary every *motiari* wishes to have the most handsome and richest *chelik* and one with enterprising qualities. In theory, it is up to girls (*motiari*) to establish a partnership with a boy (*chelik*) of their own choice. Boys are adamantly unequivocal about the particular *ghotul* rule that says that girls only sleep with whomsoever they wish. The empirical data also suggest that *chelik* are busy in the daytime in preparing an engraved wooden comb. These are minutely engraved where often their symbol of totem, natural surroundings etc. are expressed through engraving and presented to a *motiari* of his choice. If a *motiari* accepts the comb from a *chelik* which indicates she agreed to be *jor* for the *chelik* and the said comb she puts her bunch of head hair, as a cognitive symbol that she is engaged by someone – *chelik* thereby other *chelik* of the *ghotul* will not approach her for *jor*. Possession of such beautiful number of engraved combs by a *motiari* signifies her beauty in *ghotul* and social status (Sarkar and Dasgupta 2008).

### LIFE IN ACTION

To our mind religion is a phenomenon of social articulation followed by ritual and practices and by practicing it one has to feel security from uncertainty as well as a feeling of an ingroup social bondage, which differs from others. The intricate dependence of various benevolent and malevolent spirits, becomes the part and parcel of their survival strategy in such niche. One of the most important outward manifestations of religion is the performance of festivals and it has been an important feature of group life all over the world. Rituals and festivals are woven into one's own cultural fabric.

In Bastar situation, this religions manifestations are expressed through three main categories – (a) earth goddess, (b) lineage deity and (c) *matagudi*.

In each and every village in Bastar all the ethnic groups propitiate these three categories of deities where ethnic boundary is not taken into consideration. The earth is referred to as *bhum*, or *matideo* or *mutak* or *tallurmutte* or *tallin*. The earth includes the spirits of river, forest and appeased separately. The tribal people of Bastar venerate the earth goddess in different names,

which varies according to their territorial settlement pattern. They worship it in order to protect the village from all types of diseases and dangers as well as welfare of the village and to protect the village as guard deity from all types of evils.

Ancestor worship is one of the essential parts in the life and action of the tribes of Bastar. They believe that their deceased ancestors are among their own household deities who protect them from all sorts of problems and act for their welfare. The ancestral spirit holds a very important position in their culture and religions world. All tribes of Bastar practice ancestor worship. The *pen* deity is a guardian deity of a particular clan to which person belongs. These entire *pen* deities of the celestial world are mythically connected with each other through the network of social relations; more so, these deities have their own specified territory. *Anga* is the blanket term for all the clan deities.

In each and every village there is a site of *matagudi* that are also appeased time to time in order to get blessings and for welfare for the family. Some of such deities at *matagudi* are – *Pardeshin mata*, *Bhandarin mata*, *Sitala mata*, *Telangin mata*, *Jalini mata* *Maolimata*, *Kodaimata*, *Kankalin mata* etc. Incidentally these *matas* are genealogically related to each other in their celestial belief system and that again have some consanguineal or affinal relation with the supreme deity of Bastar – the *Danteshwari mata* – the tutelary deity of royal family of Bastar.

The whole concept of various *matas* or mother cults as found in different villages of Bastar centres, around the principle mother cult – *Danteshwari*, which act as a centripetal force. During Dussehra festival we have witnessed the centripetal nature of the worship of the mother cult since all the individual village deities are brought into Jagdalpur town for propitiation centering on *Danteshwari mata*. The forces of decentralization of all these individual deities take place soon after the Dussehra festival (Sunder 1997) when these individual deities return to their respective villages after performing *bidai* or *gangamunda yatra* at Gangamunda ward of Jagdalpur town – the District head quarter of Bastar.

The whole idea of centripetal nature of religious beliefs percolates in all strata of the society where the tribal and non-tribal way of life form a bond of synthesis, at least in their religious



world-view and socio-economic understanding of life. This impact is strongly evident in the life and culture of the people of Bastar at large even to this day though it might have crystallized during the reign of feudatory chiefs, who ruled Bastar till the recent past. (Sarkar and Dasgupta, forthcoming publication entitled "In the Shadow of Beliefs : Process of Integration and Social Mobility).

### Traditional Wisdom in View of Immediate Environment

It has been observed among the Abujh Maria that they count their months and days according to the position of moon. Their month starts from the first day of the lighter half called as *ujera paksh* and ends of the last day of the darker half known as *lenjatu* or *amavashya*.

They have twelve months that are divided into three seasons, namely, summer, monsoon and winter. When the *mahua* and *palash* (red in colour) flowers bloom, the mango trees start flowering, they get the indication that summer is approaching. When they see that new leaves have begun to come in the *mahua* tree and there is no flower in the *mahua* tree, when collection of *sal* (*Shorea robusta*) seed is stopped, the *fuljharia* (broom stick) in the jungle gradually stop blooming with the approach of rainy season. When *sulphi* or sago palm trees are ready to give sweet juice, paddy is ready for harvest, the *fuljharia* trees are again ready to give flower, they can realize that winter is very close to them.

It is also informed that if there is bumper production of mango, they will have heavy shower and a good harvest. When the new *mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) leaves come, they notice it minutely. If the size of *mahua* leaves are large and or the colour of the *mahua* leaf is very light, then they are sure that there will be heavy rain. If *sarai* (*sal*) flowers grow abundantly, they are sure to get plenty of paddies. If the *mahua* tender leaves are red, then the rain will be insufficient (Dasgupta and Sarkar 2005).

### DISCUSSION

Till 2000 Bastar tribal people were little bit away from the wave of modernization and led a

solitary life in their forest domain and with the advent of the globalization process the scenario has been changed which usually cut across the boundaries of nations, cultures and societies privileging a move towards a larger integration of the world and facilitating interdependence moving towards a global culture and Bastar situation is not exceptional. In short, the radical acceleration in the flows of capital, people, goods, images and ideologies – brought the most remote corner of the world under a common umbrella – the global village that signifies the growing of global inter connectedness.

The changing modern political scenario among tribal people of Bastar is simply an outcome of globalization process. One may ask how a simple innocent innocuously peaceful tribal group becomes hostile? It is true that they are deprived of many welfare activities of the Government due to various reasons and now some opportunist group in the name of some political party – forming a symbolic expressive group or Instrumental ethnicity, is crediting their grievances in this hostile attitude.

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