

Quest for Peace and Harmony: An Attempt of Social Audit of Changing Situation in Bastar

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ABSTRACT: Bastar is the cradle of tribal habitat with distinct territorial enclaves and cultural attributes. The present paper highlights the Muria tribe and their heritage institution – Ghotul (the youth dormitory) and its function on their personality building and imparting the value system of the society. Among many ethical value which were imparted among the inmates of ghotul, one among such was ‘if par chance any drop of blood is oozes on the earth their earth deity, Tallurmuttey, becomes angry and entire village is punished; so they strictly avoid any kind of human bloodshed’. In absence of such an institution, which is now in a shattered shape, it needs to be seen how they cope up with the changing situation. Here is an attempt of social audit with special emphasis to understand the social unrest which in far-off lead to disturb peace and social harmony of the territory.

INTRODUCTION

Bastar is, perhaps, one of the last and most beautiful bastions of the adivasi (tribals) way of life left in the country. The adivasis comprise almost 3/4th of Bastar’s population, each having their distinct territorial enclave, cultural attributes, own indigenous dress and ornaments, gods and goddesses, dialect which are till date more or less unaffected, continuing their heritage though modern market economy play a key role in shattering their age-old tradition which in long run sprouted some social agony.

The growing discontent that has been simmering in the forest clad area of tribals across the country for decades is now bursting into flickering flames of armed anger against the powers. To understand why and how such normally peace-loving people could

take up arms to assert and claim their basic rights of living, one must trace their history back to the days of yore (Sarkar *et al*, 2014). Here is an attempt of social audit with special emphasis to understand the social unrest which in far-off lead to disturb peace and social harmony of the territory.

ETHNO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Bastar district (undivided) of present day Chhattisgarh may be considered as a place of cultural mosaic because of mixing of different ethnic groups with their respective cultural attributes and boundary. It is the homeland of Hill Muria or Abujh Muria (a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group or VTG), Muria, Dandami Muria or Bison-Horn Muria, Dhurwa, Dorla, Halba and Bhatra. Each of these tribal communities have specified living territory which differs from other tribals enclaves. In a particular territorial enclave they eke out their economic pursuit for their sustenance.

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According to records, it was Buddhist era during 5th–6th centuries AD followed by the Eastern Chalukyas, Cholas, Western Chalukyas and Hoysalas between AD 844 and 1150 and ruled by the Telegu Nagvansi from the 11th to 14th centuries. In 1323 AD Bastar was conquered by the Kakatiyas of Warangal and become the largest Hindu kingdom which was continued till merger with Indian union in 1947. The lingua-franca of Bastar is Halbi, which is of Sanskrit origin.

The Maharaja as head of the state carried out the administration of Bastar State and a Diwan assisted him. The Diwan had powers of a District and Session Judge and he carried out his functions with the assistance of two subordinate judges. The Tehsildars and Managers had powers of Munasiff and were enjoying the powers of a second class Magistrate. The state was divided into five tehsils viz., Narayanpur, Kondagaon, Jadgalpur, Bijapur and Konta and four Zamindaris viz. Kutru, Bhoopalpatnam, Pamed and Sukuma. Chapman wrote in 1898 (Chapman, 1898) that the whole state was divided into about eighty eight (88) parganas that were under paid officials who exercised civil and criminal powers besides collecting land revenue. Again in a pargana there were several villages under its control. A list of such parganas is given to understand the network of relation from the King to village at grass root level. The wild and distant parganas were for purposes of revenue collection under Thanedars, Negis or Hikmis. These officials were paid officers and they had under them paid servants who received a monthly payment (Jay, '70). It is reported that Thanaedars were responsible for collection of taxes in the wilder and from distant parganas, Negi was a lesser person who had control over a number of villages; while Hikmis were employed under Negi to help collect revenue. Under Hikmis there were several village headman and taxes apparently were collected from Headman of village who were responsible for the person in their respective communities (Sarkar and Dasgupta, 2010).

The unit of land measurement was nagar representing the area of land that could be kept under cultivation with a pair of bullocks during one season. A plough was considered to be equal to 10 to 12 acres. Periodical assessment was made by collecting information from neighbouring village about the

number of cattle used by each cultivator in the area. Money was practically unknown and all the payments were not made in kind but were paid in cowries. The rate of assessment throughout the state used to be five dogani of cowries, which is equivalent to 50 paisa per plough. A rupee as a currency was first introduced in the state in about 1865 when teak, timber of the district found a market to Madras (Singh Deo, '84).

Therefore, it appeared that the King of the Bastar State had easy access to articulate with his subalterns which also includes tribals of Bastar even in distant wild area of the state through the system of land revenue collection or pargana manjhi system. In fact, pargana manjhi has a vital role in the state that acted as a liaison between state administration and villagers at the grass root level. Apart from this the tutelary deity of king's family- Ma Danteshwari, also acted as centripetal force of king with his subalterns. The names of the kings and a queen are listed below in Table 1.

STUDY AREA AND OBJECTIVES

About 70% of the total population of Bastar is tribal. The tribes of Bastar region are known for their unique and distinctive tribal culture and heritage. In the present write-up the author focuses on some aspects of Muria tribe – a section of Gond tribe of central India known for their unique institution – Ghotul. The Muria are confined in Naryanpur → Vennur → Antagarh area. Murias of Narayanpur and Vennur pargana are also known as Jhoria Muria or Ghutul Muria. Till now the idea of this institution – 'Ghotul', among the pre-literate Muria were to impart formal education including ethical value, social code of conduct in each religious rites and festivals in the village, customary behaviour, help and co-operation among them during need as well as practice of dance in various rituals with traditional attire as well as percolation of indigenous knowledge in the form of meeting/discussion/gossips for their survival in such forest environment (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2011). The various socio-political turmoil in their vicinity as well as impact of modernisation left this institution shattered and transformed. The importance and existence of 'Ghotul' where all the social relations of the Muria society were embedded and nurtured through kinship and its orthodox rules signify for primitive economics as per structural Marxists while

capitalist economics are embedded in a wholly different set of social relations and this concept cannot be applied to Muria society in which production, distribution and consumption of goods are not embedded in social relation of private property and capitalist political economy (Harris, '79).

Under this backdrop the present treatise intends to highlight about the Muria social structure, the role of clan of in the formation of cultural value among them and lastly, in absence of traditional institution – ‘Ghotul’, which was one of the container of their heritage and it’s role was to impart their value to the descending generations, how much they are able to cope with such situation in the changed situation for sustenance. In this connection it is also pointed out that for the last couple of years the tribal dominated Bastar is passing through some social turmoil due to Maoist activities, as a result huge bloodshed has occurred. The present article is an attempt of social audit to understand in the changing situation the role of Ghotul vis a vis social unrest in the territory.

Table 1. Names of the kings of the Bastar state

Sl. No.	Name of King	Period of reign
1.	Annam Deo	1323-1369
2.	Hamir Deo	1369-1410
3.	Bhairab Deo	1410-1468
4.	Purusotham Deo	1468-1534
5.	Jaising Deo	1534-1558
6.	Narsing Deo	1558-1602
7.	Pratapraj Deo	1602-1625
8.	Jagdishraj Deo	1625-1639
9.	Virnaryan Deo	1639-1654
10.	Virsing Deo	1654-1680
11.	Dikpal Deo	1680-1709
12.	Rajpal Deo	1709-1721
13.	Chandel	1721-1731
14.	Dalpat Deo	1731-1774
15.	Ajmer Sing	1774-1777
16.	Dariya Deo	1777-1800
17.	Mahipal Deo	1800-1842

The lineage leading from King Mahipal Deo (1800-1842) till the present King Kamal Ch.Bhanjdeo who was coronated on 19-9-96 is shown in Figure 1.

METHODOLOGY

In order to collect qualitative data following villages were identified namely, Remavand (or Remanar), Niyandar or Nayyanar and Vennur and all

these villages were under Vennur pargana, while, outside the pargana boundary Devgaon (or Pennar in Gondi) and Gardh Bengal of Naryanpur pargana were identified for generating empirical data. The extensive field work carried during 1992 to 1998 and 2001- 02. In each year frequent visits were made to various villages for collecting data and in this spell last visit was made during December, 2017. The villages were more-or-less uni-ethnic while, the other caste members in this pargana were Kopal (cow herder), Kallar (Liquor Seller), Vade (Blacksmith) Gasiya (Brass worker), Gando (weaver) and Kumma (Potter), The castes in this region can be divided into two distinct groups basing on diet and language. The Vade, Gando, Garsiya are of opinion that like the Muria they are also decedents of ‘Ravan’ and all four castes are known as beef eaters (*talli avvin*) which they eat on festive and ceremonial occasions. All of them are Gondi speakers but among Vade and Muria, it is as their mother tongue. On the weekly market day at vennur and Narayanpur it was very convenient for us to meet various informants of the villages like *chelik* (boys of Ghotul), *motiyari* (girl’s of Ghotul) *Gaita* like *bhum - gaita* (the earth master of the territory), *gayta tanda* (the earth master of lineage), *leske* (priest) etc. and empirical data were collected.

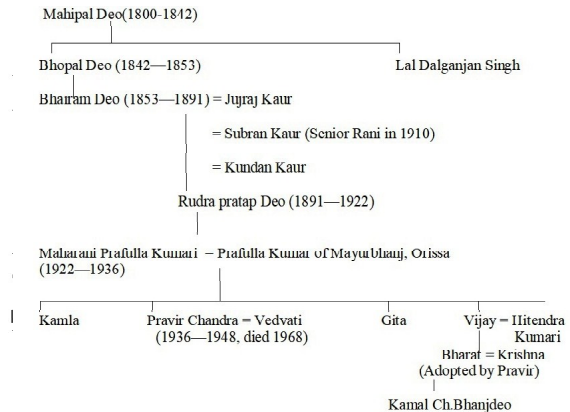


Figure 1. The lineage leading from King Mahipal Deo till the present King Kamal Ch.Bhanjdeo

SOCIAL SYSTEM IN THE STUDIED AREA

It has been observed that their clan (*katta*) are clustered and distributed into some *Vans* or *pens* (Phratries), like Nagvans (serpent), Bagvans (tiger), Kacchim (tortoise), Bakra (goat), Bodmink (a kind of fish), Durpe etc.. In each *vans/pens* there are number

of clans (*katta*), who have totem such as *katta* – *buji* (bullock - a totem), *dhurwa* (goat), *wika* (kassi tree), *sori/sodi* (tiger), *bod* (a kind of fish) etc, which are exogamous in nature and considered as brother clan (*dadabhai* or *bhaiband*) and marriage within such *dadabhai* group is tabooed. In contrast to *dadabhai*, there is *akomama* which are considered as wife's clan; wife can be brought from such *pen* or *vans* (phratry) and clan (*katta*), that is, they also practice *pen* or *vans* exogamy.

Marriage by negotiations (*ful kochna*) is most preferred along with cross-cousin marriage alliances. Apart from these there are several other types of acquiring of mate like, marriage by service, *gharjamai*, marriage by elopement (*arwitana*), junior levirate, sororate and widow marriage (*tika tasana*). They have Ghotul system (youth dormitory) 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 their mother Goddess. The earth deity *tallurmuttey* is regarded as their mother Goddess. Their rain God is known as *Bhimul* (Sarkar and Dasgupta, '96).

Ghotul was a place to impart formal education and discipline of their Muria society. It was also reported (Elwin, '68), that “we obey our ghotul laws more faithfully than laws of Government ; for we ourselves made the ghotul laws and so we love them”. Here a few of such laws are stated like, (i) quarrels in the dormitory were strongly condemned, (ii) ghotul solidarity was strongly maintained, (iii) the dormitory has to be kept clean, (iv) role of the earth deity-*tallurmuttey*, in their socio-religious belief system was imparted among ghotul inmates by their elders.. Apart from these there were number of code of conducts in the ghotul for enculturation of boys (*chelik*) and girls (*motiyari*) of Muria from where they learnt their customary law of the society which includes rites and duties during rite-de-passage, incest relations, taboos and totem of their *katta*, deity associated with their *katta and pen etc*.

In order to collection of empirical data from Vennur pargana it was reported that there are 46 villages under Vennur pargana; the villages of Vennur pargana are more or less uni-ethnic and dominated by Muria. It

was also ascertained from each of such 46 villages (Table 2) of Muria that in each Muria village there were dominant clan (*katta*) and most cases such clan have some specific role in their society of the Vennur pargana which they learnt from Ghotul.

ROLE OF GHOTUL IN IMPARTING ETHICAL VALUES

During field investigation it was found from empirical situation in comparison with the findings of Elwin ('68) and that there was sharp deviation of Ghotul rules and regulations. Ghotul is a place from where they learnt their social rule, incest -relation, taboos, values and all ethical norms as intangible cultural heritage but in absence of such institution the community as a whole is running through some kind of social vacuum. The young generation are in the wave of current market economy of the country and therefore, their all aspiration are towards materialistic world and they are considerably deviated from their traditional cultural value system of the society. Due to attractive nature of modern market economic product they are easily aspire towards cash economy instead of subsistence economy, and ultimately compelled them to in the hold of alien group who are not locals since there is no alternative economic pursuits available for these youth tribal people. As a result the whole tribal communities of Bastar are stigmatised by administration as a group of violent and involved in delirious talks.

A few of such ethics which were essentially imparted from Ghotul among the inmates as reported by the informants during present field investigation are appended below:

- (i) It is 'morally unacceptable' (polo) for married members of their community to eat new foods of the agricultural year before performances of the appropriate rituals but children of ghotul members are allowed.

Youth of a ghotul are exempted from the restriction pertaining to “new foods” and it is morally acceptable for them to share songa (a home-made leaf cigarette) with lower caste people, drink their water and eat their food without being made outcaste. During field work in this aspect the ghotul youth of Niyanar village reply was like this – “Ghotul youth are continually on the move for hunting and dancing and therefore this

rule is not applicable for them in order to consider the necessity".

Table 2. List of villages under Vennur Pargana along with the numerically dominant Clan (Katta) in those villages

Sl.No.	Name of villages	Dominant Clan (Katta)
1	Nayyanar	Allam
2	Uhnar	Karanga
3	Mallingnar	Allam ori
4	Ghohhra	Duga
5	Munjmata	Vadde
6	Bag Veda	Pattav
7	Am Gomma	Pattav
8	Kapis	Pattav
9	Varnar	Pattav
10	Arn pal	Pattav
11	Varmakot	Pattav
12	MolloInar	Gota
13	Ramanar	Allam
14	Kullanar	Allam
15	Boravand	Allam ori
16	Ur dal	Allam ori
17	Kural	Vadde
18	Kott nar	Ori
19	Gullum kodo	Korram
20	Bat par	Pattav
21	Kurs nar	Durva
22	Anda nar	Vadde
23	Onna par	Vadde
24	Ong nar	Vadde
25	Arngal	Pattav
26	Vennur / Benur	Kattlam
27	Burvet	Vadde
28	Imir	Korram
29	Ipura	Allam
30	Bira nar	Pattav
31	Kalbat	Allam
32	Mayta nar	Pattav
33	Giddum	Pattav
34	Dandvand	Allam
35	Koranda	Vadde
36	Adpal	Allam
37	Innar	Assvadde
38	Matla	Pattav
39	Matvand	Pattav
40	Kallepar	Kattlam
41	Tutta	Pattav
42	Muskurm	Dodi
43	Mundpar	Korram
44	Morrnar	Vadde
45	Mandek	Pattav
46	Aodempar	Pattav

(ii) No married person is not supposed to consume harvested cereals before its offerings; anyone who breaks the custom, would be outcaste (*Jat bahir*), and he would pay fine being compensation and make an offering to the parent

ancestral deity of the territory.

(iii) It is also reported from ghotul *sardar* (supreme post of ghotul), *baid* (medicine-man), *belosa/dulosa* (she is leader of *motiyaris* in ghotul), *motiyaris* (girl member of ghotul) and *chelik* (male member of ghotul) (Dasgupta and Sarkar, 2011) that during the meeting between two aggressive parties/villages at the cross-road between the settlement, man from both villages as well as *cheliks* and *motiyaris* of the ghotul also meet on this occasions. Both the aggrieved parties sit facing each other and offer *darango* (mahua liquor). They exchanges alternate between the groups until all the *mahua* liquor is consumed. The ceremonial exchange is concluded amid assurances that no one is angry after which the parties return to the respective villages. Manifest expressions of anger in the village are not tolerated since the same bring social tensions in the village, if par chance, blood is oozes upon the earth during the overt expression of anger, according to them it angers *Tallurmuttey* and places the entire village in anger (the loss of life – giving blood during an accident is not regarded as potentially dangerous but as an expression of passion and feminine power associated with *tallurmuttey*, it is dangerous).

(iv) It was also observed that how different clan (*katta*) members are engaged in various socio-religious occasions and a corporate nature of religious centre (*manda*) is very much evident.

(a) Such as, all agricultural ceremonies are held at the *manda* of the pargana, the *bhum-gayta* gives offering to *tallurmuttey* on behalf of villagers of the pargana, while, the *pen-pujari* lays offerings before the *angan* symbolizing *Barha pen* (who is regarded as their senior ancestral deity) and each of the ancestral deities which were brought from their respective natal villages of the *pargana* to *manda* for the occasion. People of all ethnic groups of Vennur pargana brought the ancestral deities or *pen-anask* to the *manda* of Matavand village (it is almost central part of the pargana and south of vennur village) as it is believed that it is abode of the original settlers of the pargana and the parents of all

pen-anask in the area.

- (b) The *pen-pujari* of vadde clan (*katta*) is assisted in the performance of his duties by members of his clan who themselves have specialized functions depending upon their village. The *pattav bhum gayta* (the earth mater of the territory, that is, pargana) comes from the village Matavand and is assisted in preparing and cooking the offerings for *tallurmuttey* by his clansman. Durva clansman from Kursnar village who are attached themselves to the Pattav clan and who are considered as ‘Sons of the earth master’ are said to be like store keepers who keeps account of the grain and animals provided for the offerings and feasts. The pave of a *manda* are generally feared and looked down upon for they are said to steal pieces of cloth, hair, finger nails from the people of other *manda* and offer them to *Tallurmuttey* as a substitute form of human sacrifice (that is a kind of black magic).
- (v) All clan (*katta*), lineage segments (*pen*) that occupy villages within Durpe, territory are required to bring their ‘ancestral – deities’ represented by *anga*, *Kola* or *doli* to the *manda* of Matavand village whether or not they belong to the same brotherhood.
- (vi) It is also reported that Vadde and Pattav clansmen (*katta*), the Ori (*katta*) are Sister’s son who have settled in their territory and they have much the same social position.
- (vii) Durva and Gota (*katta*) who have settled in the villages of Kursnar and Mollolnar – their ancestral deities – *Jabburani* and *Kohhla Kossor* generally considered as wives of a Vadde or Pattav ‘ancestral - deity and they consider *Barha pen* as unified parent ancestral-deity.

Further, the Pattav clan (*katta*) is divided into two *tonda* or lineages in the pargana. Those Pattav clansmen who own the earth and resident of villages like Varnar, Matla, Tutta, Varmakot, Kapis, Maytanar, Giddum and Amgomma consider *Lal Say Kuvar* as their ancestral-deity while those of Matavand, Bagveda, Arngal, Batpar, Aodempar and Arnpal consider *Son kuvar* as their ancestral-deity.

- (viii) **Members of the five clans** (*katta*) like – Vadde, Pattav, Ori, Durva and Gota – who lives in the villages of this pargana boundary are known as *durpe manda*. The *manda* is considered as religious centre where parent ‘ancestral-deity’ is supposed to be housed.
- (ix) It is also observed that earth master *tonda*’ (lineage) and the ancestral-deity sacrificer *tonda* of a *manda* stand in a relationship of maternal uncle and nephew are related through woman. It clearly suggests that there is a performance for exchanging sisters and daughters with families who are within the territorial boundary of Pargana.
- (x) It is also reported that any suffering among them are caused when *Tallurmuttey* becomes angry. Muria consider those illness like smallpox, measles and skin diseases during summer are responsible for displeased of *yayalmuttey* synonymous with *tallurmuttey* (earth deity).

OBSERVATIONS

In order to justify the proposition, the present author would like to quote that “ the central Meitei tract in Manipur is surrounded all around by tribal cultures. There has not been much of flow of culture traits from the Meitei tract to the tribal tracts or vice-versa. The tribal chiefs of Manipur accepted the political supremacy of the king and whenever the chiefs visited the palace they offered presents such as colourful scarfs etc. The appointment of the tribal chiefs in the hill villages did not require any formal approval or endorsement of the king (Chaudhuri and Dasgupta, ’75). It is learnt that the king disapproved the spread of Vaishnabism in the tribal areas and as a result of that we find that Vaishnabism has been restricted to the valley only which is chiefly dominated by Meitei (Dasgupta, ’79).

Acceptance of Vaishnabism was considered as a criteria for determining status in the present day social hierarchy. The acceptance of Vaishnabism creates some new items of diacritical cultural markers for the initiates (Saha, ’94). As per dictum of the then king of Manipur the acceptance of Vaishnabism was restricted to valley area of Manipur among the king’s

family and his lineages and agnates, which ultimately led the people of the Manipur towards a different pole, that is, most of the tribals of Manipur were inclined towards Christianity; which means in this social vacuum gave rise the spread of Christianity in the hilly areas of Manipur.

Manipur Peoples Party (MPP) was formed after the collapse of institution of Maharaja of Manipur that function as an integrating force for the valley people (Meitei, Chakpa / Loi), marshy area of valley of Manipur (Yathidi people) and tribal of Manipur. MPP ruled Manipur for a couple of years and it was mostly led by some agnates of Manipur Raj family. Later when MPP was defeated in the election and underground political party developed mainly by the disgruntled youth force of the valley – this organisation was called as PanMyl (Pan Manipuri Youth Leader). This organisation helped in uniting the youth force with boys and girls, many of whom were unemployed and dissatisfied with the then political system. It is said that this discontented and exploited youth force led by the PanMyl has been instrumental for the growth of to-day's People's Liberation Army (PLA) which has been functioning as a strong opposition force against the establishment.

CONCLUSIONS

From the aforesaid discussion it clearly reveals that the intricate relationship of various clan (*katta*) within a particular pargana boundary is not only very much evident but it acts like a corporate nature of a *manda*; and all these they learnt from the enculturation process at Ghotul but the existence of such institution – 'Ghotul', is now-a-days totally shattered. Under this situation there is a big social vacuum among the young generation of the Muria. At this juncture the innocent Muria and other tribals of the Bastar are inclined towards external political force which ultimately leads towards social unrest in the region. Here, one can remember the quotation of Balfour ('73) the arbitrary suppression of all traditional customs, ceremonies, dances is a short-sighted and retrograde polity; It strikes at the root of practically the whole social structure of the people and its effects are apt to prove disastrous. Thus, to the mind of the author, in absence

of Ghotul, a great social vacuum among the tribal youth of Muria of this region are being inclined to other gainful lucrative activities (perhaps as one of the alternative economic pursuits) of materialistic world of aspiration and that are the product of modern market economy likewise, the acceptance and confinement of Vaishnavism among the Meitei of Manipur valley area and most of the tribals of Manipur in the rest part were inclined towards Christianity (Saha, 1994) which clearly signifies in this social vacuum gave rise the spread of Christianity in the hilly areas of Manipur. This social situation may also be comparable with a thunder-storm which is formed due to fall of air pressure.

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