

# Understanding the Ghotul of Abujh Maria: A Prelude to a Strategy of the Development of the Community

**Ranju Hasini Sahoo**

Indira Gandhi National Tribal University

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## ABSTRACT

Abujh Maria tribe maintain their social solidarity and ethnic identity through this age old institution. However, the agents and institutions who have played an important role in the transformation in Ghotul system are the modern educational institutions administrative functionaries like block level officials, health and ICDS workers and their participation in the democratic process of Panchayat Raj System. Now a day's Sarpanch and Sachiv play a major role in the power structure of the village. Migration of Dandami Maria to the Abujh Mar Hills, naxalite movement and above all market economy has its own role to play in the process. The paper seeks to highlight some of these dynamics in the said tribal community.

**Keywords;** *Tribal Society, Development strategy, regional development, Tribal Development*

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### Author Details and Affiliations

Ranju Hasini Sahu is Associate Professor and Head , Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh

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## 1. Introduction

Abujh Mar ,the least known part of the state and probably of the least known parts of India, constitutes a distinct natural division of Bastar district. In Maria and their Ghotul, Elwin has described the picture as follows:-

“Form Narayanpur roads go west, south and east. The western road is one of the loneliest and most exciting in Bastar. After passing the Halba centre of Sonpur, it forces its way into the every heart of the Abujh Mar through wild and majestic scenery, and one to Partabpur and Paralkot. Here is the most striking land mark of all Bastar, the great mass of the Abujh Marh mountains, an impregnable fortress, wild lonely, exalted, an exhilarating, home of the Hill Maria” 1

Roughly elliptical in shape with the longer axis in the north-west south-east direction, Abujh Mar tract is situated between latitudes 19.0' and 20.0' N and longitudes 80.39' and 81.39' E. In the absence of any special survey it is somewhat difficult to indicate the exact boundaries of the tract and there is some confusion regarding inclusion of exclusion of some villages on its border. Broadly Speaking, Abujh Mar is bounded on the north by the plains of Antagarh and Narayanpur, on the east country of the Jhoria Murias and by the Marhin (Gudra) river, on the south by the plains areas on the banks of the Indravati and on the west and north-west by Kotri River and its tributary the Walter. Westwards the tract extends beyond the borders of Bastar district into Chandrapur (Chanda) district of Maharashtra.



Approximately the area covers 3,900 square kilometers. At the south it is bounded by the River Indravati, on the west by the River Kotri, on the north it is flanked by the plains of Antagarh, and on the east by the plains of Narayanpur. The whole area consists of an extensive mass of hills whose peaks range from heights of 600 to 900 meters. As per 1991 census the total population of Abujh Mar is 26,613 where 4927 are literate there are 237 villages and of the 237 villages 205 are inhabited by the tribe and 32 are not habitat able.

### **Etymology of the term:**

What the etymology of the term Abujh Mar is, it is difficult to say and at the most it can be only guesswork. From the available records it appears that captain C.L.R Glasfurd, Deputy Commissioner of the then Sironcha district, was the first person to visit a part of this tract- the land of the Hills Marias. He spent much of the touring seasons of 1861 and 1862 in Bastar and it is his report which is the source of the article on Bastar in Charles Grant's central provinces Gazetteer of 1870. In grant's Gazetteer the term used for this area is 'Madian or "Abajmard".

Kedarnath Thakur<sup>2</sup> in Bastar Bhushan appears to mention the term Abujh Maria for the first time. From this it appears that the real term is Abujh Mar and the terms ulrugmad or Abujh Mar is just a corrupt form of this term. If this interpretation is correct the term Abujh Mar is a mixture of a Hindi and a Gondi word the Hindi word being 'Abujh' meaning mysterious or unknown and 'Marh' meaning jungle or hills. If that be so this which it refers but has been given to it by the outsiders.

This view is substantiated by the fact that the Hill Marias do not refer to their land as Abujh Mar and it is only the outsiders who use this term. The Hill Marias refer to their land as Metabhum, Meta meaning Hills and Bhum meaning land and thus the term Metabhum means 'land of the hills' which is exactly what Abujh Maria is. The people of the Abujh mar refer to themselves as Meta Koitor or simply as Maria and they are not aware of the term hill Maria which is contained in the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes lists (Amendment) act. 1976. That is why the population of hill Marias is not available in the Census returns and in the Census of 1961 only 5 Hill Marias were returned from Bastar, the rest obviously returned themselves or were recorded as Marias and got mixed up with the figures of the Bison Horn Marias, the term hill Maria was brought into currency by Grigson and like the term Bison-

Horn Maria, was coined by him, it is an Anthropological make shift.

### **Objective of the Study:**

One of the main objectives of this paper is to examine Ghotul, the youth dormitory, which can play an important role for the sustainable development of this primitive tribe who still are in food gathering and hunting stage of development.

### **Methodology :**

Taking different scientific methods of observation, interview, census and photo documentation an attempt has been made to know the area and the people, socio-demographic profile, socio-cultural dimension, structural and functional aspects of dormitory system

### **The Universe:**

Data through census five selected villages i.e., Gudadi, Bade Tondabeda, Edjumpara, Durgipara and Markabeda which are at a distance of 5 - 15 k.m. from the Block Office Orcha. The quantitative data are collected from the villages like Dunderbeda, Kundmel and Jatlur that is 15 – 30 k.m.. distance west of the block and from Bhatbeda, Paralnar, Kusumeli, Modonar, Handawada, Bedma, Hitawada, Thulthuli, Takeli, Juada, Jubgunda etc. that are 15-50 k.m. distance from Orcha

### **Review of Literature:**

For the present study we have gone through the important research studies by Jey ( 1968 ) , Elwin (1991 ) and Grigson ( 1991 ) Besides the other works related to the present Watt ( 1970 ) Herskovits ( 197 ) , Sashi ( 1978 ) Sahu and Sahu ( 2003, 2004).Sahoo( 2005 ) Sarkar and Dasgupta ( 2000 ),and Singh And Guha ( 2002 ) etc.,

One of the major data are collected during the 10th plan project of field work of Anthropological Survey of India in connection to the national project " Dormitory system in India : Transformation and Change "

Also the important data are collected during various field works to Abhujh Mar area in connection to documentation KAKSAD , an of important festival of Abujh Maria Triba and during collection of museum specimen .

### **Analysis and Discussion:**

Ghotul is the youth Dormitory where the young men get together not only for recreation purpose but also to have training for how to lead a full fledged responsible housewives or house hold head (Sihan).

Abujh Maria explains the origin of Ghotul in a simple manner. A house was required for the villagers to sit together and chit chat together. However, some informants opined that when Ghotul was originated nobody knows. It was been in existence since long

Some other explained it for the security reason. The youth of the village were to be organized to fight against the forest animals. By the time the youth with their weapons from each house which were scattered and had distance too rushed to fight the danger, the loss might have took place. Hence, there was a need to keep the youth of the village under the roof of one house. Thus, came the origin of Ghotul.

In Abujh Mar the institution of Ghotul is an important part of the social structure and social system. Our empirical study supports the view that Ghotul has played an important role as an association as well as an institution that has an inextricable relation with the Social structure of the Abujh Maria tribe. Ghotul being an association has played an important role in attaining the goal of Social solidarity, Recreation, social Safety, security and preservation of cultural heritage. However, Ghotul as an institution that acts as enduring forms of procedure maintains a functional role which keeps the social system of the Abujh Maria going on.

Data on religious activity Clan organization economic and political activity make us understand how Ghotul functions as is an important.

Ghotul reflects the creative excellence of the tribe where folk dance, folk music, oral tradition like folk song, folk tale, and riddle perpetuated from one generation to the next.

Ghotul is an institution where religious activities of the tribe in the form of rituals and beliefs which is associated with its various festivals like Koding (devoted to the Earth Goddess Tallo Mata), Kohlang (new Kosra) eating festival), Wanging Kodtam (new rice eating ceremony), Mitching (pre sowing ceremony for the main swidden crop) and Bade

Wadang (the great gathering before the Kaksad festival) and Kaksad etc.

Clan system which regulates marriage system divides the Abujh Maria tribe in two groups. Clan system also regulates the relation between Ghotul members. Thus, the customary rules of Ghotul reveal any intimate relationship between same Clan of opposite sex is incestuous and termination of the membership is the punishment followed by ostracization and pecuniary.

Kaksad is the biggest and most elaborate of all Abujh Maria ceremony. It is the culmination of the yearly round of religious ceremonies, occurring in May or June. It is conceived of by Marias as 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 period and the resumption of heavy labor in the fields. The principal features of the ceremony are assembling of a number of clan Gods in one place, making sacrifice to them, and dancing in their honour. The ceremony is held consecutively in a large number of Maria villages, and each performance brings together members of more than one village.( Jay, 1968).

We have made an attempt to analysis the observation of Kaksad in different studied villages with a view to understand the functional aspects of this festival.

Members of a clan feel certain sense of solidarity and help one another in time of need. The whole clan does not combine for any particular cooperate functions, although worship of the clan God unites many member of the clan at the festival of Kaksad. Clan membership establishes decent and regulates marriage

Performance of Kaksad dance by the Ghotul members in different villages having other Clan then their own establishes marital relationship. A detailed description of Ghotul dance in different villages during this festival is explained in our report (Sahoo, 2005).

Abujh Maria's main economic activities revolves around shifting cultivation, settled cultivation, food gathering, hunting and trapping, domestication of cattle etc. However, they also prepare Bamboo work, Phool Bahari (Broom) other NTFP (Kosra, Honey, Medicinal Roots like Rasna Jadi or Nuleng Mada, Amla, Tamarind, etc. ), engage as daily laborer to earn their livelihood. In the economic activities of Abujh Maria tribe Ghotul is closely associated. Thus,

the Ghotul members help in harvesting the crop participating in hunting activity and at present they are looking after the purchase and sale of NTFP in Orcha Bazaar.

For purposes of administration, the Abujh Mar is divided into fourteen large areas called parganas. Each pargana has a head-man, called Majhi, who is the final arbitrator in all disputes within his pargana and also the link between the aboriginals and the official administration of the district. Each pargana is subdivided into areas, called paras, which come under the jurisdiction of a headman, called the Mukia. If the Village Council is unable to reach a unanimous decision on any dispute which is brought before them, the matter is referred to the Mukia.

The offices of Majhi, Mukia and Patel are hereditary, as are also those of Gaita and Wadhi. If there is no male offspring, the office goes to the eldest brother and thereafter to his sons. The village priest presides over each phase of agriculture.

The head of the Ghotul members is called Ghotul Patel. Though a pateline is also sometimes act as the head of the Ghotul girls, it is the Ghotul Patel who is ultimately the controlling authority. If the complain of two members come to his notice he fined them Rs.10/- or Rs.20/-.

Though earlier the Ghotul was meant for the unmarried girls and boys, during the field work it has been observed the married man also attend the Ghotul.

Illness among the Abujh Marias is treated by the medicine-man, called Leske, who is reputed to possess supernatural powers and is, therefore, the villagers' accredited medium in their communication with the greater and lesser supernatural beings. Abujh Marias lives in Hills and Forest and collect edible items like Flower and Fruits in different seasons and non edible items like various Seeds, Grass, Wood and Kosa (Silk Cocoon).

Sahu et al, Dasgupta and Sarkar (2005) have an in depth study on Ethno Medicine and Ethno Science of Abujh Maria respectively. Thus, the later research group analyzed about the land management explaining type of land, conservation of land; analyzed the use of traditional knowledge explaining indigenous health care system that includes indigenous knowledge for curing different ailments. Their in depth study and documentation of local herbs/plants and seeds used for different diseases and

the method use shed light on Ethno Medicinal aspects of Abujh Maria.

Functional aspect of the Ghotul reveals the persistence and change of this important institution. Ghotul names like Maliaro Singh, Kaliaro Singh, Suliaro Singh, Khem, Koloharo Singh, Jamadar for Ghotul boy (Leyor) and Jalari, Malari, Jalkov for Ghotul girls (Leosku) still in vogue.

Ghotul plays an important role in social control of the tribal community. Crime and punishment reveal the acts that are considered crime and mode and amount of punishment for the crime. Thus, the Abujh Maria The Abujh Maria considered beating, thieving of 'Sulphi' (Sago Palm Juice), witch craft and murder as serious crime.

The acts considered crime in a Ghotul are as follows:

1. If a layor or leynosku goes out side the village without the permission of the Ghotul Patel.
2. If two Ghotul members of opposite sex go out side of village without the permission of knowledge of the Ghotul Patel.
3. If two Ghotul member of opposite sex of same clan involve in physical relationship it is considered as incestuous.

Mura Usendi , age 50 of Orcha revealed that if Ghotul members of same clan of opposite sex involve in an affair then a meeting is held first time the the Ghotul members , then Ghotul Patel inform the Sarpanch in the second day then subsequently on day third parents of the involved Ghotul boy (layor) and girl ( leynosku ) are informed. .

A meeting is held in the Ghotul, where male person consisting of elderly male members (Sihan) of the village participate.. No other female members of the village participate except mothers of the involved Ghotul members. Even ghotul girls (leynoskus) of the village can not participate in the meeting.

For this incestuous activity parents of leyor bear more fine than the parents of leynosku. Thus, leyor's parents bear a fine of Rs.200/ , whereas leynosku's parents pay a fine of Rs.50/.

It may so happen sometimes a Ghotul girl while on her visit to weekly market if dragged by a parental cousin stayed for few days in latter's house, the act is considered as a crime. To be more explicit cross-cousin marriage is the preferential marriage among Abujh Mar. Thus, it is always an allurements for a maternal cousin of the Ghotul girl to have some

enjoyment with later one. However, the act is not accepted in the Ghotul. The Ghotul girl is fined with Rs.75/- and five bottle of mahua liquor ( dadgo). The logic behind the punishment is that she is also a party to this crime, because she has stayed with her cousin with her own consent instead of running out of that village the next day.

The researcher while in Gudadi, came across one case of crime and punishment. To the much amazement of the researcher it was revealed that one Kole None a Gunia ( leske ) of village Rohtad was murdered by some one by bow and arrow and was thrown into the jungle. The villagers of Rohtad came and informed two sirhas Lakma -Ahaka and Kati Koram of village Gudadi about the incident.

The Sirhas set in front of pen Pungo Maito and revealed the name of one Chamaru None of the same village Rohtad as the murderer of Kole None. The villagers rushed, caught Chamaru None and surprisingly he acknowledged about committing that crime.

The punishment for him was fine of One Pig/Bullock to each village around Rohtad.

Madaram Poyam, age 40 of village Butumpara explained that extra martial relationship by married couple is considered as heinous crime. Fine for a woman is more than a man involved in the said crime. It is Rs.500/- and a Pig for a man, whereas it is Rs.2500/--Rs.3000/- for a woman. Moreover parents of the woman slap her for the misdeed.

Masabhai Ahaka, age 20 of village Gudadi revealed that different 'Katta' have different Pens (Gods). A person of one clan can not participate in the worship of other Clan members. For example Pungar Pen is the clan of God of Ahaka. A person of Usendi cannot go to the worship place of Ahaka. It is polo (prohibited). Some times male person can go, but female person of different clan are strictly prohibited. If attend by a female person than she is punished with a fine of cow or goat and meeting is held on the day of 'Kaksad' to discuss the crime of violating the polo (prohibition).

Chamaru Alami of village Handawada revealed that beating anyone while in drunk, thieving rice or paddy or Sulphi is considered as crime. Rarely murder case and difference against women occurs in the community. However, for murder case a fine of one bullock, 20 Paheli rice and Rs.500/- are offered by the culprit.

## **Conclusion:**

Abujh Maria tribe maintain their social solidarity and ethnic identity through this age old institution. However, the agents and institutions who have played an important role in the transformation in Ghotul system are the modern educational institutions administrative functionaries like block level officials, health and ICDS workers and their participation in the democratic process of Panchayat Raj System. Now a day's Sarpanch and Sachiv play a major role in the power structure of the village. Migration of Dandami Maria to the Abujh Mar Hills, naxalite movement and above all market economy has its own role to play in the process.

Sustainable development is ensured that the use of resources and the environment today doesn't restrict their use for future generation which refers to the wise use of resources within a framework in which environmental, economic and social factors are integrated. IT is about maintaining and improving the quality of life while safeguarding the quality of life of generations to come....

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