

Ghotul: An Institution of Tribal Art and Culture of Bastar

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Bastar, is not only rich in natural beauty, it is also the tribal heartland of India. The district has a very unique and vibrant culture. There are many big and small colorful tribes spread over the region. Their rhythmic tribal music, dances, drama and tribal literature are treat to watch and also provide an insight into the culture of the state. The most famous tribal literature of the district is tribal song, riddles and several tribal stories. The district Bastar is situated in south corner of the Chhatisgarh between 17°46 and 20°14 north latitude and 80°15 east to 82 ° 15 East longitudes (Sarkar and Dasgupta, 15).

Bastar, a land of tribals, is the largest district in the state of Chhattisgarh. Endowed with rich minerals deposits and precious stones, it forms the southern part of Chhattisgarh. The total forest area of the district is roughly 7112sq km. which is more than 75% of total area. Tribes consist of 31.8% of the total Chhattisgarh population, with 66.3%. The main tribes of Bastar are Gonds and its sub tribes like Muria, Maria, Halba, Dorla, Bhatara and Gadba. Gond is principal tribe of the Dravidian family, and perhaps the most important of non- Aryan or forest tribes in India (Hiralal, 39) the term Gond has its origin from Telugu word "*Kond*" which means a mountain. It is believed that after the downfall of their dynasties, Gonds took shelters in the mountains. The region is also famous for some distinctive and equally beautiful craft form. There are many handicrafts manufacturing center in this region which is very important part of regional tribal culture.

The Ghotul

The Ghotul is a kind of Dormitory which is derived from the Latin word *Dormitorium* which means communal sleeping house. Most of the Dormitory are known by different names in different tribal community. Naga knew their dormitory as Morung, Ho known as Gitiora, in Oraon as Dhum Kuria, Bhotia as Rang-Bang, Bhuiya as Dhangar-Bansa and Bastar tribes knew their dormitory as Ghotul. There are two kinds of dormitory (1) Mono sexual youth dormitory and (2) Bisexual youth dormitory. Ghotul is bisexual kind of youth dormitory. Naga tribes makes different dormitory for the girls and boys. The boys' dormitory is known as *Ikhuichi* and girls' dormitory is known as *Iloichi* (Hutton, 343)

In Bastar, Ghotul is a spacious tribal hut surrounded by earthen or wooden wall. It is an integral part of tribal people of Bastar and it is surrounded by areas like Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Andra Pradesh. It is a place for youths, an independent and autonomous children's republic. According to Gond legend *Lingo*, the regional tribal hero and famous god erected the Ghotul. The building where *Lingo*'s spirit is believed to dwell is called the Ghotul. At its entrance hangs a barrel-shaped drum (Dhol) which represents the god *Lingo* (Kaufmann, 116). A very good story is told by the Samrao Hivale about the origin of Ghotul.

The story about the origin of the Ghotul

The *Dewar* who does not take advantage of his position is greatly admired. The central legend of the Muria is about Lingo their cult hero. He rose to this eminence by resisting the seduction of his six beautiful *Bhaujis*. He was the youngest of seven brothers and all the six *Bhaujus* tried their best to win his affection, but he took no notice. Ultimately they tried to take revenge by telling lies about him to their husbands who burnt him alive, and yet he was brought to life. He was buried alive but miraculously saved. At last he left the six brothers and established the Muria Ghotul-dormitory (Hivale 197)

Ghotul has an elder Chelik who gives training to young unmarried boys and girls. There are two kinds of Ghotul found in Bastar tribal society. The first Ghotul is used by the travellers and visitors as their hunting or resting place known as *Thangudi* or *Paik-Ghotul*. The second type of Ghotul is a youth dormitory known as *Koitur - Ghotul*. The Paik- Ghotul is situated at the middle of the village while the Koitur Ghotul is situated at the outskirts of the village.

The Dormitory members build the Ghotul themselves. Traditionally the Ghotuls were small and of plastered or unplastered wall which were constructed by bare logs. There was a pillar at the center where they used to carve figures of Motiari, Chelik, horses, combs etc. The doors were also designed with several motifs and figures. They may be small or large and are generally very heavily made of *Sagun* log. Instead of small hut with a small door it becomes a big room with a very spacious compound within the fencing. There is a long rectangular hut with a verandah. It is constructed at a corner. The doors are large, facing towards the center. There are several smaller sheds without door. There is an open place in the middle which is very big and having a shelter constructed by them. In this place now-a-days the visitors and travellers take them as temporary shelter. Generally in smaller sheds the children usually stay, woods are kept at a sides as fencing. The fencing is made by wooden logs and bamboo sticks.

Members of the Ghotul

Ghotul is a kind of community centre away from the village, where anyone above the age of six to ten automatically becomes a member of the center. When a new member enters in the Ghotul, a new name is given to him by the Ghotul members. The dormitory boy is known as Chelik and the dormitory girl is known as Motiari. The leader of the Motiari is called 'Belosa' and the leader of Chelics is called 'Sirdar'. It is very important to note here that only bachelors are allowed in ghotul. Sirdar and Belosa are very respectable posts in the Ghotul and they are selected at festival of '*Karepadum*'¹ in the warship of *Kaderengal*². *Charias* clean the ghotul. *Musawan* decorate the dormitory with fine colour and paintings. *Dewan* maintains discipline in ghotul. *Kotware* counts the number of Cheliks and Motiyari and takes attendance of them. *Jamadar* maintains the dresses and jewelry of the members. *Chalki* distributes tobacco among the Ghotul members. He is the supervisor of the festival and all the Ghotul festivals are celebrated in his supervision. *Sipahi* is the watchman of the Ghotul. If some unknown people enter in the village or Ghotul, they have to meet with *Sipahi*. *Vaidh* is the doctor of Ghotul as well as in the village. He knows all the *Mntra* and medicines. *Mukhawans* are the vicepersons of the Ghotul. They create new rules, maintain and modify it.

Activities in the Ghotul

Ghotul is the education centre of the regional tribal children (Grigson, 46) It is also a kind of night club where children gather and do many cultural activities. All the members of the Ghotul arrive at the Ghotul after sunset and with their sleeping mat, tobacco-pouches and other things needed for the night. In the evening when they blow the horn and beat the drum, it was an indication that the youth were preparing for the Ghotul. Cheliks and Motiari adorn themselves with jewelry, cloth and flowers. The dresses of the Ghotul members are very simple. Girls wear white skirt with the upper portion of the body being left bare; and the men wear loin cloths and turbans which are often adorned with long strings of beads wound several times around combs. There are many beautiful jewelry famous among the Ghotul members but combs are very popular and this is given by the Chelik to their Ghotul lover. These combs are made by the local Ghotul boys and decorated by many geometric motifs. The comb collection is a great presentation for the Motiyares. It was the daily routine for a girl to titillate with a comb the skin of her lover before she slept with him (Elwin, 246). A famous riddle found in Bastar region about comb-

Betle marrate pungar puy anta

On a dry tree blossoms a flower- a comb

The bigger the collection, the more popular she is. Combs are worn as ornaments in the hair. The boys make them from wood or bamboo. The connoisseurs among them decorate their comb with mirror pieces, beads, and colors. The boys also wear them, but their combs are heavier than the girls and they are worn only for decoration. If a Motiyari likes a Chelik, she steals his comb thereby allowing him to steal her heart. When the wooden bell rings, the farm activity of the Ghotul starts. They gather around it and every male is called Chelik and female is called Motiyari. They chat, joke and smoke around the camp fire. The female sing and dance. Mandri and flute accompany the music. The beat of the drum indicates that the youth are preparing for the dance. Belosa and Sirdar decide how the couples shall be paired.

Ghotul is a kind of education center for the tribal people of Bastar where unmarried boys and girls interact with each other in a responsible manner. They are taught the right kind of social behavior. The boys and girls are often paired together, by which they get to know each other and learn to live in harmony. They have a robust social structure for generations and much of the credit goes to the most talked about Ghotul way education and social teaching that are prevalent here. In the Ghotul boys and girls learn about farming, wood carving and other skills. It is like a university with no books or texts, everyone is a student and every one is a teacher here. The beginning of Ghotul is marked with beating of drum, which immediately entices loud shrill from children. In front of the Ghotul music is played using drum and flutes and Motiyaris start dancing in circles. Tobacco and local toddy are distributed among all and it's it is wonderful to watch people smoking, drinking, singing and dancing together. This is followed by the checking of home work by the elder Cheliks given to younger ones on making bamboo combs, leaf stitching etc. the good one is appreciated and the bad ones are punished. The dancing goes till late at night coupled with tribal style, *antaksharis*, puzzles and poetry. The Motiyaris flirt with the Cheliks who in turn make

effort to win the Motiyaries, and the Cheliks are allowed to give special attention to only one boy or girl and are punished if found not doing so. Some taboo is also found in sexual intercourse, it is prohibited between husband and wife or among the youth in the Ghotul from the night before sowing till the new tender crop sowing (Per 141)

Sex education

The Ghotul tradition of the Muria tribals paint the equality and unisexuality of primitive human. Equality, simplicity and freedom form the fundamental fabric of the Ghotul. Members eat, play, dress, and sleep without any separation of males and females. They can even swim into the river together without clothes on. In the Ghotul, young men and women date from the age of ten onwards. Whereas modern people wonder what age is appropriate for beginning sex education? The advocates of free sex and safe sex should study this system of natural sex education at the Ghotuls. Since the Ghotuls do not have formal teachers, the students never develop the attitude that the teachers are from different generation. The tribals of Bastar do not have teenage pregnancies. They are free from many social vices of the educated world because of neglected academic responsibilities and. In Ghotul, no distinction is made between love and sex. Everybody is free and behaves responsibly.

Ghotul is the institution of art and literature

Ghotul is the institution of regional tribal art and culture. Cheliks learn about carving, weaving, painting, basketry, singing and dancing in Ghotul. Ghotul building and compound are a very good example of regional tribal art. The Ghotul buildings are often decorated with wall paintings and they commonly paint many geometric pattern, human figures, vagina and phallic symbols. According to great anthropologist Verner Elwin "As you once went across the centre of the Muria country you find more, and more elaborate carving. The ghotul has stimulated artistic creation, not only in the realm of personal adornments but also in wall- painting and wood carving. The chelik desires that their Ghotul really should be 'lovely as bison's horn'" (Elwin 330).

Music, song and dance are very important part of any dormitory. Not only Ghotul but also other dormitory is very important institution for music and musical instruments. The Orans' dormitory known as Dhangarbasa, Dhangar meaning a farm servant or young man, or Mandarghar, the house of the drums, because these instruments are kept in it (Hiralal, 176). Ghotul is also a very important institution for regional tribal literature. There are many stories, songs, puzzles and riddles which are famous among the Ghotul members. Tribal songs of Bastar are known as *Pata*. There are many *Pata* songs which are famous among the tribal people of Bastar. Many songs are sung in different occasion. These songs are valuable as revealing in the most authentic manner what the Muria themselves regard as important. It seems that Ghotul songs are spread in many areas of middle India (Elwin, 64)

Murmy Pata-these songs are sung in local marriage ceremony by Motiaries. Murmy Pata is also famous among the married women. But no widow can sing this song.

*Meet, meet, meet Samadhi with a puppy
What should I do with a puppy
Take away your baby*

Reala Pata- *Rela Pata* is also sung in different festive occasions. These songs are liked by the *Relo Pata*. Every Ghotul member should learn to list one *Reala Song*. These songs are sometimes used for the punishment of Chelik and Mutiaris³.

*The water's for our hay
Like a stream of gold is the water.*

Hanal Pata- In Bastar dead man's soul is known as *Hanali* or *Jiva* (Postel and Cooper 19). When a man dies, the body is carried out to burial ground with singing and dancing with *Hatur-Dhol*. On this occasion they sing *Honal Pata* for the dead man.

*Ai ai ai
Who is this Raja
It is our Raja
The Raja passes the rough the under world*

Pen Pata- You can find totems of god and goddesses in Muria pantheon. Songs which are sung for the tribal deities known as *Pen Pata-*

*O the sixteen division of the earth
The nine division of the sky
Who is the lord of the earth?
The lord of the earth is Tallur Rai⁴
Give him a good Johar*

Parka Pata- Ghotul Pata is a kind of cultivation song. The villagers give the Cheliks a piece of land for cultivation which is known as *Chelik- Parka*. During the cultivation they sing many songs. This song is known as *Parka Pata*.

*We will come to plough the Madia seed.
We will come to sow the Homo seed.
We will come to pick the Madia crop.*

Lingo⁵ Pata- Lingo is a god, hero, famous ancestor and the founder of Ghotul in the Bastar. He discovered the liquor and many useful things for the local people, so they sing many songs to humor the Lingo pen.

*Johar o Johar of Lingo
The minda lyre give out its tone
On his west Lingo wears brass bells.*

Riddles- There are many riddles famous among the ghotul members. These riddles are very important part of local tribal literature –

- *Chapti Pakna Gohivalaiseh*
- The flat stone itches – – The Vagina

- *Sulung dandi bundlebursa*
- The pole is long, its bottom is black – Penis
- The Chiroto fruit is not to be plucked – Sun
- The spotted bullock is not to be tethered – Tiger
- The green stick is not to be lifted – – snake

Dreams- Dreams have many symbolic meaning. Chalik and Mutiyari see many dreams and their dreams are interpreted in different manner. The ancestor gives some code message from the other world and only the wise man can decipher them. The tribal people of Bastar distinguish the dream as good and bad :

Good dreams

- A boat- a Long journey
- An *Anga* (Tribal god)- Lucky
- A kotri (a river) fish- the dream will get money
- Drowning in a river – very good. The *Yer kanyang* (Goddess of River) so loves the dreamer that she wants to marry him.

Bad Dream

- A horse- a horse is a spirit or *Rau* (god of mountain) and dream is therefore bad
- Anything burning- unlucky
- Row meat- witchcraft
- Piled rice- the dreamer will fall ill.

Conclusion

It is understood that Ghotul is the most primitive tribal institution in India. Most literature is composed in and around Ghotul. This institution preserved many cultural aspects and stimulated the tribe to develop and preserve their dance, song and music. The Bastar tribal life looks more collective, more organized and more disciplined than any other tribe.

Due to the well developed and strong Ghotul system the crime rate is perhaps the lowest among the Muria in comparison to other tribes (Elwin, 38)⁶ Ghotul establishes a level of social communication among the tribes (Jell, 151). The members share the social responsibilities to work in the agricultural fields and to help each other. Any tribe who has less resource or no resources does not feel handicapped and his work does not suffer because of mutual cooperation and collective responsibility which is borne by the Ghotul members.

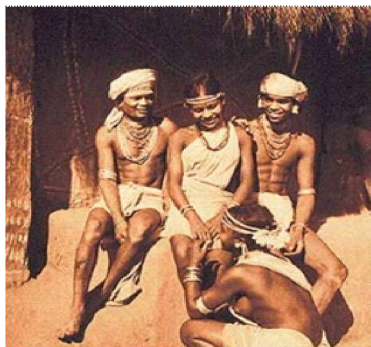
All the festivals and marriages in the tribal village are arranged by the Ghotul members. Cooking, serving of meals and other jobs are performed by them. Ghotul is like the primary *Panchayat* in village. All their quarrels and problems are sorted out

and solved in the institution. This training helps them in their future lives to live amicably and harmoniously in the society. The Ghotuls are fast shrinking, surviving today in a very limited area of Bastar. They are being replaced by centers for education as more and more school-going children opt out of the traditional ritual. Dormitory system exists among various other tribal communities in country, but became victim of homogenization because they are not as highly organized and carefully developed institution as among the Muria. The system of Ghotul is practiced to impart a lesson of social democracy right from a young age. The readers are still debating as to when to start sex education for their children, but in Ghotul, it is learnt through experience and respecting each other. There is not even a slight hint to pervert thoughts or intentions and the entire process of physical intimacy is looked at like a sacred process and the respect for each other is of the utmost importance.

Ghotul is also a very good institution in creation and preservation of arts, legends, songs, dances and folk tales. They are the very good examples of regional and culture. Due to Ghotul, they have survived in their original forms. Nowadays, due to modern impact, the change is perceptible. In many Ghotul, the girls do not stay regularly at night. The children who go to school, do not like to join the Ghotul. But this is our responsibility to protect this kind of institution

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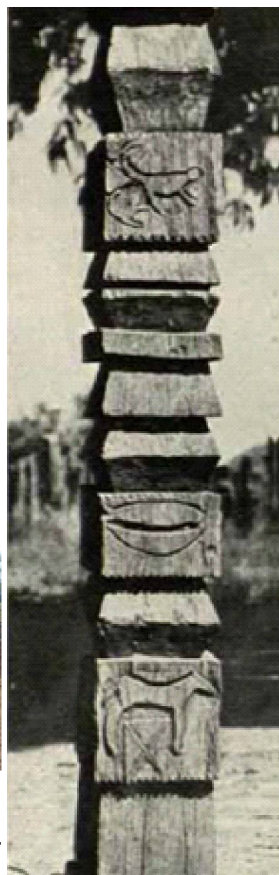
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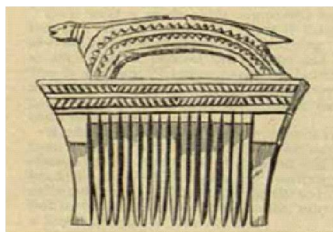
Chelik And Motiyari in the Ghotul



Ethnic Distribution of Bastar



A beautiful carved Ghotul pillar with a Vagina Motif



A beautifully carved comb by a Chelik



A Ghotul building in Bastar



Anga dev a special regional tribal god of Bastar



A Motiyari with her Comb

Footnotes

¹ This Festival is celebrated in the month of May. In this festival trees are cut for cultivation .

² A regional hunting and forest god.

³ In ghotul, if a Chelik or Motiari break the discipline of the institution they have to stand on one foot on two or sing three Relo songs.

⁴ Earth Goddess of Bastar

⁵ Lingo pen is a genuine Gond creation with all characteristic typifying a true Gond. He instructs the Gonds in the rotation of crops and art of singing, dancing and the different instruments. He instructs them about their wedding rituals, introduces exogamy and the clan system, as well as the special Gond priorities. He gives them their gods and instruction for their worship.

⁶ The Ghotul Muria, is probably to be explained by the fact that the Muria have in their Ghotul or dormitory system an ideal method for training the youth of the tribe in the civic virtues, in eliminating jealousy and in teaching everyone to live together as a family. Even the few murders that do take place among the Ghotul Muria occur, for the most part, in villages which have for one reason or another left their dormitories.