

# **Chapter-4**

# **Megalithic Living**

# **Tradition**

## **Megalithic Living Tradition**

The present chapter takes up a study of the death practices of the Gond (maria, muria and dandami maria) their beliefs and rituals in relation to the memorial stone and how they stand up to these patterns of life even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The custom of erecting memorial stone in different parts of the world is prevalent on a large scale among the diverse communities from the Neolithic times. But in central India mainly in Bastar region, the erection of memorial stone in the memory of an ancestor is still in practice among different Gonds tribes.

India is a “Melting Pot” of races and tribes. It is a difficult task for the archaeologist, the pre-historian or the anthropologist to arrange the tribal people and culture of India in a chronological sequence. Therefore, it is very difficult to give a conclusion to the origin and subsequent history of numerous aboriginal tribes of India in the absence of sufficient archaeological and palaeontological data. Rituals represent configurations of symbols akin to a musical score in which the individual symbols are comparable to musical notes. The anthropologist Victor Turner describes “ritual is a stereotype sequence of activities involving gesture, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors’ goal and interest”<sup>1</sup> Before going deep in to our discussion we need to clarify what we mean by a tribe? All tribes are specific to their groups and regions. They have their own traditions, beliefs, rituals that are limited to the individuals of the respective tribe. Their practices represent their identity. It is necessary to define “tribe” before exploring their ‘death’ culture. The Oxford English Dictionary mentions “a tribe is a group of people in a primitive or barbarous stage of development acknowledging the

authority of a chief and usually regarding them as having a common ancestor.”<sup>2</sup> Tribe is a group of homogeneous people that is with a common way of life having an in-group sentiment of their own and a common geographical territory with a common dialect which distinguishes them from other. They hesitate to have contact with the outsider and they have excess of personal beliefs in supernaturalism, practice simplicity in comparison to modern technology available and accept presence of hierarchic pantheon of their external space world like the earth goddess, the sun god and so on. They believe in the transmigration of soul and rebirth (*punarjanma*). The term “tribe” is nowhere clearly defined in the Indian constitution, and there is no satisfactory definition any where. In fact, the term “tribe” has been conceived differently by Indian scholars.

The tribals under the present study mostly live in hills and forest, generally in isolated, less fertile and less accessible habitat and they have developed a culture of their own apposite to their local environment. On socio-religious front of their culture, the sun, wind, the moon, stars, trees, animals, water, hills, birds and earth etc., play a vital role. The geographical or natural environment has an overall impact on the belief system of tribal in a particular place. It is observed that different tribal groups hold different belief system of their own which differ according to their local geographical environment.

### **Gond and Their Antiquity in this Region:**

It is very difficult to say when the Paleolithic age came to an end and the Neolithic age began in this region. The fortified hill near Bade Donger must have been extremely useful for Neolithic dwellers. The variety of ground and polished tools and pottery produced by the Neolithic people are unprecedented. Many of them are

discovered from Garhdhanora, Rajpur, Garhchandela and Garhbodra of Sabari and Indravati valley.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the domestication of animals was the first great step that people took in the conquest of nature. When the Neolithic people learnt to settle down in the grass lands they also cultivated vegetation and crop. Thus, the food gatherer became the food producer. Agriculture also developed through the time but it was not at par with the modern type. The primitive agriculture known as hoe-cultivation or burn method are called as *dippa/penda* in Gondi language.

The primitive type of cultivation is still practiced by the hill *maria* of *abhujmarh* area. Based on the above information one may state that the aboriginal tribes of this region are the direct descendents of the Neolithic age. The theory related to the migration of Indus people to this region is that, the *naga* people migrated to this region about 1700 BC,<sup>4</sup> and mingled with the earlier Neolithic people of the region. This seems to suggest the emergence of a new culture of a more primitive stage. All over the *maria* Gond region, hundreds of megalithic tombs are found; and it is also the living culture to this day. The present day practices of memorial have many similarities with the practices of megalithic period. But one may not like to conclude that the present day tribal communities are the successor of megalithic period.

The antiquity of Chhattisgarh Gond tribes can be studied on the basis of archaeological and tribal oral tradition. The following evidences throw light on the life of early tribes in this region. (1) Stone tools: Many of the stone tools have been collected from upper surface of the earth from the Sabari and Indravati river valley, and the rocky and cave areas. These tools indicate the period when they were used in the matter of

hunting, skinning of animals and digging of roots. (2) Rock shelters: The rock shelters are thought to be the earliest form of house. Most of the rock shelters were painted by early tribal who used them. There are many rock shelters one can find in the Kharkabhat area. (3) Pottery and terracotta figurines: The pottery throws light on the cultural history of the contemporary people. Many neolithic and megalithic potteries are excavated from this region. Terracotta figures of animals and human beings of different period were discovered in this region. The tribal of this region still make terracotta figures which are artistically similar to the ancient period. There is a famous art called “Dokra” in this region. (4) Tribal sources: The tribal have their traditional stories of past events. Such stories are mostly in the form of songs. They are sung in ritual dances. The antiquity of the tribal may be explained to certain extent by the folklores of the tribes. (5) Totemic origin: There are numerous deities which are related to various animals. There is a deity called “Bagheswar”<sup>5</sup> There are many totemic sept (gotra) such as tiger, tortoise, snake, goat, and so on.

**Religious Belief:** J. Troisi has written that “belief and rituals are invariant factors in all religions. Rituals are rationalized and made effective by beliefs. It is only by considering religion as a mode of action as well as a system of beliefs that the living meaning of both rituals and beliefs becomes evident”.<sup>6</sup> The tribal beliefs, rituals and practices are very much associated with their life, and it is difficult even to isolate or separate those from the people. The whole religious belief system of the tribal of India may broadly be classified in the following way:

**(i) Sacred Area:** The sacred geographical concept, one can apply even to tribal religion in India, with their sacred groves, sacred performance and sacred ritual. In Bastar tribal villages, one can find sacred places like big grove of *sal* tree (known as *Deogudi*), *ghotul* etc. These are the places of their worship and regarded as sacred places.

**(ii) Sacred Being:** Amongst the Gond people of Bastar region, their deceased ancestors are believed to be their most important sacred beings. Their clan deities and totems are also important. Among their other sacred beings *dharti mata* is worshipped by all the tribal of Bastar region. *Nelharin Mata* of hill *marias* is equivalent to *sitala mata* of Hindu pantheon.

**(iii) Sacred Specialist:** Some are regarded as mediators between common people and the almighty. Among the Bastar tribal, the sacred specialists selected for the priest posts are on a hereditary basis. The sacred specialists are *pujhari*, *gaita*, *waddai*, *gunia*, and so on.

During various rituals especially in ancestor worship, which is closely related to the erection of Megaliths monuments, is generally performed by the male head of the family. In his absence next senior male person holds the post. In every Gond dominated villages of this region, one find the ritual or practice of erecting megalithic monuments for their ancestors.

The root concept of a memorial stone is commemorative in nature that rises in memory or honours of the deceased and do not form part of the actual practice of the disposal of the dead. But in some parts of Bastar region, the disposal of the dead and

erection of menhir are done in the same time and same day as well. All the monuments are symbolic representation of deceased dignitaries. Every monument represents an individual, group either ethnic, regional or caste basis. The Gond believe in a high god whom they call either by its Hindu name *bhagwan* or his tribal name *bara deo*. He is a personal god-eternal, forgiving and maker of the fertile earth and man. In the Gond belief system there also exists a great number of male and female gods and goddesses and spirits that represent various natural features. The hills, rivers, lakes, trees and rocks are occupied by a spirit. The earth, water and air are ruled by deities that are adored and appeased with sacrifices and offerings. These deities and spirits may be caring, but sometimes they harm human beings, especially those who break the rules of tribal culture. The ancestral spirit settled in their memorial stone looks over the strict performance of the tribal rules and if anybody disobeys the rules, he or she is punished.

In Chhattisgarh the Maria Gond celebrate many feasts connected with the agricultural seasons and with various life cycle events. All sacrifices are accompanied by appropriate ceremonies of symbolic significance. The offerings and sacrifices are mainly animal and the types of animals depend on the type of deities addressed. Death ritual is a very important life cycle ceremony performed by the Gond of this region. For this they must sacrifice an animal but it depends on the economic condition of the family.

### **Nature Worships:**

Sun (*Porad*): The Sun god, one of the great gods in the Vedic times, is still widely worshipped by the Gond of Chhattisgarh. We find the symbol of the sun god from the sculpture of their megalithic monuments from Dhilimili. The Sun is often credited with

healing powers in all sorts of diseases and is responsible for rain. Earth (*Bhum*): The Earth is venerated as the mother of all living things and the giver of food and is regarded as a benevolent female deity. She has a name popularly known to Gond called as *dharti maet* (Mother Earth). Newly married couples of the gond tribe must sleep on the earth for the first three nights. Before cultivating they sacrifice animals or fruits to *dharti maet*. They also worship moon (*lenj*) and stars (*ukka*) in every *amabasya* and *puṇnima* day. River (*dhaar*): They worship numerous rivers in Bastar region, because the river gives water throughout the year. The rivers are Indravati, Wenganga and Danteswari. Mountain (*dungri*): There are many small and big mountains in this region. Every mountain is guided by some god or goddess. Gods and goddesses such as *banjari mata*, *mauli mata* and others are worshipped. Trees (*guch*): The most sacred trees are *pippal*, *palas*, *saja*, *karanj*, *sal* and *neem*.

In this region, both tribal and non-tribal observe several rituals and festivals. Some of the festivals are performed at family level and some at community level. The tribal have a large number of deities and they believe that their deities reside in jungles, hills, lands and looming in the air. There are several temples where they have installed their deities. The deities are sometimes a piece of wood, a stone slab and a tree. The following are the gods and goddesses they worship:

**Danteswari Mata:** They worship several mother deities; among them *danteswari mata* is very important. She was one of the tutelary deities of *kakatiya* king of this region. The main temple is located in Dantewada town, where she stays. Her main ritual is performed during *Dussera* festival held in the month of *Aswina* (sept-oct).

**Mauli Mata:** Mauli Mata was also another deity of the *kakatiya* kings. Her temple is situated at Jagdalpur, in front of kings' palace. She is worshipped every day in the temple and also during the *Dussera* festival.

**Kankalin Mata:** The temple is situated in Jagdalpur, behind the temple of *dateswari mata*. She gives protection from cholera and other such diseases.

**Sitala Devi:** She is often called by people as *mata*. She gives protection from epidemics like pox, measles and so on. Her temple is in Jagdalpur. Everyday, she is worshipped in her temple. When a person suffers such type of diseases, his or her family members come to the temple with the offerings of coconut, incense stick and they bring some *neem* twigs which are touched on the feet of the deity by priest and is returned to them. They keep the *neem* twigs with the patient as a protector from all the evils. Sometimes vows are kept that after recovery they will offer the deity a red *sari*, some ornament and a goat. Generally, the priest of the deity belongs to the *dhokra* community.

**Mahamai Devi:** Her temples are in the villages of Bastar. She is regarded as one of the greatest mother cult of Bastar. In her ritual, sometimes even buffalo is sacrificed but now government has banned buffalo sacrifice. These days goats are sacrificed. The deity is found sitting on an elephant and the legs of the elephant are tied with an iron chain. Generally, a *halba* or *bhatra* priest preside the ritual.

**Hinlagin Mata:** Her temple is in the villages of this region. She is also worshipped in every household. She is frequently worshipped on Tuesday and Saturday. When the deity is worshipped in households, the male heads of the family celebrate the

rituals and when it is performed at village level, a priest from *halba* community supervises the ritual.

**Pardesin Mata:** Her temples are also found in the villages of Bastar region. She is worshipped in the households or collectively by the villagers. A *halba* priest takes charge of her *puja*.

**Banjarin Mata:** It is told that *banjarin mata* is brought by the *banjara* from Rajasthan when they migrated to Bastar region. It is believed that, she guards the *ghats* (hills) and protects the traveler from all types of dangers especially from accident.

**Karitelgin Mata:** It is believed that *karitelgin mata* is very short tempered. She quickly gets displeased, so people think it is better to avoid her. She is worshipped in households and mainly worshipped by the tribal. She is worshipped on the new moon and full moon of the month. On the full moon they offer her liquor, peas, flowers, betel leaf etc. and on the new moon the priest pricks a tip of his fingers by the spike of *sedabari* tree and he offers his discharged blood to the deity mixed with some sun dried rice. They believe that, if the goddess is pleased with anybody she fulfills all his/her wishes and gives plenty of wealth.

**Lingo Pen:** Lingo Pen is one of their most important deity who is regarded as the creator of the *ghotul* organization. He is *ghotul* deity among the *muria*.

**Anga Deo and Pat Deo:** These two deities are related with *muria*. But they are also worshipped by the other tribes of the Bastar region. Both deities stay in the *sirhas*

house, where they are worshipped on every Tuesday and Saturday. They are invited and propagated in various rituals and festivals such as *marai*, *diwari*, *deogudi bazar*.

**Deven Dokra:** Deven Dokra is commonly related to *anga deo*. He is *anga deo*'s elder brother. His habitat is in Orcha village of *abhuj marh* areas. His wife's name is *karmekola devi*. He is the clan god of the *muria* and the *maria*.

**Gondin Deo:** This deity is worshiped by the tribals of Bastar; especially she is regarded as the Maria deity. She is worship in every household on Tuesday and Saturday. The ritual is officiated by the male head of the family. Every year during *chait* (March-April) they sacrifice a goat or a black chicken as an offering.

**Bhandarin Deo, Gobar Deo and Barasar Deo:** The goddess is worshipped when people leave for hunting and for success in hunting. *Gobar jharia* is worshipped before ploughing. They consider that, if they do not worship him they will not be able to plough and the bullocks would run away. The seat of *barasar deo* is at the boundary of a village.

**Mutta Lemma, Gaman, Kora, Ganganamma and Murpu:** These are essential deities of the *dorla* tribes. *Murpu* is similar to the *sitala mata*. They worship the deity to get safety from pox. *Ganganamma* is recognized with the rain god *bhimul*. He is worshipped during first seed sowing in *vija pandum* festival.

**Kora and Mattalem:** These two deities are generally established at the outskirts of the village. They are regarded as the protector from the evils. They do not allow evil

things to enter the village. These two deities are worshipped during all the important festivals.

### **Hindu Festivals Celebrated by Tribal**

**Mati Man Teohar:** It is celebrated in the latter half of the month of *chait* (March-April). They worship the earth. It is performed by the villagers collectively at the outskirts of the village, where they install a wooden pole in the name of the deity.

**Ama Khani:** In the month of *chait* (March-April) they perform this ritual. They offer mango and onion as new fruits of the year to the deity at their own house, after which only they are allowed to take mango and onion.

**Akteyi:** This is the ritual observed on any day in the latter half of the month of *vaisakha* (April-May). One day before sunrise about 3.00 am or 4.00 am, the family members go very secretly to their field and dig a corner of the field and put some paddy grain (seed). No one outside the family should come to know when a family had done this ritual.

**Bij Putni:** This ritual is linked to their agricultural life. On the ritual day villagers go to the field with some paddy grain and keep in *chipti* (a small box made with leaves). They give their *chipti* to the village priest. The priest holds the *chipti* one after another by his right hand, then he makes three rounds by each *chipti* in mud with chanting some *mantras* and returns to home. This is known as *bij putni* ritual.

**Bali Marai:** In this ritual, *bhim deo* is worshipped by the villagers in new month of *vaisakha* (April-May), when the villagers go to set up the *bhim khunt* in their village.

*bhim* is the rain god, in Hindu mythology, which is known as *varuna*. It is worshipped when there is no rain.

**Deo Gudi Bazar:** *Deo gudi* bazaar is a festival celebrated annually during the month of *asada* (June-July). In this festival they worship all the deities of the village and special importance is given to the mother deity of the village. They invite the deities by offering them a small amount of rice and a flower on a leaf plate.

**Goncha:** Goncha is a very most wanted festival for the Bastar tribal. During this festival they worship Lord Jagannath, Bhalabhadra and Subhadra. This is originally, the festival of Orissa, which was brought by one of the king of Bastar from Orissa.

**Deo Seyani:** On the eleventh day of the latter half of the month of *asada* (June-July), they perform *deo seyani*. On this day all the deities go to sleep. During these days people avoid celebrating auspicious events like marriage, construction of houses. On this day the tribals keep fast and they perform the ritual at their houses.

**Hariali:** In the month of *srabana* (July-August), they observe *hariali*. In the local *halbi* dialect, it is called as *amush*. On this day they worship their ancestors and deities at their houses with the offerings of coconut, flower, betel leaf etc.

**Panisuna Devi Puja:** On this day the tribal offer coconut, fruits and flower to *panisuna devi*. It is believed that *panisuna* stays in the water and looks like a *matshyakanya*. If she is not worshipped, their children may die drowning in water.

**Naukhahani:** They celebrate *nuakhahani* in the latter half of the month of *bhadrava* (Aug-Sept). On that day they bring some harvested rice plant from their field, which is known as *marag dhan*, earthen pitcher from the potter and new cloths for the family member.

**Dushera:** *Dushera* is the most significant festival of Bastar. It starts from the day of *kumb* (new moon) of October-November. From that day they start bringing wood for the construction of the chariot. They observe several rituals during the construction of chariot. They construct the chariot with different types of wood. They invite all the village gods and goddesses to Jagdalpur.

**Marai:** It is one of the most important annual festivals of this region. They worship all the deities. It begins during January to February. The *marai* varies from place to place. Generally, they keep it on the day of their weekly market. They celebrate *marai* for the welfare of the village.

#### **The Muria: Attitude towards the Elders:**

Training in the *ghotul* teaches *chelik* and *mortuary* to respect the elders and develops a sense of self respect. This approach remains with the children throughout their lives. On that basis an older man enjoys a very privileged position. Even the death ritual of the respected person of village is celebrated with dignity.

#### **Causation of Death: Magic and Witchcraft:**

The most important achievement of *sirha*, they think, in *muria* society is identifying the cause of death. (1) If a person dies from magic and witchcraft, the *sirha*

identifies the cause of death. When magic is suspected, they halt the bier before it reaches the burial ground and the *sirha* recites a series of names of suspected persons. When the name of the guilty is mentioned, the bier moves forwards ferociously of its own consensus. This is the best method in the *muria* clan to identify the cause of death. (2) The villager goes to the village boundary and puts five heaps of rice in a row, in the name of *mahapur*, witchcraft, *dharti mata*, ancestor and village goddesses accordingly who may have been troubled. Then people sit at some distance and wait. One crow flies down and peaks at one or other of the heaps of rice, as a result the crow enlightening the cause of death. (3) The *muria* believes that the way the smoke rises from the funeral pyre indicates the kind of death the deceased has suffered. If the smoke goes straight up, it indicates a natural death.

### **Type of Death:**

The following are the types of unintentional or abnormal death:

- (i) Death due to chronic diseases.
- (ii) Death due to bite of snake.
- (iii) Death due to killing of tiger.
- (iv) Death during pregnancy.
- (v) Death due to dissatisfaction of clan god.
- (vi) Death due to *charchar* (lighting).
- (vii) Death by magic and witchcrafts.

## **Death Rituals:**

The Gond believes in an afterlife. They believe that each human being has two souls: the life spirit and the shadow. The shadow must be prevented from returning to its home, or it will harm the surviving relatives. The life spirit goes to *Bhagwan* or *budha deo*. The shadow stays in the village after the erection of a stone memorial. These ancestor spirits watch over the moral manners of the living Gond and punish offenders of tribal law.

The final rites of passage of the ritual are performed on the death of a person. The Hill marias are more aboriginal when compared to the *muria* and the *muria* life style influences the hill maria of Abujmarh region. The *muria* bury the body of some people such as children, the victims of small pox, those who are killed by tiger and die in lightning (Charchar). Apart from this, all others are cremated. During cremation they lay the dead body in East-west direction because they believe in the worships of the Sun god and the Sun comes from the East. The sunshine first touches the head of the deceased and the departed even worships the sun while resting peacefully in the grave forever.

When a *muria* dies, his house, *ghotul* and the village become defiled. First the relatives of the deceased preferably the son, daughter, niece or nephew inform their relatives. The *ghotul* is closed that day till the cremation is finished. The relatives and others assemble in the house and in the street. The relatives cry loudly from time to time. After arrival of the relatives the corpse is carried out on a bamboo mat into the courtyard accompanied by death songs. Women and relatives sit crying. Everybody puts some water and *haldi* powder to purify the dead body. The male members of the family take the dead body on their shoulder and go to the entrances of the village or road side of the

village which is called *marghat*. Generally, the *marghat* is located near the village in jungle or entrances of the village. The dead body is followed by the men and women. The younger sister or niece or any woman of their clan throws rice over the dead body. Women come with their *kuradi* and axe. The eldest son or brother comes to *marghat* with all the primary material which was used by deceased such as *kudhari*, pottery, arrow, bamboo stick, drum, bow etc to be put with the dead body.

After the dead body is put on the pyre, some women place a little earth and *saja* leaf at either side of the dead body. Some women take a stone and break the bracelet of the dead mans wife. They put all the material with dead body on the pyre ground and cover with *saja* leaf. They place some stone on the pyre ground to identify the place when they will again come to erect the memorial stone. One can find different kinds of practices however in the same community.

When a reputed person dies such as *gaon mukhia*, *gaita* or *waddai*, the ritual is more elaborate where the whole village gathers and the body is taken out to burial ground with singing and dancing. The *akomama* (mother side) relative beat the traditional *dhol* (drum), which is kept in *ghotul* to summon the relatives, and it is followed by the dance of *dhanghda* (boys) and *dhanghdi* (girls) before the dead body.

### **Death during Pregnancy:**

Women who die during pregnancy are believed to become ghosts or *bhut* according to *muria*. The ghosts are said to live outside the village in the field, rivers, wells, trees and their *uraskal* (memorial stone). Their belief in these ghosts is that the person has missed the most delightful, excitement and interesting thing in life and

dissatisfied with relatives. Therefore, she is supposed to be anxious after death to take revenge. Due to this belief the *muria* perform a separate death ceremony to satisfy the *atma* (soul) of the deceased.

The relatives take the dead body between the point where two roads converge in the two stream of papal tree near or inside the jungle. The relatives (only male) put *haldi* and water on the bier and dry it for one or two hours. The husband of the dead calls “my darling does not come again to my family” and greets her finally. If the dead body is obliged by the husband’s word, the body burns totally; if not, it does not. For this the relatives wait to see whether the body is burning or not. If the flame does not consume the entire body then the soul of the deceased is dissatisfied. Then they leave the body there and come home. The next day they sacrifice a black hen in the name of village goddess. In this ritual there is no role of *gaita*, the ritual head. Only male members of the clan participate in it.

### **Death from Wild Animals:**

The abnormal death from the wild animal is common in *muria*’s life due to their geographical setting or settlement pattern. Death from killing by tiger or a bear are very common. When such incident occurs, the relatives of the family first collect the remains of the body from the place of mishap. They dig up some of the blood-stained earth and make wooden image of the tiger and the dead man. They call the *gaita* and sacrifice a cock in the name of tiger and say: “Take the fresh blood and do not kill people again.” The images are burnt in-situ. In this ceremony there is no feast given to villagers, but some *salpi* party is given to some people who participate in the ceremony. The ceremony

is called *bagh-dhra* in gondi language. Only male members of the village participate in this ceremony. These days ceremony is not practiced by all the *muria* community. Those who stay in dense forest observe it. If the person is a reputed being, then they make an *uraskal* in his/her name outside the village near marghat and the monuments should have the symbolic picture of a tiger. For the purpose of satisfying the deceased, the relatives sacrifice a black cock to jungle *devi* known as *banjari* in *ambasya* or in *puernima* day. They believe that the *banjari devi* protects human beings from being killed by the wild animals.

### **Jiu Uthani: The Belief towards the Soul**

This ceremony is performed after twelve days from the death of a person. The relatives summon a feast. The relatives both *akomama* and *dadabhai* assemble on that day. Generally, this ceremony is performed on a weekly market day because every body comes to bazaar for their weekly ration. The *chelik* and *motiari* dance with their drum. The elders of the family put some rice in the corner of a room and stay away for some hours. When they enter the room, generally on rice they find some foot prints of animals or goddesses. They believe that the symbol of the foot print is the sign of the soul that comes via animals to home and stays in departed pots.

Another method is that the relatives go into the water and try to catch any kind of living thing. Whoever first catches is regarded as being specially loved by the dead person and rewarded with extra drinks. If they catch fish, they put the fish into one of the pots. The pot is covered with a new sari and the *akomama* relatives put some *haldi* and

oil over it. Then a woman (married) lifts the pot and puts it down near the pot of the departed. Their idea is that the soul will come back home through the fish.

### **The Departed Pot: (Photo-30)**

The departed pot has great importance in the *muria* life. The funeral rites and erection of memorial pillar are the symbol of remembrance to ancestors. But the daily and monthly ritual inside the home is very important in their life. For the purpose of daily rituals each *muria* family keeps a pot inside the corner of the room which is called the “hanal” room. In addition to the pot there is also a hearth of the departed on which the housewife must cook new grain at each of the first eating festival called as *nuakhahani*. It is a permanent pot to which special offerings are made on all important occasions. There are various rules about this pot. Only the married women and *gaita* can remove and move toward the pot. When the newly bride comes home, it is the mother’s responsibility to introduce about the importance of the pot. The pot can be changed every year if the pot is fractured due to any cause.

### **Practice for Erection of Memorials:**

The *muria* erect menhir and dolmen in memory and conciliator of the dead. They continue this tradition in different forms. Those who are staying inside the jungle and hills, they continue this tradition. The tradition has been abandoned in most of the areas such as Jagdalpur, Bastar town and some part of Kondagaon tahasil. The stone erected by *muria* is an upright menhir called as “uraskal”<sup>7</sup> in gondi. Some *muria* of Bailadila area believe that the size of the menhirs is based on the personality of the dead person how much he or she was reputed. If we look at the *muria* of Narayanpur and Bhopalpatnam,

they say that the size depends on the availability of suitable stone in hills. The *muria* erect menhirs for men and women, which stand in long rows by the roadside, near the village boundary or in the place of *marghat*. Stone for men and women are usually put separately. These stones are not confined to this region only. They are found extensively in almost all the inhabitant of *muria*. If anyone, who has died under suspicious circumstances his or her menhir is put in a secluded place. In the village Murdanda of Avapalli area, the *urias* erect menhirs in the name of men and dolmen in the name of women, because they believe that the men can stand more time compared to women. Therefore, all the menhirs are in standing position and the dolmens are in the sitting position.

If we see the Timelwada area of Konta tahasil the *muria* erect only dolmen (photo-14, 20) in the name of both men and women. Due to unavailability of proper height stones, now they use wood as a memorial pillar. These days *muria* generally use small stones and have to quarry them and pick them off the ground. When they go to the forest for wood or to hunt, they keep a look out for suitable surface stone and also good quality of wood. During the taking of the stone from hills, the *chelik* and *motiari* escort the menhir to its place with their drum and dances. The relatives give some drinks to their clan members who cooperate in taking stones.

Generally the stone is selected by the old man of their clan or *gaita*. It is believed that the removal of the stone must be performed by a member of such clan or *gaita*. The *gaita* makes a small hole on the stone and offer *salpi*, pulses and rice, and digs it up. If the stone does not get out of the ground, then the *gaita* declares that the soul of the dead

person may need something different. They sacrifice a black cock to the stone and then the stone is dug it. Once they get the stone out of the ground they cover it with a new cloth and take it directly to the burial ground or *marghat*. Apart from the memorial stone, another small stone is kept with the menhir. Sometimes the people put stones in the name of deceased. The wife of the dead man; and if not, the wife of brothers, takes the small stone and keeps it with the menhir. Everybody puts a mark of oil and *haldi* on the stones just like the marriage of couples in the Hindu tradition. They leave the stone near the menhir and return back home and sacrifice a cock in the name of departed pot. Next morning or any suitable day, the relatives give a feast to the entire village to satisfy the soul of the dead man. The erection of menhir is very costly and it depends on the economic condition of the family. If the family is unable to offer a feast to the entire village, they offer them drinks.

### **When They Worship?**

There would be no value of menhirs without worship. The family has the responsibility to continue the worship of the stone. Generally, they worship the menhirs during the following day.

- (i) The day of *amabasya* and *pu'nima*
- (ii) Before going to cut the crops
- (iii) Before going to hunting
- (iv) First three days of marriage
- (v) Before going to put seed for cultivation

### **Wooden Memorial Pillar :( Photo-16, 21)**

There are two types of memorial pillars one can find in Bastar and Dantewada region, one is made of stone and the other is wooden. Nowadays it is very difficult to get proper surface stone in hills and finding and taking a good stone is time taking. So the *muria* have taken the alternate of wood in lieu of stone. For erection of wooden memorial pillar the procedure of the menhirs, is followed. The most valuable thing is that they decorate the wood in various shapes and draw different kind of picture on it. They decorate even the stones too.

### **Rock and Wooden Art and Architecture: (Photo-16, 18, 19, 20)**

The members of the deceased person call the carpenter to decorate the wood with pictures. The decoration is based on two things: (1) the picture should be of what the deceased person liked. (2) Picture of the nature Gods and Goddesses and also the pictures of animals such as crow, peacock, sparrow, tiger, bull, rhinoceros and fish are drawn. The nature gods and goddesses are sun, moon, stars, trees and mountains. For the decoration, the carpenter charges around 1500 to 2000 rupees. The *muria* carpenters are very advance in their art. One can find various dolls and toys of high quality in the market of Bastar and Jagdalpur. The question arises as why do they decorate? The answer may be because they believe that after the death these gods and goddesses would help the deceased.

There are some memorial pillar at Dhilimili where one can see the creatively of the *muria*. It is a fat, thick pillar, carefully squared, standing between 3.05 to 5.05 mts. with complicated carvings surrounding the base and a beautification of crocodiles and pigeons at the top. The centre is surmounted by a trident and on this again is a small bird

called *paara* and *chentia*. On the west face of the pillar, there are carvings of dancers wearing their traditional dresses and some girls who are realistically portrayed. Below them is a tiger, a crane and a peacock. On the south side is a picture of a man riding an elephant with an umbrella in his hand and a bag of some material, and five women follow him with pots of rice-beer and leaf spoons. Below them are some rats. At the bottom are men ploughing, deer and tigers. On the east side is a man riding a horse and catching fish and tortoises. To the north, there is a man and his wife with their children. Below this are two pairs of dogs. It seems as if they are copulating. At the very bottom some men are carrying a pot of rice beer. Near the pillar are grave and a modern hut built up by the *gaon mukhia* to preserve these monuments.

### **Beliefs towards the Memorial Pillar:**

The *muria* believe that if the dead soul is satisfied with the arrangements that one made for him/her the stone grows in size. The soul of the deceased stays in the stone. When the family gets a child, the soul will come with the new child. The soul also protects the deceased family from devil. The maximum period of worshipping the stone is twenty years after that it becomes only memorial. Another theory of growing stone is, if the stone is erected in an isolated place and nobody touches and disturbs the stone then the stone may grow 1.2" every year.

### **The Hill Maria**

According to *maria* Gond, death is a natural process. They are created by the *Pen* (God). They came here to finish their work. After they finished their work, the *mahapuru* calls them to their original place. They believe that their souls have three *atma* (*jiv*). The

first is in their chest, which makes it *dhak-dhak*. The second is in their mouth. The third is in their body. The first will go to the *mahapuru*. The second will go near by a tree and the third will be staying in the memorial stone. They worship the tree, monuments and pray to the *mahapuru* that the soul should come home and stay in the departed pots. They believe in the transmigration of the soul and rebirth “punarjanma”. After finishing their work (what *mahapuru* said them during the creation) they return to the original place. So they have to die for returning to *mahapuru* for *punarjanma*.

Apart from the calling of *mahapuru*, there are many unnatural deaths due to the dissatisfaction of *mahapuru*. The following are the causes of abnormal death:

- a) Death due to chronic diseases.
- b) Death due to killing tiger.
- c) Death during pregnancy.
- d) Death due to dissatisfaction of clan god.
- e) Death due to *charchar* (lightning).
- f) Death by witchcrafts.

Death depends on the cause. If it is a normal death, one of the family members of the deceased first informs the village *mukhia*. The *mukhia* will call the *gunia* or *waddai* to identify the cause of the death. The *gunia* or *wadai* has the autonomous power to identify the cause of death. If it is a normal death, then he asks the family to inform their relatives

to come. If it is unnatural death then the *gunia* or *wadai* decides to fire the death body outside the village or any water location. All the primary rituals depend on the cause of death.

### **Funeral Rites or Death Ceremony:**

The ceremony of death and the soul of the dead get its place again in *marni pendul*<sup>8</sup> ceremony. *Pendul* means marriage and *marni* means end of life and together it is called *marni pendul*. When a person dies in a hill maria family, the relatives first call the *waddai* to find the cause of death. The news of the dead is sent out to all the brother clan and wife clan relatives. In *ghotul*, the *chelik* and *motiari* beat the drum till the cremation. The cremation generally takes place in the evening. If it is natural death then the body is taken to the burial ground near the village or road side of the village with their relatives. This ceremony is different from the *bison horn maria*. The villagers dig the earth up to 3 to 5 ft. on the direction of east-west. First they put the saja (*patar*) leaves in the digging ground. Then the eldest son of the deceased or elders of the deceased family, with other relatives make seven or three round in the ground. In the meantime they put water and *haldi* on the body for purification. The water has an important role in the death rituals. If they place water on the dead body, the sins are purified.

The purity of the soul depends on the water and the water should be from the river or *nala*. They place the dead body in East-west direction with some used materials, like bed, earthen pots, coins, pottery, iron object, arrow, etc. The elders of the family or son offers first earth to the death body, and then others fill up the ground. They cover it up with small stones and put some bamboo stick on it for identifying the place. Unlike other

deaths, they bury the pregnant woman in a different way, with mass of female participation. There are separate places for various people to bury. They take the body to road side, near the river or *nala* and below the *mahua* tree (if not mahua, then pipal also). The women also participate in the ritual like the men. They put water and *haldi* on the body and put fire on it.

After coming from the burial ground, they take bath in the river or *nala* and take *salpi/ tadi*. On the same day they decide to give a feast. The deceased family gives the feast to the villagers and relatives. If they are unable to give on the same day, they give it after a week. It depends on the economical status of the family. If the child is below the age of 6 to 8 years, they do not give feast but they give formal drinking party for consolation. There is a particular spot in each village. The selection of spot depends on the cause of death. If it is a normal death, then the spot may change.

### **Departed (Hanal) Pot:**

Each and every *maria* family keeps a *hanal* pot inside the room. Sacrifices and offerings in each and every ritual and function are made at this pot. No sexual intercourse is allowed in the room as it is disrespect to the ancestor. A woman in her menstrual cycle is not allowed to enter the room. Those who die abnormal deaths such as cholera, small pox, during pregnancy and killing by tiger, for them they do not put *hanal* pot.

### **Abnormal Death:**

If the person dies from cholera or small pox he must be burned in other places. For this no menhir is erected. If a person is killed by tiger or other wild animals he must be burned, at the place where their remains are found. They must not be brought into the

village; otherwise the dead man soul (*atma*) may bring the tiger to home. No menhir or dolmen is set up for him or her. If a person dies in pregnancy, the body is taken outside the village near the *nala* and burnt with *mahua* wood. They also burn the used materials of the deceased particularly the cloth and bed.

**Belief towards Cremation:**

They believe that, if they cremate the body, the *atma*/soul will be sitting the ground forever and in next birth he/she will come to their family. If they bury, their *atma* will roam in the air. There is a special place for cremation. It is called *marghat or hanal gutta*. This place is prohibited for the children. They believe that the soul and ghost stay in that place. The pregnant women also are prohibited from going to this area. The child, the pregnant women, and those who are killed by tiger are cremated and all other are buried.

**Idea about Direction:**

The direction of head is placed in the east side because they believe that the sun rises from the side of the head of the dead body and they believe that their ancestor comes to this region from the eastern part of the world. According to villagers the eastern part is located in thousand miles from the present village; it may be identified in somewhere Andhra Pradesh most certainly Ventapuram in Khamman district. They also worshipped the sun god. So, they placed head in the east. But generally it is not the rule. Within the hill maria community at Chotadonger area they put the body in reverse as they find suitable to place it.

### **When they worship?**

Every full moon day (purnima) and solar eclipse day (amavasya) they give some food and *salpi* to menhir. Apart from that, they worship on the day of marriage and *dassera*, *nua khahani*, and each festival day. There is also the practice of a great deal of hunting. Before preparing for hunting they worship the memorial monuments. They believe that, if the forefather's soul is dissatisfied their hunting would not be successful. Before they start cultivation and sowing the seeds, they worship the monuments with rice and *salpi*. They sacrifice the cock, hen and goat.

### **Ghost and Witchcraft:**

They believe in Ghost. If the soul is dissatisfied with the arrangement, it becomes a ghost. For the satisfaction of ghost they sacrifice black chicken and black pig. This is one of the cause of fear, for which they worship the soul and memorial monuments.

### **Double Burial:**

They erect monuments for a single person. If somebody in the same family dies on the same day in the same incident, they erect double burial monuments. If a man and woman die at the same time they place dead body in reverse manner. This type of burial can be found in the twin menhirs at Karhibhadar.

### **Erection of Monuments:**

There is a difference between erection of menhir and dolmen. In some places like Avapalli, they believe that man can stand many hours, so they placed menhir in the name of man. Women cannot stand more time compared to men, so they place dolmen in the

name of woman. Generally, the dolmen is placed in a sleeping position. In some places like Kondagaon area there is no difference between the menhir and dolmen. It is a memorial to the departed.

The selection procedure of a stone depends on the economic condition of the family. If the family is rich, they buy the stone from Jagdalpur stone factory area. If the family is poor they can take it from the mountain, whatever they get from the mountain. The eldest son of the family can place the stone. The construction of monument depends on the family. If the family is rich, they place dressed or decorated stone. The decoration is done by the craftsman. It costs about Rs 2000. Those who belong to poor families place wooden pillar. They decorate the wood with various pictures such as birds, animals, fish, moon, sun etc.

### **Reason for Erecting Menhirs:**

They erect both menhir and dolmen in the name of their ancestors. The menhirs are called *kotakal* in gondi. They believe there is continuity beyond death. The deceased wishes desire and needs, which the relatives would fulfill. They believe that the unsatisfied sprits would trouble.

There are many reasons for erecting menhir or dolmen. They are as follows: (i) After death the soul (atma) need not go anywhere, it will stay in the stone near the house. (ii) If they stay inside the stone, they must not harm the relatives. (iii) They must help in bringing rain and protect from the harmful and destructive spirit. (iv) The coming generation must remember their forefathers by seeing the Memorial stone. (v) If they erect the monuments, the soul of the departed again will come in the form of new born

children. (vi) They worship the monuments and it is their belief and tradition. (vii) They believe that they have been worshipping the monument from time immemorial. If they stop the tradition it means it is disrespect to their ancestor. (viii) It entails community participation and shows the strength and unity of the community in the village or region.

### **Dandami Maria (Bison-Horn Maria)**

The *dandami maria* believe that there is a continuity beyond death. Among the *dandami*, death is associated with various beliefs, customs and rituals. They believe that, the hostile spirits, black magic, witchcraft or the wrath of the deities cause death. An elaborate ritual is performed to mitigate the effects of their harmful elements on the living members. The departed soul would not realize the depth of sorrow of his relatives and would grumble in the other world if they do not make crying sound until the body is taken to the cremation ground.

### **Death Ceremony:**

When a person dies in the *dandami* family, his son-in-law first informs their relatives with beating the *dhol* (drum). The beats continue until the relatives and friends from mother clan (*akomama*) and father clan (*dadabhai*) assemble or until the dead body is taken to the cremation ground. After the arrival of the relatives the body is taken out of the house to the verandah, washed with a pot of water and massaged with *dumber* oil. They also put turmeric (*haldi*) on the body to purify and put a new cloth on it. Four men of the dead relatives carry the bier on their shoulders to the cremation ground. An elder man brings some *saja* leaves and puts it over the face of the dead body. He also brings water from the stream in *saja* leaf cup and sprinkles it on the face of the corpse. Some

young men and women beat the funeral drum in their traditional dress. The son sets fires to the pyre of the body. As soon as the pyre catches fire and burn intensely the relatives go away from the cremation ground and return home after bathing in the river. Generally, the cremation ground is situated outside the village or on the road side near the water source. Next morning the relatives go to the cremation ground to see whether the body has been completely burnt or not. If any portion of the body remains unburned, then it is a sign that the death took place due to magic or witchcrafts. They throw away the remains of ashes and bones into the river.

### **Erection of Menhirs:**

Some days after the completion of the death ritual, (after seven days) on any festival or bazaar day they come to the pyre ground to erect the *urasgatta* (menhir). In between they collect the wood from the forest and prepare wooden pillar. These days in lieu of stone they erect a wooden pillar due to the unavailability of proper surface stone in hills. They decorate the pillar in various shapes and draw various pictures on it. The picture is based on the likes of the dead according to the instruction of the relative. After putting the *urasgatta*, they sacrifice a chicken or goat in the name of the dead soul. The relatives give a feast in the village. The major cause for not erecting stone menhir can be attributed to close contact with Hinduism and its practices. If they erect menhir they must sacrifice a buffalo or cow and the sacrifice of cow is pronounced illegal by the Chhattisgarh government.

If a reputed person dies in the village such as *gaita*, *gunia* or village *mukhia*, they erect the menhir but without sacrificing the cow. Instead of a cow they sacrifice many

goats or pigs. The stone is selected and carried from the hills to home. If they do not find any suitable stone in the hills then they go to the factory area at jagdalpur. The rituals are same with the hill *maria* but the cost of the feast is be high. They collect the feast materials more or less from each household. They put the menhirs near the village at an important place and they cover the menhirs with cement plaster.

### **Abnormal Death:**

If a person dies an unnatural death such as cholera, small pox, killed by tiger, suicide, snake bite and women dying during pregnancy their bodies are buried in places other than the usual cremation ground. It is generally believed that people killed by tiger are transformed into tiger spirits and wander around the forest to attack people. For satisfying the soul they sacrifice a chicken in the name of jungle *devi* or village goddesses. If pregnant women die, the relatives first inform the *gunia* to find out the cause of death and give a black hen for sacrifice. The *bhut* (shadow) of the deceased goes to the near by *palas* tree. The *gunia* identifies the *palas* tree and sacrifices the hen under the tree.

### **Departed Pot:**

The *dandami maria* keep the departed pot in their house and it is called the *hanal* room. In this room they generally keep grains and all agricultural implements. They worship the pot on every festival day and also sacrifice a cock before sowing, harvest and hunting. If a marriage takes place in the family, the pot is worshipped for the first three days. They worship the pot with country beer or liquor. The *dandami maria* have accepted most of the methods of death ritual of the *murias*. Even some *dandami maria*

tribes of Jagdalpur recognized themselves as the murias. They want to be more advanced like the muria. Now-a-days they are going to school and colleges for higher study. Their culture mingles with the Brahmanical culture. They are increasingly following the Brahmanical way of life.

### **Indigenous Iron Smelting:**

In Chhattisgarh the old indigenous methods of smelting ore are still carried on to fulfill the day to day requirement of iron implement. The *agarias* are a small ethnic group of Chhattisgarh. They are concentrated in the Sarguja, Shadhol, Bilaspur, Durg and Raigarh districts and some parts of Kanker district of Chhattisgarh. They have adopted the profession of iron smelting. Their traditional and main occupation is iron smelting. They get their ore from the *maikal* range, selecting stones of dark-reddish colour. They mix ore and charcoal in the ratio of 16:10 in the furnace and the blast is produced by a pair of bellows worked by the feet and conveyed to the furnace through bamboo tubes. It is kept up steadily for four hours. The clay coating of the kilns is then broken down; and the ball of the molten slag and charcoal is taken out and hammered into iron. In this way, they make ploughshares, mattocks, axes, sickle and so on.

**(Table-1) Materials Made by the Agaria for their Day to Day Use.**

<b>Iron Materials (Local Name)</b>	<b>Description</b>
Aitwar Mundri	It is a type of twisted iron, usually made of kauri loha and worn by a lamu child as a protection against lightning
Surahi Mundri	It is an ordinary type of ring of plain iron. It is used as a guard against the diseases.
Chulmundri	It is used in the weddings by Gond. It has copper mixed with

	the iron.
Chhura	It is an anklet of plain or twisted iron, generally of kauri loha. It worn by men and women as a protection against magic.
Pidha	It is a wooden board covered with iron.
Kharaut	It is a wooden clogs covered with iron.
Gurud	It is an iron scourge. It has knobs and spikes making it a frightening weapon.
Katahi	It is a scourge and fitted with iron tips and spikes.
Hiranoti	It is a very elaborate lamp stand used in marriage.
Painari	It is used to cut grass and thorn bushes, to break off earth that has stuck to the plough to dig for rats.
Bakkhar	It is a paring harrow. It is used for rooting up stubble and breaking the clods of earth that the plough has turned up.
Kanta	It is used to dig up roots or to make holes in the ground.
Hassia	It is the sickle used to reap rice, to cut grass, to cut meat.
Gaend	It is large iron ring which is fixed round the pole in the centre of the threshing floor.
Basula	It is an adze, used for smoothing the wood of a plough or indeed for planning any kind of wood. It is sometimes also used for digging.
Tangia	It is used for cutting bamboo.
Tangi	It is used for cutting wood.
Pharsa and Pharsi	It is used for killing animals.
Sandi	It is a nail used for fishing.

**(Table-2) The following table lists the local factory names and their respective description as prevalent in Bilaspur district:**

<b>Sl. No.</b>	<b>Local Name of Iron Ore, Metal and Slag</b>	<b>Description</b>
01	Chawaria	The ore dug from pits in the Motinala Range and is considered

		as the good quality in this area.
02	Chawaria	The ore dug from the Karanjia Hill Range. Good quality.
03	Bhawaria	Dug from the Motinala Range. It is of good quality.
04	Pando	Gathered from the surface of the ground in Motinala. It is a pure heavy ore quality.
05	Katarra	Collected from the bank of the streams in Motinala. It is of poor quality.
06	Charki	Dug from the pits in Motinala. Tools made from this are said to break readily.
07	Jak-Makka	Dug from the pits in Motinala.
08	Dhidha(metal)	The ore has been extracted from the furnace after an hour and a half smelting.
09	Pajar(metal)	Dug from the pits in Motinala
10	Mail(slag)	Dug from the pits in Motinala

The Tata iron and steel company at Jamshedpur was enterprising enough to analyze the above mentioned type of Iron ore, metal and slag.

**(Table-3) Percentage of Chemical in Iron Ore<sup>9</sup>**

<b>% of Chemical</b>	<b>Chawaria</b>	<b>Chawaria</b>	<b>Bhawaria</b>	<b>Pando</b>	<b>Katarra</b>	<b>Charki</b>	<b>Jak-Makka</b>
SiO <sub>2</sub>	13.10	3.78	9.90	6.00	2.92	10.24	4.60
Ai <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	2.68	2.94	2.94	5.52	4.69	9.74	8.20
TiO <sub>2</sub>	0.10	0.10	Trace	0.70	0.50	1.60	0.70
FeO	Trace	Trace	Trace	0.26	1.94	0.38	1.29
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	69.20	80.36	70.21	79.22	77.93	70.36	73.22
MnO	0.70	1.33	1.90	0.49	0.15	0.27	0.06
P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	0.120	0.460	0.220	0.192	0.925	0.215	0.765
CaO	Trace	Trace	Trace	0.30	0.40	0.20	0.20
MgO	1.15	0.72	1.44	0.22	0.52	0.23	0.28
H <sub>2</sub> OI <sub>8</sub> B	13.00	9.80	12.60	7.32	10.20	7.12	11.00

(Table-4) Percentage of Chemical in Slag and Metal <sup>10</sup>

% of Chemical(Slag)	Mail	% of Chemical(Metal)	Dhidha	Pajar
SiO <sub>2</sub>	18.00	C	0.78	0.42
Ai <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	9.02	Mn	0.10	0.42
FeO	53.40	S	Trace	Trace
TiO <sub>2</sub>	0.30	P	0.140	0.043
Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>2</sub>	10.01	Si	0.075	0.48
Met.iron	1.60			
MnO	4.75			
P <sub>2</sub> O <sub>5</sub>	0.450			
CaO	0.40			
MgO	2.16			
Carbon	0.28			

The above chemical analysis of different specimen shows that the iron ore from the Chhattisgarh are of good quality and people easily get the ore from the nature. This is one of the cause the *agaria* took the profession of iron smelting even during present day. One can say that the origin of present smelting of iron is from the megalithic period in this region.

#### **Type of Megalithic Monuments:**

Presently, on the basis of morphological features the megalithic monuments found in different Gond inhabited areas of Bastar region are broadly divided into the following types:

(i) Menhir, Alignment, Avenue (Uraskal).

(i) Dolmen, Cap Stone (Dhanyakal).

(iii) Wooden and Stone Memorial Pillar (Urasgutta).

(iv) Stone Circle (Pathri)

### **Philosophy Behind the Practice of Megalithic Culture:**

Megalithic practices seem to connect the entire community into oneness by traditions, which lead to unity in social and cultural spheres. The people of *muria* and *maria* gond are controlled by the rules and customs for the projected behaviour of their societies. Every village is a self ruled unit. The natural objects such as trees, forests, stones surrounded by megalithic monuments are believed to have supernatural power. The big stones and mountains are supposed to be malevolent spirits by these people. People believe that for a peaceful and wealthy life they practice this culture. The ancestor had erected such stones to perpetuate their powers and names. The practice of megalithic culture seems to carry the concept of unity and human power in the society. These memorial stones exhibit the belief of the people in supernatural powers. These stones are treasured, worshipped and honoured by the community.

### **Importance of Monuments in Agricultural Practices:**

The megalithic monuments have a great importance in their agricultural life. The first showers begin in the month of June-July and the activity of sowing starts with vast religious rites. Ritual and sowing are always done together when they start slash and burn

(Pedda) cultivation.<sup>11</sup> The Gond believes that invoking godly power is a must to ensure good yield. On the occasion of first sowing two rites are performed, namely, a sacrifice for the *dharti maa* (mother goddess) and a sacrifice for the guardian to the family which is called the *pathri* (stone). Prior to sowing, the family is offered a black chicken, millets and seeds (various kinds) that are to be sown in the season. They sacrifice before the *pathri* focus on, good yield without any harm to the farmers from the wild animals. The entire ritual is known as *bijputna* in *abhujmarh* region.

### **Ritualistic Importance:**

Within accumulation to the composite of memorials, commemorative or stone for social prestige and status put up by the clans, the three types of Gond erect a series of stones connected with funerary and ritualistic purpose. The funerary stones are those connected with the burial rituals including the disposal of the mortal remains of the dead. The tribes bury their dead but the place of burning differs from tribe to tribe. The tribes such as *maria*, *muria* and *damdani* practice megalithic traditions which are definitely of their own that are in tune with the ecological environment and the community vision held by them. With the arrival of modernization, the tribal society has undergone noticeable change in their cultural life. Instead of cow they sacrifice goats or pigs when they worship the stone.

### **Importance of Pottery in their Death Culture:**

The potters work on wheels and produce for weekly market in the small towns. In the Gond community some people take the profession of making different pots. The male members of the family are engaged in cultivation and the females supply periodically a

certain number of pots for the use in religious and social occasion in the village. Every Gond family in this region has a ritual pot inside the house. Sacrifices and offering on each and every ritual function are made at this pot. They believe that the ancestral soul comes home and stays inside the pot and protects people in the time of difficulty. They generally use the pot for making the food, carrying water from the *nala* and in the various ceremonies. One can find many villages where the potters are established. Since potters are settled from a long ago in this region one can assume that this tradition continues from their ancestors.

**(Table-5) Explored Villages, Presently Erecting Megalithic Monuments**

Sites	Block/Taluk	Districts	Cultural Assemblages	Location
Mundrapara	Dantewada	Dantewada	Menhir	15 km from Dantewada
Jampara	Dantewada	Dantewada	Menhir	10 km from Dantewada
Dhurli	Dantewada	Dantewada	Menhir	10 km from Dantewada
Murdanda	Usoor	Dantewada	Dolmen	10 km from Avapalli
Jhaugaon	Gidam	Dantewada	Wooden pillar	15 km from Gidam
Baiguda	Gidam	Dantewada	Wooden pillar	8 km from Gidam
Suklapara	Gidam	Dantewada	Wooden pillar	13 km from Bairampur
Tumnar	Bairamgarh	Dantewada	Wooden pillar	10 km from Bairamgarh
Rompalli	Sironcha	Gadchiroli	Menhir	17 km from Sironcha
Sirkonda	Sironcha	Gadchiroli	Menhir, Wood en pillar	15 km from Sironcha
Kotapalli	Usoor	Dantewada	Menhir	9 km from Avapalli

**(Table-6) Population of the Study Village above 14 years**

Village/Sites	Block	District	Tribe	Male	Female	H.H	Total
Dongri	Narayanpur	Bastar	Damdami Maria	24	18	15	59
Murdanda	Bijapur	Dantewada	Hill Maria,Muria	41	32	21	86
Karkabhat	Balod	Durg	Muria(Gond)	88	79	41	219
Bartia Bhata	Saraipali	Mahasamund	Kharia, Gond	56	49	36	144
Gammewada	Dantewada	Dantewada	Muria	101	92	47	245
Orcha	Narayanpur	Bastar	Hill maria	112	87	39	234

**(Table-7) Geographical Data of Study Villages**

Village Primary Data	Dongri	Murdanda	Karkabhat	Bartia Bhata	Gamewada	Orcha
Household land/hec.	72	12	61	43	53	57
Irrigated land/hec.	0	0	29	203	0	0
Fertile land/hec.	0	0	27	90	0	5
Location of Village from Big Town/KM	52	108	67	32	22	47
Number of Monuments	62	9	232	431	51	43
Location-in/near Forest	In	In	Near	Near	In	In
Source of Water	Nala	Nala	River	River	Nala	Nala

## **Short History of the Study villages**

**1. Dongri:** The village *dongri* has been set up by ancestors and the people have been residing in this village before king's rule. The ancestors of these people belong to the hill maria community. They are the aborigines in this village. Most of the people of this village were working in the court of the Barsur gond rajas. The raja had given the land in the name of this village. The ancestor chose this side for the village because it was located in the dense forest, hence was a suitable site for safety against the rule of the kings and later the British Empire. There is a story behind how the name of the village came into being. There is a small hill on the eastern side of the village. The small hill is known as *dungri*, so they call this village as *dongri*.

There is no proper communication to the village. One can reach this village through the main road or footpath. Tribal culture still thrives in this village. The erection of memorial to dead is common. The sacred groves are referred to as *gaon devis stal* (place). There are few *devis* (goddesses) in the village forest. The village had its own traditional form of self governance. The decision regarding village and the lives of the people were taken by the villagers themselves. Elders were given a lot of respect and they had a say in the decision. It would be a rare situation when the decision of the elders were opposed or violated. The traditional systems of governance handled all the matters of daily life, matters concerning safety and security of the village, protecting their tribal culture, interpersonal relations like marriage.

The people of the village have a very close relationship with the forest. The forest is life for them. They can never imagine the existence of life without forest. Due to the

dense forest and non interference of the government and presence of *Naxalite* they have been able to keep their culture intact and uncontaminated even in this twenty first century.

**2. Murdanda:** The village is dominated by the *muria* and hill *maria* population. It is situated 17 km from the avapalli police station. The village has been set up by the ancestors six generation ago. The ancestor came to this village from Venkatapuram area of Khammam district of Andhra Pradesh. First two families came to this village. Due to the suitability of forest products, they chose this village. There is a story behind how the name of the village came into being. Long ago the *mur* (peacock) used to come to the village regularly. The villagers would hunt the peacock with their bow and arrow. Once the gond raja came to this village and ate the *mur* meat. Raja did not like the killing of *mur* in large number. So he had punished (dand) some people for that. Therefore they call the village Murdanda.

In this village the tribals still preserve their traditional culture. They celebrate and sacrifice goat and cock to *danteswari mata*. *Danteswari mata* is the village goddess since medieval period. In this village we find dolmens and menhirs still erected by the *muria* in the name of deceased. There is no proper communication to the village. One can reach this village through main road or footpath. Due to *Maoist* influence now the village is looked after by CRPF. The traditional system of governance is totally disturbed by the outside interference.

**3. Karkabhat:** The village is situated 17 km from the Balod taluk of Durg district. The majority of the populations belong to the Gond community. Due to

industrialization there is a proper communication to this village. The village was set up around 250 years ago. The ancestors came from the Kanker area. Now in the village, the tribal culture is totally disturbed by the outsiders. Due to establishment of factory, all the menhir and dolmen are converted in to chips by the road contractor. Here one can find menhir of 20 to 25 feet. All are in disturbed condition.

**4. Bartia-Bhata:** The village is situated 22 km from the Saraipali of Mahasamund district. The *kharia* and *gond* are the inhabitants of this village. The *kharia* came to this village from Orissa and the *gond* from the Jagdalpur area. The village Bartia-Bhata is a historical place. The nomenclature of the village is Bartia means Barat in Hindi and *bhata* mean *maidan* in Hindi, so it is called Bartia Bhata. Long ago the *barat* of a zamindar came to this village and stayed here during night. The belief is that due to some magic all the people got converted into stones and are still lying on the floor. The stone got converted into a shape according to position they were in that night. The size of the stone has been decreasing with the passage of time.

The villagers speak about the stone in this way “if somebody takes this stone home intentionally, then he or she will face problem”. Even he would dream of the devil that would kill him in near future. Even he would vomit spirit blood.

Now the villagers worship the stone during every festival. They believe the presence of *gaon devi* in the stone. When this researcher went to the village and tried to dig one of the stones, he found an iron instrument beneath the stone. The instruments are preserved in the village *mukhia* house. Due to construction of road, the contractor

converted the stone into chips. In the village one can find nearly five hundred menhirs in disturbed condition.

**5. Gamewada:** This village is situated between Dantewada and Bailadila road. The murias of this village are very advanced compare to others. Here we find around 60 menhirs of older date. One of the sites of this village is preserved by Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Prehistory Branch, Nagpur. The villagers work in Bailadila iron factory.

**6. Orcha:** The *abuj maria* is a primitive tribal group in chhattisgarh. The communication facility to Orcha is very poor. One can go to Abujmarh area only during a weekly market day, which is on Wednesday. The village is situated in the jungle near hills. The village is situated on the highest place in Chattisgarh. So people used to call it “uccha” which later became Orcha. The majority of the population is maria. The area they are staying is Abhujmarh hill so they called it *abhjmaria*. In this area, one finds many menhirs and wooden pillars erected in the name of their ancestors. Here the tradition still continuous without break.

### **Continuity and Decay of Megalithic Culture:**

In this region the megalithic culture of Gond is in decay. In Pujharikanker, Avapalli and some part of Bhapalpatnam, people continue to erect the menhirs but in different forms. Nowadays, they are not following rituals strictly like before. There are many difficulties faced by the people in erecting the menhir. These days it is very difficult to find a proper surface stone in the hills. Taking big stones from hills to home is time consuming. If they erect a menhir, a great feast has to be given; one or more pigs or

many chickens must be sacrificed. They spend more money in their marriage ceremony. Another major thing is the influence of Hinduism and the ban on cow sacrifice. In these days due to interferences of political party, there is no unity in the village community like earlier.

The clan system is getting collapsed by the interference of outsiders such as *bania*, *marwadi* and *gujrati*. Similarly the cult of *danteswari* was worshipped by the Gond only, but nowadays she is worshipped in public places at Jagdalpur during *Dussera*. During *salva judum* campaign most of the forest villages are destroyed in anti Maoist campaign. This is the reason for migration on a large scale.

The industrial policy of government more or less gives opportunity to some tribals to change their profession. The murias are more advanced compare to other tribes in this region. Their children are going to school and colleges for higher study. They are eager to go to town and city for employment opportunity and never come back to their village. The death culture of the tribal is in ruin. They accept the Hindu ritual and they worship the Hindu Gods and Goddess. Due to the influence of *tantric* Buddhism and Vaishnavism in sixth century A.D.<sup>12</sup> this culture may be said to be amalgamated with Hinduism. They do not have any independent religion anymore.

### **Impact of Modernization to Megalithic Culture:**

These days there is a change in the practices of Megalithic culture. Now-a-days, we find the erection of Megaliths in dense forests, in the village. The villages which are near the urban center are not erecting. Due to industrialization, most of the tribal are working in the factory as wage labourer. They have no time to spend looking for suitable

stones for menhirs. The government education policy “Sarva Sikhya Prasaran” is in full flow in the tribal area. Their belief system is in erosion. The tribal also want to come to the mainstream of the civilization. Instead of erecting stones or monuments they celebrate only the feasts like the Hindus. The tribal children are going for higher education to Jagdalpur and Raipur. The parents of the children try to earn more money to send their children to educational institution. So, they are eager to earn money and come to town in search of employment.

There is the strong influence of Hinduism on the tribal culture. Due to the liberal nature of the Hindu rituals, they believe in the Hindu way of life. The religion, like culture, has everywhere been undergoing a certain degree of change through a process of acculturation. One can distinguish two major type of acculturation: (i) incorporation (ii) directed change.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand the Christian missionaries have established their churches in the dense forests and are trying to modernize them only to convert them subsequently. In large number the tribals are migrating to town, due to *salva judum*, the anti *maoist* movement.

Nobody attempts to preserve the megalithic monuments. The Megalithic monuments of this area are going to ruin due to road construction and canal construction. The stone contractor destroys the stone monuments to convert the menhir into metal chips (Photo-27). Due to construction of Pandit Ravi Sankar Sukla dam, most of the megalithic monuments at Dhamtari have been destroyed. The megalithic sites in Bastar region have not so far yielded any intrinsic evidences of chronology. It is not possible as

the megalithic fields in each village under study are painstaking as living monuments and they are protected by the villagers.

**Importance in Society:**

Every tradition and culture has its own significance. The study of megalithic culture in present context gives information about the death practices and belief towards the philosophy of life. One can observe the structural changes in death practice amongst the Gond. These changes are demonstrating the change of human psychology and thought prorny through the phase of history. More or less they continue to practices the aboriginal knowledge and belief towards the superstitions, which are heady constructive to presume the sense of self or soul in tribal community.

For the sake of continued existence in hilly and forest environment, even today they have not forgotten to practice their indigenious knowledge, where natural resources have great role. The deep-rooted belief on the survival of supernatural power also exists to influence each and every step of their life and this belief system gives them power to reveal fight the ravage of them. Its best suited for their existence. All tribes have their own way of doing almost everything, right from childbirth, rearing, marriage, death, etc. For instance, they are aware of a variety of herbal medication as remedies for certain ailments, which are specific to every particular tribe. They hardly share such information, which could possibly be recorded for further use.

Whatever we do with megaliths in the present that is to study them, excavate them, restore them, erect an information board and a counter next to them, is a contribution of contemporary history of culture to the monuments, present and future

lives. Remembrances of culture is the way through which a society ensures cultural continuity by preserving its communal knowledge from one generation to the next, narrate it possibly for later generations to reconstruct their cultural identities.