Chapter V

FOOD AND DRINKS

"Jawa undana bukkate jawa tattana, marsu billu kani paytu kotum gada dayna";
To drink gruel, fill the gourd bottle with gruel, hold an axe, arrow and bow, to go to field and forest".

An Abujhmarhia proverb.

Food, and the few devices employed in obtaining it, is the focus of economic life among the Abujhmarhias in a more fundamental sense than it is in more complicated economies. Food-getting is an important activity, but more than that, it is a direct confrontation of man with nature. That is to say, there are no specialized groups who get their food indirectly by buying it from the producer or by exchange services for it in some way.

I. Food :-

The economy of these hill dwellers is still obviously able to shift its balance between the two main sources of subsistence, i.e. shifting cultivation, and forest products. The kohla, a small millet is the principal crop of this region, and the people are predominantly kohla eating, but this crop does not fulfill their requirements for the whole year. Therefore it is supplemented with forest products. Game and fish. Grigson (1938:154) says that "The hill Maria (sic) is omnivorous as all Gonds, and it is difficult to discover what he will not eat if he can get it."
That this is wrong, can be seen clearly from Appendix. It shows that these people have got only certain varieties and not all of cereals, vegetables, yams, herbs and root meats of different animals and birds. They never use young green leaves, flowers and seeds of the sal tree (Shorcarobusta) as wrongly mentioned by Grigson. The variation in the Abujmarhia diet is not a man-made part, but it is a nature's gift to him, it is an ecological adjustment. The cereals and pulses cultivated by them is their food lasting only for six months (e.g. kohla, turhorki, tur, rice, and maize and pulses mainly pupul). But to fulfill their requirements round the year, they have to depend on forest products. Leaves, fruits, yams and roots are arranged in such a way by them that fresh roots, "with nature cooperating" generally fulfill their needs in the months of May and June and dried ones throughout the year. Insects are available for the whole year. Fresh fishes in the months of May and June and September, October and dried ones for the whole year. Green, new, leafy vegetables are available from April to October, "some of them are grown by them to be available from October to January." Yams and tubers are also available from October to January-February, young karku in June and July and the different kinds of fruits from April to May-June.

Thus they never face scarcity of food. Famine is not a problem in the Abujmarh hills.

A. Cereals:

Half of the year the Abujmarhia diet consists of kohla or manji rice of tur and turhorki for two months November and December. Kohla is considered a richer food
The pounded kohla is called kohlanukang that kohla rice is generally supplemented with different minor grains as shown in the Appendix V:1(a). Kohlanukang is prepared in two ways; first it is half boiled, then insulated, after which it is husked, and then boiled with maize or with gurra, an inferior millet or with gond, turi, arku which are all millets or the pith of gorgamara, a palm tree to a broth which is called jawa, gruel. If the kohlanukang with any supplementation is boiled till the water has evaporated, it is called gato. Wanjinukang that is rice, being scarcely grown in a type of villages. It is a feast-day meal or it serves the purpose of Government officers or workers who visit these villages occasionally. In the boundary villages, of course, it is now in a daily use.

Pulses are boiled with jira or its dried flowers, dried meats, dried pulp of mango fruits or with dried tamarind fruits. In the lean months of September, October the maize is served in the morning meals. In July-August it is mixed with little kohlanukang to prepare the day gruel. Bamboo shoots, basta serves the purpose of evening meal in the month of June, July and August. The gruel serves 2/3 part of meals for the whole year, which is taken with the sauce of red ants, tamarind fruits and jirapula.

B. Vegetables, Jabba :-

No vegetables are prepared for a day meal. They are served only in the evening. Some of their main vegetables fulfilling their requirements are as follows :-
(i) **Jirapula:—**

In the rainy season, vegetables are prepared from the young green leaves of *jira* and in dry seasons with its dried flowers which are picked, stored and cooked mixed with roots, tubers, gourds through out the year. This curry is sour in taste. Sometimes the vegetables are soured with the pith of the *kabaunda* tree roots or dried pulps of the tamarind fruits. *Karku* or a bamboo shoots which come out in the monsoon, are cooked with vegetables from the beginning of July till the first week of September. It is boiled and eaten with salt and red ants and mango pulp sauce.

(ii) **Yams and tubers, eating:**

They collect many yams and tubers. These are recognised by their dry leaves. They never dig roots and yams in rains as wrongly mentioned by Grigson (1938:152). But they do so in winter commencing from November till January. Roots and yams are generally found one to two feet deep under the ground. It is mainly women’s and children’s affair to dig them out. Longer and deeper roots are dug by the males, and carried home by women. These, then are stored for months. Poisonous yams like *kohkamati* are cures in various ways; for instance, they are first put to soak in river of stream; then they are shaped and rasped. Thus the poisonous juice is removed. Even then they are not eaten raw, but are usually cut into small pieces and boiled mixed with dried pulp of mango, tamarind fruits or *jira*.
C. Fruits, Kayaing :-

They collect a large number of varieties of forest fruits.

(i) The fruits of tamarind: are plucked by men and generally by children and women. Tamarind trees, *Attamarang* were originally planted around the village sites. Their fruits are gathered therefrom. Tamarind trees are not found in the interior villages; in middle villages the trees are just new and only in the boundary villages they are old and in plenty.

(ii) *Bassia latifolia*, Irakmara :-

This tree is not very common in the Abujhmarh hills; it is limited only unto the boundary villages where the Abujhmarhias collect its flowers and fruits as eagerly as other tribes do throughout the Bastar district. Usually they get the *irka*, mahua flowers in exchange of *kohlā* with the plain Murias. The flowers mostly used for distilling liquor and at times for eating. The fruits are sold away in weekly markets. They distil mahua spirit on monsoon ending crops festivals when the liquor shops are not approachable because of bad foot-paths.

(iii) Mango fruits, Markakayan :-

The wild as well as cultivated mangoes are common all over the Abujhmarh. The unripe fruits are cooked with vegetables and also eaten uncooked with salt. This is an usual afternoon refreshment of an Abujhmarhinia eating as many as five at a time in the months of March, April and early May. The children also relish it very much. After mid-May till July they eat ripe uncooked mango fruits, a few as
breakfast and more than 20 making a full lunch. The mango days cereals are cooked only for dinner.

(iv) Other fruits:

The ripe fruits of Eugenia Jambolana are eaten but not stored. Fruits of rekamara, buchanania latifolia and tumirmara, diepyros melanoxylon are eaten when they are fully ripe. The fruits of rekamara are also insolated and stored for rainy season. But the tumirkaya are not stored as other tribes of Madhya Pradesh do. The fruits of Marking-nut trees, kohkapandi, are eaten when they are ripe, the seeds are not edible. Other fruits which are edible mentioned in Appendix V:1.

D. Meats:

(i) The fowls are served to guests or to the family on the festivals only. Even though an Abujmarhia has a sizable poultry, he does not take eggs, "chickens are reported to be more economically". The chicken is half roasted on fire and then cooked with water and salt. Frying is not known to them. Chillies, mirieng are also applied to taste.

The goats are domesticated in few boundary villages and most of the clans consider that meat a taboo. The meat wherever prepared "I think the meat is hardly prepared anywhere" is cooked in the same way as chickens.

Meat and fish from wild beasts are dried and stored; and two or three small pieces of this is cooked with pulses or vegetables at every evening meal.
(ii) **Pork, pudding** :-

This is eaten on ceremonial occasions, such as marriage and birth, feasts and festivals. The method for cooking the pork is very simple. The slaughtered pigs are singed on the spot over a slow fire and cut into the small pieces and washed in hot water. The pork cut into small pieces is thrown in hot earthen pot and half roasted with chillies and salt, and then it is boiled and eaten with rice, gatta and pulses. The pigs, at ceremonial occasion, are cooked by men. At the time of wedding, these are bride's Gotul boys who kill the pig of her wedding ceremony.

At home the women of the house is permitted to do cooking. The men whose wife is pregnant or in her menstruation is tabooed to eat the meat of liver, intestines, head, ears, tongue and legs of the pig as these are the parts which the priests take out and cooked separately at the time of religious offerings. They eat every part of the pigs. Sometimes, the skin is boiled separately and is eaten with the salt and chillies with a great taste.

They also eat the meat of wild boar, sada radda.

(iii) **Beef** :-

The Abujhmarhias generally kill the cow, bullocks and buffaloes when they are old or when the females are not in a position to give more calves. Not a single cattle dies its natural death as it is treated as a loss of village or individual property. These people do not admit of beef eating for the fear of being disliked by the Hindus and
Government officers. Therefore on your face they may call it lago, bad.

E. **Honey**

They collect honey of various kinds of various bees. When a beehive is detected in a tree, two or three men go to remove it during full moon. For the purpose, they use long thick bamboos, cutting the side shoots down to stumps four or five inches long to serve as ladder rungs. In order to protect themselves from the stinging bees, they burn dry grass beneath the tree and sometimes they burn the bees also. The man who climbs the tree keeps a handful of dry grass in his hand and after removing the hive, ties it into his loin-cloth. They also know the "magic" and some of them also use herbs and roots to save themselves from the bees. The bees' hive is generally divided among the men and eaten on the spot, but if they get the big bees, then they carry it home, where the honey is squeezed from the comb and eaten by the family members. The wax generally and honey, sometimes are sold in weekly markets.

F. **Taboo regarding food**

The crops of all cereals, pulses, vegetables and fruits are associated with some festivals. Without the celebration of the new crops is tabooed, polo. Not only particular animals' meat is forbidden by some clans, but also the meat of some parts of animal is tabooed for men and women in particular periods of time and on certain occasions. Some of the relevant facts are mentioned below :—
(i) **Taboo regarding pig, Paddaling polo :-**

To the Aohla clan of Kachikapal domestication of pigs and eating the pork are tabooed. They say that "if they eat pork the village mother deity Nauarkirnata will strike disaster on the clan."

(ii) **Taboo regarding goat, Pokrha tinum polo :-**

To the Nirutti and Kumutti clans of Kolar and Nurdesh parganas, eating the meat of goat is tabooed. It is said that in former times the goat was sacrificed to the parents of their clan-god; when he was a child. When 'He' saw the eyes of the sacrificed goat whose head was put on the shrine of his parents, he was afraid. From that day, to sacrifice and eat the goat's meat is not only the cause for fear of clan-god Nuyapaka but also for the clan members. Therefore it is polo to kill and eat goat's meat. They are of course allowed to domesticate it for sale. It seems that in these hills nearly all the clan-gods are afraid of the sacrificial goat, therefore, the clan members also consider it polo.

(iii) **Taboo regarding the Monkey :-**

The monkey is polo all over the Abuhrwahr except for the Padda clan of Paddaldeh pargana. In Chanda and among the Dandami Marhias (Daison-horn Marhia) it is common practice to kill a monkey and eat it.

(iv) **The husbands of women in menstruation and pregnant are not allowed to take the meats of certain parts**
of hunted animals, such as, liver, lungs, head, ear, hoofs of legs, and tail. To eat this meat is treated as polo.

(v) Meat and liquor is forbidden, lago tor揽í for pregnant women.

(vi) The Abujhmarhis never use milk; they do not also milk the cow or she-goat. Many village headmen told me, "it is not our right to take the milk of another's mother; it is the calf's right to drink it."

G. Food of the sick :

The essence of gruel is given to the sick man. It is also prepared from turibhorhi as it is treated very light food. It is also the food of a new mother during the period of delivery.

H. Food of Famine :

There was famine in 1965. But these hill dwellers, never migrated from their villages. The scarcity of food fulfilled by the gorgapindi, the pith of Gorgamara and by the bark of Bhawramara. The pith is cut into small pieces, and insolated, after insolation it is mixed with bamboo seeds and reduced to powder in the grinding mills. Then gruel is prepared out of it.

I

Food habits

The morning and mid-day meal is taken in the form of gruel, jawa. Therefore the morning meal is prepared by any young woman of the house, who may be daughter or daughter-in-la
The goblets are prepared by younger members according to the numbers of the household members. The members of the household take their breakfast as well as mid-day meal by themselves as these are very busy hours for every member (supra...). The earthen cooking pot, arhka with some gruel is left for children of the house with two or three goblets; from which they take jawa whenever they feel hungry.

The evening meal is prepared by the newly married woman or the head woman of the house. The young marriageable but unmarried girls in the house usually do not cook. The Abujhmarhias say, "those people are the outgoing folk, let them play and gossip with their friends, because one day they will have to do the cooking in their husband's house."

The evening meal consists of gato, jirapula or jabba (vegetable with meat pieces). All the members of the household take dinner together. The elder woman of the house serves all the members, men and women sitting in a semi-circle near the hearth. This meal may be cooked by any woman of the house, but it is usually served by the old. If her husband is dead, and if there is any newly married woman, then it becomes her duty to serve the house members at this time.

The goblet of gato is held in left hand and the goblet full of pulse or vegetables and one or two gourds full of water are placed in the centre. Usually they drink water before and after the meal. When they are on a visit to the markets, fairs, Kagsar or the forest, they do not eat gato with the hand as is the standard style of all Indians. But holding the goblet full of gato in their both hands, they eat it directly with the mouth, and also the water in the same way. The Abujhmarhias generally take their meals three times in a day: first time in
the morning between 7-00 to 9-00 A.M. known as Jawa undana pahar, the time of taking gruel, the second time is between 12 to 1 P.M., i.e. arki nivatu and the third time at evening between 7 to 8 P.M., gato tindana pahar, i.e. rice-taking time. This order of taking meals is changed according to the variations of seasons. For example in winter they take gruel at about 9 to 10 P.M. The meal times are changed because of the different hours of working and change in season. A grown up man eats in one meal about undgoli (one soli, local measurement of 250 grams rice). One family of 4 persons requires about 10 khandis of kohla with one khandi turiborkhi, half khandi gurra, arku, and half khandi other cereals and quarter khandi pulses of pupul, pashel and nai in a year.

II

Drinks and stimulants

A. Tobacco, Pugga

Tobacco is planted in the kitchen-garden after the crops of maize in the month of September and October in every household of the Abujhmarbias. Some tobacco is also planted in the paddy fields after the harvest in the month of November and December. The crop is ready in January in kitchen-garden and in February in the paddy fields. Sometimes due to the shortage of dried leaves of tobacco, the young green leaves are plucked and dried near the kitchen fire for immediate use. But generally the ripe leaves are plucked a few inches from the ground, taken home, cleaned and then, 3-4 leaves are tied with paper cords in small bundles; and then
pressed under the bamboo mat for two or three days; after which it is insolated on the roof of the house or on mats in some (open space of the house) for about six to seven days, and stored in baskets for rainy season. Only few Abujmarhias sell it in weekly markets. Practically, the whole crop is used for house consumption only. All the persons above the age of ten years are passionate chewars. Occasionally, the old men also smoked it. But now-a-days smoking is very popular with the Gotul youths, in the evening when they gather in the Gotul, they smoke together, from a single pipe prepared out of a paure leaf. The country cigar-bidi is rarely used. The use of tobacco indeed has a great social value, and significant function in their social relations. To ask for tobacco from another's wife leads not only quarrel but sometimes to blood-shed and murder; because asking for tobacco means asking her for sexual congress. They never ask "have you got tobacco," puzga-manta or "bring tobacco", puzgatay, but they simply say "bring the small box," guttatay or kisutay, bring fire. Even you cannot ask for tobacco from layasku. If you do so, she has to say, 'no' ille. The man who asks for tobacco from the girls of his own clan, is treated as dangwal, 'treachrous'.

The tobacco for chewing is prepared by mixing it with the dry powder of the oysters. Very few of them know the name of ganja cannabisativa, neither do they know nor use 'Bhang' or 'Opium'.

D. Drinks :-

1. Sago-palm juice, Gorga :-
   In intoxicating drinks the juice of sago-palm
occupies a very important place in the life of these hill-dwellers. The fermented juice of the sago-palm, gorge in the Abujhmarhia and shaft in Halbi being a mild drink, is the commonest intoxicant, practically, all over the Abujhmarh region. The palm tree is not only common in these hills, but it is also found in the Muria country as well as in Dantewara, though in a lesser number. It is also freely cultivated by the Abujhmarhias. The ownership of these trees in this region is communal or sometimes they belong to the Gaita only except in the boundary villages where they are individually owned.

There are only three or four peduncles growing in a tree, cut off before the flower acts as taps. Small earthen pots held at their upper edge with the help of creeper cords and are fastened below the cuts to catch the juice. Two earthen pots go on alternating morning and evening. After about two months only one pot suffices as the juice becomes lesser and lesser. The palm tree is ready for the cut when it is 25 to 35 years old; a tree gives sap for not more than three years and a peduncle oozes up to six months. The usual period of making the cut is from December to April. But this juice is available more or less all the year round. As it is very mild, some roots and herbs are put into it to make it intoxicating. Two or three of these roots are being given below:

1. Nelamati
2. Marhaugzi - a plant and the roots
3. Kandimati
If they put the relamati the sap becomes very intoxicating and it makes the drinker very lazy and sleepy. The marhuggi and kandimati are milder. When there is plenty of sap in beginning they use the marhuggi, thus they can drink as much as they like. It is not only a drink but also a food for them. When the sap becomes scarce towards the end of the season they use relamati to make it more intoxicating.

The gorge is not drunk for intoxication but also serve to have social discussions and gatherings. The older people and household heads of the village gather together in the mornings and discuss the social and economic affairs of the village over the gorge drink. The fresh gorge juice is a very refreshing drink and tasty too.

(ii) Liquor, Dorhango

For the Abujharias and other koir of Dastar, liquor which is distilled from the dry flowers of the mahua tree is not only a welcome stimulant, but also an important ingredient in the religious and social rituals. It is essential for every offering; it is not only consumed in large quantities at weddings and funerals, but also has an essential function. To ask a girl or woman "dorhango undaken; would you like to drink the liquor with me," means you are not only asking her for sexual congress but also you want to marry her.

Before they drink, they pour a few drops on the ground, in the name of their Talur and ancestors. They drink it from a leaf cup. In religious, marriage and death
ceremonies they use pure liquor - phuli which they distill on their own.

The mahua liquor is purchased from liquor shops at weekly market places. Sometimes the itinerant Halbas sell it to them. The Abujuharhias do not use it very much, know the merits and demerits of excess drinking.

But on feasts and festivals it is free for all. It is also a medium of contact of the outsiders with these people. A Halba or any other non-Marhia may present an Abujuharhia 1 or 2 bottles of liquor and say, "gotiya bane may, I want to be your friend." The offer would be accepted and the outsider may be treated as a brother. "The Abujuharhias never request Halba and other non-Marhias to be their friends. This shows that they do not want any thing from non-Marhias". But it is the necessity of non-Marhias to get kohla and forest products from them through the friendship tie.

C. Drinking, Taboos :-

1. The mother as well as father of a new born baby upto 10 days from the birth of child cannot take a drink.

2. A pregnant woman should not take a drink.

3. The pujari (priests), lestkas and Gaitas and some of the village headmen never use new mahua flower liquor (in February, March and April) without the performance of the koding festivals of their villages.

4. At the time of worship of the Talur the Gaita never takes a drink before the ceremony. It is a taboo for them by him.
NOTES

1. The word tobacco is not used here. Gutta is the tobacco container described on page 6.

2. The oysters are collected from the river or stream. Then they are burnt in the fire and after that the dry powder is prepared for this purpose.

3. Belamara roots are yellow in colour. They are then dried and bitter in taste. Therefore they are cut into small pieces and 3-4 pieces are dropped in the pot for time fermentation.

4. Marhduggi is a small plant of 4-8 inches in height, found in valleys.