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## GOND SOCIETY IN TRANSITION: CENTRAL PROVINCES (1818-1921)

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### Abstract

The theme of this paper is to examine, in the context of tribal History some of the distinctive characteristics of gond society. It has argued that despite its structural similarities with what is called the peasant society and the tribal society in general Gond Society was distinctive in several ways and that some elements of its distinctiveness were becoming more pronounce with its encapsulation in the wider political and economic systems during British rule.

We have stressed the process of this encapsulation and the failure of Gond society to adjust to the strains the process had generated. The notion of tribe was not the product of black imagining either. The perception of this identity had distinct historical roots memories of collective agricultural settlements, language, religious beliefs including creation myths and folklore. However, the perception was scarcely static but was being enriched, particularly by the increasing awareness of the Gonds about their adversaries and by the overriding need to build up and effective resistance against them. The Colonial Authority did not construct of non-existent entity, but merely described the existing one.

**Keywords:**Gond, Ho, Murao, Malguzars

The theme of this paper is to examine, in the context of tribal History some of the distinctive characteristics of gone society. It has argued that despite its structural similarities with what is called the peasant society and the tribal society in general Gond Society was distinctive in several ways and that some elements of its distinctiveness were becoming more pronounce with its encapsulation in the wider political and economic systems during British rule.

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A large section of the Gonds now live in the plains were they have learnt permanent agriculture or the arts and crafts while the Hill Gonds are trappers and hunters or practice brand tillage. It is remarkable how magic assumes a different guise as it aids economic toil in the different phases of social development. The hunting Gond would light the lamp or fire read omens and then enter the thick jungle, the Baiga or purist diving and indicating the direction of his expedition. The agriculturist Gond would before sowing make public offerings to the village or the earth mother and when the mains fail would harness nude girls to the plough that they draw bleeding under the spur of the goad. In the Gond country, spirits, gods and magical rites change with economic evolution. There is logic behind the magic that is correctly applied to organise and regulate intensive economic efforts and ensure their results. Thus magic becomes an indispensable tool of economic adaptation<sup>1</sup>. Hindu India has given to aboriginal India not merely superior methods of farming and arts and crafts but also faiths and observances that have provided easy economic adjustment and emotional and intellectual integration of the primitive community<sup>2</sup>.

The great problem of aboriginal India is to smooth and regulate its social and economic transition. In the thickness of the jungle where the Gond lived undisturbed in his clearings, British Indian law has introduced game protection and even deprived him of his bow and arrow. The timber merchant has penetrated into the wilderness and explored Gond labour while the ubiquitous shopkeeper has sold tinsel, bought grains and forest produce cheap and ensnared him in debt. In the plains, the Gond agriculturist has been unfairly exploited and expropriated by adventurers and money-lenders until the passing of the C.P. Land Alienation Act in 1916. Even now the transfer-ability of the occupancy holding under the O. P. Tenancy Act of 1939 is working against the Gond tenant who is losing his land aue to indebtedness. If forests have to be protected against felling and Dahiya cultivation in the interests of rainfall, agriculture and irrigation of the plains, forest areas have to be reserved for the hunting and roving agricultural groups and the interests of afforestation and tribal food-



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collection and hunting reconciled under careful protective administration<sup>3</sup>.

Uncultivated wastes have to be reclaimed by Government in the plains in order to speed up the adoption of sedentary cultivation by the tribal groups, and some kind of collective farming may be experimented with among Gond settlers in these pioneer areas. Co-operative credit, abolition of sub-letting non-transferability of occupancy holdings are other measures for regulating the extravagant borrowing of the Gond and giving him security in the land. Through constant fractionalisation, the land is slipping from the Gond's feet, thus some legislation preventing subdivision beyond economic limits and bringing about restripment and consolidation of holdings will be desirable. The Gond is jovial and care-free, and does not suffer, as some Indian aboriginals do from defeatism and lack of zest in life that prepare the ground for tribal extinction. But it is necessary in his case as well to bring about a smooth psychic adjustment as a prelude to economic adaptation. Education in home crafts such as spinning, weaving basket-making or mat work and in agricultural dairying, bee keeping, and fruit farming should proceed pari pasu with the desire for improvement of the standard of living that culture contact brings with it. An artificial]]' bolstered up standard of living that is often the result of Christian conversion when it is unaccompanied by any attempt to renovate economic life spells social disaster.

An over-literary type of rural education unrelated to the economic needs of the primitive community destroys much more than it recreates. In the reduction of the primitive community ancient faiths and observances, festivals and ceremonies may yet play a significant reorienting role. Much may still be said in favour of India's age-long method of education and conversion through the assimilation of aboriginals into "castes" within the frame-work of Hindu society and the gradual introduction of beliefs and rites that fit in harmoniously with the tribal culture pattern. The social planning of the Indian aboriginals is an extremely delicate task. Neither segregation in special tribal areas or isolated camps that shuts out the normal expansive forces of economics and culture that sweep through the country nor laissez-faire that throws the flood-gates open to the rising tides of tribal exploitation and expropriation, but a judicious planned protection, guided by social psychology, hold key to cultural progress of the Indian aboriginals<sup>4</sup>.

The land of the Gonds is known as the Gondwana eya-appellation given by the Mohammedan rulers of Northern India. Another name which occurs in the Ain-i-Akbari is 'Garha-Kantaka', (Garra Kantak in Elliot's translation of the Tarikh-i-Salatin-i-Afgana. Elliot, V. P. 12. The Makhzan writes Gurra Kota). Gondwana properly includes the Satpura plateau and a section of the Nagpur Plain and the Narbada Valley to the south and the west. Roughly speaking, it is bounded by the Godawari in the south, Bombay Presidency and Berar in the west, while Centra] India upto the river Chambal lies to the north of it and the Eastern States' Agency in the east. Approximately this implies the present Central Provinces and some parts round about it. This is the tract where most of the Gonds dwell today, a part of the country which is long associated with Gond life and culture. There is no district or state in the province where they are not found. It is both on account of their numerical strength and the fact that the Gond dynasties ruled over a greater-part of this vast area that the territory of the Central Provinces was formerly known as Gondwana. In 1911, the Gonds were three millions strong, in the Central Provinces alone their number1 being 2,300,000. In 1 there were 2,260,000 Gonds in the Central Provinces<sup>5</sup>.

A Gond possesses a very detailed knowledge of the qualities of timber. He knows the durability and hardness of several types of wood and uses them with discrimination. The Gond always makes his stick or the handle of his axe from durable wood like, Khamar, Khairand Karra because all these woods are strong and tough. His acquaintance with the vegetable kingdom is so thorough that he can at once name the trees by seeing its leaf, or even the colour and grain of its timber. The nature of rock and stone, the position of the stars, the properties of nuts, berries, barks, flowers, grasses and roots the habits of birds and rats are matters with which the Sirdar, the grand old man, among the Gonds, is very familiar. An old Gond in a village-near Pandaria, Mandla boundary, came forward and said, to our surprise that he could distinguish a good many varieties of rats, and gave us as many as fifteen different names. He said there are black hairy cat,



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mussa, the black hairless; the red, parbat mussa, the brown, bijnori the large musk rat, ghush and the like, lie also seemed to be quite familiar with their habits and the way of trapping them. A Gond recognises many varieties of poisonous plants and roots. He uses a deadly poisonous root, black in colour, at the lower end of his arrows' tang for killing animals during his hunting excursions<sup>6</sup>.

The Gonds of old times were clever and close observers of celestial phenomena. Their identification of Great Bear, nagar, Little Bear, Icutala, the Pole star, jagjaga and various other constellations differ from that of the grouping of European observers. They have their own way of grouping the stars. But barring a little variation, the Gond way of grouping and that of the European can be reconciled. The appearance of the milky way, dhud-dhar and the rainbow indicate the approach of fair weather. Reading of omens before wedding, hunting and fishing, is a common practice among the Gonds. The crossing of the way by a cat or a jackal is taken to be a bad omen<sup>7</sup>.

Taking the above into consideration, we can easily appreciate the kind of knowledge possessed by the Gonds in such matters. The knowledge of Indian things has in many cases permeated through magical beliefs, folk-tales and folklores, although it must be noted, careful observation strengthens the experience handed down by the tribe to posterity<sup>8</sup>.

The Gonds always attach a certain amount of sacredness to the forest not only because it provides the principal source of food supply to them but also because of its close connection with their gods. There is a common belief that there is a Ban-Devi (forest nymph) who presides over the forest and trees. Mahadeo and Parbati are commonly associated with the forest. The birth and history of Lingo as depicted by Russell and Hiralal is indeed interesting. They say, "The yellow flowers of the tree Pahindi were growing on Dhawalgiri. Bhagawan sent thunder and lightning and flowers conceived. In the morning the Sun came-out, the flowers burst open and Lingo was born. Lingo was a perfect child. He had a diamond on his navel and a sandal wood mark on his forehead. He fell from the flower into the heap of turmeric. He played in the turmeric and slept in a swing" (Tribes and castes of the C. P. Russell and Hiralal). This account of their great saviour when the Gonds were confined in a cave by Mahadeo, goes to confirm the idea that there is an intimate relationship between the life of the Gonds and the vegetable world around. There is a sort of kinship between man and trees according to their belief<sup>9</sup>.

Such mythological beliefs and traditions, studied from the sociological standpoint, throw ample light on the rituals, observances, magical practices and totemistic beliefs among them.

## FOOD QUEST

The mode of subsistence and the manner of partaking food indicate the cultural status of people, both civilized and wild. The problem of food may thus be considered from two standpoints, first, from its nutritional and secondly, from the sociological aspect. We take food to keep us fit and going, and we share our food with others to establish social bonds. A Gond invites friends and relatives to meals, uses food as religious offering, and observes certain taboos with regard to his food. All these factors regarding food, therefore, worth our attention. To quote Dr. Richards; "The traditional, tribal or cultural attitudes towards food are among the most important cohesive forces in the community which unite its members to each other and differentiate them from, neighbouring tribes". (Hunger and "Work in savage Society. By Dr. Audrey Richards) Most of the animals have, either vegetable or meat diet. But man is distinguished from other creatures by a wide range of food stuff which he can consume. No other animal has such power of adapting itself to different environmental conditions, nor such a bewildering number of appetites and tastes in the matter of food<sup>10</sup>.



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In spite of the fact that man has such a wide range of choice in food, there are also a number of limiting factors which determine the diet of man. The diet of man is as much limited by biological or environmental factors as it is by his traditional and social practices. Social bonds limit him where nature frees him. Thus we find primitive people refusing food of excellent dietetic value because of their innate prejudices. They think that it might bring them some calamity or expose them to some unknown danger. They accept it because it has the sanction of their society. That is how we see that social heritage has much to do with a particular group's selection of diet.

Among the primitive people the question of food supply is often subject to seasonal variation. When shortage of food is experienced during the rainy months, the primitive people—the Gonds in this case fall upon their reserves, and supplement their normal food with other things like flowers, berries, leaves and roots<sup>11</sup>.

The flower of Mahua tree is available both in the plains and on the hills. The women and children gather the flower on summer mornings. These are dried in the sun and then stored in bamboo wicker baskets. They are used to flavour *pej* (gruel), and are roasted and eaten raw. Tamarind is not very common in the forest but is easily available near village sites and is carefully collected and preserved; *tendu* and *char* are other important fruits that are gathered widely and used as food, among the Hill and Plain Gonds alike, *awala*, *jamun*, *dumar* and *hair* are also eaten. Mangoes are quite popular, raw and ripe both are eaten and they are also preserved in dried state, called *amchur*.

The Marias of Bastar go out into the forest during the rains in search of red ants, ant-eaters, rats, squirrels and grubs, all considered as delicacies or quality-food. The Maria Gonds of Bastar are very fond of red ants and give them fried or roasted to women during confinement. White grub and certain kind of beetles, fried in oil with a little spice and chillies, are relished beyond measure<sup>12</sup>.

The Gonds are very fond of liquor. This excessive drinking, we might say as well, is the besetting vice of these people. They generally indulge in drinking country liquor distilled from Mahua flower. In the southern part of the Central Provinces and in Bastar State toddy-palm is very common. This is tapped and the fermented juice is known to be very intoxicating. Sago-palm is common in Bastar. This palm also is tapped and an intoxicating liquor is made out of its juice. 'Londa' or rice beer, is another kind of drink much favoured by the Parjas and Dhruwas of Bastar and the Dhur Gonds of the Central Provinces. Londa in Bastar is prepared by mixing rice or 'kutki' with sprouted mandia. This mixture of rice and mandia is put in a handia (an earthen pot with narrow mouth). It is boiled and then kept in a cool place for fermentation. With the formation of a certain kind of bacteria in it, the liquid emits a foul odour and then they consider it to be in a ripe stage for drinking. This type of wine is largely used during marriage ceremonies. It is a cheaper substitute for Mahua liquor<sup>13</sup>.

To afford protection against weather, raincoats, *chatera*, are very commonly used in the rainy season. This is a shaped bamboo frame-work, lined with leaves, either round or oblong, in the latter case with one end peaked from the head and the other spread wide to cover the back. These are most picturesque in appearance and are a substitute for umbrellas. They are specially useful when the wearer is weeding or transplanting rice in his fields. When it is raining, he has only to squat on the ground and turn his back to the rain and then, not only is he completely protected from the rain but his hands are free for work. They cost little and usually last two seasons. No-doubt they serve almost equally well as protection from the sun like 'sola' hats; but they are not a very common head-wear during summer. These umbrellas are also known as *khorma* or *khumree* and are sometimes lined with Mohaline tree leaves. The *taghali*, bark rain-coat, is usually made of long thin strips of bark. They are put round the neck where each bark is twined round a thick string leaving the other end to hang loose. They are very closely knit together and completely cover the body of the wearer. The barks are softened by rolling them between the palms of the hand. This pretty piece of garment is used as rain coat by the *kutru-mar* people (Bastar). They are also widely used as protection against cold and occasionally utilised as mat for





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ssleeping<sup>14</sup>.

We shall now discuss the question of natural surroundings from another angle and shall see how far the Gonds have succeeded in exploiting their own natural environment to satisfy their wants. We have in the first place to differentiate clearly between the two groups of Gonds, one that still remains in the jungles and bind their habitation in inaccessible mountains and their fastnesses and the other group that have migrated to the plain country. We propose to distinguish between these two groups and would call them Hill Gonds and Plain Gonds according to the nature of their habitation. Living in the neighbourhood of caste Hindus, the latter have undergone some transformation in their social and economic outlook. They have, no doubt, adopted Hindu ways of living and have taken to permanent modes of cultivation but all the same it should be remembered that the original, basic Gond culture is still to be found in them. The traditional aspect of Gond life and the principal traits of their culture have not disappeared from them though they have in some parts freely mixed with the caste people. There remain many things that are even now common between the two groups.

The Hill Gonds, who even today practise the shifting type of cultivation known as 'Dippa' or 'Penda' in Bastar, indiscriminately cut the forest, burn it and then sprinkle seeds on the ashes. To them trees having thick girth and tall trunk are of no consideration but lie other group who have slowly begun to realise the value of timber do not cut the trees without discrimination. They do not burn them to ashes but use them for the purpose of timber. They invariably use the sal wood as house building material and in places like Chanda and Raipur we have noticed how the thick trunks of trees are sawed into planks and used for patawa as they call it, i. e., putting planks below the roof supported by cross beams. This they do to protect themselves from the heat of summer and to secure additional space for storing grains and other domestic articles. It is only the less durable wood and smaller trees that are cut to serve the needs of fuel. Thin branches and slender trees are used for fencing the baree. Houses have commonly grass thatches resting on bamboos tied across the roof beams and secured against the wind by bamboo crisscrossed outside the thatch. Sometimes logs are put over the roof to protect grass from being blown off by the wind. The walls of the Hill Gonds' huts are made of pieces of chhirra straw, neatly arranged in lines and tied in places with strips of bark, or of split bamboo roughly intersected and tied together in the same way. These walls do not go right up to the roof of the house and thus afford very little protection from the elements. Among the Plain Gonds, mud walls are very common, they prepare a mud plaster, made by mixing loose earth with pirosee (Paddy or Kondon chaff) and water; it is a sort of plaster which is used in the raising of walls. The plaster is put up layer on layer. When the mud dries up, a wash of cow-dung solution is used. Grass of a particular kind is used to prepare masni (mat). This grass is very soft and the mat prepared out of this can easily be rolled up when not in use. The Gonds sleep on these mats and frequently this is the only kind of furniture which one meets with in the Gotul (dormitory). The visitors to (the Gotul) are usually offered this mat to sit on.

Leaves of various trees are used for making leaf cups (dona) and platters (patari). The Gonds use leaf cups to drink their peja and wine. Native flax or patuwa is used in making strings and ropes of various sizes; this is also utilised in making fishing nets and traps, and in various other ways. Bamboo is very widely used in the construction of houses, as beams, cross-bars, etc. It is also used as a fence for the baree in Bastar Chanda, Chhindwara and other districts where bamboo grows in abundance. Baskets of various sizes and shapes are also made from bamboo. 32, 836.

Dug-out troughs of sal wood are kept outside the house for water and food for domestic animals such as pigs and cows. The usual form of door is a rectangle-shaped split bamboo wicker work sliding between two pairs of upright wooden posts. In richer and more advanced villages, among the Plain Gonds, wooden doors and pad-locks are very often seen. Dyes of various kinds are manufactured from the bark and leaves of trees. Black colour from bhilaioa and harrah, yellow colour from JpsK, flower of parsa are greatly admired by them.

At present the condition of Gond villages, both in their composition and technique, have undergone some changes from the traditional type, though much of it still remains. In most of the districts of the C. P. where Gonds are numerous the village sites are selected in such a manner that they have the natural advantage of surface drainage. In Mandla, Chanda, Chhindwara and Betul districts, we find that most of the villages are situated on elevations that are either stony or covered with light murram soil. A slope is most essential for them for carrying off the surface drainage from the hamlets into the small back garden or haree, without which no Gond house is complete.



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We propose here to describe a typical Gond village. As we have said above, the village is usually located on a raised piece of land having the advantage of natural drainage. Trees like Mangoe, Tamarind, Jamun, Pipal and Ber are very common in and about the villages and are carefully preserved. The chabutra, which is a raised platform, on which village-gods are housed and which serves as a meeting place for the villagers, is erected under the shade of such trees. The villagers sometimes assemble there, to discuss important matters concerning the village arrangement. The houses are built on either side of the main street, which runs through the middle of the street village (Man and his Habitation by Dr. Eadha Kamal Mukerjee. Page 32). Somewhere to the east of the village will be the burial ground scattered all over with bits of broken bamboo biers, arthi (in which the dead body is carried to the burial ground) and number of gharras, (earthen pots) lying about, brought in with the dead bodies. On the extreme eastern boundary of the village a number of long stone cairns are found, with poles, flying flags at the top fixed into the middle of heaps of stone. These are the shrines or cenotaphs of Gonds, who have died violent deaths mauled by tigers. The members of the family of the deceased visit this place and make, annual offerings for the purification of their soul. Sometimes a wooden plough, with a ring of roughly carved stakes, painted with vermillion, is placed at a short distance from the village to mark the last resting place of the dead. Just outside the village, under mahua, saja or some fig tree, will be seen a small shed, about three feet high, surrounded by broken cocoanut shells and small sticks with little flags flying from their tops. This is the village shrine and the place of khair mata. Inside that little and rough temple is seen a smooth stone lavishly painted in red colour and an iron trisul (Trident) with a pierced lemon sticking to the middle prong. The whole place emits a horrible smell of country-wine that is poured on the slab whenever some offering is made.

The Gond village, as has been indicated, consists of number of houses each of which is occupied by a family. Only in a few cases it has been noticed that all the brothers live together under the same roof. The husband, wife and the children form the family unit. A grown up male member of a family, as soon as he is married, shifts from the parental home and has a separate cottage for himself. The youngest brother usually stays with the old parents and occupies the old family hut but the elder brothers have new huts built separately. But though they live separately the social bond between them is not snapped.

The Raj Gonds or the proprietary section are class apart and the superiority of their social status is never challenged because they trace their origin from the old ruling race of the land. But in the case of other classes like the tenantry and labourers, birth does not give any social prerogative. Their status is determined by the social function they perform. They have the same origin, but the profession they follow have, as it were, separated them. On the whole we may say that among the Gonds there are only two main divisions, the Raj Gonds that is the ruling class and the dhur or plebeian Gonds, the ruled, who are now designated by various professional or generic names. To the former belong the big Zamindars, Malguzars, Patels, headmen and others occupying some responsible posts in the village organisation and to the dhur or dust or plebs belong the men discharging other functions in the social structure. The majority of the Gonds of the Central Provinces fall under these two main heads.

The gotul, or the village dormitory, is an interesting and useful social institution among the Gonds. A bachelors' house or an unmarried girls' house or a common dormitory for youths of both the sexes is to be met with among the primitive people of both India and abroad. In India, bachelors' house is found among the Hos, Mundas, Oraons and other tribes of Chota Nagpur. It is also common among Konyak tribes of the Naga Hills in Assam. Such an institution is also to be found in Africa among the Masais and it is widely scattered among the primitive tribes of Melanesia, Indonesia and New T Guinea.

It appears that at the beginning, the dormitories were intended to accommodate all the able-bodied male members both bachelors and married of the village, and to stand in absolute readiness to defend the village against enemies and wild beasts; the women and children living in a more secure and protected area. But in course of time very many other traits have been adopted and woven round the dormitory, and as a result of all these we have the elaborate gotul organisation among the Murias. Settled life and better means of food-supply do not encourage predatory habits and thus the preying of neighbouring villages and decamping with food stuffs, cattle or women, have become almost unknown. The problem of accommodation yet remains to be solved. The grown-up members find it convenient to use the dormitory for sleeping and for communal activity. With the establishment of security of person and property and growth of individualism and exclusiveness, the married couples have begun to set up separate establishments and the unmarried only



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are left in possession of the dormitory.

But the need of special training -for each sex under different local and tribal conditions, and taboo on sexual intercourse before the communal hunt, during sowing, reaping and harvesting operations, have contributed towards keeping alive the institution of the dormitory though it originated in a period of struggle with the forest, wild animals and alien men. The gotul did not originate from a desire to effect separation of the sexes, as has often been assumed, ;and as might actually have been the case with the Maria gotuls of Bastar or the tribes of Assam. On the contrary, the Muria gotuls are institutions which serve to provide opportunities for young men and women to stabilize and strengthen intimacies which may be a prelude to marriage. Thus in the privacy and shelter "of these bachelors' houses or dormitories liaisons are the rule rather than exception and obtain sanction of 'tribal custom. It should not be lost sight of that this sort of free mixing of young people, and of marital apprenticeship through long courtship and trial intimacies within the dormitory, serve to give the right direction to the sexual urge and lead to happy enduriug unions. In this way it affords an easy solution to the marriage problem. Young girls freely choose their husbands here. Thus the gotul serves a social necessity.

Among the Gonds the rule of exogamy is rigidly enforced ; a man must not marry a girl within his own totemistic group, nor should she be one from a group which worships the same number of gods. Iiaier marriage between sept's which are bhaiband or brothers to each other is also prohibited. Cross-cousin marriage, that is, unions between a brother's daughter and a sister's son is most common. The union between brother's son and sister's daughter is also common. Thus the system of cross-cousin marriages is almost Universal among the Gonds. When a Gond wishes to marry his children, he-looks first to his sister's children upon whom he has the first claim. When he takes a sister's daughter as a wife to his son, such an alliance is known as dudh-lautawa, i.e., return of the milk. Such marriages are common because it is a sort of repaying the obligation of the first generation when one family gets the daughter of the other family as wife to some male member. In the next generation the family which gives the daughter receives the daughter of the other family as the wife to a son. Apart from this kind of repayment of social obligation, bach arrangements save the excessive bride-price which marriage in a new family involves. Thus, to avoid excessive bride-price and to maintain unity between the families already related by marriage, ' Cross-cousin marriage is very widely practised among the Gonds throughout the Central Provinces. Sometimes when the girl is grown up and no match can be arranged the father will request the girl's maternal uncle's son to take her away by surprise, the latter having a sort of prescriptive claim to receive her as his wife. It is also very common to have a second or a third co-wife from the younger sisters of the first wife. This saves the bride-price and minimises domestic quarrels that are so common among co-wives. In case the sister's daughter is married to some one else, it is not strange to hear her maternal uncle demanding some money by way of compensation for the loss of the girl as a wife for his son. This money is known as milk-money, dudh-bunda (compensation for milk). But this practice of dudh-bunda is fast disappearing.

The women amongst the Gond occupy almost an equal position with men. Child marriage being rare, the girl has every right to accept or refuse the spouse selected for her by her parents. Normally she is free to be wooed by the man of her choice and it is almost uncommon to see a Gond bride who is below fourteen or fifteen. The children of the consanguine sisters cannot marry among themselves and so also a man may not marry his wife's elder sister, any aunt or niece or his mother-in-law or her sister. These may give us some idea about the prohibited degrees of marriage relations.

Manogamy and patrilocal residence are the general rules but those Gonds who are rich enough and can afford to maintain more than one wife, generally like to marry several. Patrilocal residence being universal, the wife after her marriage dwells mostly at her husband's place. There are a few instances of matri-local residence, but such rare cases are met with only when the bridegroom serves at his future father-in-law's place for getting his daughter as his wife and driven by sheer necessity remains with his wife's people.

There are various forms of marriages with some ceremonies that either follow the marriage or come before it.

(i) The Normal Marriage. —or the marriage with the marmi ceremony. It is a simple affair, the father of the boy starts the marriage negotiations as approved between cousins. The negotiation being finally settled by the favourable opinion of the elders, the marriage procession starts from the bride's place. As compared with the Hindu ceremonial, the most distinctive feature of a Gond marriage is that the bridal procession usually starts from the house of the bride with the bride and the main ceremony takes place at the house of the bridegroom. A platform of coudung cakes is built over which



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a cotton sheet is spread; the couple stand on the platform and exchange vows. The bridegroom slips an iron ring on the bride's finger and the ceremony is all complete. The bride's people, after a hearty feast and a dance, return to their village leaving behind the bride in her father-in-law's house. When the father of the bride leaves the place, he instructs his daughter to occupy the new house, to adjust herself to her changed environment as wife, to be hard working and above all never to come alone to his house without her husband's permission, because she is now married and as a responsible woman, she must look after the happiness of her husband and his children. After the marriage the couple usually betake themselves to a separate room or a new hut.

(ii) Marriage by Mutual consent:—This takes place when the girl herself plans her marriage which she is absolutely competent to do. She usually pours solution of turmeric and water on the man of her choice before some people who stand as witnesses to this ceremony. She can then be taken to the house of the man on whom she has thus bestowed her favour. This is regarded as a valid form of marriage. The elders of the caste meet and the bridegroom or his people arrange the marriage-feast which is shared by the whole caste and thus the hallmark of the valid marriage is put upon this union.

(iii) Serving for wife—this is known as lamsena latnana or lamjhana form of marriage in which the would-be-bridegroom goes to his future father-in-law's place and offers his personal services in lieu of the bride-price which he is not in a position to pay because of strained financial circumstances. He has to remain there and serve his prospective father-in-law for a number of years. It varies from two to five and at the expiry of the stipulated period, he is allowed to marry the girl without being put to further expenses. This kind of marriage by service is also insisted on by a father who has only one daughter, or if he has a large establishment and requires the help of some one to manage his property and attend on him. The young man is not supposed to have access to the girl till he has finished his term of service. The father often, postpones the marriage as long as possible ; but if the girl is grown up and an improper intimacy springs up between her and the serving man before regular marriage, the necessary rites must be performed at once. In case she has kept her virginity, the full marriage ceremony takes place, but if things have taken another turn, the marriage is cemented by the pat ceremony (irregular marriage). In some cases, this type of union takes the form of matrilocal residence, and the husband, even after marriage, lives with his wife's people. But as we have shown, this is not the usual practice. In our investigations we have come across only a few cases in which the husband settled down finally at his wife's place. This state of living at a wife's house is known as char-ghia, a contemptuous term, meaning ' the creature of a father-in-law '.

(iv) Marriage vs capture: —Marriage by capture is still to be seen, but it is falling into gradual disuse. When a girl remains unmarried and the parents are subject to taunting remarks from the caste people, they arrange with her cross-cousins to take her away. There is some hint in this system of the ancient marriage by capture. Usually in marriage by capture, the bridegroom gathers round his friends and carries off the girl from her village when she is returning from the jungle or has gone to fill her pitcher in the nullah. When the party arrives at the bridegroom's place with the valuable acquisition, some turmeric water is poured over the bride and the bridegroom and they get the status of man and wife. But they are to live separately till the bride's people arrive and the full marriage ceremony takes place. It is a complicated undertaking and because of its penal nature, abduction being an offence under the Indian Penal Code-marriage by capture is rarely practised without a prearranged plan with the bride and the bride's father and the whole show is now a tame business and a big fun.

(v) Irregular Marriage:—This takes place when a Gond girl conceives before marriage. If the man with whom she has liaison belongs to a clan with whom she can be married without the infringement of exogamous provisions, she simply names the man before the tribal panchayat and the man thus named has to accept her. She then goes to his house and becomes his wife. This is called paithu (entering). The man has to stand a caste-dinner and has to pay something to the bride's father as bride-price.

The Gond marriage customs are so varied and so much laxity exists in them, that it is almost impossible to say exactly what is regular and approved and what is not. In short, we may say that among the Gonds consummation perfects all forms of marriage and the caste dinner legalises all kinds of union between man and woman.

The Gonds hardly attach any religious significance to marital tie. Divorce is freely allowed on various grounds, for example, adultery, carelessness in the upkeep of the house, quarrelsome disposition, barrenness etc. Either party to a union may terminate it at any time for any reason. The lead to get a divorce among the Gonds, may be taken up by the





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wife also. She is equally competent to dissolve the marriage tie and go to another man. In case the marriage tie is dissolved by the husband himself, the wife can go to any man without any liability; but in case the wife takes the initiative and deserts the husband and is accepted by another man as his wife, this man (new husband) has to pay the first husband his marriage expenses. This compensation money is known as bunda. The tribal panchayat decides the case, and fixes the amount. It may be sometimes much more than the amount actually spent in the marriage, -When a man divorces his wife, he has no liability for maintaining her; on the contrary, the ornaments which were given to her during the coventurer Ho, are all taken away from her. Although there is complete freedom for both sexes in dissolving marriage and entering hi to new partnership, divorces are comparatively not very frequent.

Widow re-marriage is- widely practised. As a rule, the widow of the deceased brother becomes the wife of the-; younger brother. Widow marriage is universally accepted as a valid form of marriage. The pair in this form of marriage stand under the eaves of the bridegroom's house, a mixture of turmeric and oil is applied to the bridegroom's forehead and the bridegroom then ties a string of beads round the woman's neck or puts • some glass bangles, churi round her wrist or a ring on her finger and then she walks into the house of the new husband as his wife. The usual caste-dinner follows this simple ceremony and puts a legal seal on this union. It being a valid form of marriage, children born of this wedlock are all legitimate. This form of marriage is known as churt phahinana (putting on the bangle). The custom of the levirate being very common among the Gonds, some scholars hold it to be a reminiscence of polyandry but this conclusion seems. farfetched. The primary consideration in such kind of marriage is avoidance of bride-price. Neither is there any disparity in the, number of males and females in their society that might lead to what has been called polyandry in such cases. Their laxity in sex relation, divorce and above all their polygynous character do not in any way show that, the pratice of evirate is to be associated with anything like polyandry among them<sup>15</sup>.

Polygyny is very frequently practiced: there is no stigma attached to it. Those Gonds who can afford to maintain more than one wife, freely indulge in having as many wives as they can. "A Gond who has seven wives in Balaghat was accustomed always to take them to the bazar, walking in a line behind him".(Tribes and castes of the C. P. Eussell and Hiralal.)

This custom of polygyny has an economic background. It should be pointed out that a plurality of wives help substantially in the work of cultivation. They will always put forth much more labour than hired farm labourers. When a man goes in for more than one wife, he does it usually to get extra hands for work in the fields. It is also common among the Gonds to regard a man who can maintain more than one wife as wealthy. It is thus a sign of social importance with them. A man's prestige is direct enhanced by the number of wives he has. Indirectly but mainly his economic resources are enriched for the services of several wives since he employees them profitably in work. It is common for women who are generally unattractive or have lost their womanly charms to go and live as second wives. The men getting their services do not at all mind about their features or physical charms so long as they can work hard. It is convenient for a Gond to have extra women as workers. In case of several wives the first is his regular married wife; the others will be either the younger sisters or cousins of the first wife or someone else who chose to come and live under his protection or one with whom he had pre-marital sex relation, resulting in pregnancy. Sometimes the supplementary wives are women who are experts in mat-weaving and basket-making and are strong enough to carry heavy loads to bazar. It is more of economic necessity, therefore rather than anything else which lies at the root of the system of polygyny in Gond Society,

The Colonial Authority did not construct of non-existent entity, but merely described the existing one.



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