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THE TRADITIONAL GOTUL INSTITUTION OF THE GONDS IN NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The traditional Gotul Institution of the Gonds had inculcated a sense of discipline and co-operative endeavour among their members. It was not just a club for meeting the boys and girls at night, as it was focussed by some scholars. Indeed it was the center of learning and had a religious affiliation to it. When there were no educational institutions available to the Gond community, the Gotul was functioning like training centre. It inculcated the integrity and uniqueness among all the members of the Gotul. However, with the time changes, the Britishers destroyed Gotul system as they considered them as a center for conspiracy against them.

Anthropologists (among them Verrier Elwin) feel that the Gotul is an ancient institution, a living university. There are no books or texts yet one is taught life's education. Ghotul is a cultural center of Abujhmarias, Gonds and Murias in Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Lingopen, a phallic deity is the founder of the Muria Ghotul. The Gotul is typically located outside the village. Long time before the land grant universities were a norm in the western world, the adivasis reserved empty tracts of land for educating the young. They grew vegetables in the Ghotul garden and taught community living to the children. It is also a cultural center. Every youth older than six years is automatically a member.

Equality, simplicity and freedom form the fundamental fabric of the Ghotul life. The members eat, play, dress and sleep without any separation of male and females. They could even swim in the river together without clothes on. In contrast, the so called modern society of India even today does not accept if man and woman share the same bed before marriage. The Ghotul tradition of the Muria tribes points to the equality and unisexuality of primitive humans.

Since sex is considered a very natural phenomena at the Ghotuls there arise no perversions. Sex is seen as natural as hunger or sleep. In some civilized societies sex is considered to be a man's right and woman's duty. Whereas at the Ghotul, it's a motiyari's privilege and the chilak's duty. Since partners are continuously rotated, every pair get a chance sooner or later. Although dating is restricted to Ghotuls, it is not uncommon for the couples to meet outside the Ghotul in the forest or at the river. If someone finds out, both of them are punished. If a Motiyari singles out a boy to treat him specially she is punished by the other boys. Because of their sexual freedom, at the time of marriage, neither is the bride a virgin, nor is the groom inexperienced.

Although youngsters enjoy free sex at Ghotuls, they practice strict monogamy during their married life. Those who succumb to weaknesses are sometimes punished even after death. They believed, Married people are generally not allowed to enter the Ghotuls. The youngsters strongly protest any meddling in the Ghotul's affairs by their elders. Young boys and girls of Muria tribe, belonging to Bastar District, Chhattisgarh use combs as a decorative item on their hairs. These carved combs are symbolic of the love and admiration they receive.

Elwin's original ethnography portrayed ghotul life in a way that continues to embarrass the British govt. in nineteenth and early twentieth century. Some ethical questions are raised about the anthropologists' use of public and private information. Ghotul partners are often kin who would not make proper marriage partners. Despite the regulations they sometimes elope or the girl becomes pregnant (since a couple are considered fertile when they are in love, this is treated as the same kind of problem like elopement.) In such cases they are brought back to the village, the girl's marriage date brought forward and she and her ghotul partner must publicly renounce their connection to the satisfaction of the prospective groom's family. If a girl does not like her first husband, she can leave him and another will be chosen for her, but she can not return to her ghotul partner. In this way the separation between ghotul and adult life is maintained.



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It is said that a fisherman never finds the beach beautiful. It is unlikely that freedom, free sex and the equality of sexes are as attractive to the tribals as they are to us. Since they always live amidst accidents, diseases, and natural dangers, their times of enjoyment are very few. These special occasions are shared only with special guests. After the forest department, police and tax officials started taking advantage of the gonds they were excluded from the ghotuls.

In this brief study I had tried to portray the distinctive features and the social acceptance of the system amongst different stratas of the society.

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