

A Study on Death Rituals and Memorial Pillars of Tribes of Bastar

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The present paper deals with the death rituals of tribes of Bastar and their beliefs and rituals in relation to the memorial stone and how they stand up to these patterns of life even in the 21st 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.

Megaliths, as defined by Vere Gordon Childe "are ...constructed usually of large slabs or blocks of stone, either in their natural form of roughly quarried and trimmed". Megalithic tradition is helpful to unfold the history of early Iron Age communities. It would also enable us to trace out the antiquity of those communities who follow megalithic culture in present day. Research on the monuments and burials referred to as "megalith" or "pandukuls" or "pandukulis" in India was initiated in the beginning of the nineteenth century when Banbinton unearthed an interesting group of Burial monuments at Bangala Motta Paramba in the Northern part of Kerala in 1823. Subsequently many British administrators and other individuals excavated a large number of megaliths. Since the publication of J.W. Brecks work on the megalithic monuments of the Nilgiris in 1837, the megalithic monuments of the Tamilnadu have attracted the attention of archaeologists. The systematic study of the South Indian Megaliths started after 1940s and scholars like R.E.M Wheeler (1947), B.K. Thapar (mid. 1940s) and V.D. Krishnaswami (1949) studied the megaliths at Brahmagiri (Karnataka), Porkalam (Kerala) and Cochin (Kerala) regions.¹

The megalithic cultures which still flourish in Chhattisgarh, north eastern States, and Orissa etc. have during recent years been studied in

considerable detail, it has been possible to establish the fundamental homogeneity of the megalithic complex throughout South East Asia.²

Area of The study

The paper proposes to study both the ancient Megalithic monuments as well as the present megalithic among the tribal groups in Bastar region of Chhattisgarh. Bastar region is the melting pot of cultural behaviour for a long period. The original inhabitants of the region are tribal like, the muria, the abhuj maria, the bison-horn maria, the halba, the bhatra, the dhorla, and the dhurva and so on. One can divide these tribal groups in their specific regions. The abhuj maria are settled in the north-western part, the bison horn maria are in South-central part, that is in Dantewada region, muria are in the north and north west, dhorla are in southern part and in Bijapur area, dhurva are in south-eastern part in Sukma region, bhatra are in Jagdalpur region and halba are in the north and south Bastar.

Significance of the Study:

The region of Chhattisgarh is distinct from both geographical and physiographical aspects. Chhattisgarh is rich with potential archaeological sites, the inaccessible terrain along with the socio-political conditions prohibit detailed exploration and though the region is rich with archaeological, not much work has been carried out to study the Megalithic evidences from this region. The antiquities recovered from these monuments reveal that the Megalithic culture in this region is coeval with similar culture in other parts of India. But, so far no comprehensive study of these archaeological sites has been carried out. Another interesting aspect that prevails among the existing tribal groups is the practices of erecting Megalithic monuments even to the present day. The first documentation of megalithic culture around Chhattisgarh is by J. D. Begler in his report on a tour in central provinces, which he undertook in 1873-74. J. D. Begler has given information about group of Menhir, V. Elwin, in his paper 'Funerary Customs in Bastar State' (Man in India, 1945) produces a very detailed and descriptive account of the funerary rites and eschatological belief of the aborigines like Hill maria, bison maria and jhoria of Bastar. C. Von Furer Haimendorf, in his paper 'The Problem of Megalithic Culture of Middle India' (Man in India, 1945) mentions that the similarity of customs and rituals are found between the middle Indian and North

East Indian tribes, V. Elwin *Maria Murder and Suicide*, (1977) chapter V, examine how the tribal belief and practices came to be believed in by Hindus and Muslims of the Bastar region. Chandrasekhar Gupta, in his paper 'Megalithic Culture of Daksina Kosala' (Indian Archaeology-New Perspective, R. K. Sharma, ed., 1982) gives an information about megalithic culture in Bastar district and add that the megalithic traditions are surviving among the tribal folks there even in the present time. A. K. Sharma's work, *The Archaeo-Anthropology of Chhattisgarh*, (2000) documents that right from the Bastar region in Chhattisgarh to Manipur in North-east through Hazaribagh and Singhbhum district of Jharkhand, megalithic is a living tradition of the aborigines. A.K. Sharma also excavated twelve different types of Megalithic monuments at Karkhabhat in Balod district.

Features of Megaliths of Chhattisgarh :

There is some difference amongst the construction of megaliths monuments of South India, Central India and other part of the world due to geographical and technological influences. Most of Chhattisgarhi megaliths were non-sepulchral nature like Dolmen, Menhirs, etc. One of the noteworthy features of the megalithic culture of Bastar is that it represents a living tradition of entirely unknown antiquity, whereas south Indian megaliths came to end in the first century A.D. Secondly, the tribal notion of life after death and idea of plurality of souls is very near to philosophy of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. Last but not the least all the monolithic pillars are associated with ancestor worship, cult of fertility, practice of sacrifice and worship of linga-yoni.

Tribal Life of Bastar

Bastar region is not only naturally very beautiful but it is also tribal heartland of India. The rhythmic tribal music, songs dances, drama, festivals, religious practices and their concern to nature and forest provide us an insight of the culture of Chhattisgarh. The district Bastar is situated in south corner of the Chhattisgarh between 17°46 and 20°14 north latitude and 80°15 east to 82 ° 15 East longitudes. Bastar, the largest district in the state of Chhattisgarh is endowed with rich minerals deposits and precious stones and forms the southern part of Chhattisgarh. The total forest area of the district is roughly 7112sq km. which is more than 75% of total area. Tribes consist of 31.8% of the total Chhattisgarh population, with 66.3%. The main tribes of Bastar

are Gonds and its sub tribes like Muria, Maria, Halba, Dorla, Bhatara and Gadba. The region is also famous for same distinctive and equally beautiful craft form.³

Tribal gods of Bastar

Grigson writes that *Doctor Deo* is represented as a principal god of 'north Bastar'; actually the Mohammedan sub-assistant surgeon 'deified' as *Doctor Deo* died of cholera on the Keskhal pass as he was returning to Raipur from Bastar, and his spirit has been attached by the surrounding Murias as a peon or servant to the shrine of Bhangaram at the head of the pass, where from generations past the final scene of disease riddance or *bohltarani* ceremonies among the Bhatras and Murias of Jagdalpur and Kondagaon tahsils and the adjacent Bastar.⁴

There the clans are divided into groups according to the number of Little Gods or Chuddur Penk kept as domestic godlings in a pot inside the house of the head of the family; and for each clan there is, or was, somewhere in the Province, a Holy Circle or *Pen-kara* beneath a sacred *saja* tree, in the fork of which would be tied a grass bundle containing for the whole clan a set of godlings of the same number as the Chuddur Penk in the houses of members of the clan; this set is in reality the Big-God or Bhera Pen (a name commonly Hinduized as Bura Deo or even Mahadeo) of the clan.⁵

Death Rituals

The death rituals refers to the entire process, which is conducted after the death of a person and continues up to the end of the erection of a memorial pillars. Generally, the entire process takes some twelve to fifteen days, but in some of the cases they take two to three years (Haimendorff 1943:149-178).⁶ The entire process of the death ritual covers many ceremonial customs that have been followed by previous ancestors and present family members of the deceased. The death ritual of tribal communities is vary from group to group, but ultimately it signifies that all the communities' inhabitant in forest areas and associated with megalithic tradition, believe in life after death. They believe every human being has two souls: the life spirit and the shadow.⁷

Concept of Death

The Gonds had their own concept of death. The funeral rites were part of the metaphysical significance that the death occupied an

important occurrence in the birth-life-death cycle. Among the Gond mythology, the dead were believed to be greatly interested in the affairs of the living. There was a keen desire to maintain contact and to solicit the presence of the dead to minimize the difficulties of the living, and to help to bring rain and aid the crops to thrive. In the underworld the soul, enjoyed the same status as they were on the earth and led the same desire for thing they owned here.⁸ They believes that after the death of a person, the spirit of the deceased wants to stay in the village to watch over the moral character of the people, and if anybody disobeys the tribal law then the spirit has the power to punish them.⁹

Religious belief of rebirth

The Gonds share with many Central Indian tribes the belief that a child in the mother's womb is lifeless, until a jiv or life-force enters and animates the embryo. This jiv is sent into the child by Bhagavan, the supreme deity, to whom the Gonds refer usually as Sri Shambhu Mahadeo. But when a Gond's span of life draws to its end, Bhagavan recalls the jiv, and thereby causes death. It is generally held that a jiv returned to Bhagavan's pool of life-forces may be incarnated in any living creature, be it animal or man.¹⁰ All Marias agree that the dead are somewhere underground; men, animals, trees, and perhaps rivers and streams have in them *jiwa*, a principal of life, and some say that when a man dies his *jiwa* goes to Pogho Bhum, the sky, while that part which is cremated or buried goes below the earth and is his *hanal*. There is a belief that the menhirs erected at the *kotokal* or *uraskal* increase in size if the *hanal* commemorated by it is happy.¹¹

They believe that the spirits of ancestors are reincarnated in children or in animals. Sometimes they make a mark with soot or vermilion on the body of a dead man, and if some similar mark is subsequently found on any new-born child it is held that the dead man's spirit has been reborn in it. In Bastar, on some selected day a short time after the death, they obtain two small baskets and set them out at night, placing a chicken under one and some flour of wheat or kutki under the other. The householder then says, "I do the work of those old men who died. O spirits, I offer a chicken to you to-day; be true and I will perform your funeral rites to-morrow." On the next morning the basket placed over the flour is lifted up, and if a mark resembling a footprint of a man or any animal be found, they think that the deceased has become incarnate in a human being or in that animal.¹²

Funeral Rites

R.V. Russel write, "Burial of the dead has probably been the general custom of the Gonds in the past, and the introduction of cremation may be ascribed to Hindu influence. The dead was usually with the feet pointing to north in opposition to the Hindu practice, and this fact has been adduce in evidence of the Gond's belief that their ancestors came from the north."¹³

Funeral Rites of Abujhmaria

Grigson writes that in abujhmaria, news of the death is sent out to all the brother-clan and wife clan relatives and friends of the deceased. The funeral is postponed for two or three days, to give them time to assemble. Then all the women gather in and around the house where the body is lying. A man is never left to die on a cot, but is lifted on to the ground as his end draws near; they say that their reason for this custom is simply that they do not want the dying man to fall off the cot in a last convulsion. Women are never allowed to sleep on a cot. They close the eyes of the corpse, and lift it on to a rough wickerwork bier, covering it over with a length of cloth. It is burned or buried with the clothes and jewellery that were on it at death. The women sit around the corpse and outside in the street, and break into loud keening for the dead. For the last rites the body is not washed or otherwise prepared, but is left just as it was composed alter death.¹⁴

Funeral Rites of Maria

Among the Maria Gond, a drum is beaten to announce a death, and the news is sent to relatives and friends in other villages. The funeral takes place on the second or third day, when these have assembled. They bring some pieces of cloth, and these, together with the deceased's own clothes and some money, are buried with him, so that they may accompany his spirit to the other world.¹⁵

When the death is obviously a natural death after a long life, and there can be no suspicion of magic, nothing is done at the funeral to ascertain the cause of death. But if, for example, a man or woman dies suddenly in the prime of life for no apparent reason, the bearers halt on the path just by the funeral ground, and stand with the bier resting on their shoulders. The *waddai* takes seven *saja* leaves, and places them in a row on the ground a few paces away from the bier. One leaf represents the Earth or Bhum, and stands for death through the

displeasure of the Village Mother; the second stands for death through sickness; the third for death through the displeasure of the clan-god and the Departed (*pen-hand*) ; the fourth for death through the magic of a fellow-villager ; the fifth for death from the magic of a man whose enmity has been aroused against the deceased by a quarrel or exchange of abuses ; the sixth for death from the magic of a *waddai* or magician ; and the seventh for death from natural causes.¹⁶

Sometimes a little rice is put on the leaves. An axe is struck three times on the ground, and a villager now cries to the corpse to disclose the cause of his death, and immediately the bearers, impelled, as they believe, by the dead man, carry the body to one of the leaves. If they halt before the first, then the death was in the course of nature; if before the second, it arose from the anger of offended spirits; if before the third, witchcraft was the cause. The ordeal may be thrice repeated, the arrangement of the leaves being changed each time. If witchcraft is indicated as the cause of death, and confirmed by the repeated tests, the corpse is asked to point out the sorcerer or witch, and the body is carried along until it halts before someone in the crowd, who is at once seized and disposed of as a witch. Sometimes the corpse may be carried to the house of a witch in another village to a distance of eight or ten miles.¹⁷

The Maria Gonds of Bastar, however, place the feet to the west in the direction of setting sun, and with the face upwards. In some places the Hindu custom of placing the head to the north has been adopted. Formerly, it is said that the dead were buried in or near the house in which they died, so that their spirits would thus be more easily born again in children, but this practice has now ceased.¹⁸

Both for burial and for cremation most Hill Marias place the body in the grave or on the pyre with the head, face upwards, towards the sunrise and the feet towards the sunset; the Usendi clan, however, reverses this.¹⁹

The Gonds often take food on the spot after the burial or burning of a corpse and they usually drink liquor. Sometimes the rule is that the priest should receive all the ornaments worn on the right side of a man or the left side of a woman, including those on the head, arm and leg. If they give him a cow or bullock, they will choose the one which goes last when the animals are let out to graze.²⁰

Mourning is observed for four days after the funeral, and it is taboo for the heir and the men of the deceased's family to go to work in this period. Often a house or a portion of a house in which a death has occurred is shut up and not re-occupied. It is, however, not repaired. So long as it stands, it is regarded as a memorial of the dead.²¹

On the day after the funeral, if the house is still to be occupied, the rooms and the surroundings are cleaned out, and then floors are replastered. On the first three mornings after the funeral they place a little meal from the Pot of the Departed on the grave as an offering. At the end of the period of mourning the heir, if rich enough, should proceed at once to set up a menhir to the dead in the *kotokal*. If, however, he cannot yet afford to do so, he goes to the graveside, bows before the *hanal-garya* cromlech, tells the dead man's *hanal* that he is sorry that he cannot yet afford to erect his stone, and begs him to be patient, to forgive him for the delay and not to harass him. It may take him two or three years to collect the necessary grain and money for feeding those who are to help him to find and erect a suitable menhir. Both for burial and for cremation most Hill Marias place the body in the grave or on the pyre with the head, face upwards, towards the sunrise and the feet towards the sunset; the Usendi clan, however, reverses this.²²

Russel holds the view that the children at breast are buried at the roots of a mahua tree, as it is thought that they will suck liquor from them and be nourished as if by their mother's milk. The body of an adult may also be burnt under a mahua tree so that the tree may give him a supply of liquor in the next world. Sometimes the corpse is bathed in water, sprinkled over with milk and then anointed with a mixture of mahua oil, turmeric and charcoal, which will prevent it from being reincarnated in a human body.²³

Abnormal death

A person who has killed himself, or who dies from cholera or small-pox, is not buried or cremated at the regular funeral ground but in the forest at some distance from it.²⁴ Russel writes that the person killed by a tiger the body is burned, and a bamboo image of a tiger is made and thrown outside the village. None but the nearest relatives will touch the body of a man killed by a tiger.²⁵

Persons killed by tigers or other wild animals must be burned, not buried, at the place where their remains are found, or to which they

are brought for the inquest. They must never be brought into a village, for otherwise the dead man's *hanal* may bring the tiger there. Logs are piled under the body where it lies and kindled, and anything found with the body or at the place where the tiger attacked the dead man is burnt with it; but no dancing dresses or other property are brought from his house to be burned with him, and no offerings of grain or *mahua* spirit are made at the grave. No *marma-kal* cairn and no *kotokal* menhir are set up for him.²⁶

When a man has been killed by a tiger, or when he has died of disease and before death vermin have appeared in a wound, the whole family are temporarily out of caste and have to be purified by an elaborate ceremony in which the Bhumka or village priest officiates.²⁷

Ceremonial Feast of Gond Community

Temple holds the view that the relatives of a deceased person are unclean for a day. The ceremonial impurity is removed by bathing.²⁸ But Russel and Grigson don't support the Temple's views. Russel holds the opinion that the mourning is usually observed for three days. The mourners abstain from work and indulgence in luxuries, and the house is cleaned and washed.²⁹ On the third day after the death of the deceased, they invite their village headman and their relatives to discuss the further procedure of death rituals, such as searching and erection of a memorial pillars, and arranging a grand ceremonial feast.³⁰

On the tenth day, they organize a feast; in this event, they invite villagers and their relatives. The importance of the day is that, on this particular day they go to the forest in search of a 'Menhir' or Uraskal in Gondi.³¹ At the end of the period of mourning the heir has enough grain and money to pay for the food and drink needed for the erection of a menhir, he calls together his relatives and friends, and all go off into the forest to look for a suitable stone. The only consideration guiding their choice is the adequacy of their resources to provide food and drink for the men required to drag or carry the stone. The menhirs in the Abujhmar country and the adjacent Muria tracts are considerably smaller than the vast menhirs sometimes met in the Bison-horn country.³²

The size of Menhirs depends upon the socio-economic status in the society as well as sometimes it depends upon the character of the person (Figure 3). The common belief of the Gonds is that their ancestors live in this pillar and they protect their clan; and if they stop the tradition,

it is a kind of disrespect to their ancestor and they may face problems. Usually, they worship these Menhirs, on some selected days. (i) The day of *Amabasya* and *Purnima*, because they believe that in that particular day the evil spirit is more powerful. (ii) Before, harvesting their agricultural produce (iii) Before going for hunting and gathering (iv) at the time of a marriage ceremony (v) when a child is born in his family (vi) during the time of natural calamity and (vii) if they face any kind of serious problem, which, cannot be solved by them or their village headman. The maximum period of worshipping the pillar is twenty to twenty five years.³³

Death Rituals in Bison-horn Marias

When a man dies, his son-in-law is sent for, and on arrival climbs on to the roof of the house with a *dol* drum, which he beats for some time with a series of one long followed by two short beats to announce that a death has occurred in the house; he then climbs down, and continues this drumming on the ground until the relatives and friends of the dead man assemble, or until the body is taken out to be cremated. Messengers are sent out to neighbouring villages to bid relatives to the funeral. When all the men and women have assembled the body is taken of the house and washed with a pot of water and anointed with a mixture of ground turmeric and oil. They then spread a cloth on a bier of bamboo wicker-work, lay the body on it, and spread a cloth over it. Each male relative who can afford it brings a cloth and similarly spreads it over the body.³⁴

Four men then carry the bier on their shoulders to the cremation ground, followed by all the mourners, and men beating the dactylic funeral drum-beat. The pyre is made there, the body laid on it with head to the east and feet to the west, and covered over with fuel. Two men, generally two sons, or two sons in-law, or a son and a son-in-law, then kindle the pyre at the head and the feet of the body respectively. As soon as the pyre is blazing fiercely the company leaves the cremation ground and returns to the dead man's house for food.³⁵

The cremation ground is almost always on the side of the path or road opposite to the row of menhirs erected to commemorate the dead, which is known to the Bison-horn Marias as *uraskal*. On the next day all go to the cremation ground to see whether the body has been completely reduced to ashes; if any portion remains unburnt, it is a

sign that the death was due to the magic of some enemy. All condole with the members of the bereaved family and return to their houses. On the next Saturday morning comes the erection of the *uraskal* menhir. There are *uraskal* with great numbers of menhirs almost everywhere in the Bison-horn country, and in most parts villagers continue to erect them for men, women and children whenever a death occurs.³⁶

Death rituals in Muriyâ community:

In Muriya communities around Kondagaon, Jagdalpur and Gîdam the custom is to wash the corpse and then to rub it with oil and turmeric. In Nârâyanpur area they do not wash or apply oil and turmeric to the corpse; they simply put a few drops of liquor in the mouth of the corpse instead. When an old man dies they beat a drum and blow the *todi* to inform people. In Jagdalpur-Lohanrîgudâ and Kilepâl-Tokâpâl areas they have a special person called *anmer hurrâ* who beats the drum to inform people of the death. In Kondagaon and Nârâyanpur area the deceased's daughter or daughter's children usually do this, but the deceased's sister may sometimes do it. The drummer dances with the chicken which is called *tum kor*, *hânâl kor* or *tum kukadî*. The chicken remains fastened to the drummer's waist until it dies. Whilst the drumming is happening they sing the *girada pata*, the happy song. This song is sung in certain areas only, not in the whole of Kondagaon Tehsil. Two groups of men and women sing this song. The tradition of singing also exists in the Narayannpur, Lohanrîgudâ, Gîdam and Dantewâdâ areas. The women also go to the cemetery to witness the internment. Meanwhile the affine cook rice, *udid dâl* and chicken and place the food on the homeward track. As the funeral party returns the chief mourner picks up the food the affine have prepared and offers it to the soul of the departed. Before doing so he gives the soul a toothbrush (*datun*) and water for washing. The food and water given in the leaf-bowls made from the leaves of a *âdan* tree.³⁷ On third day they perform ritual called *kaimul*, *pitâ câbanî* or *bisar chiwanî*. After this ritual has been performed the family members of the deceased are free to eat non-vegetarian food, before it they cannot.

Death rituals in Halbâ community

In this community on death of any family member or a close relative they shave the head and moustache but leave the *shikhâ* (pony tail). On the death of the father the son of a deceased man has his head

completely shaved but not when his mother dies. Whenever any person dies his corpse is lowered to the ground immediately. They place a winnowing basket full of rice (paddy) and lamp a *diyâ* at the corpse's head. They wash the corpse before they take out the funeral. When a woman predeceases her husband her corpse is adorned like a bride. They cover the body with new cloth and apply turmeric on it with the left hand. When the bier is taken from the house the feet of the corpse are to the front, the head to the back. When they arrive at a crossroad they circle it three times and place the bier down on the ground. Women do not go to the cemetery; they head off in line to river or pond for bath instead. The Halba community buries their children but cremate adults. The youngest son ignites the pyre of his mother's corpse by putting fire onto her mouth; the eldest son ignites his father's pyre in a similar manner.³⁸

Death rituals in Bhatârâ community:

The Bhatara do not beat drums or sing funeral songs. They perform *tij nahani* on the third day and the *das nahani* on the tenth day. They also place the bier down at a cross road like the Halbâ tribe. The women put turmeric and a handful of soil on the corpse and go to the river or pond for bath. They do not go to the cemetery. The corpse is generally buried but if the death was the result of any serious illness or swelling it is cremated. Before putting the corpse into the grave or on the funeral pyre the bier makes three rounds of the grave or funeral pyre. They throw coins into the grave and drop a mixture of raw-sugar and water on the mouth of the corpse. People then throw soil and tobacco into the grave or salt onto the funeral pyre. Well-to-do people build a grave stone³⁹

Death Memorial Pillars

Menhirs are monolithic pillars, dressed or not, planted vertically into the ground. Their height ranges between 1 m and even 5 m, but usually does not exceed 2 m.⁴⁰ Currently three tribe groups — Marias, Dorlas and Murias — practice the megalithic culture. Earlier, Gond tribals of Kanker in Bastar also observed this tradition, but they discontinued it since long.⁴¹

In Bastar, at some convenient time after the death, a stone is set up in memory of any dead person who was an adult, usually by the roadside. Families who have immigrated to other localities often return

to their parent village for setting up these stones. The stones vary according to the importance of the deceased, those for prominent men being sometimes as much as eight feet high. In some places a small stone seat is made in front, and this is meant for the deceased to sit on, the memorial stone being his house. After being placed in position the stone is anointed with turmeric, curds, gin and oil, and a cow or pig is offered to it.⁴²

Afterwards irregular offerings of liquor and tobacco are made to the dead man at the stone by the family and also by strangers passing by. They believe that the memorial stones sometimes grow and increase in size, and if this happens they think that the dead man's family will become extinct, as the stone and the family cannot continue to grow together. Elsewhere a long heap of stones is made in honour of a dead man, sometimes with a fiat-topped post at the head. This is especially done for men who have died from epidemic disease or by an accident, and passers-by fling stones on the heap with the idea that the dead man's spirit will thereby be kept down and prevented from returning to trouble the living.⁴³

If one or two persons die in a house in one year, the family often leave it and make another house. On quitting the old house they knock a hole in the back wall to go out, so as to avoid going out by the front door. This is usually done when the deaths have been due to an epidemic, and it is presumably supposed that the dead men's spirits will haunt the house and cause others to die, from spite at their own untimely end. If an epidemic visits a village, the Gonds will also frequently abandon it, and make a new village on another site.⁴⁴

Gonds belief that their ancestors live in this pillar and they are responsible for the protection of their clan; and if they stop the tradition it is a kind of disrespect to their ancestor and they may face number of problems. Usually they worship the memorial stone or menhirs during the subsequent days: (i) The day of Amabasya and Purnima, because they belief in that particular day the evil spirit is more powerful, (ii) before cultivation of the crop, (iii) before going to hunting (iv) during the time of marriage ceremony (v) when a child is born in his family (vi) during the time of natural calamity and (vii) if any serious problem which is not solved by them, the maximum duration of worshipping of the pillar is twenty to twenty five year.

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. 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. Today, we find interesting sketches on the concrete pillars with paintings of bikes, cars, aeroplanes, horses, animals, guns, or anything on Earth which depict not only their hobbies or their likes but also how they died, if due to liquor or malaria then picture of mosquito or bottle of alcohol is seen on these pillars.

Easily noticeable, erected on either sides of the road in patches from Jagdalpur, Tokapar, Bastanar, Dantewada, Gamawada, Kodenar, Katekalyan till Bijapur district. While most of them these days are made in cement and stone, the tribals have consciously decided not to cut trees for wooden pillars. The stone pillars at Gamawada and wooden at Dilmili have been declared protected monuments under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites Remains Act 1958.



The above memory Pillars of Gamawada are located at a distance of around 14 km from Dantewada in a small village named Gamawada. These pillars are built with stones, and reflect the tradition

and culture of the local tribes. It is believed that these pillars were constructed to commemorate the relatives of the local inhabitants, and are centuries old. This place is easily accessible from Dantewada by local buses.

The wooden memorials cannot stand the ravage of the weather, termite and fungal attack. Hence most of them do not last more than a decade. Those buried in the soil are lost within a few weeks. However, some of them, preserved in different museums are as much as fifty years old. The granite stones last for centuries, but often they are defaced, deformed and worn out by weather, human vandalism and lichen attack.



Figure 1

In this memorial pillar (Figure-1) the deceased person is sitting on elephant. He holds axe in one hand and umbrella in another one. Elephant, weapon and Chhatra are symbol of wealth and prosperity. In figure 2, the deceased person is sitting on horse and holds sword in one hand. Moon and sun, symbols of Bastar state are also on the pillar.



Figure-2



Picture - 3

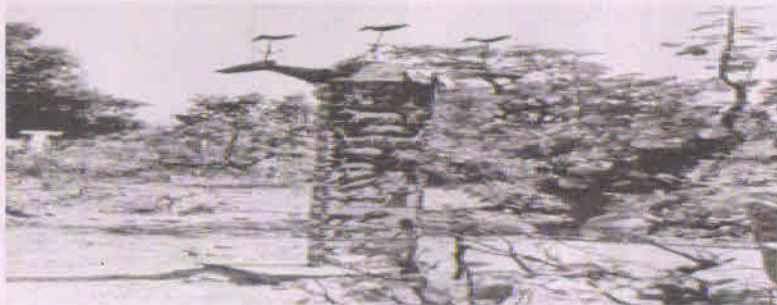


Picture - 4

Both the above cited pillars are unique combination of stone and wood. The memorial pillar (picture-3), built in 1989, is of a Muria woman. The lower part of the pillar is made of stone while in upper part a decorated wooden structure has been fixed. There is a Chhata (umbrella) over the head of woman. Image of elephant and birds looking in different directions are also painted on stone. The date of memorial pillar (picture-4). On the top of stone pillar, we find a wooden figure of an ox, looking in four different directions. There are also Kalas and Trisul on the top of the pillar.



These three memorial pillars are on Jagdalpur- Dantewara road. Two pillars are older and are made of natural stones while the central pillar is modern creation.



In the above memorial pillar of 1991, we find use of stone as well as wood. The lower portion of the pillar is of stone whereas the upper portion is of wooden structure. In upper wooden structure, two animals can be seen and on the top trisul and flying birds. The painted stone portion depicts various animals, dancing women etc. Use of red, yellow and black colour is prominent in the painting.



The above stone memorial pillar of Dantewar is a Maoist comrade. Here we find symbols of sickle and hammer on the top of pillar. In most of memorial pillars, tribals of Bastar fix Trisul of the top of the pillar.

Math

Nowadays, the practice of making memorial pillars of single stone slab or wood has become obsolete. Use of bricks and cement for making Samadhi Sthal in different structure like temple or structure of modern mode of transport has replaced the Menhirs. This bricks and cement mead memorial structure is known as math. The most prevalent practice was to depict the deceased person riding an elephant or horse to reach

heaven. Impact of modernization can also be seen on this traditional practice of memorial pillars. Car, jeep, motorcycle, boat and aeroplane has replaced elephant and horse as mode of transportation to heaven.



With the passage of time the concept and structure of memorial pillars has been changed. The above memorial pillars are of most modern type of memorial pillars found in the Bastar region. In these pillars the deceased person are seen with motorcycle, Jeep aeroplane etc.

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