

## IMMORTALITY OF SOUL AND CONCEPT OF HEAVEN IN GOND TRIBES OF BASTAR

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India is a land of varied and colourful culture and tradition with different religion and regional languages and dialects. Tribal communities of our country made it more fascinating with their religious sacraments, customs, tradition and social belief. The culture which has been survived with its originality and peculiarity is the only cultures of tribes. Tribes of all over the world have different social and religious beliefs gained by their ancestors from generation to generation. Chhattisgarh region is endowed with rich cultural heritage of tribes in North region. Tribes like Uraon, Baiga, Bhotia, kauravas found in southern region of Bastar. It extends from 17.46 to 20.14 degree North Latitude and lies between 80.15 and 82.10 degree East Longitude with tribes of Gonds, Halba, Bhatra, Bhunjia. Gond tribes are the largest tribes of India perhaps in the world. Gondwana, the tribal domain was extended from Ganga to Godawari but due to foreign invasion these natives shifted to forests and hills. From known history it was the home of many hermitage and sages and suitable place of penance for them. It was name after a king Dandak called it Dandakaranya which is also mentioned in Hindu mythological book *The Ramayana*.

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Gonds of Bastar are also following many such custom and tradition like other worldwide tribes. Bastar has always been the center of attraction for their tribal rituals. They are worshipers of nature from their beginning on earth to departure from earth. From the evolution of earth they are protector of nature like deities. Later on it was transferred as religious rituals. They have kinship with Plants, animals and every elements of nature and these strong bonding with them makes partner and soul mate with the Nature. Tribes never considered alone themselves, they considers nature as their partner.

“The belief in Totem is everywhere found amongst the Gonds, many are the plants and animals which are regarded as sacred. The late Major Lucie Smith, a well-known authority in south Gondwana, stated that each of the four well-known groups of Gonds had their own special “Totem”-the four –God Gonds regarding the tortoise and crocodile as their totem; the five God Gonds, the tiger; and the seven-God Gonds, the Porcupine”.(TSOG 131).

These Tribes are emotionally and spiritually attached with religious ceremonies and this became base of their religion. All social, religious, cultural sets of these people are associated with nature and imbibe in their day today life.

“The Bastar tribal is an animist in so far as he sees life and kinship in everything.”(TSBAOEEOB,15)

Their approach to life is different than others, for them life is endless journey of soul from one body to another as a medium of presence in earthly world. Every life in earth is infused with divine spirit. Bhum (earth) is regarded as highest honourable Goddess and without her consent no living and non living things can be part of earth. Even all natural calamities on earth is only because of her anger. They propitiate her annually in festivals called MaatiThihar, Madai. Bhum includes the spirit of forest and rivers and these are separately appeased so that it would not harm natives. All the important agricultural festivals like seed sowing ceremony, new mango, new tamarind, new horse gram eating ceremony (called Jogana) are also celebrated with same enthusiasm as other big day celebration.

Every non living creature is also pulsating with rhythm of the life. Tribal songs and Ballads connote various example of life in non living things. They feel gratitude for everything provided by nature and this gratitude or thanks giving for their giver is celebrated by them in different ceremonies called Deity festival (Dev parab). They utter their reverence to God by singing and dancing. Singing and dancing is a religious duty for them. The most prominent mentor, religious Guru, reformer in Gonds is Paarikupar lingo who gave all knowledge of wisdom to their tribes without him religion, custom tradition of Gonds would not be understood. Lingo pen is considered as Natraja one of Lord Shiva's incarnation, he taught singing and dancing as a ritual to God. He is the inventor of many musical instruments and a dexterous musician. He can play 18 musical instruments at a time.

“He is of course, Vishwakarma, the master craftsman. He is Manu, the giver of Laws for conduct of life; he is prajapati( heprecedes over society).Lingo also brings to mind Apolo, the Greco-Roman god of Music and inventor of musical instruments”(TSBAOEEOB,48)

He was the founder of a school called Ghotul, where they learn different customs and tradition singing, dancing, and other kinds of skills for their life. These festivals is connected with numerous God and Goddess like village mother( Mata) , God of clan( Anga Dev) , God of ancestors. God of parganas, Karsad and jatra (fare of deities) is called every year to celebrate the presence and part of deities in their life.

“one curious feature of Gond's theology is to be found in the number of gods he recognises”(TSOG,Pg 121).

The Sirha( Baiga) is only live medium between heavenly deity (devta)and earthly people to communicate with one another. He is like wi-fi to connect with godly signals. Sirhas are men and women who invites the spirit upon themselves during their visitation with godly power they provide guidance. They believe in spirit God. One of the religious traditions are “Forming village” and in this tradition villagers seek permission for creating a boundaries of village. Different Goddess with different names is being worshipped by villagers like Mawali, Karana Kotin, Kotgudin, Kankalin, Hinglajin, Shitaladai, Telangin. These Goddesses are worshipped with coconut and areca nut. Some Gods called Paat, PilaPaat, Barabhuji, Narshimnath, Inge-Hungedev, kudumtulla. These dev sometimes pleased with sacrifices of Goat, Hen, Pigion, pig and help in removing witchcrafts, black magic, thieves, Ghost and other evil eyes. Execution of

all these religious work needs Sirha and he is the important figure in every scene. An assistant called Leski helps in communicating oracular words spoken by Sirha Baiga with villager, he also conveys all the messages with them.

Goddess Danteshwari is said to be the Goddess of Bastar. The Gond God Parsapen (shiv) and Goddess Danteshwari are oldest couple of clan. Gonds are children of Shiv and Parwati and they are very adorable format Parvati (Danteshwari). In olden days king of Bastar used to worship Mai Danteshwari and for every expedition and important administrative work they serve and pray to her.

“The central theme of Dussehra festival, taken generically, is said to be the worship of the goddess by the king on behalf of the kingdom, in order to ensure its well being” (SAS, Pg 59) Worshipping of Goddess later becomes as Dussehra festival, a grand celebration of Mai Danteshwari (yayalmuttay).

History of Bastar and Devi Danteshwari is associated with each other. According to a famous legend, Danteshwari came with a Kaktiya king from Warangal. After Mughal invasion of Warangal and Nijam one of the Kaktiya king Annamdev proceed to extend its kingdom towards Bastar. During his expedition, Danteshwari gave her consent and said to follow her with tinkling sound of anklet which is in her feet and warn him not to see back while moving forward. As long as he could hear the sound he followed, at Dantewada, near Sankini, Dankini river anklet of Danteshwari sunk and king could not hear sound of anklet and turned around, whereupon she settled in Dantewada and at that place a temple was built. Further Annam Dev also extends his administration to Dantewada only. Since then Danteshwari is being worshipped as Devi of Bastar and royal ritual includes this as important royal Goddess. Dusshehra rituals includes the Kachan Gadi ritual, Jogi Bithai, Mawli Parghav, and Kumdakote kidnapping. All these rituals are followed by tribes of Bastar to revere to their Goddess and serve new grains. Royal people worshipped for well being of people of their dynasty.

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It is a prevalent belief that existence of soul remains after the death of body. Death is not the end of life but it's a expedition for new journey through new body. They only goes to meet with their dead ancestors for sometimes and soul again comes to dearest and nearest one in their own family with new body and deceased are treated as household God. It was also believed that these soul helps in adverse conditions like in epidemics, driving other negative spirit, witchcraft, sorcery, evil eyes. Ancestors like a deity and their worship has an important place in their religious beliefs. The soul of ancestor is called “Hanaduma”. Most of the tribes have no idea of heaven. The simple reason of it is that they believe that the happiness lies in this earth only. Imagination of heaven is mere illusion, the jungle where they born is more than the love for heaven. For them, jungles are visible heaven whereas concept of heaven is nothingness.

They believe that every wrong doing is punishable and social punishment is imposed by old aged members of the society and also the different diseases causes are the punishment by spirit god, seclusion during their punishment (during their disease) are considered as Hell. Every virtue has its value for their own clan. Immortality or any kind of life in heaven after death is not

considerable for tribes of Bastar. However, they believe in immortality of soul. All the deities are their ancestors so they worship them as god. One of the deities, DohlaDokra and Pendraavan's Godin Devi is being worshipped by royal family of Bastar. DohlaDokra was a devotee of Devi Danteshwari and after his death he became divine spirit and worship by the people. In Dusshera festival, one of the ritual is Kachin Gadi, Kachin was a untouchable girl, Raila was a warrior in Kaktiya dynasty and after their death they became deities. Likewise many souls are being worshipped by Tribes of Bastar. Death arise a new stage in life cycle. Dead man's people serve liquor (Mahua) and favourite food items to their clan people in the name of departed soul. After cremation there is another ritual held in the name and honour of dead person and that is practice of erecting memorial stones called Menihari. It is believed that this memorial stones grows in height day by day like a growing in age. All rituals are began from origin of earth, origin of flora and fauna to and for expansion of caste, devotion and dedication for earth, nature, God and clan people. Tribes are rich and prosperous in their culture, tradition, custom. It is secured by the tribes since ages and given by them to their generation in the name of Budhadev and Vansdevi. It is only a religion which creates a connection between human and spiritual power just like a baby is connected with his mother by umbilical cord. Spirituality guides human to be man not a monster, although outer world interpret tribes as illiterate and ignorant ,they have excel knowledge of spirituality in connection with world since origin and evolution of earth. All these tribals treasure is in the form of folk tales and mythical stories is transferred by ancestors orally from one generation to another. They saved all these in their mouth, however in this print age everything is available on paper, when men was away from every pageantry life style. When any one follows and search the path for eternal bliss and peace of mind, and satisfaction in every small piece of work, that develops the question of spirituality, world God in connection with Living and non living creatures.

The concept of heaven and salvation is nothing but a concept of mingling of soul in nature as a part of it. Soul remains abide in air, water, in soil, in the family with supreme power of God as no human body cannot be possibly attain that power. Physical world is just a little stoppage of continuing the journey of a soul. The concept of heaven in tribal society is mere imagination because soul is immortal, deathless. As it was also said in *Bhagvad Geeta* that "soul is neither created nor be destroyed"

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