THE GHOTUL IN MURIA SOCIETY

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Thesis submitted for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the Australian National
University, Canberra.

August 1984
Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents my original research.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a field study of the Muria of Bastar district, Madhya Pradesh, India. The Muria Gonds are a tribal (adivasi) group practicing paddy agriculture in a heavily forested area. Chapters 1 to 7 of the thesis describe the setting, and the major features of Muria social structure. Chapters 8 to 10 are devoted to the most distinctive and well-known Muria social institutions, the Ghotul dormitory for the unmarried boys and girls of the village.

The main objective of this thesis is to place the Ghotul in its full social context. The three introductory chapters give details on the history of Bastar district, present day administrative arrangements, and the environment of the field-work village, here called Manjapur. The widest context of Muria society is provided by the system of clanship and alliance. Clanship is dispersed and relationships between clans are organised according to marital relationships. Conceptually all Muria clans are either 'brothers' or 'affines' to one another, but the reality is more complex and village affiliations are crucial. It is argued that the need to assert legitimacy within a village political unit is paramount in alliance politics. Case study material from Manjapur is used to illustrate the underlying theme of insecurity in Muria village politics. It is argued that two institutions in particular are exploited in the assertion of legitimate claims to village membership; the cult of the village gods and the Ghotul institution.

The Ghotul, in which it is obligatory for all households with adolescent children to participate, sets up a mechanism of intra village exchange and coordinates the developmental cycles of the individual joint family households making up the village. The Ghotul is also linked to the religious system and serves to mediate between men and gods as well as between kin and affines.

The Ghotul is described in detail in all its aspects, and its internal organisation, rules, and activities. The jor (sleeping partner)
relationship is of central importance in individuals' Ghotul careers. This relationship is carefully regulated but can on occasion result in love affairs and elopements which directly challenge the elder generation's monopoly of alliance politics. Results of such confrontations are illustrated using case materials.

Finally, the Ghotul and marriage, two dominant themes of Muria life are brought together. The Ghotul is a profoundly integrative mechanism within Muria society as a whole, but has extremely disruptive consequences, at times, in the lives of individuals. The possible relationship between the Ghotul jor relationship and forms of token pre-puberty secondary marriage practiced by local Hindu castes is indicated.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was carried out over two separate periods of fifteen months in 1976-77, and six months in 1978 in a village of Narayanpur tehsil, Bastar district, Madhya Pradesh. I returned for a further three months in 1981 in connection with a BBC film on the Muria. The film project proved disastrous and I had to eventually dissociate myself from the BBC edited end-product titled "Muria Marriage"; however my stay in the village provided me with valuable material that has been incorporated into the body of the thesis. The time-span current to the thesis however remains the years 1976-79 when the bulk of the fieldwork was conducted. I have adopted the pseudonym 'Manjapur' for the fieldwork village, and none of the names of people mentioned within corresponds to their real names. I am grateful to the Australian National University who gave me a scholarship and who generously funded the fieldwork.

I am well aware that the credit for lasting out a long and arduous fieldwork is due not to my powers of endurance which are slight, to say the least, but to the many people who intervened at crucial stages with offers of concrete help and whose unrequited kindnesses were mainly responsible for my sticking it through to the end. Over the years my debt to these people has increased immeasurably as I have come to appreciate the value of the years spent, and of the friendships formed with the Muria as being undoubtedly the most rewarding experience of my life. I must record my gratitude to Mr. Jangley who made it possible for us to tour the district and eventually decide on a field-site, and who continued to respond to our pleas for help throughout our stay in Bastar, and Mrs. Jangley who graciously accepted me as a guest in her home when I turned to her in desperation on a torrential, monsoonal day in June 1976 after arriving alone in Jagdalpur only to find the rest-houses full and bus services suspended to other parts of Bastar! Of all the people we met in Bastar outside our village we became closest to Mr. Pyarelal Chadha, Divisional Forest Officer and his family; we adopted them as 'our' family in Jagdalpur and they always welcomed us with open arms on our holiday trips there,
treated us to Hindi movies, local gossip, and to the most delicious food that we have ever eaten. In the course of our acquaintance we developed a deep respect for Mr. Chadha whose vast knowledge and love of the forests of Bastar, and whose humanity and decency made a great impression not only on us, we discovered, but on most people. Closer to home we had a friend and ally in Mr. Goswami, then Deputy Ranger of Forests stationed near the village. Mr. Goswami personally ensured that the incomplete, mud-walled structure that was to be our home was not washed down by the rains by organizing the construction of a roof frame in record time, and by begging for a few spare roof tiles from every house in the village until he had enough to cover the bare walls with.

Within our village there were far too many people who helped us in many different ways to be mentioned by name, but there are a group of people who stand out from among the larger body of Manjapur villagers, whose presence is pervasive in the following pages of the thesis, and without whose day-to-day cooperation the thesis would never have been. These people are the family of Ghassiya Usendi, namely, Rasool, Salo, Ange, Yaya, Korial, Rassini, Rasai, Asa, Motu, and little Rajman and Somaru. Ghassiya Usendi took upon his shoulders the awesome responsibility of our well-being; he surrendered a portion of his house for our use, exposed himself and his family to the enquiring gaze of two strangers, and coped with the unpleasant burden of becoming the target of envy— with all its implications— among his fellow villagers. It was the women in the house, most flamboyantly and memorably Yaya, but mainly her daughters and daughters-in-law in fact, Rasai, Rassini, Salo and Ange, who made the most sacrifices in attending to our daily comforts— making an extra daily trip to the river to fetch us water, washing our clothes and utensils, and bringing us nourishing, hot java gruel to drink hourly when either of us was sick. Our connection with the Ghassiya family has become such a permanent feature of both our lives and inseparable from an enduring, pre-destined 'kinship' relation that it has superceded the narrower aims of anthropological work. It is therefore impossible for me to simply register my gratitude to them for all they did in the context of this 'acknowledgement' without seeming to trivialize its significance in my, and my husband's, lives.
At the Australian National University I was supervised for a short time by Derek Freeman and I here acknowledge the fact that he was extremely forthcoming with his help during my first fieldwork. After Professor Freeman my supervision was taken over by Professor Jim Fox and Kirk Endicott to both of whom I owe thanks for not only many insightful remarks and painstaking corrections, but also for their patience and sympathetic understanding of my situation at all times: I am aware that I have been unusually fortunate in this respect. A few chapters were read by Johnny Parry who spent a whole morning in discussing them with me. Undoubtedly however, the one individual unconnected with the thesis whose interest and encouragement was mainly responsible in reviving my enthusiasm for it at a very difficult time was Dr. Chris Gregory. I owe him a special thanks for all he has done.

My profoundest debt is to my parents, but after it, is the one owed to my husband, Alfred Gell. While not wishing to belittle the efforts of my teachers in the past, it is Alfred who has taught me most of what I know of anthropology, and who has been my guide and mentor throughout. His involvement in the thesis at every stage is ubiquitous and his presence, more than any other factor, has been indispensable to its inception, execution and completion. In the field Alfred taught me the rules of Gondi grammar, uncomplainingly took upon himself the task of cooking our food so that I would be free to visit households in the village during the time that most women were preoccupied in cooking the family supper, suggested lines of enquiry and questions for me to follow, and magnificently absorbed and deflected my frustrations, moods and temper tantrums with his inexhaustible strength of will and patience. During the years of "writing up" when in fact whole months passed without a single sentence written, with me sitting in an agony of helplessness over a few facts that seemingly defied analysis, Alfred invariably came to my rescue by applying his mind (for half an hour!) and suggesting an analytical context that was just what I wanted. I have made free use of many of his ideas which are so pervasive throughout the thesis that many of them remain unacknowledged specifically. However although a large part of the intellectual content of the thesis is owed to him it would be wrong to hold him responsible for the errors and shortcomings that remain: had he been in complete control a
very different standard of work would have been produced. I have also used
Alfred as a dictionary and Thesaurus, and he has also gone over the draft
of almost every page correcting grammatical mistakes and improving its
sense. He has drawn all the maps and diagrams as well.

No words are adequate to describe the role played by my parents in this
enterprise – mercifully I come from a culture where 'thanks' by a daughter
to her parents are considered out-of-place and presumptuous. I am also
sensitive to the fact that a 'thank you' creates a distinction between my
parents and me which has hitherto never existed: my achievement and my
happiness has always been indistinguishable to my parents from their own
happiness and achievement as theirs has been to me. In such a situation it
is impossible to say what thanks are owed and to whom. I would nonetheless
like to say that my prime motivation all along has been their love and
dedication, as has been the desire to see the efforts of the one, most
important person in my life, borne to fruition – my father.
1. INTRODUCTION

Fieldwork among the Bastar Muria

I was originally urged to undertake fieldwork among the Murias of Bastar District by the eminent Indian anthropologist and expert on tribal (Adivasi) society, Surajit Sinha who assured me that it was a most beautiful part of India and that the Muria themselves were fascinating people. There were many moments, during the long months of fieldwork in Bastar which followed, when I had occasion to reflect a trifle sourly on the golden picture painted for me, in Professor Sinha's enthusiastic words, of a cool green forest idyll, secluded from the hustle and bustle of India's densely-settled heartlands, inhabited by simple and agreeable people. For months on end the forest idyll is a sea of impassable mud and raging torrents, at other times vicious heat must be endured without benefit of fans or supplies of cooling iced drinks, while the winter months, delightful enough by day, chill the marrow-bones with arctic nights. And the Muria, bursting with confidence in the rightness of their way of doing things, quite unaccustomed to giving the almost instinctive displays of deference which greet the member of the urban elite classes elsewhere in the subcontinent, refuse to treat seriously an individual, such as a wandering anthropologist, who seems to them to lack even the most basic social qualifications.

To begin with, and for many months, I was unable to speak, unable to explain what kept me in their country, unable to form social relationships with them and seemingly without any relationships with my own privileged kind. I therefore endured the most unfortunate experience of being nobody, denied the most basic identity. I could see, going on around me, a complex and engrossing social existence, little dramas erupting and subsiding against a stable background of strong, but implicit, social relationships, but I could neither interpret (except in the most fragmentary way) the causes of the alarms and excursions which swept through the family with whom I was lodged, keeping them up half the night engaged in conversations
which fluctuated between heated arguments, whispered confidences, and helpless laughter. I had no reason to doubt, from the very beginning, that Professor Sinha's remarks on the fascinating and charming nature of the Muria and their life-style were abundantly justified, but I often had occasion to doubt that I would ever become acquainted with them, since no Muria, with so much else to absorb his/her attention, seemed likely to spend long hours explaining Muria language and customs to someone as frustrating to communicate with as myself. About the first remark made to me in Muria that I really understood was made by the old woman who later became my 'mother'. It was: "Lahari, why don't you talk? Why do you sit by yourself and keep silent?". My deficient Gondi was enough to capture this idea because the context made it so abundantly clear what she meant. It seemed like a stalemate: the Muria would not keep patience with me because I could not speak with them, and I would never learn to speak with them unless they showed more patience with me. And in the village in which I worked, despite there being two men, the village headman and another who could communicate in Hindi, there were no Muria available to act as a linguistic assistant. Nor are there any text-books on Gondi, or even a usable vocabulary. It was borne in on me that it was going to be a very long haul. Moreover, to make it even more unendurable, the fact is, if I may say so, that I am a talkative individual, and that I mainly relate to my social surroundings by talking to people, rather than by watching them. Some anthropologists can build up information even without understanding much of the language, but this is not my style. I have to talk, not just for asking questions, but so as to follow the gossip, in which most of what is of real interest to me is embedded. Bereft of my essential channel of communication with the world and missing the company of my husband, I felt very lost indeed.

How did it come about that I exposed myself to a situation such as this? My entry into Bastar, once I had chosen it as my fieldwork site, was made much smoother than it might otherwise have been by the fact that my maternal Uncle had some years earlier occupied the position of Inspector General of Forests, i.e. had been over-all head of the Indian Forest Service. In Bastar district the Forest Service is almost a parallel administration alongside the State and national government, and in the heavily forested parts of Bastar, where the Muria live, is probably rather
more significant than the government itself. On hearing of my wish to work in Bastar district, my Uncle's contacts in the forest service in Bastar district laid on an elaborate and luxurious tour of the district for my husband and myself, accompanying forest officers in their normal duties as they visited the various forest ranges into which the district is subdivided. In the course of a visit to the forests around Narayanpur, in the heart of Muria country, we were accompanied at one stage by one of the very few literate Muria who have joined the Forest Service. This man revealed that he was half-brother to the important siyan (village elder) who is pseudonymously referred to in this thesis as 'Tiri', who resided at Manjapur, close to Dhorai in the Chhote Dongar range. He suggested that we all pay a call on his half-brother. Manjapur proved to be well off the road and it was only with difficulty that we were able to reach Tiri's rather splendid-looking house in the forester's jeep. Tiri was sent for and eventually arrived. He was a powerfully built man in his late thirties, and he obviously at once put on his mettle to impress both his half-brother and even more so the Forest Service top brass who had suddenly descended on Manjapur. No Muria, least of all an aspiring big-man with an eye as unswervingly fixed on the main chance as Tiri's always was, could ignore such a splendid opportunity to get into the good books of the all-powerful forest department as seemed to be on offer. On our side, we were entranced by the extensive, neat and prosperous-looking village scene which Manjapur presented, and we also noticed that Tiri's house looked both large and weather-proof. Sweet palm-wine was offered and consumed and there and then a deal was struck, through the mediation of the half-brother. After the rains I would take up residence with Tiri, and later my husband would come too. But it was obvious that at the time, Tiri only faintly noticed the Punjabi lady and the white man - his prime concern was the forest officers and the prospect of them becoming indebted to him.

When I eventually arrived, Tiri was as good as his word, placing one large room of his house at my disposal, together with his only bed. The room was windowless, noisy and the bed infested with itch-provoking mites but this was luxury by Muria standards. The Muria can be infuriatingly off-hand, even stand-offish at times, but they are never less than generous and honourable. Tiri did his best, but it was immediately apparent that I would need separate quarters if I were ever to get any sleep (or any work
done), away from the hubbub of talk and work (beginning at 4 a.m. in Tiri's house) and with light to see by and air to breathe during the long, hot, days of summer. My first months in the field were occupied with endless negotiations, both to find a plot on which to build a house and to obtain the labour and materials needed in the construction. I found out the hard way how jealously the Muria regard their land, even the tiny patch of low-grade bhat land needed to build a hut. It was soon apparent that none of Tiri's neighbours who possessed such land would give it for this purpose for fear that Tiri would lay a claim to the plot and house once I had gone. Eventually, after much argument, my house was constructed on the other side of Tiri's courtyard only yards from his front door. He felt this as a slur on his hospitality, but generously acquiesced in the situation. But for the building, no labour was available in the village itself. I was most astonished to discover this fact, since labour-shortage is the one kind of shortage which one does not expect to encounter in India. But in Manjapur labour is very short indeed. Eventually I imported Hindus from another village. Only weeks before the monsoons descended, which would wash away the walls of an uncompleted house almost overnight, our house was rapidly erected and roofed over, its speedy construction ensuring that it also speedily fell down again two seasons later.

These concerns occupied the first three months of fieldwork. Though I had with great difficulty arranged for a place to live, and was in close daily involvement with one of the most important families in the village, I still felt I lacked any means of getting into the language and learning to communicate with people, other than the very few who (like Tiri) knew Hindi. At this juncture my husband arrived, bearing with him notes on the grammatical structure of the most nearly cognate Gondi language he could find described in the linguistic literature (Koya, spoken in N. Andhra: Tyler 1965). Shortly afterwards he managed to obtain an invaluable two-page summary of Muria Gondi verb paradigms from an anthropologist (Dr. I. Popoff) working nearby, who had in turn obtained this document from a missionary linguist. This event proved to be the breakthrough. We inscribed the verb paradigms in a book we christened 'The Sacred Book of Verbs' and I rapidly committed them to memory. I discovered that with the guidance of my linguistically-minded husband I could say things in Gondi almost overnight, and as soon as I started doing that I became a real
person in Muria eyes. I think that the pressure to speak had been building up all along, and that I probably knew more than I suspected even when I felt I knew nothing. With this powerful motivation, which had less perhaps to do with anthropology than with resuming my accustomed place in the world, I speedily gained confidence and fluency in Muria Gondi. As a Muria-speaker, I immediately became a person of wide reputation within and beyond the village, and I also became more and more integrated as a 'daughter' in my adopted household. Tiri ceased to be my prime patron, his place being usurped by his (and my) redoubtable mother, whom I had been always taught to call yaya (mother) and who now really became one to me. Through her eyes, and her instruction, the pattern of Muria village life was laid open before me. Yaya is one of the most forceful and intelligent women I have ever met, perhaps the most; I soon found out that her dynamism, passed on in good measure to her son Tiri, had raised an impoverished family, on the run from their natal village, to a pinnacle of social and economic prestige in Manjapur from which they are unlikely to be displaced. The Tiri family turned out to be an excellent choice anthropologically, in that being 'strangers' in the village themselves, but at the same time always in the thick of village affairs, they were exceptionally articulate, once they could be persuaded that it was worth talking to me at all, about what made village society tick. Moreover, Tiri's two younger sisters were both going to the Ghotul (dormitory) at the time of my arrival, while his younger brother, his wife and her illegitimate son were also resident, along with Tiri's wife and children, not to mention Tiri's father (a very subsiding figure, unlike Yaya, for reasons to be discussed in due course). In short I was surrounded by individuals at every stage of the Muria life-cycle, and moreover in one of the liveliest joint-family households in the entire village, dominated by two of the most impressive and fiendishly intelligent operators in village politics. I had eventually acquired the means to study the Muria. But what should a study of the Muria really focus on?

The Ghotul in Muria Society

It had been my original intention, when I set out from the Australian National University, to contribute to the studies then being carried out by certain anthropologists there, on child behaviour, play and cognitive
development. But I discovered first of all that the methodology of such studies, primarily observational and at all times highly structured, conformed not at all to my real personal interests and proclivities, which as I mentioned earlier, lie towards conversation, and in particular the kinds of conversation which deal with topics of specific interest to the parties to any such conversation, not necessarily ones of interest to psychologists and behavioural scientists. I despaired of inducing Muria to cooperate in a highly-structured data gathering exercise, so foreign to the style of their culture, and moreover likely to arouse their strong suspicions. As my Gondi improved, I took to conducting free discussions with women of various ages. As these discussions progressed I began to grasp the pattern of the Muria female life-cycle, and the absolutely crucial role played in it by the brief but never-to-be-forgotten years each woman spends as a laiya, a Ghotul going unmarried girl. It seemed that these years had formed each woman's perception of life and society, and moreover the consequences of the doings of these years left an indelible mark on each biography. Yaya herself had come to Manjapur as a runaway, eloping with her Ghotul partner, for all he was now the wheezing, hard drinking old man she now barely acknowledged. From another side as well, my attention was being inexorably directed towards the Ghotul as the key institution in Muria society that was both creative and destructive in its effects. First from Tiri, and later from the other village siyan, or elders, I began to obtain data on marriage and exchange, the genealogical linkages between blocks of lineages within the clan, and the network of marriages and betrothals between them. It seemed that the alliance system was the structure which integrated Muria society on the large scale, and that it was the set of institutions involving alliance which absorbed the energies of politically-active men such as Tiri. But it was soon apparent also that Muria marriages were highly unstable to begin with and that betrothals frequently came to nothing. The social system focussed on marriage, yet stable arranged marriages were seldom seen. The activities of men like Tiri seemed largely to consist of negotiating compensation, and renegotiating exchange relationships between families which had been ruptured because of the wilful behaviour of the young people it was proposed to marry off. The Ghotul seemed to be the central factor disturbing the politics of marriage; but paradoxically, when we attended
marriage ceremonies, the Ghotul girls and boys seemed to be the main performers, singing the marriage songs, dancing, attending to the bride and groom as well as cooking and distributing the food. How devastating Ghotul entanglements could be politically I was enabled to see when one of Tiri's younger sisters eloped from the Ghotul early in my stay in his house. Tiri was furious and deeply offended, not least because the marriage negotiated by him for this girl was one of impeccable orthodoxy, which would restore the 'image' of Tiri's household in the eyes, not only of Manjapur, but Tiri's father's original village Boorpal, where Tiri's father's reputation had been under a cloud since he had eloped to Manjapur, many years ago, with his Ghotul girlfriend. However a marriage (the right one) was quickly arranged, and one more Ghotul boy was brought before the village council, whose self-righteous anger is not reduced by the fact that few of the elders sitting in judgement there have not been the culprit in some equally unsavoury business on an earlier occasion.

Both my conversations with women, and the dramas within the Tiri household and the village generally pointed insistently towards the Ghotul as the most interesting feature of Muria society. But what is the Ghotul? We might have imagined that we were in a position to know this already, since the study by Verrier Elwin of the Muria adolescent dormitory institution (The Muria and their Ghotul: Elwin 1947) is the only extensive study of the Muria in existence and is devoted to elucidating—in all its 718 pages—this very subject. But as I came to know Manjapur and the Muria better, I became wholly dissatisfied with Elwin's account of the Ghotul, which is far too romantic and does nothing to set the Ghotul in its social context, treating it more-or-less as a dreamland of adolescent sexual bliss. I started to visit the Ghotul regularly, in company with Tiri's remaining unmarried sister, and I soon learnt that it was nothing of the kind.

Just as Elwin had, I came to identify the Ghotul as the key to a description of the pattern of Muria social life, but having made this identification I became all the more determined to show the institution in its true colours, and in relation to Muria society as a whole. I abandoned my planned investigation of childhood, which seemed far too narrow, and began to collect materials for a general account of the Manjapur Muria, to
centre around the Ghotul and what happens there. The thesis here presented is the result of the investigations I began to carry out at that time. I visited the Ghotul every night and studied its organisation in as much detail as possible. The circle of my intimate associates widened to include not only the Tiri family, but the then Ghotul cohort, particularly the young man herein called Malu, who though not the head (Patel) of the Manjapur Ghotul was certainly its brightest spark, as well as many others, both boys and girls. I participated both in their expeditions and merry-making, and also in the tempestuous debates and altercations which enliven Ghotul life through the dull months of hard agricultural labour. Elwin did none of this, nor did he speak Muria Gondi, so this account, whatever its many demerits, does enter into ethnographically unexplored territory.

I also studied Manjapur village, and got on close terms with other siyan besides Tiri, notably Panku Ram (another pseudonym) Tiri's most serious rival as a political operator. I endured many bitter reproaches from Yaya on account of my unhealthy intimacy with the Panku Ram household, presided over by another matriarch only slightly less domineering that Yaya herself. Through the siyan, I began to understand the complex undercurrents of village politics, and the essential insecurities which threaten the position of even the most entrenched-seeming households. It became clear that the assertion of unequivocal status and legitimacy in settling in the village, cultivating its land, and taking part in its political life, is both the goal of every ambitious man, and at the same time the most difficult thing to achieve, since the very success of a household arouses jealousy and can spark off a serious challenge. Once again, it proved that the Ghotul played a crucial role in the assertion of a legitimate 'village' identity, since it is by sending its adolescent members to the Ghotul that the individual (and competing) households in the village assert their common underlying interest, their 'belongingness' to the village.

An outline of the argument

Chapter 2, following this introduction, describes the physical setting of Bastar district and sketches in some of the most salient details of its recent history. The account I give is brief, but there is little available
to go on, and a comprehensive history of the area has yet to be attempted. There follows an account of the present day administrative system, the Government and the Forest department. The chapter concludes by looking at the caste communities present in the immediate vicinity of the fieldwork village, and places the Muria in the caste hierarchy as well as points to an important difference between the Maria Ghotul and the Muria Ghotul, a detail which assumes significance later in the thesis.

Chapter 3 'The Manjapur Environment' describes the basic layout of the Muria village, and locates Manjapur in its regional setting. The village ecology is described both in its physical aspect, and in terms of the values attached by the Muria to different categories of land: forest, dry fields, paddy fields and grazing land. Chapters 2 and 3 are of an introductory nature only.

Chapter 4 'Muria Clanship' begins the analysis of the sociological background of the Ghotul. The problem discussed in this chapter is the general form of Muria social organization and the nature of clan units. This problem is discussed in a comparative perspective since in some parts of Bastar (where the Maria live) it seems that clanship and territory are closely linked, which is not the case in the vicinity of the fieldwork village. The argument that a fixed arrangement of agnatic clan-territorial units has 'decayed' due to economic change is rejected and the form of the present day dispersed Muria clan is attributed to the role of saga or dadabhai (agnates/kin) to one another and the question is raised whether the Muria are arranged in marriage moieties. In fact, this is not so, as local segments of dispersed clans have largely different complements of saga/dadabhai clans depending on local configurations around particular village units (nar). Nonetheless, the Muria conceptualise their social universe dualistically. The component clans of the fieldwork village and their alliance relationships within and outside the village are described. The intention in this chapter is to emphasise the central position of alliance relationships in Muria social structure.

Chapter 5 'The Village, the Land, and Politics of Manjapur' introduces the fieldwork village and describes the typical patterns of Muria small-scale politics. I propose that the fundamental unit of Muria society is
the village unit (nār), and that this makes the Muria distinct, as a 'tribal' society, from the general Indian pattern, in which, as Dumont and Pocock have argued, the village unit does not define sociological boundaries of overwhelming importance. Manjapur village contains two castes, Muria and Maraar who interact only marginally (and are physically separate) except in connection with village ritual. The Maraars are pre-eminent in the cult of the state goddess, the Murias in the cult of the earth and fertility. The village is a single, interdependent religious congregation. I proceed to the question of land ownership and the history of the migrations of the presently dominant lineages in Manjapur. Land and wealth are not necessarily connected, but the dominant political faction in Manjapur (lineages of the Korami clan) own most of the land. I describe the instabilities of wealth and prestige in the village: the lineage of the village Patel is declining, Tiri's is rising. The major figures in intra-village politics are introduced and the interplay of sectional interests is brought out by means of an extended case history of a dispute I witnessed, in which Tiri's father was accused of murdering the present Patel's father. The theme of this chapter is to identify the sense of insecurity which seems to lie behind so much Muria public behaviour, the fear of losing status in the village or even being ejected from it. I conclude by pointing towards the religious system and the Ghotul as the means adopted by Muria to express their dependence on the village community, and the validity of their claims to belong to it.

Chapter 6 'The Extended Family' discusses the form taken by the Indian 'Joint Family' in the present-day Muria context. This short chapter sets the family in its physical, domestic setting and paves the way for Chapter 7 which provides an extended discussion of the Muria life-cycle and the nature of marriage and betrothal.

Chapter 7 "Kinship and Affinal Relations in the Muria Life Cycle" opens with a discussion of the Muria life cycle and the changes in status experienced by members of each sex at different stages in it. The basic nuclear family relationships are examined in turn, i.e. parent/child, sibling relations, and marital relations. The chapter then goes on to discuss the preferred marriage with FZD. It is argued that this marriage stems from the dynamics of the sibling tie between cross-sex siblings
within the nuclear family, while the underlying alliance pattern remains one of bilateral cross-cousin marriage, without asymmetric features. The chapter concludes with a discussion of saga (alliance) relations at an interpersonal level, and the nature of mahala (betrothal) and the accompanying exchanges.

Chapter 8 'The structural interpretation of the Ghotul' introduces the Ghotul from the point of view of alliance and village politics which has been built up in the preceding chapters. It is argued that the Ghotul plays a structural role in the integration of the village political unit (nar). The linkage between the Ghotul system and the religious system of the village is analysed. The Ghotul boys and girls stand as intermediaries, poised between kin and allies at the social level, and between men and Gods at the religious one. The framework of major religious festivals is described, and the part played in them by the Ghotul members. This chapter provides an overall theoretical perspective of the Ghotul as seen from outside. The next chapter looks at the Ghotul as seen from the inside by its participants.

Chapter 9 'The Ghotul' incorporates descriptive material, illustrated with extended case histories, on the Ghotul as it functions on a day-to-day basis. Ghotul initiation is described, and the allocation of sleeping partners (jor) to new members. Ghotul girls are assigned a partner at all times, in theory one of their own free choosing, but the reality is much more complex than this. Next, an account is provided of the Ghotul as an institution, and the various offices held by more senior boys, who are responsible for Ghotul discipline and the performance of Ghotul duties. Genuine offices are distinguished from Ghotul names, some of which sound as if they went with offices, and were treated in this way by Elwin, but which do not actually do so. The factional politics of the Ghotul is described, and examples are examined of rule infringements debated within the Ghotul, and the punishments imposed. Instances of conflict involving relations between the Ghotul and village elders are examined.

This chapter proceeds with a detailed analysis of the actual content of the all-important jor (partner) relationship within the Ghotul. A lengthy case history is provided of one such relation involving considerable
emotional commitment by the couple concerned, and it is shown how the Ghotul as a body attempt to defuse such relationships before they culminate in an elopement, though often without success.

The final section of this chapter discusses the nature of sexual relations within the Ghotul, and the consequences of pregnancy (nashamaina literally, 'spoiling'). It is shown that, contrary to Elwin's account, sexual intercourse within the Ghotul is frowned on, and is not common. Muria beliefs about conception are described. Conception is associated with maiya (love) and a definite wish to become pregnant on the woman's part. This runs completely counter to the Ghotul ethos of diffuse solidarity and results in the expulsion of the girl from the Ghotul and the punishment of the boy responsible. The possibility of a girl's becoming pregnant in the Ghotul is a major worry for parents, and a threat to previously-made betrothal arrangements. This leads to them putting pressure on the prospective husband's family to hasten the marriage; but against this must be set the countervailing motivation on their part to hang onto daughters as long as possible so as not to lose their labour contribution to the family economy.

Chapter 10 'The Ghotul and Marriage' discusses the impact of the Ghotul on the marriage system. It is shown that in certain circumstances, young people can exploit the freedom of action that the semi-autonomy of the Ghotul gives them, to determine their future marriages in defiance of parental plans. But such successful elopements or forced marriages must result from jor pairings which are 'good' (arta) according to the alliance schema of the clans concerned. The distribution of 'good' and 'bad' (arro) jor pairings is discussed. Two contrasted case histories are provided of elopements from the Ghotul and subsequent negotiations within the village between the groups of saga whose interests are involved. Ghotul freedom is limited by alliance and political considerations.

This chapter concludes with a theoretical discussion of how it is that Muria society tolerates the Ghotul, and in particular the jor system, when these so often create political dilemmas and occasions for conflict in the village arena. The possibility is raised that the mixed-sex Ghotul, which seems to be a development of the single sex (male) Ghotul still found
among the neighbouring Hill Maria, may reflect the closer relations the Muria have with Hindu castes in the area, among whom pre-puberty marriage is the rule. The local Hindu marriage system is described; these groups place female reproductive power under social control from the outset by compulsory marriage of pre-pubertal girls, to a pot if no living groom is available. Among the Muria these values no longer have the same ritual meaning, but none the less the Muria regard it as shameful to keep adolescent girls in the domestic unit, transferring them to the control of the Ghotul and a male jor partner. This is a preliminary to marriage, and may indeed be interpreted as having certain features of 'secondary marriage' granted that in the Indian context marriage is very far from being an all-or-nothing affair. It can be tentatively suggested, therefore, that the form of the Muria Ghotul, far from representing the promiscuous innocence of 'tribal culture' is, in fact, a modification of a basic tribal institution (the male dormitory) in the direction of Hindu marital institutions, in particular, the performance of a secondary form of marriage prior to the main one, as a means of getting over the betwixt-and-between period between the onset of menarche and the assumption of a full marital domestic and reproductive role.
2. THE SETTING

Bastar District

Bastar is one of the administrative districts of Madhya Pradesh. It has the often cited distinction of being the largest district in India, and its size of 16,000 square miles has encouraged comparisons with Denmark and Switzerland. The population of Bastar in 1961 was 1,167,501 of whom some 70% were classified as tribal in the Census. The Muria tribe number approximately 90,000 but are not enumerated separately in the Census. The population density is 7 people per square mile (though much land is mountainous and lightly occupied.) A more significant fact is the plentifulness of cultivable land held per capita, which averages 8.26 hectares - the highest per capita figure in Madhya Pradesh. In the region dealt with in this thesis, family landholdings averaged 10.6 hectares (Govt. of Madhya Pradesh : 1965). Madhya Pradesh consists of what was formerly known as the Central Provinces and is located at the centre of the Indian sub-continent (see Map 1). Bastar district protrudes down to Andhra Pradesh in the south and is bordered by the states of Orissa and Maharashtra to the east and west respectively. It has only remote links with the capital, Bhopal, which is about a thousand miles away. The nearest city of importance is Raipur, some three hundred kilometres away. Raipur is a bustling commercial and industrial centre with a steadily growing political influence, having contributed two successive Chief Ministers to the State as well as a Union Minister. Bastar is connected to Raipur by an all-weather road. There are no rail links to any other part of Madhya Pradesh and in a country which has a vast network of railways this fact goes to highlight the neglect and isolation that Bastar has experienced for so long. The journey from Raipur to Bastar is tedious, taking about eight hours in public transport.

Extending southwards from Raipur towards Bastar is the Chattisgarh plain which presents a monotonously drab and dusty landscape devoid of
vegetation. Chattisgarh is a distinct cultural region (Babb 1975) whose people speak a dialect of Hindi and live in the compact, nucleated villages typical of northern India. Bastar's major ethnographer, Verrier Elwin, was so struck by the contrast in landscape between Bastar and Chattisgarh that he exclaimed almost in the first paragraph of his book: "...as the traveller moves toward the Bastar plateau the countryside breaks into song about him; he is greeted by hardy, smiling woodmen singing at their work; the skyline is broken by fantastic piles of rock; all around is evergreen sal forest" (Elwin 1947: 3). Elwin's prose notwithstanding, this is a point worth making for the Bastar scenery is on the whole strikingly green and luxuriant and makes a strong impression on visitors acquainted with the generally arid Indian landscape.

Detailed description of the physical geography of Bastar is available in the work of Aggarwal (1968). For the sake of simplicity it is possible to divide the district into three broad natural divisions.

1. The Bastar-Jeypore plateau which comprises the river basins of the Indrawati and Boardig rivers and lies at approximately 1900 feet above sea level. The major towns are situated along the highway which dissects this plain. It is the most heavily populated part of the district and supports an agricultural-commercial population of Hindu migrants. The few forests that exist are secondary replantings and the majority of the land is intensively cultivated.

2. The plateau which is flanked on the east by the Eastern Ghats that continue in an unbroken stretch along the southern coast of the Indian peninsula. The hill ranges are thickly forested and largely inhabited by the Raj Muria tribe who are to be found in the environs of the district capital, Jagdalpur, as well. Culturally and linguistically they bear little affinity to their namesakes, the Hill Marias and the Murias, and are considered to resemble the resident purer castes of Hindus. They were the main retainers of the Raja at Jagdalpur, and they were the first to modify their 'tribal' customs in favour of a more Brahmanic style of life. There is a road and also a single track railway, which crosses the hilly country so as to connect Jagdalpur to the busy port of Vizagapatnam on the east coast.

3. The range system consisting of the Abujhmar and the smaller ranges of the Kutru, Bailadilla and Golapalli hills which encircle the western
limits of the plateau constitute the third division. It is still regarded as presenting a formidable physical barrier to communication with "cracked and seamed valleys running in all directions" (Grigson 1938:26) and peaks rising abruptly. The region is covered in thick, impenetrable jungle which supports an abundant wild life of wild buffaloes, pigs, deer and the occasional tiger. The Abujhmar ranges and their foothills form the backdrop of this thesis. The Murias inhabit the surrounding low country and foot-hills, while the Hill Marias, a closely related group, are to be found in the more rugged country of the interior. The Murias also spill out into the edges of the plateau, very close to the lowlying area around Kondagaon, an important town on the main Raipur-Jagdalpur highway.

Except for small patches that have been cleared for shifting cultivation where "...high grass and stunted trees make the country monotonous to the eye" (Grigson ibid.), the Abujhmar hills are almost completely covered with forests of teak, sal and bamboo. The vegetation has been described as "tropical, moist, deciduous forest". (Aggarwal 1968:75). Grigson who made extensive studies of the Maria maintained that "there are only 150 and 160 villages in all this area of 1,500 square miles, about one village in every 10 square miles and less than 8 persons per square mile, making it about the least populated part of the country" (Grigson 1938:28).

The climate of this third natural division in which the Muria are located, has been classified as "moderately hot-wet", with a mean annual temperature of 72-76°F, and an annual rainfall of 60-70 inches. The rainfall is concentrated mainly in the months of June to September with sporadic rains during the winter months. The driest season lasts from December to May, and it coincides with the slack agricultural period when the ground is too hard to plough. The general opinion of forest officers resident for many years in the area is that the destruction of forests has led to a decrease in the annual rainfall, to higher summer temperatures, and to longer periods of drought in between dry season showers.
Historical background

The lack of published historical records makes the task of reconstructing Bastar's past a difficult one. Grigson has commented that "Bastar has always been an almost unknown backwater of Indian history" (page 3); another writer has stated somewhat grandly: "The history of Bastar is wrapped in twilight and darkness". (Joshi 1967: 26) Grigson nonetheless attempted a historical introduction to his book on the Hill Maria, and it is from there, as well as from the Chattisgarh Feudatory States Gazetteer of 1909 that I have drawn material for this section.

From Grigson's account it is evident that the tribal groups in Bastar were never self-contained, autonomous political units presided over by tribal rulers. The Bastar tribes have always been assimilated into the kingdoms of non-tribal kings. This is an important point and worth stressing. Of course it is difficult to say with any certainty whether an archaic form of tribal political organization existed and was superseded at some stage in history by the more powerful force of foreign invaders. References to Hindu kings since the early 12th century and the ruins of temples dedicated to the Hindu Gods of Ganesh, Siva and Vishnu at Barsur in Bastar make it clear that, for a very long time at least, the Murias as well as other tribes, have not had an indigenous, over-arching political order. Political unity was achieved by an alien overlord from whom emanated formal political power and office. Grigson makes this point:

"The Marias of the Abujhmar hills seem to be the most primitive and isolated aboriginal race of the Central Provinces, yet only a few miles of mountain and forest separate their habitat from these old centres of Telegu civilization". (1938: 5)

The rulers were either refugee aristocrats or brigand upstarts from the Telegu empires to the south. Bastar's geographically inaccessible position and the rigors of its monsoonal climate enabled it to escape from the interminable Muslim invasions which were a feature of neighbouring kingdoms. For the greater part of history it remained divided into small chiefdoms which maintained a relative peace with one another. It is not known exactly when the kingdom was unified and divided between two royal
families: one based at Kanker, and the other at Jagdalpur, but it was probably some time in the 15th century.

The tribals remained a peripheral group of these kingdoms. They paid a nominal tribute in return for the protection they enjoyed as subjects loyal to a single ruler. The state armies were composed of Maratha militiamen who intermarried with the tribals, and are supposed to be the ancestors of the present-day Halba tribe. Murias were not recruited into these armies, and so far as is known, performed no military function in the established kingdom. To this day, there are no traces of military organization among them.

It is important to point out that apart from certain matters relating to dispute settlement and revenue, the relationship between the Raja and his 'primitive' subjects was expressed in cult and ritual. The Bastar ruler acquired the properties of divine kingship. According to Mahapatra, there is a basic similarity underlying the conceptual models of God and King, that leads to a fusion of the two in many parts of India (Mahapatra 1976). The similarity is expressed in the symmetry of rituals performed for the King in his court and for the God in his court, or temple. The Bastar ruler become the incarnation of the Goddess Danteshwari who was placed at the top of a hierarchy of gods, with pagan tribal gods being assimilated at the lower levels. Joshi has suggested that Danteshwari had tribal origins and was elevated to head the state cult by the King. (Joshi 1967) The goddess was Hinduized in the process of adoption by Bastar's rulers with an eye towards the kingly models of southern India. The cult was sustained in ritual observances throughout the year paid to localized 'refractions' of the Goddess in all Muria villages, and in a special annual occasion held in Jagdalpur at which tribals would pull a mammoth juggernaut through the city streets on which sat the Raja in all his splendour.

When the British arrived, they made vigorous attempts to overcome the physical barriers that had contributed to centuries of virtual isolation. A Captain Glasford was assigned the political agency of Bastar. He made a preliminary survey of the region and in a report, published in 1863 wrote:
"The country is an interminable forest, with the exception of a small cultivated tract around Jagdalpur, intersected by high mountain ranges which present serious obstacles to traffic. Its insalubrity is proverbial; the inhabitants are composed of rude, uncivilized tribes of Gonds." (Glasford: 1863)

Glasford urged that the dependency be civilized and expressed the view that the breaking down of the barriers to civilization would coincide with the introduction of trade and commerce. Great attention was to be paid to the development of lines of communication in order to make Bastar accessible to traders from other parts of the country. Grigson points out that such efforts were bound to have negative effects upon the local people. Actively encouraged by the government and emboldened by the establishment of a judicial system designed to protect their interests, Bastar was rapidly colonized by Hindu traders and land hungry peasants who streamed in from the north and south. No longer did the primitive sanctions against interlopers prevail and the migrants began to appropriate vast areas of the best land. In some areas the tribals were simply edged off the land or reduced to the life of bonded servants and tenants. (This trend continued unabated until the Indian government passed legislation designed to give the tribals or 'Adivasis' as they are termed, a primary and unalienable right to their own land). The indigenous people of Bastar reacted violently to these changes and there were a series of uprisings during the years 1876 to 1891.

In 1836 a detachment of Nagpur police was stationed at Dantewara in South Bastar to prevent the human sacrifices which, so rumour had it, took place at the temple of the state Goddess. They saw no sign of human sacrifice but continued to be posted there, as a preventative measure.

After the construction of roads, the British turned their attention towards the organization of an efficient system of revenue extraction. As a step in this direction the traditional arrangements for brewing liquor were swept aside in favour of a system of licensed outstills that were auctioned off and which were invariably bought by outsiders who had the cash necessary to pay for them. The British also initiated a schema of appointee ministers (diwan) to the courts of the native rulers. Of all their schemes this was probably the most disastrous. The men they
appointed were true outsiders, born and bred in the outlying provinces. They saw their task as advancing the progress towards civilization of the tribals but they succeeded only in antagonizing them. Such a progressive Diwan passed a decree for the conservation of large areas of forest and threatened to put an end to the traditional hegemony over forest land that tribals had always enjoyed. No comparable inroad into tribal rights had been undertaken by any previous ruler. The Diwan also devised another scheme which, though well intentioned, was entirely counterproductive. Hundreds of school teachers were sent to villages in order to impart education but they only added to the numbers of bossy over-seers who commandeered free labour and established small fortunes for themselves by annexing the best land. In 1910 a major rebellion took place in which several tribal groups, including the Murias, arose in revolt against measures which they saw as intended to cut them off from the land, and from their most important resource - the forest. The tribes advanced on Jagdalpur and the rebellion was suppressed by a battalion of Punjabi troops and some police hastily summoned from the plains.

It is clear from all this that the encounter between the traditional tribal state of Bastar and the centralized administration introduced by a modern British regime was not a very happy one. In Grigson's words the failures were mainly due to an "administration divorced from anthropology" (1938:17) The enforcement of new laws such as land registration made the tribals an easily exploitable target for colonists. As the natives did not hold title deeds to their land, whole villages were acquired and the tribals forced to retreat to the more forested parts of the hills. The period was marked by economic dislocation and political discontent. But having said all this I consider certain qualifications needed. It is easy to exaggerate the painful nature of the initial contact and the extent of discontinuity between traditional and modern systems of politics and administration. This results from the constellation of associative meanings surrounding the word 'tribal' in present day discourse in India. The word 'tribal' brings to mind 'exploitation', 'poverty', 'innocence' and 'sexual immorality' somewhat in that order. But this is a stereotype that does not accurately reflect the situation of tribals in parts of India, and certainly not of those resident in parts of Bastar, nor the experience of all the tribes here. The tribals whose way of
life was most radically affected were those geographically proximate to the newly opened lines of communication along the river basins; the majority remained relatively untouched by legislation or colonization.

After 1920 the district was administered by sympathetic, ethnologically minded administrators like Grigson who rejected the old system of trying to modernize the tribals and instead advocated isolationist policies with the tribals being left to themselves to catch up with civilization at their own pace. In 1935 the Government of India passed an act to bring about the recognition of 'excluded' areas inhabited by 'backward tribes'. This was in order to prevent the across-the-board application of laws unsuitable to conditions in tribal areas.

During the period after independence, Bastar was beset by political turmoil and confrontation between the traditional forces and the central administration at Delhi. The last Raja of Bastar fought a tragic battle against the representatives of the 'democratic' regime - a battle that ended in 1964 with his own assassination and subsequent wiping out of all traces of the traditional political state. (Joshi 1967 :115ff) Shortly after independence, Bastar became the subject of anxious political speculation that revolved around the rights to lease iron ore deposits that had been discovered a few years earlier at Bailadilla and Roaghat ranges. These deposits were vast (approximately 1400 million tons) and their attractiveness was enhanced by their accessibility to the steel mills of Jamshedpur in Bihar, and to the port of Vizagapatnam. The Raja at the time was Pravir Chandra Bhanjeo, a boy of 18 years, who had been installed as ruler shortly before the transfer to power took place. There was concern that he would form a political unit with Hyderabad state whose inclusion in the Indian nation was at that time anything but a foregone conclusion, since Hyderabad was a Muslim state and teetered on the brink of joining with Pakistan. Eventually sufficient pressure was bought to bear upon him and the Government began mining operations in the region.

The Raja never acquiesced to the presence of the government and vigorously campaigned against it. The Indian government regarded him as somewhat of a paranoid madman and fervent anti-nationalist. He was accused of holding his 'primitive' subjects in the grip of a fanatical religious
cult that would force them into blind obedience of his every command. The ruler on the other hand, was in profound disagreement with the secularism of the government and questioned their right to rule Bastar. In a book with an appropriately hubristic title "I, Pravir the Adivasi God", he publicized his resentment against the Congress, whose membership he said, consisted of "upstarts and puppets", who had swept aside the "first class and inborn administrative talents and genius" of the "natural rulers" of the country. The foundations of princely power lay in spirituality which must remain untouched by the machinations of government. He wrote: "The goddess has shown the world that even without my state I am the recognised ruler of my people"; and "the Adivasis have set an example to the Indian government by showing the world that divinity still exists in the material form of their Maharajah just as the rishis of old used to believe that Ramchandra and Krishna were manifestations of the Supreme Being." By a simple logic, Pravir Chandra regarded the removal of the king as resulting in a state of religious depletion as well and equated his own personal struggle to recapture his kingdom with a religious battle against moral depravity. A journalistic account of the period brings out the politically volatile situation that existed in Bastar throughout his career. Several mass meetings and demonstrations were organized first to demand his release after the Indian government arrested him in 1961, and later to press for the removal of his brother who was crowned in his place after he was deposed. On the 25th of March 1966 the Raja, along with about a dozen of his tribal retainers was found dead from shot-gun wounds at his palace in Jagdalpur; an order to shoot was given by the Police Commissioner but the events of that day, as well as the number of people who died in the firing will perhaps always remain shrouded in mystery.

The Raja had served as a symbol of the unity of the social order within Bastar - a unity that was profoundly affirmed in the compact between supernatural and mundane forces within his person. There could be no substitution for the king who was the source and justification of an already dangerously fragile system of power and authority in Muria society. In many ways it could be said that the kingship, with its complex of participatory ritual and duties, filled a political vacuum. Where the Murias, among all the communities resident in Bastar are concerned, this is particularly true, and the death of the King had particularly devastating
The Raja's death threw the Muria into a state of confusion. In the years 1964-66 rumours were circulated that a holocaust was imminent and that the army was rounding up thousands of tribals. The feelings of insecurity eventually coalesced into a cult around a certain Baba Bihari Dass who proclaimed himself to be an incarnation of the dead king. Murias flocked to him in the hundreds and obeyed his injunctions to give up meat and alcohol. In Muria areas, thousands of goats and pigs were butchered as a first step towards adoption of a more abstemious life. (It is now ruefully admitted that the only ones to benefit from the 'insanity' of the times were the Muslim butchers who acquired vast quantities of meat at throwaway prices). In many villages Ghotuls were abandoned and little white flags were erected in the compounds of houses to announce that those within were of the Baba's sect. Baba Bihari Dass was finally arrested by the Government in 1968 on the grounds that he was an impostor and was amassing a fortune from the dues that he collected from all his disciples.

After Baba Bihari Dass' arrest his sect declined in membership. His injunctions tested the limits of Muria endurance, and many people began to long for the meat and liquor that had been removed from their diet. Informants in the fieldwork village of Manjapur said that there was a period of intense political debate as meetings were held to decide the future direction of villages - would they adhere to the new creed or revert back to their life as avid consumers of meat and alcohol? Villages became divided into the opposing camps of the disciples faithful to the Baba and those who chose to drop out. More than five years after his arrest, the feelings between the two groups are still marked by antagonism towards each other. In Manjapur there are only two families of 'Baba people' left; they refrain from commensality with the opposite majority group and restrict their social intercourse with them to a minimum.

Administration: Traditional and Modern

The traditional kingdom was divided into territorial units known as pargana. It is possible that these units were once based on clanship and that each pargana was dominated by the clan who maintained territorial
rights over it. However in the light of present-day Muria social structure it would appear that this is a highly questionable assumption (see below Ch. 4). There is no simple coincidence between territory and clan identity and many different clans are found residing together in the same pargana. Nonetheless a pargana is not altogether devoid of social meaning. Men from diverse villages will often underline their unity on public occasions by reference to their residence in the same pargana. Each pargana was in the charge of an appointed official of the Raja, known as Majhi. The Majhi's duties consisted of representing his pargana to the king and of organizing rituals devoted to the State Goddess, as well as presiding over conflicts, within it. One Majhi's jurisdiction spread over about fifty villages and he consequently spent a lot of time travelling. The Majhiship was hereditary, confined to a single lineage. Once a year, Majhis from the district gathered at Jagdalpur for an audience with the king who presented each with a red turban that was the insignia of his office. (The Majhis still receive their red turbans from important government visitors to the region). Apart from this the Majhi received no remuneration.

During the 1977 elections the Congress Party adopted a strategy of wooing the pargana Majhis into canvassing on its behalf. It was felt that on account of the formality of their office, a Majhi's words would carry weight and influence among the members of the pargana. But it is misleading to think that direct service in the king's administration and the duties that it implied would lead automatically to the establishment of a personal basis of power and influence. The authority of the Majhi was more illusory than real; it was not based on any sanctions that he could bring to command obedience. Most Majhis were relatively poor men who could at most count on a show of compliance at public occasions. The Majhi could not violate the supreme and abiding influence of the village council (bhumkal). Whatever his own personal opinion may have been, conflict settlements had to be decided in consultation with the local villagers. Indeed usually the village council decided disputes without inviting his opinion. The Majhi of the Chhota Dongar pargana within which fieldwork was conducted, did not stress his Majhi-hood, but rather his position as the Gaita (earth-priest) of his village and it was obvious that he regarded it as conferring much greater prestige than his Majhiship. The office of Majhi may have contributed to a certain measure of personal influence in
social relationships, and as a man who could supply gossip on the goings on in other villages his presence at drinking parties would not go ignored. But it did not, by itself, give him any rights of command over other men.

The matter of fact way in which the Majhi is treated is revealing. The kingship was absolute; it could not be confounded with its representations, and the attitudes that characterized it could not be affixed, in howsoever diluted a form, on to those who were said to 'stand' for the King. It highlights also the freedom that the Muria enjoyed under the traditional, kingly regime. Representation would have had a practical importance if the king had been a terrible autocrat and his relationship with his subjects founded on the promulgations of decrees that affected their lives. As it was, the kingship was notable only for its unimportance so far as any practical consequences in the lives of the tribals were concerned. It was celebrated in ritual and myth, but was regarded as completely irrelevant to everyday life and economy.

The effects of the new administration have been the infiltration of a government bureaucracy into even the relatively isolated regions of the district. In Bastar there are to be found two classes of bureaucratic organizations. One is devoted to the Development and Glorification of Tribal culture and is to be seen in the profusion of tribal welfare agencies (Adim Jati Kalyan Kendras) that have sprung up all over the district. They are staffed by a mixed contingent of officials drawn from the Social Work, Education, Family planning, Conservation and even Museum schemes. It would be heretical, but nonetheless true, to say that this arm of the bureaucracy is the one that has the least contact with, and sympathy for, the tribals. It is safely confined to the tehsil (sub-district) headquarters and neighbouring villages, where its intentions to educate and provide better health facilities for the tribals are pathetically proclaimed in gaudy hoardings and in messages and patriotic slogans plastered on neat little concrete buildings. A second type of bureaucratic organization is concerned with the business of administrative control as exemplified in the Revenue, Police and Forest departments. To the tribals the introduction of such administration has meant coping with a bewildering mass of paperwork concerning land registration and revenue, and with curbs on the use of forests and meadows that are now categorised
as government property. But by far the most important, and to the tribals, the most inimical, agency of the state is the Forest Department.

Bastar district is justly famous throughout India for the wealth of its forests: about 70% of the district is covered in forest. The forests have been classified by the Forest department, on the basis of accessibility to exploitation by the natives. The government forests (that is, those that do not fall on land registered in the names of private individuals) comprise about 57% of the total, and these are further subdivided into 'reserved forests' which are strictly forbidden to the inhabitants, and 'protected forests' (nistari van). The protected forests are the most crucial to village economy for they are generally found on the fringes of cultivated land. Their products provide a supplement to the diet as well as a source of cash income, quite apart from their role as providing an avenue for recreation and escape from the village scene. When bored, Murias plan expeditions of kotom valli or "forest roaming" with their companions and pass the time either in hunting birds and game, or in collecting seeds, and gathering edible fruits and leaves, or simply in exploring parts of the forest.

The fieldwork village was surrounded by thick, primary, 'protected forest' and the Muria here were more fortunate than tribals in other parts of Madhya Pradesh (cf. Saxena 1964) in that within limits, they enjoyed free access to forest produce. The villagers could, for example, fell any amount of trees which were under three feet in girth. They could also collect forest produce such as seeds, lac, fruit etc. without having to pay even a nominal fee (this is not so of bamboo). A grazing fee per head of domestic animal was fixed but it was small and did not tax the budgets of most villagers. The Muria are also entitled to supplies of construction timber free of charge, and in theory, such a request would be granted on the filing of an application with the Forest authorities. But in practice, the application has to be accompanied by a bribe and some entertainment of the officer in charge. It is invariably an expensive and time-consuming operation, and the reason for which tribals are tempted to neglect the business and simply steal logs from the forest under cover of darkness.
The majority of such thefts go undetected, but the possibility and the fear of being apprehended by the local forest guard on his patrol is real enough. Interaction with forest guards is always dreaded because of its intimidatory and exploitative nature. The normal punishment is the payment of a set fine in cash, but a negotiation almost always takes place whereby the amount is supplemented by a goat, cow or several hens to be delivered to the forest guard himself, on pain of a substantial increase in the fine.

The system of forest guards has enabled the Forest Department to penetrate into the most remote and isolated areas of the district, where it is the only government agency to maintain a mostly hostile, yet persistent contact with the natives. The words nakedar and daphydar meaning 'guard' and 'ranger' are common in Muria vocabulary and only few Muria have met with government officials from any other department. I only once encountered a forest guard who was a tribal and had his roots in the area. On the whole, the forest guards are recruited from different districts and even states in India and are transferred to Bastar fairly early on in their careers. A posting may last as long as seven years, and the forest guard becomes a part of the local scene. A typical posting consists of a settlement of standard two-room concrete dwellings that are typical forest guard accommodation, and his social life contracts to a circle of a few local forest guards and their families. Apart from the trips to the town and a rare home visit on leave, a guard's life is a monotonous round of gossip sessions at the local tea shop and lonely patrols to villages in the interior. Most forest guards have rural origins anyway, and so it is not the hectic life of cities that they miss. They are generally young and ambitious and regard a posting in an isolated region far away from home as more than compensated for by the opportunities it affords for the exercise of power and most importantly, for the accumulation of small amounts of wealth by underhand means. In a very matter of fact manner a forest guard once explained to me, the different schemes he used for appropriating government money entrusted to him for payment of forest labour and other services; there was no other way, he said that he could afford the lavish food and generosity with which his boss, the Divisional Forest Officer, had to be kept for the two or three days of his monthly tour when he visited the settlement. Forest guards are also in a position of being able to arrange the unhampered passage of
truckloads of illegally felled timber for sale to furniture merchants in Raipur.

It is perhaps ironical then, that forest guards are formally entrusted with the task of policing the areas assigned to them to prevent the infringement of forest regulations by the local Muria. It is this aspect of their work which throws them into conflict with the local people. It is a universal truth with the forest department that the tribals are the major enemies of forest conservation and indulge in a reckless exploitation of forest. On one occasion, a distraught forest guard told me of the miles of valuable teak plantation that had been destroyed, when, he said, two Muria had lighted a fire for the purpose of smoking out a rabbit they were chasing. The Muria, however, accuse the forest department of being destructive agents themselves, and point to the truckloads of trees that are felled every day and transported elsewhere, and to the miles and miles of deforested land that results. The Muria regard the forest guards as rival competitors to forest wealth and a necessary evil of the state system. As to the attitudes of the forest guards towards the Muria it is difficult to say. I have often wondered whether forest guards do not maintain a contradictory and confused image of Murias and their society, based on a lack of coincidence between their public and private views of it. To all visitors the popular image of the Muria as somewhat stupid, lazy, poverty-stricken and drink besotted primitives is passed on. Privately however, it is my impression that the forest guards admire the Muria for possessing a formidable intelligence and cunning, as well as a standard of living that few forest guards can boast of having experienced themselves.

Besides the day-to-day administration which is mainly in the hands of the Forest department, there is a political superstructure which remains inactive for most of the time and springs to life only during the elections. We were fortunate to be in the field during the 1977 elections. Public meetings were hastily organized and the markets became the scene of frenzied political canvassing. The Muria have their share of political wisdom which emerges in their discussions with petty politicians of the area. On the whole, they have a pragmatic, political philosophy. Elections are regarded as pageants where very little is at stake. The replacement of
the government by another cannot mean the removal of its presence from their lives, and the internal quarrels of the government are best left to those that rule. Elections are a game in which a man must take sides on the basis of predictions concerning the outcome of the struggle. The thrill of having one's own side emerge victorious is not unlike that of having backed the winning cock at the local cock fight. Besides, being on the losing side automatically places a man in a position of disfavour with the authorities, so it is believed. Some Muria believe that the aftermath of elections will be a campaign consisting of vengeance against the supporters of the defeated groups who are rounded up and harassed by justifiably angry politicians. Shortly after the results of the elections had been announced, a man guiltily confessed to us that he had voted for the losing side. He wanted to get it all cleared up he said because it had not been his fault. In fact he had nothing to do with pressing the stamp on the symbol, which had resulted from a mysterious downward movement of the voting paper caused perhaps by the wind, and an involuntary placement of his hand so that "it just happened" that the stamp had come to be aligned with the unfortunate symbol.

Other Bastar communities: The Maria

Bastar district, like every other part of India is a culturally diverse entity, with many different groups living alongside each other. Bastar is predominantly 'tribal', but this fact does not imply the existence of autonomous, self-contained societies of 'tribes' - in this sense the term 'tribal' is a misnomer. In the Bastar context the designation 'tribal' means that the numerically dominant cultivating groups are members of 'scheduled tribes' as defined in the Indian constitution: it does not imply that these 'tribes' can be considered as self-contained social units, since these cultivating populations of 'tribal' people live in close co-existence with other and different communities, both 'tribal' and 'caste' groups. One must assume that a certain degree of cultural mix and heterogeneity has been a permanent feature of Bastar populations in the past, as it is observably so in the present. Aggarwal divides the district into seven cultural sub-regions, thus: a) Unclassified Gonds region; b) Bhatra and Dorla tribal regions; c) Muria tribal region; d) Dhurwa (Parja) tribal region; e) Bison-horn Maria tribal region; f) Abujhmaria tribal region. Aggarwal's procedure
is to list the cultural characteristics of each region in terms of its "cultural advancement" which is manifested in degree of Hinduization of "dress and house type". He finds the Unclassified and Bhatra and Dorla tribal regions, as well as the Dhurwa tribal region to be markedly more 'advanced' in this respect than the Muria, Bison-horn Maria and Abujhmaria tribal regions. Aggarwal mentions, but does not describe, the other communities of Hindu castes and Muslims he says are found in the regions. However the Chattisgarh Feudatory States Gazetteer of 1909 devotes an equal amount of attention to describing 'Hindu' and tribal Gond communities within Bastar. It lists the following groups in the 'caste' category: Brahmans, Halbas, Dhakars, Panaar or Maraars, Rawits, Kalars, Gandas, Pankas, Sundis and Gadbases. The Gazeteer also makes an observation especially relevant for the purposes of this thesis, namely that "Adult marriages are the rule among the Gonds. Among the Hindus they generally take place before puberty". This point will become important at a later stage.

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It is not necessary to go into a detailed description of the ethnography of most of the above mentioned groups, as the Muria never, or very rarely have an opportunity to come into contact with them. But it is necessary to emphasize the point about the co-mingling of groups who are identifiably (and were so in 1909) Hindu in their lifestyle, and those who are 'tribal', even in the "culturally backward" part of Bastar indicated by Aggarwal. Indeed one finds, in the "Muria tribal region" groups who could be placed at all points along a culturally conceived 'tribe-caste' continuum. The important attributes of all the larger groups living in Muria country have been listed in the above table. All these communities have complex relations with the Muria, and exert powerful influences on Muria customs. The most important, and largest Hindu caste group as far as the Muria are concerned, is the Maraar community. The Maraars share villages with the Muria and they could be said to embody the typical values of Hindu caste society; they connect with mainstream Hindu society. The Maraar regard themselves as being of impeccable Hindu pedigree — and are seen as such by the Muria. The Maraars are described at a later section of this thesis. For the time being it is important to concentrate on the 'tribal' neighbours of the Muria — the Maria. If the Maraars fall on the extreme 'caste' end of the spectrum, the Marias by contrast, are to be placed on the extreme 'tribal' end of the spectrum.

The Muria have a consciousness of themselves as falling somewhere intermediate between the Maria and the Maraar: although this awareness is not quite so cogently expressed, it is suggested by the Muria self-image of being "civilized Maria". In other words, both Muria and Maria regard themselves as one people; Muria use the term "koitor" both for themselves and for other Maria, thereby affirming common ethnic identity with the Maria and their separation from other non-koitor groups. However, the Muria have an ambivalent attitude towards the Maria. They stress their cultural affinity with them but also are at pains to distinguish themselves from them. They see the Maria as socially and culturally backward, and there is no doubt that if the Murias are seen as 'jungle primitives' by the Hindu population the Marias are viewed in a similar light by the Muria. Murias distance themselves from their 'primitive' neighbours by making disparaging comments about the rootless existence of the Marias in their temporary villages, and even their childish,
irresponsible mentality; for example, I was told by one Muria that Marias have fragile kinship ties and cared little of whether their kinsmen lived or died, echoing precisely the opinions held by local Hindu officials about the Murias. Muria and Maria Gondi is only slightly different and both groups can converse with each other, and may also inter-marry with one another. The organizational framework of Muria religion – the gods and inter-village visitations and first-fruit rituals – encompasses both Muria and Maria territory. Many Muria gods are the progeny of Maria gods according to local mythology. Maria gods, are perhaps for this reason, feared by the Muria for being the more malevolent, powerful gods and more numerous than Muria gods. The clan god of the Koramis, a clan group found in the fieldwork village, resides permanently in Maria territory, and is ministered to routinely by Maria priests. When the divinity made the customary ten-yearly visit to Muria territory a major ritual was convened to which representatives from both Muria and Maria villages were present. However it was the Marias who monopolized ritual services to the divinity, much to the annoyance of the local Murias. This is in accordance with the Muria view of the Marias, however, because the Marias, living in the forest (kotum), the domain specially associated with the gods, are believed to have special virtuosity in religious matters, as well as in black magic and sorcery. In other respects too, the Maria act out the Muria image of them as 'wild' people: for example, the boisterous dancing style of the young Maria girls and boys arouses mild derisory laughter among the 'civilized' Muria. Muria and Maria also present a distinctively different appearance: Maria women are heavily tattooed on the face – a practice that is disdained by the Muria as unbecoming, and Maria women leave their breasts uncovered in a way the Muria consider immodest.

The Abujhmar region, where the Maria are found, has not yet been surveyed by the Indian government for revenue purposes, and neither does the area have an infrastructure of roads which is a pre-condition for settlement and penetration by Hindu groups. The Government has a definite policy of discouraging outsiders from even temporary visits to the area, and all persons, including Indian citizens, interested in doing so must first apply for permission and then agree to leaving their cameras behind – a precautionary measure designed to prevent "exploitation of tribal nudity", which is seen by bureaucrats as inevitably the primary motive for
undertaking such a visit. The Maria have therefore been relatively isolated, while the Muria have always had some contact with Hindu groups.

The Maria are discussed at different points in the thesis. For the present it is best to end this section with a note on the Maria Ghotul which although going by the same word, is very different in organization and membership to the Muria Ghotul. The ethnographer of the Maria, Grigson, mentions it as a "bachelors dormitory" to which no girls are admitted. Grigson also contrasted the Maria Ghotul with the Muria one, believing the latter to be a tribal method of training young girls and boys, thus:

"There is no system of training Hill Maria children corresponding to the Gotul or Dormitory system of the Murias, except in the northernmost Hill Maria parganas of Padalbhum and Nurbhum. In the greater part of the Maria country children learn simply by accompanying and imitating their parents and elder boys of the village. At night the boys who are old enough to leave their mothers sleep in the communal dormitory and in the evenings they sit outside the dormitory round the fire with the men of the village ... Girls similarly soon learn domestic routines from their constant association with their mothers. They cannot associate with boys in the manner of the Murias, among whom every girl must attend the boys' dormitory every night and has her own gotul 'boy-friend' to serve, since these gotul unions must be between couples who could legitimately marry under the rules of exogamy, and in nearly all Hill Maria villages all the boys and girls are of the same clan and therefore kindred." (1938: 267).
The fieldwork on which this thesis is based was conducted in Manjapur village some twenty five km. south of the tehsil headquarters at Narayanpur. (map II) Manjapur is a 'typical' Muria village for its immediate area (Narayanpur tehsil) but of course no village is really typical since local factors, such as closeness to roads, or a town, the nature of the topography, the availability of land, water, forest, etc. all vary from place to place, as does the proportion of Muria occupants of the village to those belonging to other groups. But in the Manjapur locality all Muria villages have certain assets which enable them to carry on a distinctively 'Muria' mode of livelihood. That is to say, each village will:

1) have access to a market (hatum)
2) have access to a river (berer)
3) have some swidden land (dipa)
4) have some grazing land (bhat)
5) have some forest (kotum)
6) have some levelled paddy fields (vedang).

The present chapter presents a generalised picture of the environment of the characteristic Muria village. The aim is to provide some degree of orientation for the reader, who may be more used to visualising the tightly-packed village and intensively-exploited countryside of more densely occupied parts of India, rather than the lush setting and dispersed settlement pattern of the villages described here. Muria land is rolling, heavily forested, and where the forest has been cleared there are large areas of scrub and rough pasture, and only a relatively small proportion of the land is ploughed for paddy each year. The Muria landscape is more than a patchwork of different categories of land: grazing, forest or field; it is also a conceptual landscape which provides the basic backdrop for all phases of Muria life. In what follows I will briefly sketch in not only the utilitarian aspects of the various features
of the Muria environment, but also say something about the conceptual significance of each.

Muria villages lie in a broad belt to the east of the mountainous Abujhmar area. Manjapur lies actually on the edge of the Abujhmar scarp, while most other villages have some hilly terrain within their boundaries, either the Abujhmar itself or its outlying foothills. We can give a generalized impression by means of a diagram showing a section through Manjapur territory on an E-W axis.

Muria villages, like Manjapur, are territorial units within which settlement is dispersed, the houses interspersed among the level areas where paddy fields have been constructed. The figure below provides a schematic representation of the relationship between the patchwork of adjoining nar (villages/territories) into which the country is divided. Each village is represented as a core area of vedang (fields) surrounded by its dipa (swidden land), bhat (grazing land), and kotum (forest). A more detailed village map of Manjapur is provided below (Map II).
The region and the Market centres

Alfred Gell has shown that for most Muria, regional geography is understood primarily in terms of the hierarchy of Market centres (A. Gell: 1982). Manjapur is in Narayanpur tehsil and Narayanpur is the major local market and local centre, though many individuals have visited Kondagaon (75 km. away by road, though only about 50 as the crow flies) and some have ventured further afield still, to the district capital Jagdalpur (120 km. to the south), though visiting Jagdalpur has declined since the abandonment of the royal rituals at the Dushera festival which used to draw many tribals to the capital once a year. Nowadays the great fair (mandhai) at Narayanpur is the most important regional festival commonly attended by people from Manjapur.

Narayanpur is about 25 km. away. Not all Manjapur villagers have been there (especially women and children below the age of ten or so, but most have at one time or another). For most Manjapurias, as the villagers are called, Narayanpur is a market, rather than an administrative centre, and few Muria have any contact with the legions of government officials who throng the place, going about their bureaucratic rituals. Narayanpur is a bigger, better, but more distant version of the Manjapurias 'own' market.
which is held at Dhorai. We may truthfully say that the Manjapur world starts at Dhorai market which is the point of contact between Manjapur and the dimly perceived 'outside world' reigned over by Indira Gandhi from her golden palace. At Dhorai, therefore, one can begin the description of the Manjapur environment.

Dhorai is a small village (population: approx. 500) which owes its importance firstly to its location along the only road in the region, and secondly to the forests which surround it, considered richer than most because of the prevalence there of valuable teak trees. It is a centre for minor forest department personnel who live there in relative contentment - happy to be able to enjoy trips to Narayanpur, and to take advantage of the illegal sale of teak timber which forest guards in other, teak-deprived, zones are denied. Dhorai is definitely cosmopolitan by the standards of the area. It has a mixed population of forest guards originating from different parts of the country, a rich money lender from the south, a distiller and his family who have come from somewhere in the north, a large community of Bengali refugees and several members of the Kalar sub-caste. This is bought out in the architectural styles of houses seen in Dhorai which range all the way from the most rustic constructions to a lavish, modernised rest house for forest officials. The transitory and displaced feeling that the place communicates is reinforced by the attitude of the surrounding populace for whom Dhorai as a village and government centre is coincidental and secondary to its function as a Friday market (hatum). The hatum is the high point of the week, and a full description of it has been given by A. Gell.

For Murias, no pleasures and excitements can equal those of imbibing the sights and sounds of the local market. Immaculately coiffured Ghotul girls and boys rub shoulders with sedate Maraar matrons, village elders sit in gatherings under trees drinking wine and discussing local politics amid the hubbub of activity and the background patter of stall keepers and vegetable sellers. There is a vast and tempting array of consumer goods that can be bought: factory spun cloth in all colours, bangles of every conceivable size and description, cosmetics, talcum powders, hair oils, hair pins, brooches, perfumed soaps, keys, ribbons, beads, bags, and the much sought-after 'snow' cream popular with Muria girls. The four or five tea
shops do brisk business as the Murias flock to them for exotic snacks made from wheat flour fried in huge cauldrons on the spot, from which there emanates the most delicious aromas. A common sight is that of men and women huddled around a huge mound of dried red chillies using all their powers of discernment to identify the sharper tasting ones. This ingredient is vital to Muria cuisine. Another essential, purchasable only at the market, is salt, which is bought for cash or bartered in exchange for lentils, and vegetables.

The merchants' stalls, about twenty five of them, are the part of the market which represents to the Murias the remote corners of the outside world with which direct familiarity is impossible. The stall keepers are Hindus who have been doing the 'bazaar' circuit for many years, and even generations and who can cajole their Muria customers into buying their goods in fluent Gondi. Muria men prefer to cluster around the jewellers who rank the highest in terms of a prestige system which evaluates the sellers according to the value of their wares. It is at the jewellers too that men congregate in order to pick up absorbing details appertaining to the financial strengths and vicissitudes of prominent local individuals. Men who can give 5000 rupees for gold necklaces are instant saukars (men of wealth and influence) and those who can pay 700 rupees are at least to be accorded respectability. But perhaps the most entertaining event of hatum day, and one that is exclusively the preoccupation of men, is the cock fighting that begins as the women and children wearily make their journey home, and the last stalls pack up and leave. Bets are made, but these are relatively unimportant. The main payoff is in the form of the carcass which the owner of the winning cock can take home to be consumed. A cock that is a veteran of several victorious fights can fetch a high price in the market since such a cock will be considered desirable for breeding purposes. Cock fighting is less a spectator than a participatory sport: almost everyone present brings along a cock, or at least enjoys the satisfaction and excitement of watching a friend's cock win. Even poorer men, much to the chagrin of their women, will save their cocks from consumption during the year to risk them at the fights.

The Dhorai market is patronized by a population of about 6000 people inhabiting the 17 villages that lie within a radius of around ten miles.
from its centre. But the hatum is not a disorderly affair with only a commercial flavour. A. Gell has shown that it is regulated by a set of rules designed to preserve the structure of the wider society, and it therefore has a sociological importance as well. Hawking sites are distributed on a village basis; every man or woman sits in a group along with fellow villagers. The spatial arrangement of sites is such that the territorial layout of villages is condensed and reproduced within the hatum plaza. Space is also used to make symbolic statements about the prevailing social hierarchy: the Hindu Maraars occupy the central places, surrounded by the tobacco sellers, and toilet goods stalls, and encircling the entire lot on the peripheries, sit the Murias, the cloth traders, and the tea shops.

The market provides the outer framework of Muria village society. It is through the market that Muria enter into communication with the outside world and the various kinds of people it contains. But the market is essentially foreign: the medium of communication used tends to be Halbi rather than Gondi and even though trading at the market is very much part of the ordinary routine of Muria life, the market belongs to the non-Muria world, not to the world of the villagers themselves. Turning away from the exciting, but at the same time alien area of the market, I deal next with an environment in which the Muria feel fully at home, with which they identify, and with which they are identified by others - the forest.

The forest: utilitarian aspects

The forests of Bastar, beyond the officially designated dipa or swiddening areas, are conserved by the State Forest department. Muria have no right to fell trees greater than three feet girth for their own use, and no right to sell timber or bamboo of any description to outsiders. To this extent, the forest does not belong to the tribals at all; but this is not an accurate reflection of their own view of the matter. The saleable trees may belong to the Forest department, but the forest belongs to the village and is part of it.

Murias are, from the point of view of government agencies in the area, forest people, whose function it is to perform the labour needed to
extract timber from the forest. Most Muria men, at some stage of the year, work for the Forest department, and some for months at a time. The unmarried men, Ghotul-going girls, and any women unencumbered by children also find work, at only marginally less pay in the Forest department sphere. The colour and splendour of tribal gatherings is financed largely by the cash earnings of Forest department labourers, since Muria finery is not home produced. The Muria are able to indulge themselves in this respect because working for the Forest department is conveniently at its height during the dry season, when the cultivation of crops is at a stand still, and trucks can reach the coups (felling areas) in the deeper forest. This is the slack agricultural season, so cash earning and subsistence work do not conflict with one another. But highly important though this paid employment is to the 'luxury' sector of the Muria economy, the Muria attitude to the forest is more basic and traditionalistic than simply as the location of wage employment. The forest is a world on its own, delightful and also mysterious and frightening: the forest is nature in the raw.

The forest plays an integral role in Muria economy which is a mixture of hunting and gathering, and rice cultivation. Vegetables and leaves from the forest compensate for the general absence of domestic vegetable gardens which require irrigation and intensive cultivation. While rice is highest on the list of food priorities, Muria disdain the taking of rice by itself, and they welcome any addition to the daily meal in the form of vegetables and/or pulses. The Muria predilection for jungle leaves and shoots has impressed itself on the surrounding Hindu population. At a seminar on Tribal Education in Narayanpur to which we were invited, one of the main speakers emphasized the Murias' ingenuity in finding food in the forest, as one of the factors contributing to the essential durability and worthiness of tribal culture. The Murias on the other hand, are aware that selectivity with regard to food is an index of ritual refinement among Hindus. One woman pointed out to me somewhat apologetically the many different varieties of fresh leaves and shoots in her kitchen, saying: "We Murias will eat anything". (mamat bata tun pishom).

The gathering of food in the forest is the special province of women who organize collective expeditions to the forest in search of seasonal
fruit, tubers and vegetables. At the peak of the rice cultivation season, between July and September, jaunts to the forest provide a welcome relief from the oppressive work routine and women often spend three or four days making daily trips there in search of mushrooms which have a brief season at this time of year. Later, when bamboo shoots become available more time is spent in collecting huge bundles of them. Throughout the year tubers are also eaten.

Forest produce also enters into the cash or market sector of Muria economy. Murias are unwilling to sell any rice except when forced to by desperate circumstances. Women however hawk forest leaves and tubers at the bazaar and also exchange them for rice to Maraar women who are more restricted in their movements. Products from the forest are essential to Muria material culture. Houses, shelters for cattle, drying platforms for grain, are constructed from forest timber. Bamboo is used to make fences and also woven to make the many types of baskets which are used to carry and store grain and are indispensable to the gathering conducted in the forest. During the slack agricultural season women make trips to the forest to collect the reeds used to make a special type of sleeping mat (gig). These are subsequently exchanged at marriages, and regarded superior to the common bamboo one.

A major source of cash income for men, second only to daily labour with the Forest department, is the sale of silk cocoons (kosa). They are found only on the top branches of tall sal trees and so are difficult to obtain. They fetch a very high price at the market and are also used in the weaving of indigenous cloth.

The forest: conceptual aspects

The forest is the natural habitat of gods and ancestor spirits. The gods are thought of as capricious beings who indulge in play along with the wild animals who are their consorts. The feast that concludes the mortuary rite (katar) is always partaken in the forest, and the temples of pen gods (rawr) are constructed on the fringes of the forest, facing it.
Pen gods are born in trees in the forest. Men are informed of the birth of a god by a shaman while he is in a trance. He leads men to a tree in the forest and proceeds to bind it with a long thread. The tree is then felled and constructed into the wooden pole (kolang) that henceforth will be used as the special representation of that particular god. Theoretically the task of cutting any tree is accompanied by a certain amount of supernatural danger; it is impossible to foresee whether any tree is germinating, as it were, a village god, or whether there are gods playing about in its branches. There are stories told of men who have been taken violently ill and died after cutting a tree which unknown to them, harboured a god. Little children are generally prevented from loitering around under trees. There are precautions that can be taken so as to ward off impending disaster and avoid arousing the wrath of the gods, such as: a) not cutting the mard marra tree, and certain species of trees which bear a red, fleshy fruit regarded as particularly attractive to the gods; b) leaving undisturbed an old and gnarled tree. But such avoidances are not in the nature of taboos, and most Muria cut trees with reckless abandon whenever they have a need for wood. Trees are essential to Muria economy and the fact that their cutting can throw men and gods into conflict is just one of the unfortunate conditions of human existence.

Although gods and all sorts of malicious spirits are located in the forests, men are relatively free from supernatural attack in their own village forests. The maliciousness of the spirits who inhabit them has after all been bought under control by the regular offerings of gifts made collectively at rituals in the rawr temples. When a man desires the produce of forests that lie outside his own village bounds, he must ask for permission from that village's council of elders (bumkal) and he exposes himself to the risk of incurring a large fine, or worse still, supernatural punishment, if he violates these boundaries. This rule does not apply to edible jungle produce and women usually visit forests other than those of their own village in their gathering expeditions. But it is vigorously enforced with respect to the taking of wood, and also the burning off of swiddens. It is a capital sin, offensive to the gods, to use the branches of trees from some extraneous forest for the purposes of rejuvenating village land.
Whatever sinister connotations the forest has in Muria cosmology, to individual Murias it expresses freedom and escape from the pressures of daily life. The forest provides anonymity and solitude and time spent wandering in it complements the closely-lived domestic life of Murias. Women make more trips than are strictly necessary for little essentials, such as firewood and leaves to use as food containers. The wanderings of solitary women are regarded suspiciously as the forest is well-known as being the venue for the clandestine meetings of lovers. It is therefore only in a group of two or three companions that women venture out. This form of sociability is most enjoyed by the comparatively younger married women who are excluded from the institutionalized drinking and food parties of the village matriarchs. The forest also offers the exciting prospect of successful hunts and of hours spent in the company of age mates for men. From the age of eleven, and sometimes even earlier, groups of youth armed with their bows and arrows spend days exploring the wooded sections of the village, close to the house and discovering the whereabouts of monkeys, rabbits, snails and lizards, all of which are eaten.

The forest is at the opposite end of the spectrum of 'places' from the market. The market puts Muria into contact with Muria from different villages and with other groups, such as caste Hindus of various kinds, and superior kinds of people such as government officials, merchants etc. The forest is non-social and inhabited by different kinds of superior beings, i.e. gods, spirits etc. One can bring this out by mentioning a linguistic detail. The ordinary Gondi word for 'outside' is duwar: the word for tiger is duval. A tiger, the forest being par excellence is an 'outside being'. Although tigers are very rare nowadays, they still take the occasional cow or straying goat, and deaths as a result of attacks by tigers are well remembered, if not at all common recently.

Swidden fields (dipa): utilitarian aspects

As has been explained, the Muria are sedentary cultivators with permanent village sites and fields. The fraction of their economy which is devoted to the subjugation of the forest and conversion of it into cultivable fields is confined to the outlying belt round the village.
called dipa. However it must be pointed out that this swiddening only takes place within the village boundaries. In other words, whole villages do not move along with sites, and they are not determinative of village boundaries. It is not possible to generalise with any confidence as to when the Muria rejected reliance on the shifting technique and adopted a more settled mode of agriculture. The fact that their society is based on the notion of discrete village units makes it highly unlikely that it is a particularly recent acquisition. As far as it is possible to discern from informants' statements, the Muria have always considered themselves settled cultivators. Nothing in the earlier ethnographies tends to suggest that the Muria were more mobile in the 30's than they are now.

The dipa is a special land type defined by the utilization of slash and burn techniques. But it is a spatial category as well and one that is meaningful only in terms of its position within the spatial structure of the village. It is always located between the vedang or field zone and the forests that border the village. It functions as a territorial marker circumscribing the two zones and in some ways it could be said to insulate the village from its forest wildernesses.

In Manjapur, the dipa lies at some distance from the inhabited section of the village. Consequently a trip to the dipa requires a full days absence away from home. Work parties are organized and food taken from home and eaten there. Work at the dipa takes on an expeditionary character, unlike the more routine nature of work in the fields close to home.

The clearing of dipa fields is a slow and arduous task. The larger trees are felled and dragged to the peripheries of the site; whatever small bushes remain are then fired along with collected brushwood. Before crops are sown the land is ploughed. The villagers complain however that dipa soil is coarse grained and stony causing their ploughs to wear down rapidly and contrast it to the soft, clayey soils found in the established paddy fields. It is regarded as highly fertile and the crops sown in it are more or less bound to flourish for they are able to tap the vitality of a soil close to its primeval state, and because Muria believe that the technique of firing further stimulates the soil's natural fertility.
The creation of dipa fields is tightly controlled by the government since it poses a direct threat to the forests. I was informed by the local Patwari (land-revenue collector) that at present each Manjapur family was entitled to about five hectares of dipa and that dipa making was confined to specific areas only.

The crops grown in the dipa form a special class, categorically opposed to those grown in the vedang paddy fields and dandi fields that are not man-made constructions as are paddy fields. These crops are kohla and gorang (varieties of millet, still the main staples of the Maria in the mountainous Abujmar area, where swidden agriculture still dominates) and the hard, dark green lentil pupulu. These crops, which so to speak represent the 'prehistory' of Muria society, are integrated in the Muria diet with the staple, rice. Millet is an essential ingredient of jawa (a gruel of rice, ground millet and corn) which the Muria take to fortify themselves throughout the day. Pupulu is the archetypal lentil to be eaten with rice meals. The dipa therefore is essential to the Muria conception of a proper dietary balance.

The dipa: conceptual aspects

The dipa-grown lentil, pupulu and the shining white rice (nukang) are both sacred, ritualised foods: the first fruits ceremonies for each being the most important events on the agrarian ritual calendar. Pupulu is singled out for its ritual importance by two factors: firstly, where it grows (on the margins of the forest and the village) and secondly, by its physical characteristics as it is dark (as opposed to light) and above all, slippery, mobile, as opposed to rice which is stodgy and solid. In other words, pupulu is labile and marginal as opposed to rice which is firm and central. Pupulu comes to prominence, as one might expect, at times of birth, boundary crossings. The Muria year begins with the first-fruits ceremonies for pupulu which take the form of a visitation by the forest dwelling gods who come and enjoy themselves in the village; this is pen karsna or 'the play of the Gods'. The pen gods are feted at this time in order to ensure that they keep out of the village during the crucial rice-growing season which is just about to begin. This ceremony (in the third week of April in Manjapur) is far too complicated to be described at this
stage; but it is sufficient to note the strong association between the pupulku first-fruits and the passage of the gods through the village. The slippery marginality of pupulku can be seen just as clearly but on a smaller scale, so to speak in connection with the ceremonies of birth. Here pupulku balances rice as a means for bringing about bodily deflation as opposed to rice which inflates the body. The Muria believe that life consists of a struggle to maintain the balance between the two conflicting and equally harmful tendencies: to bloat and expand with over-indulgence and to wither and shrink with excessive restraint. They also believe in the existence of a caterpillar (puri) that lives in the stomach of all living things which ingests food, breaking it down into the form in which it leaves the body as faeces. Without this caterpillar life would come to an end as the body would simply retain all its food and the person eventually swell up and die. On the other hand, if food were not passed to it, the caterpillar itself would die. After child-birth, the mother is given only one meal of rice a day for a month until the child-naming ritual (satti) takes place. A woman explained to me that this was on account of the fact that the baby's caterpillar was also immature, and thus incapable of processing the solid food that would pass to it, via the mother's milk. The taking of solid food, i.e. rice, is dangerous to the mother as her body is considered to be in a marginal condition as a result of the sudden changes resulting from giving birth. Pupulku and fish are given in great quantities to the mother at this time specifically because of their 'labile' qualities. At the naming ritual pupulku is cooked in the same pot with rice and offered ceremonially to the mother and baby, thereby symbolizing the end of the taboo period and the bringing together of solid and fluid foods in these two substances. It is also the occasion at which ties are severed with the ancestor spirit that has protected the child during its sleep in the womb. Pupulku is the vehicle along which sacred ancestor spirits leave the child's body. Only after this release has been affected can the child be given an individual name and social identity.

Rice fields (vedang): utilitarian aspects

The staple Muria crop is rice, and the mainstay of their life and economy is the cultivation of many varieties of paddy. The economy is
diversified enough to allow also the growing of other crops, such as lentils, mustard and other oil seeds, as well as a few garden vegetables, but all these are secondary to the principle crop which is paddy. All Muria eat two main meals of rice and relish a day, in quantities that vary according to economic status, and their daily intake of rice is augmented by copious servings of jawa rice gruel.

The most superior land in Manjapur is that which has been converted into the paddy fields known as vedang. In terms of the gradations of land types from forest to dipa and bhat, vedang lies at the extreme 'cultural' end of the continuum: much human labour and expertise is essential to their construction.

Vedang are fashioned out of dandi fields. Dandi are permanent fields but without the water-retaining devices of vedang fields. The earth is dug up and huge chunks of it transported to the sides to form the embankments that are the distinctive sign of the vedang field. The entire process is slow and labour-consuming. Care has to be taken to ensure a level surface free of slopes and depressions. After the embankments have been raised to about three feet above ground level, a system of irrigation sluices is constructed out of the hollowed-out logs of trees. The best vedang are the ones with the highest embankments and the most efficient drainage facilities. But not all vedang remain in their pristine condition and most of the so-called vedang in Manjapur are a far cry from the ideal one. Each field needs to be worked upon prior to the planting season as the embankments become eroded by the action of heavy rains during the previous season. In order to make vedang labour must be diverted from other pressing tasks and sources of food or cash income. It is the rich who can pay for the extra labour who can afford to invest in vedang. Vedang are the thin end of the wedge of economic differentiation: the more vedang a man has the more labour he can afford subsequently in order to establish even more vedang and so on. Some men in Manjapur possess no vedang, some make half-hearted efforts to make them, and others have a high proportion of vedang to other types of fields.

To the Muria, the prosperity of their economy is reflected in the presence of numerous vedang fields. They point out that vedang are not as
dependant upon a regular supply of monsoonal rain and can survive small periods of drought. Vedang are also regarded as highly economical in terms of the ratio of seed sown to crop harvested. Their productivity is also based on their ability to support higher yielding varieties of rice. The Muria list sixteen types of paddy, and of these the ones selected for planting in vedang are either the more delicate, low-yielding ones that get a higher price in cash markets, or some special native varieties considered superior because of their glutinous, voluminous quality.

Rice fields are found where the topography permits. As they require care and maintenance, they are generally concentrated fairly close to one another, rather than being dispersed like lentil and millet fields. Murias do not go to the trouble of terracing slopes and hillsides and there is no rule about house-sites being immediately adjacent to the fields. But whatever the distribution of fields in relation to houses, the vedang belt is always 'internal' and centrally placed in relation to the dipa and forest. It would be thought of as highly anomalous for a man to make a rice field in a clearing in the forest, or to set aside some dipa for such a purpose, as both dipa and forest must remain peripheral.

The common Asian technique of rice transplantation is known but seldom practised. Rice seeds are rolled in cowdung, as this is believed to hasten their sprouting, and then broadcast. Little children are sent to drive away the flocks of birds which swoop down at this time, while adults attend to the dykes and sluices. Once the plants are about a foot high, the most onerous task connected with rice cultivation - weeding - is begun. It involves long hours of back-breaking labour spent in the wet, muddy fields. The richer families try to hire labour for this purpose as intensive weeding is considered to greatly increase the chances of a good harvest. During the rice growing season which lasts from June to November life for the villagers takes on a hectic pace: as much work as possible is crammed into the daylight hours and the centre of domesticity shifts from the house to the fields and field-houses. Families depart at dawn, return briefly to snatch a meal and come back at night exhausted. Rice cultivation does not take up all the time; cattle have to be kept out of the way of rice fields, and taken to the forest to graze. A common cause of friction between villagers is the accusation that someone's cattle have
rampaged through a rice field. In November the rice is harvested. There are two types of threshing operations. In one the harvested rice is piled at the centre of a carefully swept courtyard. Four to six cows are yoked together to a pole standing upright in the centre of the rice heap. The cows are then driven to trample the heaped rice while a man follows behind them, turning over the trampled sheafs. The other technique is for men to trample the rice with their own feet - an extremely labourious, tiresome process. The threshing takes place gradually and is spread over several months. The threshed rice is then winnowed in the wind.

Vedang: conceptual aspects

Rice is at the top of a hierarchy of food substances. Not only is it the most highly sought after and desirable food, but in ritual contexts it is used as a symbol of good-sacredness versus the sacred marginality of pupulku, and the profaneness of certain other foods like sonang and batrang pulses which have no special ritual significance.

At the sowing ritual (Korri-Della) natural and human fecundity are linked and the spheres of vedang and rice integrated with that of house and domesticity. The Korri-Della ritual falls into two parts which create this linkage. The first part takes place in the fields and is presided over by the village priest (Gaita). The Gaita in Manjapur has to be a small boy, who is kept in special seclusion, away from all profane activities, and who is forbidden to attend the village dormitory. This boy-priest sacrifices a chicken to the demi-urge Tallur Muttay who pervades the village earth, and sprinkles its blood over one field belonging to every male member of the village. Later the same day the unmarried girls of the village visit each house of the village and paint dotted patterns on the door and the wall of the house. They make similar patterns on the winnowing baskets used by women in de-husking the daily rice supply. The patterns are made from rice flour, tumeric powder and charcoal and resemble the tattoo markings on women's bodies made when they reach puberty. The girls sing marriage songs and dance for a while, departing only after they have been given a token payment of rice beer and dargno liquor. It can be appreciated that there is an analogical similarity in the acts of sowing rice by making holes with little digging sticks which is the method adopted by the Gaita on this day,
and that of impressing patterns on mud walls; both the ritual sowing and pattern making are referred to as kothina.

After this ritual, comes the first-fruit ritual for the new rice. It is the only first-fruit ceremony of its kind that takes place within the house and in which women are pivotal to the proceedings. New rice (satka vanjing) is roasted on a fire and cooked in milk and then given to domestic cattle specially bedecked in flowers for the occasion, and to the family ancestors residing in an earthen pot (hanal kurma) kept in the inner room of the house. While women look after the guests and arrange the feast, men take turns visiting every house in the village. They are greeted by women who press wet rice on their foreheads, and salute them formally at the same time.

The atmosphere at these rice rituals is totally unlike the atmosphere at the corresponding pupulku rituals mentioned before. It would be out of place here to go into detailed exegesis, but essentially it can be said that pen karsna the pupulku ritual, stresses the periphery or 'outer frame' of the village by mobilizing whole villages in massive celebrations that involve mutual ritual services between neighbouring villages while rice rituals concentrate on the 'inner frame' of the village: the component households, each of which conducts its celebrations separately. With the emphasis on domesticity in rice rituals comes also a stress on femininity and domestic purity. Where the pupulku ritual brings men into relation with the 'external' forest dwelling gods - a transaction that is mediated entirely by men, the rice rituals bring men into contact with the indwelling gods that reside in the fertile earth below, and in the fertility of women and the transaction as a whole is mediated by women who play the major ritual roles as well as bear the children. The opposition dipa/vedang therefore goes far beyond a simple difference in technology or types of crops. It expresses the tension between the village as a political unit, a society, versus the village as a collection of separate domestic units.
Interspersed between forest and fields are patches of grazing land known as bhat. In stark contrast to the usually luxuriant forest, and the well-defined fields, bhat is barren land that sprouts a typical vegetation of tall grasses and the occasional tree. Bhat land is infertile and produces no food. It does have a role in Muria subsistence indirectly since it is useable as common grazing land. The possession of a large herd of ploughing cattle is the most obvious sign of wealth for a Muria villager, and is the source of prestige and influence in village affairs. Livestock owners, therefore, derive great benefit from the bhat where cattle may be grazed without cost to the owner. But the bhat is not seen as a resource independently of the animals which are individually owned. But there is one respect in which the bhat is directly exploited. At certain seasons of the year it is the scene of convivial work activities in which groups of children, girls and boys of the ages of six to eleven, roam the scattered sections of bhat land pollarding its bushes and small saplings of turner whose fresh, green leaves, when they sprout, are used for binding the bidi cigarettes smoked throughout India. The children are given about four to eight annas a day for pollarding. When the bushes put on their fresh leaves, women and children collect bundles of them for the contractors who come from Raipur and pay cash for them. The leaves are taken to factories in Raipur, and distributed to other parts of India.

Bhat is dying land, destroyed by continuous swiddening or cultivation. As such it represents the negative aspects of human endeavour and the presence of extensive areas of bhat is always a matter of some concern to the villagers. Bhat occupies an interstitial position in the system of spatial categories. The characteristic that points to its marginality is its reversibility. Bhat is not only patches of land that have formerly been forest, but it is also decayed land which has previously been fields; moreover, on occasion new fields are laboriously constructed in the bhat. In this way, the bhat becomes the archetype, in ecological terms of intermediacy and indeterminacy: bhat is the grey area between nature and culture.
Grazing land (bhat): conceptual aspects

The marginality of the bhat emerges most clearly in its metaphorical usages in everyday speech. Menstruating women are euphemistically referred to as "coming on the bhat" (bhat takey aina). This usage may perhaps be a carry over from the old practice of building menstrual huts, still carried on by the neighbouring Hill Maria. It is more probable that it reflects the socially marginal or 'invisible' status of the woman, who is restricted from joining the company of men and women and must eat, drink and bathe separately from them for the duration of her menses. In Muria eschatology, ancestors are classified in terms of the positions they occupy in a spatial universe: the spirits of men and married women reside in the ancestral pots kept in the inner rooms of houses; those of unmarried women whose links to lineage and clan via their husbands remains unrealized are said to hover around the bhat. The bhat is also a burial ground for men, women and children.

The Ghotul dormitory of adolescent girls and boys is also categorically equated with the bhat: going to the Ghotul is "going to the bhat". This terminological usage reflects the 'interstitial' nature of the Ghotul institution as a whole, about which I shall have more to say later on. The period of adolescence lies between the sexual and social maturity of adulthood and the socially irresponsible period of childhood. Its position in the human life cycle is an analogue of that of the bhat in the ecological natural cycle.

In ordinary usage bhat refers to an identifiable land type, but a bhat is, so to speak, 'created' whenever a problematic transition arises. There is said to be a 'bhat' between villages, marking a sociological transition, but there is also said to bhat (nadam bhat or "middle bhat") between any given house and its surrounding fields - despite the fact that the house may be surrounded on all sides by good land or dandi fields. It is the transitional character of the situation, rather than the objective land type that is referred to in this idiom as bhat.

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These spatial categories, kotum, dipa, vedang and bhat are the elements which make up the composite Muria landscape, the background to every kind of activity. But this is not all. The Muria think of this visible landscape as no more than a single level sandwiched in a whole sequence of worlds, each of which broadly resembles the other, but in such a way that any person from this world (the middle world or "nadum bhum") would find themselves lost, kinless, strangers in any other world, which would be familiar but at the same time totally alien. Nonetheless, that is the fate of the soul after death, to wander aimlessly in the porro bhum, the upper worlds, searching in vain for familiar landmarks, faces and possessions. Between these different worlds - seven in all - traffic is mediated by the Gods whose forest habitat in this world merges with their other-worldly residence in upper worlds. The tigers in the forest are the gods household pets, their dogs, who prey on man, their sport. This cosmology of endlessly reflecting mirror worlds is characteristic of aboriginal Indian religions (Furer-Haimendorf 1962; Fuchs 1977). The orientation of the Muria though, is definitely this-worldly; they are neither gloomily fatalistic or mystically inclined. Their attitude is perhaps best bought out in a poem by a Ghotul boy, Malu whose doings are reported at some length in a later chapter, and who may be allowed the last word, so far as this chapter is concerned.

Your kind of people and my kind of people will go to the upper world, by and by When its time to go, we will go to the Moon (or Silver) City Grandfather and Uncle, all will be there But they will not recognise or speak o us.

So put rice in the outstretched palm We had better look after ourselves while we are here, The great Goddess is roaming with us, Up there, the stones and the earth and the mud Are all the same.
4. THE MURIA CLAN

The preceding chapters have sketched in the background features of Muria country: it is now time to turn to the major problems to which this thesis is addressed. It is a question, essentially, of situating the Ghotul in its sociological setting, a problem which - as will be argued in more detail later - Verrier Elwin's voluminous writings left unsettled. This failure on Elwin's part arose from the insufficiencies of his attempts to give a coherent picture of Muria social organization. One sympathises with his efforts, and Grigson's, in this respect, because it is indeed the case that Muria social organization often seems maddeningly fluid and arbitrary; but the history of the last twenty years in Anthropology has been marked by many efforts to comprehend instances of social organization which resemble the Muria in their degree of apparent structural ambiguity and some of these efforts have been very successful in demonstrating unusual degrees of 'order' where, it would have appeared, only disorder was present. Indeed, partly what the thesis demonstrates is that the problem of the Ghotul, the rationale for its persistence and its centrality in the web of Muria village institutions, is intimately connected with the prevailing structural context of ambiguity in the institutional framework of Muria life. The Ghotul with its strong loyalties, and complex cultural embeddedness acts as a social focus which both modifies the autonomous status of the extended families which make up a Muria village, and ties them together in the pooling of their adolescent membership in a village-centred 'super-household', a household of households. The Muria are staunch defenders of the village dormitory institution as essential to the organizational requirements of their society (so that strong moral pressure is applied on parents to ensure attendance by their offspring); yet it is this same institution, the Ghotul, which is the source of a great proportion of the conflicts and disputes which are so common and so disruptive an aspect of Muria village life. This is the central paradox with which we need to come to terms in the ensuing chapters. In order to do so, it is first of all necessary to give a complete account of the contextual factors - the clan system, the village and territorial system,
and the domestic unit - which impinge on the Ghotul and at the same time are responsive to its presence.

When we consider these factors, what we find - and this is only what would be expected - is a multitude of conflicting elements: clanship conflicting with territorial alignments, village membership with household interests, economic self-interest with established alliance obligations and so on, so that the net result is by no means a stable equilibrium, but a series of situationally specific compromises that are united only by the fact that a common language and set of concepts are in play in negotiating each particular outcome. Anthropologists have become very familiar with these problems and perhaps the most convenient and relevant examples can be found in the debates in the literature on 'loose structure' in the New Guinea highlands, and in S.E. Asia. The study of tribal societies in India would benefit very much from the launching of a comparable debate to these ones, but the chances of such a debate are diminished by the quite major difficulty of defining a suitable frame of reference of 'roughly comparable' societies selected from the range of Indian so-called 'tribal' societies, not all of which bear any mutual resemblance. Comparative considerations must therefore be deferred - except for the references I shall be making to the Khond or Kond of Orissa described by Bailey (1957), and more important references to the Ghotul system prevailing among the Hill Maria. But the problems which are central to the debates between specialists in other ethnographic areas have a family resemblance to the issues which arise in the description of Muria social structure - or, one is tempted to say, lack of it. The issue, so far as the present chapter is concerned, is the presence of a clan organization which seems at one level to provide a representation of the total society, its segmentary parts and the relations of exchange (i.e. marriage alliance) which theoretically obtain between these units, but which does not define action groups or property-holding groups at all concretely. Muria clans are more than dispersed naming groups but less than corporate groups in the full sense, even at the level of the commonly residing set of members of a particular clan found in a single village (the level of the local sub-clan as one might call it, following the usage of Leach 1958). Understanding the role of the clan as the maximal unit of Muria social structure is the first major problem encountered in the
description of Muria society: it is not that Muria clans recruit members in non-unilinear (cognatic or locality-based) ways — though this does occasionally happen, but more that clan identity plays an ambiguous role in aligning actors socially. This ambiguity in defining the social meaning of clan membership has implications well beyond the sphere of clanship as such giving rise to a more pervasive ambiguity in reference group definitions which is relevant to the structural interpretation in which kinship, matrimonial alliance and locality and residence all play a part.

The indigenous term for Muria clans, 'per' is linguistically related to 'par' or 'pari' which refers to the mud embankments bordering vedang fields. In the light of the following discussion on Maria clans, it will be seen as fitting that the term pari which designates a division of physical space is indistinguishable from the one used to mark the boundaries of the social group as well: among the Maria pari is the word used for clan. Muria clans are patrilineal, membership passing from father to son. Clan membership is normally passed on to sons at birth, but in the case of adopted or illegitimate males, it is conferred as a result of residence with their adoptive parents, i.e. a woman's illegitimate child becomes a member of her legitimate husband's clan. Women are excluded from formal inclusion into the system of clans. When asked for the name of their clan, women will simply assert that their sex excludes them from clan membership and say that women do not have clans; when pressed for an answer they will state that they are the "daughters" of their fathers' clan. In the case of women living with their second husbands, the response to enquiries about clan affiliation is usually made in terms of the clan of their previous husband, and not the original clan of their fathers. In the system of clans, women are poised between paternal clans of origin, and the clans of their children's fathers, without being 'members' of either. There is an acknowledgement that their fate eventually is to become identified with another clan. When I remarked to a man who had informed me that frying rice pancakes was taboo for his clan that I had on several occasions seen his sisters frying them, he said that it did not matter what they did as he had "already given them to other clans". I may add that in this instance no suitor had been found for one of these girls so that this man was stating what he simply regarded as a foregone conclusion — women must be given away to clans of affines and therefore are outside the scope of their
paternal clan taboos, though they will have to observe their husbands' taboos eventually. This socially accepted fact that women are destined to become identified with their husband's clan is structurally important when considering the place of the Ghotul in Muria society, and within the village in particular. The 'daughters and sisters' (helar-miar) of the resident clans in a village are collectively seen as affines of the village via their role as mothers of in-marrying brides (father's sisters = mothers-in-law: on the terminological details, cf. below). Prior to becoming identified with their husband's clans with the social categorization as affines, the younger helar-miar are consigned, for a period, to the Ghotul, which also, and for this reason among others, stands in an 'affinal' relation to the village as a whole, which I will explore in greater detail later on.

It is not possible to elicit a comprehensive picture of Muria clans from any one informant. The list of clans given by men vary in composition and do not always overlap. Men generally enumerate somewhere between seven and ten named clans. Not only does the total number of clan units enumerated vary, but it is also impossible at times to identify and compare the level at which the units themselves have been defined. For example, a man may qualify a particular clan he has mentioned by reference to a territorial district - thus, the Korami of Vargama etc. but make no verbal discrimination between the Hallami clan of, say Mahima Gwari and Hallami found elsewhere.

One cannot use territorial maps to indicate the boundaries of clans; Muria clans are dispersed and it cannot be determined that at some archaic period they had definite geographical boundaries. Today the clan names are not associated exclusively with any particular territorial division, although informants when attempting to specify clans outside their immediate social experience will often associate a clan with a particular geographical area. This is purely a verbal shorthand however, and no homogeneous territorial clans are found upon investigation. The frequent references to village or broad territorial region which one finds in informants' statements is a device intended to segregate the members of a particular clan with whom the informant has some degree of social acquaintance from the wider, general clan about which the informant has no
personal knowledge but which he is aware exists. Rather than asserting a political hegemony over the area by the particular clan, such statements recognize the futility of generalization from one level to another and acknowledge the locally specific nature of 'parts' of the same clan. The clan picture must be built up piecemeal; the totality is arrived at by a mechanical process of adding together scattered pieces of the clan. At the present there is no village, let alone a district which is not a multi-clan entity.

The local dominance of a particular clan within a given area is a different question, and is a common enough phenomenon. Manjapur was situated in an area of Korami clan domination in that the most important political and ritual offices in the village were held by Koramis as they were in the two neighbouring villages of Atargaon and Bargaon. It was the Koramis who were said to have been the 'earliest' settlers in the village and who were entitled to prestige on account of their status as the oldest residents. There were more Koramis in Manjapur than were members of any other clan and between them they owned more land than any other single clan. However, they were not at any economic advantage vis-a-vis the other clan groups in the village in terms of the land held per head of the clan population. In this respect there could be said to have been an equitable distribution of land resources in the village. Nor did the Koramis distribute rights to the cultivation of Manjapur land. In fact, during the year that fieldwork was carried out, there was a reaction against the political dominance that larger numbers gave to the Korami clan in village politics, and in the general spirit of resentment, a man sold his land to a Hallami clan member, even though he was being offered a higher price by a Korami family. The Korami population of Manjapur, Bargaon, Atargaon does not constitute the entire Korami clan. Other patches of Korami concentration exist in geographically disparate areas - around Remawand, for example, which lies in a territorial district to the north-east of Chotta Dongar, in a different pargana altogether, some twenty miles distant from the Korami-dominated belt around Manjapur, and separated from it by areas dominated by other clans.

Clanship had no greater territorial meaning in traditional times. The political organisation of Bastar state relied on territorial divisions
known as parganas. Each pargana had its own Majhi nominated by the Raja, an officer responsible for organizing pargana wide rituals devoted to the state goddess Danteshwari, and for maintaining law and order within his pargana. However his powers were not commensurate with his duties, and he was titular than real leader of the district. The Majhi of a district was not chosen on the basis of his clanship as the mixed clan population of any pargana would have made this an impossible criterion to employ, and because the Majhi's clan affiliations could not have enhanced his legitimacy. With the collapse of the Bastar state, it is difficult to enquire into the rationale behind the selection of Majhis. It seems to have been entirely arbitrary, but a choice once made tended to be perpetuated in time as the hereditary office of a particular family or lineage.

The pargana was subdivided into villages (nar), but these were not mechanically related to one another as the segments of a clan. Clans as wholes are not effective territorial political units; they are never mobilized collectively in politics and no loyalty attaches to the clan unit vis-a-vis other clans. However, having said this, it is important to note that a much more rigidly territorial clan system, with strong associations between clanship and exclusive occupancy of tracts of land, is reported by Grigson for the Hill Maria in the Abujhmar, whose boundaries begin only a few miles from Manjapur. The difference between Muria and Maria clan and territorial arrangements are all the more striking in that they distinguish groups otherwise closely connected culturally and linguistically, and having the same ritual system, and indeed the Ghotul, though here also there are differences which will be dealt with later. As has already been explained the Muria and the Maria think of themselves as "one people" (i.e. koitor). What distinguishes them fundamentally is the presence of an agriculture dependent upon permanent fields (vedang) in the Muria case, and upon swiddening (penda) in the Maria case. Grigson's conclusions concerning Maria clanship are summarized in the following excerpt:
"...the clans are not merely little more than surnames; quite apart from questions of exogamy, they are, in the Abujhmar hills practically political units, each, at least of the flourishing clans with its own clan area; and each clan had a panchayat system for dealing with everyday offences. Clans may feel themselves closer to some others in kindred or affinity, as the case may be than to others; but on the whole it is the social solidarity of the clan and its members, its bhumkal, as the Marias say that keeps the Hill Marias together." (1938: 236)

Every Maria clan according to Grigson has its own "clan-parish", its right to utilise the land for shifting cultivation are confined to that area, and are allocated on the basis of clan membership alone. The unit of ownership, production and distribution is one and the same, and consists of a man's clan agnates. Village sites are temporary. Villages move in accordance with the state of soil, (the exhaustion of existing shifting cultivation slopes) periodically migrating to rejuvenated, or relatively unexploited land sites. Grigson speaks, at some points in the book of "creeping individualism" that has caused division of the land among the individual members of the clan in certain areas; from this one can surmise that in the average "clan parish" communal ownership in regard to land was normal and no parcels of land were individually held.

How is one to explain the apparent strength and significance of the Maria clan and the fragmentation of its Muria counterpart? Can it be that some revolutionary change in values led to the gradual impoverishment of the Muria clan, and to the break up of the Muria clan polity? Verrier Elwin was predisposed to the view that the Muria clan was a historical end product of disruptive changes and used these to explain the lack of order and consensus that is typical of Muria clanship. He began his own account of the Muria clan system with the following disclaimer: "An elaborate discussion of the clan system of the Muria would be out of place and not very profitable, for it is impossible to bring any kind of order out of the confusion into which that system has fallen in modern times". Elwin developed a hypothetical picture of the Muria clan as it must have existed in the past:
"In the old days it seems probable that the inhabited territory of north Bastar was divided up among the different clans of Maria and Muria, and each had its own particular bhum or clan area. In each bhum there was a spiritual capital called the pen rawar or pen kara. Here lived the clan god or Anga with the clan priest to tend him and mediate between him and his kinsmen. Here they came for the chief festivals of the Anga; here they brought their dead and erected their menhirs; here they gathered for the special panchayat that discussed offences against the clan laws.

Traces of this organization exist, but the increase of population, the occupation of vast new tracts of land, the scattering of the clansmen in all directions has destroyed the clear pattern of former days. Many Muria have never visited their pen rawar, many are living in villages that are widely apart. There are no longer compact clan areas, and in every village — though each is regarded as the bhum of some special clan — there live members of several other clans." (1947: 59)

The theory that the Muria clan is a degenerate form of the Maria clan can only be formulated with precision once a comparative study is undertaken into other aspects of the social organization of Muria and Maria communities. Both Muria and Maria clans are alike in the inconsistency with which marriage rules are applied to relate clans to one another as either affines or consanguines. They differ in the territoriality of the Maria clan and its tight control over economic resources, whereas no such function can be seen to be performed by the Muria clan.

The Muria and Maria practise very different types of economic techniques: shifting cultivation among the Maria versus cultivation in man-made and more-or-less permanent fields among the Muria. One can reasonably expect the differences in mode of economic activity between Muria and Maria to be reflected in their social institutions as well. Recasting Elwin's view that the "confusion" of the present day Muria clan is the product of an historical change affecting a pristine state of affairs in which the clan and the bhum coincided, one can hypothesise that the change was initiated because of a technological shift towards permanent fields. Thus what Grigson calls "creeping individualism" reflects the greater individual investment (or family investment) in creating vedang fields, compared with the cooperative labour involved in
felling the forest around a Maria swiddening village. Once the fields are in existence the mobility of the village as a whole ceases to be a prime means of distributing land, and people move as family units to the villages where land is available, rather than villages moving as wholes. The existence of matrilineal ties outside the clan parish results in particular families moving outside their clan parish to occupy under-utilized fields controlled by allied clans (mother's brothers, affines etc.) - this kind of thing certainly occurs today. Men well-endowed with land but lacking labour will import relatives or even un-related persons to increase the productivity of their households, these immigrants prosper and acquire fields of their own, and the net result is the disappearance of the clan as a territorial unit. The sequence of events seems to be compatible with the distinction, made nowadays, between the "original" inhabitants of any given village and the large assortment of (more or less) "newcomers".

Here we face a dilemma though. It is one thing to claim that the Muria development of permanent field agriculture as opposed to the swiddening system of their neighbours is responsible for the decay of the territorial clan; it is quite another to propose a simple causal model of this historical process. One school of thought contends that intensive occupation of the land results in a strengthening of unilineal descent corporate groups (on Radcliffe-Brownian grounds cf. Meggitt 1965) while another school of thought sees intensification of land occupancy as providing the ecological rationale for the development of a 'flexible' system of land allocation (which facilitates an optimal distribution of cultivating families to the land area available) and a political system based on land patronage and an 'optatitive' element in group-affiliation (cf. Goodenough 1951, Brookfield & Brown 1963). That is to say, intensification of occupancy of land can, with equal plausibility be attributed quite contradictory sociological effects. And in fact the discussion by Bailey of Kond social structure in Tribe, Caste and Nation (1960), perhaps the most sophisticated discussion of Gond social structure to date, (the Kond are members of the Gondi-speaking family of tribes, living in the Orissa highlands, some 300 km. distant from the Muria) depends crucially for its argument on the Meggitt/Radcliffe Brown type of approach. Thus whereas I have conjectured that the shift from axe and
shifting cultivation to wet rice cultivation created conditions for a loosening up and gradual disintegration of territorial clans, and the proliferation of autonomous territorial units within the clan parish, Bailey sees the same process in Kond society, as leading to a rigidification of social structure and to the creation of solidary territorial units that regulate and distribute rights of access to the key resource in the system — land.

Bailey's argument can be briefly summarized as follows: Axe cultivation techniques allowed only the existence of small groups often no larger than a senior man and his immediate patrikin, plus spouses, which would range over relatively large areas. Land intensive agriculture and the consequent frequency of migration acted as a check against the growth of large scale, complexly inter-related groups of families resident in the same area. Axe cultivation imposed mobility on surplus population causing the separated groups to proliferate horizontally. This reduced the need for internal group organization. Paddy cultivation, however, is labour intensive, and capable of continuous regeneration at a more-or-less permanently located site. In Bailey's own words:

"Rice cultivation tended in the Kondmals to bring about a concentration of population. This fact, combined with the relatively heavy investment in a wet rice field, strengthened and extended political alliances. There is now something worth fighting for. The local group must develop sufficient coherance to fight to protect itself and its property. We would expect the development of institutions capable of uniting in coordinated action a group larger than five or six elementary families. We would also expect that the structure would harden out and become less fluid". (1960:66)

In Bailey's model of Kond social structure, the principle object of the clan as an institution is the exploitation and protection of land resources. The territorial clan was born out of the need to secure the boundaries of residential groups. The land became the property of the clan and ownership of it was secured by means of membership within the clan. As a form of social organization, the clan developed as a response to the greater densities of social relations which prevail within large, stable communities. The stimulus for these changes was the adoption of a
sedentary mode of life and a settled pattern of paddy cultivation at some stage in Kond history.

It would appear, then, that two paths of development can be postulated from the imagined 'initial state' of mobile villages occupied by unilineally related households as paddy cultivation acquires dominance over swiddening. Bailey's model suggests the elaboration of more inclusive segmentary unilineal descent groups on the 'African Model' whereas the Elwin-Grigson reconstruction suggested above sees the decline of descent-groups and the rise of multi-clan territorially defined villages as the consequence of the same process of change. How is one to escape from this dilemma? I am of the opinion that Bailey's model does not accurately reflect the factual position, certainly not in Bastar district, and probably not even in the Kond area, since a close reading of Bailey's own material (S. Gell, ms 1978) reveals that the Kond village is now as socially heterogeneous with respect to the descent group affiliations of its membership, as is the Muria village. But the criticism of the Bailey position must eventually go deeper than this, and embraces the Elwin-Grigson "degeneration" model as well, in that there is really no justification for invoking a process of change, or transformation or "creeping individualism" as the explanation for the current status of the Muria clan. What I propose to argue, instead, is that far from being a "degenerate" form of territorially discrete clan, the Muria clan is adapted to a steady state, a social and economic regime which has not experienced the kinds of fundamental change invoked by Elwin or Bailey, as the only means of accounting for it. Plough agriculture on fixed fields is not an innovation of the remembered past in Bastar, and is presumably no less ancient than elsewhere in India, as may be testified to by the remains of medieval temples now to be found in thick jungle at Barsur, that serve as evidence of an incipient urbanization at a relatively early date in a part of Bastar now primarily 'tribal'. We cannot assume any simple progression from low-density swiddening to high-density paddy farming triggered off by the incursion of a new technology. The elements now found in Bastar (the Maria in the hills, the Muria in the plains, and the Hindus settled along lines of communication) have been present, and in more-or-less the same condition since time immemorial. Grigson indicates (page 142) that the Hill Maria abandoned paddy cultivation after 1910 in order
to avoid revenue payments and depredations by police, who took rice but disdained the food grown on swiddens. The Maria therefore changed their agriculture to suit the conditions of the time. This does not suggest that the Maria-Muria transition is a simple matter of technological progress. The Muria, presumably, could not follow the Maria example in this respect as they were more closely supervised by the revenue authorities and their forests were under crown control. Any model based on technological change, large-scale movements of populations (i.e. the Maria leaving the hills and occupying the plains, thereby turning into Muria) has no genuine historical basis. One should therefore not indulge in 'conjectural history' in order to explain the Muria clan, nor assume that the appropriate explanation of the present role of clanship in Muria society presents a problem of origins and development. The problems are more structural, functional and synchronic. Elwin's claim that the Muria clan is a broken-down system is the consequence of his failure to define the socially relevant units of the clan in the appropriate social contexts. Elwin makes the mistake, which, I think Bailey also does, of conceptualising the 'ideal' clan as an inwards-looking group preoccupied with its separateness, corporateness, and independence from other units of similar order. From a Muria perspective this is not at all a natural way to approach the clan since the essence of clanship is revealed not in intra-clan relationships, but in inter-clan relationships — that is, in connection with the formation of marriage alliances, the exchange of wealth between affines, the performance of reciprocal religious duties, and so forth. In Bailey's text 'alliance' means political alliance, with an implication of non-marriageability (1960:53-54) and no extended account is provided of the nature of affinal relationships between clans, or segments thereof. Once the clan is viewed from the perspective of its marital exchange relationships with other clans it becomes impossible to maintain the inwards-looking 'homogeneous descent group' point of view of clanship.

Rather than viewing the comparison of the Maria clan and the Muria clan as 'before' versus 'after' stages in the shift from 'communal' or clan-village swiddening to 'individualistic' paddy farming, it is more appropriate to consider the clan as it actually is now as the explanatory frame of reference in Muria and Maria country alike. Viewed from this perspective the Muria and Maria clans are not so different at all. Maria
clans are dispersed over many district territorial units just as Muria 
clans are (in fact, a great proportion of the clan names recorded by 
Grigson for the parganas adjoining Muria country are identical to Muria 
clan names). Secondly the definition of any action group is never clanship 
per se but clanship in conjunction with territorial propinquity and/or the 
pattern of marriage-alliance between local segments of clans. It is 
misleading to suppose that the existence of 'single-clan' villages among 
the Maria (cf. Grigson's village-plans and accompanying genealogical 
details on pages 104-109 of his book) is indicative of the existence of 
'clanship' as the basis of landed corporate groups among the Maria of a 
kind now obsolete among the Muria. The size of the clan 'village' among the 
Maria corresponds to that of the agnatic cluster resident in a single para 
(house-cluster) within a Muria 'village' (which normally has many such 
para units within its boundaries). The status of Maria clan villages as 
separate 'villages' rather than component para units of a larger unit (the 
nar) is a consequence of swiddening which lowers the density of land 
occupation overall, and the presence of many wild animals which motivate 
the building of small, compact dwelling units within a protective stockade 
in some areas (Aggarwal 1968). Whenever circumstances permit more dense 
occupancy of a village site, as in the large Maria village studied by Jay 
(1968) the village takes on a multi-clan complexion and is subdivided into 
para units which are more agnatically homogeneous.

The differences between Muria and Maria social organization have, 
therefore, nothing to do with the 'decay' of the territorial clan, which 
does not exist in either area. What does differ is the settlement pattern, 
but the structure of the clan is identical. What is this 'structure' 
though? The basic features are as follows:
1. Clans exist as name groups which overlap in distribution throughout Muria/Maria country.

2. Territorial units (nar) are associated with locally dominant, clan segments that are numerically preponderant in the locality and monopolize traditional village offices such as Gaita or Earth Priest.

3. The distribution of land is not determined by clanship but by membership of the local political unit, the nar, which can be acquired without reference to clanship or indeed any genealogical criteria, as well as by descent and by intermarriage. (The Ghotul institution, as I will later show, is crucially involved in establishing nar affiliation).

4. Clanship locally - but not globally - determines the pattern of exogamy and alliance. The political alliance of clan segments within the nar and between nar depends on the pattern of marriage exchanges between them. Only in the light of alliance (which is not predictable in the light of clan membership alone, but depends also on locality factors) does clanship become the basis for socially defining relationships between specific actors.

To this aspect of clanship I will now turn.

Clans and Alliance

The Muria belong to the broad category of 'Dravidian' cultures of southern India, among whom it is usual to find that, in one way or another, the continuity and structure of society as a whole is conceptualised in terms of marriage alliance (Dumont 1961). The arrangement of marriages is the key issue, so far as active adults are concerned, in local-level social affairs, and it is through the system of marriage alliances that Muria, in common with many other Dravidian societies, 'tribal' and 'peasant' urban/literate alike, see themselves as able to perpetuate their social group in a legitimate, socially-approved, and conceptually coherent way.

The Muria are an 'alliance' society in a regional system dominated by 'alliance' thinking. In order to make sense of the Muria clan one must place it in the alliance context in which it functions. The essence of alliance is a system of social classification which is predicated on the idea of marriage as a structural element in the ongoing pattern of social relations in the long term, rather than as a contingent relationship which
comes into being between social units otherwise independent of one another. Marriage in the alliance scheme of things is the expression of a pre-existing relationship of 'affinity' (i.e. structural alliance) between the social units concerned. The affinal relationship linking particular individuals who are parties to a marriage, or closely related to the parties to a marriage, is not the consequence of the marriage, but its pre-condition, and unless such a relationship exists, or can be reconstructed after the event, the marriage is not legitimate. The Muria fully share in this fundamental premise of alliance thinking: and their clan system is geared to it. Clans do not exist as permanent entities between which alliance relationships are contingently brought into being by marriage. The alliance relationships are as permanent as the clans and are their real reason for existing.

In order to proceed with the discussion of clans, it is therefore necessary to sketch in the bare bones of the Dravidian kinship terminology found among them, since this system of classification of kin underlies the pattern of alliance in the sense that the terminology provides the categories into which particular affinal relationships are fitted such that they can be seen as legitimate expressions of alliance principles. The terminology also helps to understand why the Muria conceptualise their social universe in dualistic terms, as consisting of intermarrying moieties, each containing a number of clans.
# Muria Kinship Terminology

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DADABHAI = 'KIN'

SAGA = 'ALLIES'
The chart of Muria kinship terms, though simplified, suffices to show that the most important features of Dravidian terminology are maintained, i.e. a clear division of the kinship universe into two halves (MB = FB, MBS, D, = FBS, D, etc.) plus the crucial MB = WF, FZ = WM equations which indicate matrimonial alliance. There are, meanwhile, certain features of the terminology which may cause puzzlement, notably the tendency for some terms, (notably pepi, kaka, babo, haray, koriyar, didi, and ato) to have meanings which include individuals in different generations. Thus, kaka means 'father's younger brother' and 'father's elder brother's son'. It would be out of place to discuss here this departure from the standard pattern of Dravidian terminology, which usually does not permit terms to cut across generation lines, since it does not affect the 'alliance' implications of the terminology as a whole. I will mention this problem later on, since it really has to do with the identification of junior members of the senior generation with senior members of the junior one, reflecting the social inequality between elder brothers vis-a-vis younger brothers within their own generation (cf. Ch. VII, below on relations between brothers). But there is one such transference of a set of terms across generation lines which is worth looking at in this connection, since it relates specifically to the preferred marriage pattern (Father's sister's daughter marriage). This is the identification Ato = FZ = (B)D, miar = D = F(B)Z, didi = EZ = FZ. The distinction between miar (daughter) didi (sister) ato (father's sister) is not a matter of generation differences in genealogy, but of deciding what aspect of a relationship is to be emphasised. Ato is used for reference rather than address (except in joking contexts) because it focusses attention on the mother-in-law aspect of the relationship between ego's group and its own out-marrying women who, by virtue of marrying out, are socially identified with affines. Generally, unrelated women married to senior saga or affines are ato. But it is standard usage to employ didi ('senior female agnate') or 'miar' 'daughter' for such women in politeness contexts, when the 'affinalizing' connotations of ato would be inappropriate. Thus, if ego uses (as he may) ato to mean 'brother's daughter' he is emphasising the fact that, given the FZD cross-cousin marriage rule the BD will come to occupy the same slot in the pattern of delayed exchange as was previously occupied by the FZ.
i.e. he emphasises the 'wife of an affine' aspect of the situation. Conversely, when a man calls a classificatory father's sister miar, he is emphasising the fact that she is a 'daughter' of the group he belongs to, even though she may be senior to him. The way in which ato and miar are used reflect the assumptions about exchange which are built into the system, i.e. that ego's FZ and D will occupy equivalent positions, due to the repetition of marriage exchanges after a lapse of one generation.

The two sides of the chart of kinship terms are labelled dadabhai and saga respectively, these being the Muria words used to make a category distinction between 'kin' and 'allies'. Dadabhai are all those with whom ego may not contract alliances (which will include members of many clans besides his own) and whose wives he may marry after death or separation have dissolved a previous marriage; while saga are all those with whom ego can contract alliances, but whose wives he can lay no claim to. The question next to be considered is whether the Muria have marriage moieties, i.e. is it the case that there is a society-wide system whereby
there is congruence between the set of saga and dadabhai clans recognised by each individual clan separately, such that, if clan A can marry (has as saga) clan B, and clan B can marry clan C, clan C cannot marry (is dadabhai to) clan A, and so on. Is there a consistent 'two section' system in Muria society as a whole, or does the dualism implicit in the kinship terminology stop short of this?

The pervasively 'dualistic' features of Muria conceptualisation of their social universe can be a source of confusion, because the language available for describing this feature of Muria society is inherently misleading, inviting us to suppose that there are 'groups' where there are only 'categories' (Keesing 1975) i.e. 'moieties' to which membership is ascribed by birth (as it is to clans in their guise as name-groups,) where no such entities really exist. But - and here is the real source of difficulty - there is an overwhelming temptation to use the word 'moiety' when discussing Muria society, because in category terms, a dual opposition between the set of 'agnates plus non-allied clans' (dadabhai) versus 'affines plus allied clans' (saga) or some sub-set of these maximal sets (also saga/dadabhai, the precise reference depending on the context) is constantly drawn by Muria themselves, and moreover, to make matters worse, it is often the case that, situationally, sub-sets of 'saga' and 'dadabhai' actually coalesce to form action-groups or interest-groups of a concrete, identifiable kind.

First of all, it is necessary to state that Muria society boasts no 'named moieties' of the unequivocal type possessed, e.g., the Umeda (Gell 1975) or (perhaps not so unequivocally) by the Todas (Rivers 1901). If the Muria have moieties at all, these consist of two sets of entities (clans) not two entities per se (named 'septs' or 'phratries' cf. below). There are no names for these sets, and 'saga' and 'dadabhai' are certainly not replacements for such names, since they are of course applied symmetrically. Certain investigators believe that there is, however, a 'moiety' (group) organization extant in Muria society in that there is a consistent rule, applicable to most Muria country, if not all of it, whereby (male) individuals, merely by virtue of their clan affiliations, are assignable to a set of clans, all of whom share identical alliance-possibilities with respect to an equally exclusive set of saga clans, the
two sets together exhausting the entire population of Murias. These would be real moiety 'groups' to the extent that alliance could, at least in some residual sense, be predicted from a knowledge of the 'moiety' to which the clan of any particular individual belonged. According to an Indian anthropologist with whom A. Gell discussed these matters, the Majhi of Alor village, near Kondagaon and a long way from Manjapur, is the final arbiter in such matters, and he knows which clans are permitted to intermarry with which - even if nobody else does. There is an unassailable logic in this position, since the Alor Majhi is presumably both competent and sincere in his claim to authority, and we could perfectly well adopt the 'Alor standard' on Muria moieties and regard all behaviour which contradicts it as 'deviant' with respect to tribal law and morality. But this is an unenlightening approach to take. There is no evidence whatsoever that people outside Alor take cognisance of the Alor Majhi's views on alliance, or indeed know what they are, so one must abandon the idea that there is any Muria-wide consensus about the membership of mutually-exclusive dualistically arranged sets of clans composing (unnamed) 'moieties' at this level. Examples of the variations involved will be examined in due course.

But the non-existence of a Muria-wide consensus on the clan-composition of marriage moieties does not mean that the notion of moieties must be rejected. The consensus which underlies Muria conceptualisation of their society, about which all would agree, is that clans are opposed dualistically as saga vs. dadabhai, but this does not extend to a consensus about which particular clans, except locally, and it is only in the local context that action/interest groups, recruited among particular local components of clans, actually form and confront one another on moiety lines. But, unlike the Dravidan societies analysed by Dumont (1957) and Yalman (1963) the Muria marriage exchange is egalitarian in the sense that marriage alliance does not perpetuate a relationship of inequality in status between wife-givers/takers which lasts for more than the life-time of the marriage, and even at the time of performance of the marriage ceremony (marming) itself, when any inequalities between wife-givers and takers can be assumed to be expressed to the maximum, only slight elements of asymmetry of status intrude (cf. The preferred marriage Chapter 7). This absence of expression of hierarchy in marriage is associated with
preferential patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, (i.e. delayed direct reciprocity in women between allied groups) and such cross-cousin marriages as actually do occur are overwhelmingly of this type. Needham has pointed out that patrilateral cross-cousin marriage as a preference has consequences which are straightforwardly bilateral and symmetrical, rather than asymmetric, at the systemic level (Needham 1958) so that the combination of an underlying Dravidian 'alliance' kinship terminology, combined with bilateral cross-cousin marriage as the official ideal, strongly motivate an overall conceptualisation of the kinship/alliance complexion of the society as a whole as consisting of two marriage-moieties in a persisting relationship of direct exchange. From any one individual's point of view, and from the point of view of the 'group' which arranges marriages and confers legitimacy on them, there is no ambiguity about the bifurcated nature of the social/marital universe, and it is in these terms that any particular marriage, or history of marriages between localised elements of clans, will be discussed and evaluated.

In what follows I will continue to speak of 'moieties' in the belief that this word reflects Muria thinking, which constructs society in terms of exchanging 'halves': but I do not want to give the impression that these moieties are specific collections of clans considered sociocentrically rather than ego-centrically, or, more precisely, from a village-based standpoint. Within the village itself, 'sub-clans', or clan segments are quite unambiguously grouped according to alliance possibilities: i.e. with respect to all the clans found in any one village (and the preponderance of clans in neighbouring villages in the locality) it is always the case that any one clan either is/is not marriageable, and there will be exact congruence between the rules governing all clans present, such that if A can marry B, and B can marry C, A will not be able to marry C, and if C can marry D, so will A be able to marry D, but D will not be able to marry B, and so on, exhaustively. When a Muria speaks of saga clans and dadabhai clans, at the most general level, the reference is to that collection of clan segments, of indeterminate composition, which fall under the scope of the particular rules about alliance-possibilities which he, individually, is prepared to respect and uphold, a collection which will include all the clan segments in his village and the neighbourhood, and a more vaguely defined collection of socially salient clan segments elsewhere.
Within this most inclusive grouping, certain clan segments are singled out, so that when a Muria speaks of his saga, it is most likely that reference is being made to certain immediate matrilateral or affinal relatives (mother's brother's clan segment, father's sister's clan segment, sister's husband's clan segment, each localized in a particular village) or to certain 'traditional' alliance-partners of ego's clan-segment, with whom he may not actually have marital relations, but which would be considered particularly appropriate in this respect. But the fact that when used to indicate specific people, the word 'saga' does not single out these individuals as members of a moiety, but as specific affines of ego, linked by specific marital or traditional ties, does not mean that the 'moiety' sense of the saga/dadabhai terms is a merely 'theoretical' matter, without practical significance. In fact it is just because an individual's 'practical' saga are heterogeneous in clan and locality terms — his mother's brother's people being of one clan in one village, his wife's people perhaps of a completely different clan somewhere else, and his sister's husband's people different again — that the fact that they are all saga in moiety terms assumes its true significance; because in this way an organizing principle is imposed on the heterogeneity and fragmentary character of practical kinship such that a general moral claim is made with respect to all these people, and an indefinitely large number of other people as well, with whom ego may have no current relationships of any intimacy. This is the ultimate background security-net of diffuse but enduring moral claims which enables practical, immediate and relatively short-term kinship and alliance relationships to be negotiated on the day-to-day and year-to-year basis. Taking Muria country as a whole, it is of little importance that the moiety configuration in which different clans are arranged differs from place to place, but it is important that Muria are able to project the dualistic saga/dadabhai opposition onto society at large, and within this framework they can construct new relationships of a practical kind, when and if this becomes socially necessary.

Grigson and Elwin were puzzled at the obvious lack of concurrence between the universality of the moiety ideal presented in their informants' discourse, with the facts of inter-clan marriage which they unearthed, in both Muria and Maria societies. They both hypothesized that such a model must be a survival from the past and may have represented an
accurate description of Muria society at some archaic period in time. Their own observations led them to question Russell and Hiralal's account of Muria social organization as dominated by an over-arching moiety system of the following kind:

"In one part of Bastar all the septs of the Maria Gonds are divided into two great classes. There are ninety septs in A class and sixty-nine in B class, though the list may be incomplete. All the septs in A class say that they are Bhaiband or Dadabhai to each other, that is, in the relation of brothers, or cousins, being the sons of brothers. No man of class A may marry a woman of any sept in Class A ... Any man of a sept in Class A can marry any woman of a sept in Class B." (Russell and Hiralal, III. 64f. quoted in Grigson, 235).

Grigson quite rightly perceived that the diversity of informants' theories regarding the clan composition of the two moieties was a function of the positions they occupied in geographical space, and to the distance between them. Thus one finds greater similarity in the views of people living within one pargana than between the views of people living in different parganas. All this points to the fact that the moiety system is operative only in geographically defined zones or areas. Grigson blamed this on the bad communications within the region: "Communications among the Hill Marias are very bad, and it by no means follows that an Usendi living, let us say, on the southern edge of the Chotte Dongar pargana has the same views on the clans from which it is permissible to seek a bride as an Usendi in the Chanda part of the Abujhmar hills or in the northernmost Maria pargana of the Antagarh tehsil". (1938:234) There were practical difficulties that came in the way of a rigid adherence to the moiety schema even at the pargana level. Often a clan segment would colonize land lying in a pargana different to that of its parent clan. The clan would be fitted into the moiety structure already prevailing within the area, but while adopting some of the alliance partners of the clans within its own moiety, it would also retain some of its older alliance preferences, regardless of whether these coincided with the groups with which it shared a moiety. In so doing it compromised the relations between clan groups and created areas of ambiguity between them. For example, if A, B and C are members of the same section and classified as 'agnates', and A instigated
an alliance with B, it would upset the conventional and supposedly straightforwardly agnatic relations between B and C.

Grigson realised that despite the tenaciousness of the moiety as a structural ideal for native Murias, it was sociologically and analytically irrelevant. He suggested instead the grouping of Muria clans into phratries intending thereby a local aggregation of (parts of) clans in consistent saga-dadabhai groupings. Nonetheless he admitted that "these groups or phratries are not proved", and that "the people themselves are perhaps not conscious of having any phratries at all". Elwin adopted Grigson's phratry model and offered no new insights into Muria clanship.

However, Grigson failed to consider the problem of the boundaries between the localities where one phratry arrangement overlapped with another. Even if it is true that in two separate localities a consistent 'phratry' opposition between saga clans and dadabhai clans can be demonstrated (with different clans in the opposed 'phratries' in each locality) there is nothing to suggest that in localities spatially intermediate between these two, the clan categorization into saga-dadabhai 'phratries' might also be intermediate – which is indeed most likely. The trouble with Grigson's 'phratry' idea is just that it suggests exclusive groupings where there are in fact none. The category opposition between saga and dadabhai is universal, but the contents of the saga grouping and dadabhai grouping are continuously variable from village to village and indeed within the village, in cases of families whose migrations between villages have resulted in their saga categories being out of step (temporarily) with most of their fellow villagers'. In my own enquiries I found the categorization of saga or dadabhai clans to be idiosyncratic, and extremely variable between people belonging to the 'same' clan but living in different villages. It is evident from a comparison of the responses made by an Usendi of Vahker to an Usendi living in Manjapur and a Gota clan member in Vahker to one resident at Manjapur, that each holds widely divergent, indeed incompatible ideas of how their clan fits into the system of clans and Muria social structure in general.

From all this it should be clear that the moiety conception, or the division of society into the two categories of kin and affine defined as
sets of clans, is a formula adopted by all Murias to constitute their own universe of kin, a formula, moreover, which has importance for the ritual system, but which is not an accurate description of the relations between clans as wholes. It does not give rise to systematic connubial relations between clans at the tribal level, and there is no 'official' all-embracing clan alliance strategy. Alliance relations are not governed by a corpus of myths regarding clans - in fact the paucity of clan myths, which could function as historical charters for groups, is striking. There are no clan elders, for example, with the power to enforce clan regulations relating to alliance. As I shall show, members of the same clan even in the same village have common views only in so far as the clans that are found co-existing with them in the same village, and in a few neighbouring villages are concerned; beyond that boundary they all hold unique and often drastically divergent conceptions about the clan groups scattered in villages far and wide. They have little opportunity to become aware of the extent of consensus on clan matters (i.e. alliance and kinship) as given the diffuse and fluid nature of Muria clans, and their lack of centrality or focus what so ever, clan members remain unaware of the total membership of their own clan.

The bifurcation of society into kin and affines is a very potent conceptual scheme for all Murias, but one which is not embodied in concrete or tangible groups on a tribe-wide basis. Thus although all Murias subscribe to the image of their society as neatly arranged into complementary halves, nobody would insist that this scheme is actualized in reality. All sorts of ambiguities creep into the system that make it difficult, if not impossible, to realize the moiety ideal 'on the ground', so to speak. The alliance pattern is elaborated somewhat differently for each clan, each village, and indeed each individual. The particular form that Muria society takes is intimately bound up with the problem of integrating these diverse, fragmentary alliance schemas, whose effective frame of reference is always the particular nar, with one another. The skeletal framework is provided by the clan concept with its sharply defined alliance scheme but the details are filled in by individuals acting in response to the contingencies of life within bounded residential communities.
I should mention one other aspect of clans as large-scale units which points to the fact that at this level they are perceived as logical and abstract categories rather than as real entities. Murias believe that the permutations and combinations in clan relations with one another could yield, on purely logical grounds, at least one pair of clans that are symmetrically related to one another in their alliance, non-alliance relations. For example, it is said by the members of the Usendi clan resident in Manjapur, that they, together with their saga, the Gota clan, which is also one of the clans found in Manjapur, bisect the universe of Muria clans into non-overlapping dadabhai and saga. In other words the Gota clan does not marry into the alleged affinal category of the Usendis and vice versa. However there is no compulsion towards contracting marriages with one another simply on this account. Both the Manjapur Gota and the Manjapur Usendi have their own special affinal clan (gatnay saga) - the conventional alliance partner with whom most marriages are contracted. The solidarity between the two is expressed in individual statements regarding their perfect ritual compatibility, and is left at that.

The idea that particular clans have perfectly congruent kin-alliance relations has its logical counterpart in the idea that for every clan group within a village, there exists a tariusaga or a group of equivalent level, which is both saga and dadabhai. The structural ambiguity of the category is bought out in the lexical combination of the words: tario which is the most general term of address for kinsmen, and saga - a word expressing affinity. I shall discuss tariusaga further below, in connection with the distribution of rights to widows and divorcees. It should be noted that the tariusaga category has radical disruptive implications and poses a threat to the conceptual validity of the saga-dadabhai scheme. Consequently I have never heard people referring to whole clans as tariusaga and noticed instead the narrow and bounded nature of the groups people specified to be their tariusaga. For example, while clans are sometimes given a wide territorial reference, tariusaga are invariably identified by village names, such as Vargamarialor i.e the people of clan X in Vargama etc.
In speaking of alliance-dadabhai relations between clans and their variability it should be borne in mind that not all marriages by any means, are the first marriages of the husband or wife, and that it is very likely that in any given marriage one or other of them has been married before. We have therefore to define the rules which apply to second marriages as well, and see how these are related to the village moiety system and the saga-dadabhai scheme.

The basic rule is that widows and divorcees may be taken by dadabhai clans of the clan into which the woman was previously married, in fact, this is the most valued aspect of the dadabhai relationship. The only exception to the rule that widows or divorcees move in an opposite direction to daughters is the tariusaga who may provide one's group with both daughters and widows. But an ambiguity arises because a runaway woman say, may be marriageable to X (i.e. saga) in terms of the dadabhai scheme of his village of origin, yet her brothers belong to a clan which is saga to X's dadabhai in the village in which he is resident at the time. To marry her, therefore, would be to become dadabhai, by implication to intra-village saga. Or to put it another way, if the original husband of the runaway woman (X's dadabhai putatively if he marries her) is dadabhai to X's intra-village saga, they will be his putative dadabhai which is contradictory. In fact, such a manoeuvre on X's part would be seen as offending against the legitimate rights of his intra-village saga to receive the runaways and widows of their true dadabhai, and consequently as a hostile act in internal village politics. Consequently, in order to avoid the possibility of conflict over claims to widows and runaways there must be a consistent application of the saga-dadabhai traditions of the component clan segments resident in that village. This scheme will be applied to other clans, in other villages as well, at least in the matter of marriage if not in certain other contexts. The scheme will be that of the dominant clan in the village which holds the office of Gaita.

It is possible, but rare, for a man to change his clan when he moves to another village. The relativity inherent in the system does not refer to the ease or frequency by which men change their clans but to the fact that while remaining a member of the 'same' clan, his associations with other clans may undergo a radical transformation, depending upon the village in
which he chooses to reside.

It is clear, from the preceding discussion that clanship and locality interact in two ways. 1) As a means of classifying people, and providing a basis for political association, clan affiliation does not operate except as a means of creating blocs of 'kin' within the nar who have congruent saga relationships within the nar and outside it. "In other words it is only from the point of view of a particular nar that clanship has definite implications with respect to alliance relations, and even here there are distinctions between gohor lineages within the clan segment resident in a particular nar (see below). 2) Clanship interacts with nar affiliations, secondarily, in that relationships between different nar are a function of the locally-specific, saga-dadabhai relations between segments of clans distributed in neighbouring villages. The structure of inter-village relationships is governed by the way in which particular clan segments in any one village are linked to segments of different clans in different villages by saga ties, especially the gatnay saga or "true saga" relationship of consistent wife-exchange over the generations. One has, therefore, a double relationship between nar and clan: one cannot predict the saga-dadabhai relations between clans except in the light of the nar in which these clans are represented; on the other hand one can only understand relationships between nar in the light of the saga-dadabhai relationships between segments of clans. Inter-village relationships are understood in terms of relations between clans.

Many of the ideas used in the analysis of Muria clanship have been extracted from Alfred Gell's unpublished notes on Muria clanship. He points out that it is a misnomer to pose the question as a "descent" or "locality" one for it is always both. The important point to stress is that the Muria clan - and this is true of the Maria and Kond clans as well - enters into the 'structuring' of Muria society only as an aspect of alliance, not as a basis for forming corporate unilineal descent groups. Bailey's mistake, in his discussion of the 'clan' in Gond social structure, was to think of the clan as 'corporate' and as a group which established social cooperation between individuals on the basis of 'descent-constructs' (Scheffler 1965). In truth, clanship and corporateness have nothing to do with one another: what clans do is to specify alliance
relationships across clan boundaries, and solidarity within the clan comes about as a consequence of having the same affines (saga), not being 'brothers' or having property in common. The 'alliance-construct' interpretation of clanship (cf. Gell, A. 1975) can be contrasted with the descent-construct interpretation as follows: one can either see clans as creating solidarity on the basis of putative common descent:

![Diagram of clan relationships](image)

or as a means of distributing rights to exchange women:

\[(A \rightarrow B, B \rightarrow C, A, C \rightarrow B, D, D \rightarrow C).\]
Alfred Gell points out that from the alliance point of view, intra-clan relationships form a graded series of 'closeness' just as in the classic nested paradigm of the unilineal descent group segments are socially distant to one another as a function of the number of genealogical steps linking them to a common ancestor, but the mode of reckoning closeness is quite different in the alliance paradigm: segments of a clan are socially distant as a function of the degree of congruence in their alliance relationships. Thus, the main Korami gohor of Manjapur are congruent in this respect with the Korami of Atargaon, but differ from the Korami of distant Boorpal in fundamental respects. However, in the last resort, clanship is recognized to the extent that all Korami, everywhere, must marry non-Korami. We can look at this phenomenon in slightly more detail by taking the Hallami clan as a point of departure. Four lists of saga specifications for five Hallami segments living in Manjapur are given on page 85.

It is time to focus attention more narrowly on the status of the clan segments found within a particular nar. These 'segments' one might call 'local sub-clans' were this not too reminiscent of the idiom of unilineal descent group theory, suggesting that these sub-clans could be fitted into some overarching genealogical framework, which they cannot. Such segments are referred to in a number of ways in ordinary Muria speech. Frequently they are referred to by clan names, the context making it clear who are referred to. For example, "the Usendis have bought another buffalo" means "the Usendis in this village". Such usage is ambiguous, however, if there are many members of a clan in a particular village, since clan segments within a village rarely act as one in performing any task. One often hears whole clans referred to when in fact just one particular individual is being singled out. The localised clan is referred to as per — the same word as for the clan as a whole. However, within this village based per, genealogical criteria are used for distinguishing shallow patrilineages known as gonda, gochi or, most commonly gohor. A gohor is a cluster ofagnates bound by close genealogical ties. Gohor distinctions are relevant in different ways depending on circumstances. For instance, the Manjapur Koramis break down into four gohors: three lineages of the "original" Korami of Manjapur, the largest being the headman's lineage, the next being the Gaitalor — the lineage holding the office of Earth priest. These two
lineages, plus one other small one, are closely linked to one another in that they have identical saga; but the fourth Korami lineage is a client lineage of immigrants from elsewhere whose saga are different and who therefore are only 'distant' fellow-clansmen of the dominant Korami group. The Hallami of Manjapur are similarly divided into different gohor — three in number — all quite disparate to one another except in respect of being all aligned as saga to the dominant Korami of Manjapur and dadabhai to the Gota clan segment of Manjapur. The Manjapur Gotas and Usendis are each single, undivided patrilineages, so in these cases the effective local clan segment is identical to the gohor: these segments are referred to either by clan names or by the names of their most prominent men — the village shaman, Majhi, for the Gotas, and the prominent village leader Tiri for the Usendis. Gohor become important as political cleavages during village disputes, but have no common property or institutionalised leadership. The real unit for property transmission is the extended family (see Chapter 6) of which there may be more than one in any gohor. The gohor corresponds to the cluster of closely agnatically-related families whose solidarity depends on agnatic kinship per se, as opposed to the clan, whose solidarity depends on the patterning of alliance relationships, not on agnatic ties as such. But this agnatic solidarity at patrilineage level is quite diffuse, and often the interests of different families within a single gohor diverge. In practice, it is at extended family level that the basic cleavages of village politics are expressed.
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<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S&amp;D</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vahker</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>S</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table giving the clan-alliance schemas of the five Hallami families resident in Manjapur.

S = Saga
D = Dadabhau
S&D = both saga and dadabhau (informants tended to specify regions where clan was saga and oppose these to other broad regions where it was not).
GS = Gatnay saga
? = informants did not know
Clans in Manjapur

Manjapur's population is divided into four clans: Hallami, Korami, Gota and Usendi. The moiety division within Manjapur categorizes the Hallamis and Gotas as dadabhai to one another and as the alliance partners of the Koramis and Usendis. In the table listing the distribution of village population between the four clans, it is striking that the Koramis account for seventy five percent of the total village population. But is their numerical preponderancy responsible for conceptions held about village as a whole, as somehow 'belonging' to them? There is an awareness that the Koramis are ritually focal and historically the most entrenched group in that their associations with Manjapur extend further back into the past than any other clan group. While all the other families are third or fourth generation descendants of immigrants from elsewhere and can still recall the circumstances of their ancestors' arrival in Manjapur, the arrival of the Korami group from another village (Lakkapur in Kondagaon tehsil) though postulated, is nevertheless regarded as having taken place in the dim legendary past, a long, long time ago. People think that while other groups may come and go, the Koramis will be there forever. It is in the interests of the Koramis to stress their historical priority; not only does it make them the 'original' owners of Manjapur land, but it also gives them some degree of solace for their present day misfortunes and economically inferior status vis-a-vis certain other non-Korami groups in the village: the upstart Hallamis and Usendis who have become rich, so they say, by 'eating of the fat of the Koramis'. 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>married men</th>
<th>unmarried males</th>
<th>In marrying women (father's clan)</th>
<th>unmarried girls</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Korami</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6 22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hallami</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9 -</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gota</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 -</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usendi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>- -</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total numbers</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>11 6 22 3 1 14</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>231</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Clan distribution of Manjapur's population.
Although the Muria concept of wealth is complex, involving access to labour and cattle as well as ownership of land, at one level there is the belief that the amount of land owned is proportionate to the standard of living enjoyed, and it is this that forms the basis for the Korami conviction that had it not been for the presence of these other groups they would have owned all of Manjapur land, and consequently been much richer than they are today. The Koramis uphold a romantic belief in a golden era in the past when they were the sole owners of Manjapur; but the important point is that the non-Koramis do not concur in this view. Whenever, in any contentious situation the Koramis begin to emphasize their rights to Manjapur's land and economic resources, the non-Koramis of the village counteract by giving their contrary picture, which depicts the Hallamis as the 'original' inhabitants of the village and the Korami as having come after them. Of course the non-Koramis are at somewhat of a disadvantage in that they cannot fortify their claims by saying that they are the direct descendants of the Hallamis who occupied according to them, Manjapur before the Koramis did; those Hallamis are the present day residents of the village of Mangwar, and none of the Manjapur Hallamis originate in Mangwar. There is at least a genealogical continuity between the earliest Koramis and the majority of those living in Manjapur now. The question of who really belongs to Manjapur and who doesn't and what rights and privileges accrue to those who do are issues that can never be resolved; they do not belong to the realm of established fact but to that of political debate and discussion. They are always contentious issues and the claims of any single group regarding its hegemony over Manjapur are seen as controversial and inflammatory. Each side is committed to upholding the opposite view of Manjapur's history.

The headman of the village is a Korami. It might be supposed that on account of this fact, and as a direct consequence of their larger numbers, the Manjapur Koramis are politically dominant. However it is only in the very loose sense of the term that they could be so designated. Political dominance is more in evidence in caste-stratified villages where it complements, or contrasts with a pre-existing hierarchy; and where the boundaries between groups are more rigidly drawn. In Manjapur the Koramis as a whole cannot be said to be a socially solidary group; there is perpetual flux and change in the composition of political alliances and in
conflict no simple segmentation on the lines of clan membership can be observed. Groups rally around one another on the basis of criteria that are contextual to the quarrel itself and household groups change sides with equanimity from one conflict to another. If the Hallami and other non-Korami groups are fragmented and disunited, the Koramis are also riddled with divisive factions. Nonetheless there is a certain snobbery attached to being a Korami, to being part of the largest network of kin residing in Manjapur. Koramis tend to maintain their exclusivity as a social community by measures such as restricting their feast invitations to those of their own kind. The sociability of the rest of the Manjapur groups is definitely depressed by comparison with the Koramis. The Koramis circulate freely among households in the village and make visits to their kin regularly. They always seem to know more of the actual goings-on in the village and they have access to channels of communication which are kept apart from local non-Koramis. They are at the heart of village social life while the Hallamis, Gotas and Usendis are kept at the periphery. Another factor which contributes to their elevated social status are their connexions with important persons dwelling in the neighbouring villages. The Koramis are embedded in a network of inter-personal relationships which transcend village boundaries, while the Usendis and Gotas are still in the process of developing them. The Hallamis case is slightly different as most of the Manjapur Hallamis come from villages fairly close to Manjapur, and therefore their migration would not bring about as total a rupturing of social networks, as it would for the Usendis or the Gotas, both of whose natal villages lie far away.

In the sphere of ritual it might be said that the Koramis are also dominant. Their dominance is of a traditionalistic, ascribed kind. The Koramis number among them Gaita-lor, the group from amongst whom the occupants of the ritual office of Gaita are drawn. The Gaita officiates at all the first fruit ceremonies and is the guardian of the demi-urge Tallur Muttay. Tallur Muttay is in charge of the earth in its natural condition and must be propitiated in order to bring out the life-sustaining properties inherent within it. The 'earth' (bhum) is a very loaded concept in Muria cosmology to which attaches a penumbra of mystical qualities. The rituals devoted to Tallur Muttay are characteristically solemn and have none of the fan-fare associated with rituals organized around other
village gods known as pen. Tallur Muttay is not humanized. In other words, she is not given human traits of marital infidelity, treachery, capriciousness etc., like the pens. While pens are dependent upon men to mediate life cycle transitions of birth, naming, marriages, Tallur Muttay is relatively autonomous. She is pure and benign and is the very essence of life, of fertility, and death. The Gaita-ship carries tremendous prestige, and the Koramis of Manjapur stress that there is a linkage between their historical rootedness in Manjapur and the fact that it is only from amongst them that Tallur Muttay, the archaic and timeless virgin of Manjapur soil, selects her votary. It is because they, and their descendants are potential Gaitas that the Korami claim to being the true Manjapur people can be so convincingly and confidently made.

The cult of Tallur Muttay does not exhaust village ritual propitiations. There are other village gods to be considered. While Tallur Muttay is uniform from one village to the next, these gods have identities that are inextricably those of the village itself. The cult of these village gods, or pens is the formal organizational framework for the expression of inter-village relations. The village gods make visits to the gods of other villages, and periodically invite their daughters, given in marriage to other gods elsewhere, to return to their birthplace. Pens are numerous and personalized. All of them have names and idiosyncrasies that are acted out by the shamans when in their possession trances. The saga and non-Koramis of the village perform an integral role in the system of village gods. Manjapur's own gods were born to saga gods, in saga villages, and were given to the Manjapur people only after their births, just as the Koramis of Manjapur were responsible for passing on the gods born in their village to their own sagas. In other words, the exchange of women between affinally related groups parallels the movement of gods from one to the other. The shamans of Manjapur village gods are non-Koramis and saga, although there is no theoretical prohibition against Korami shamans. Each group is dependent upon the other for the exorcism of evil spirits. For example no Korami can communicate with a malicious ancestor spirit or pen, when one of his lineage is the victim, and must rely upon the intervention of a saga who can cajole the spirit to desist. The saga of the Koramis in Manjapur have to act as mediators when Koramis make offerings and sacrifices to their 'own' gods or to the Manjapur pen. As far as the
pragmatic politics of Manjapur is concerned, the ideal of a monolithic clan hegemony is vigorously enforced, but in the domain of ritual, the village polity is conceived in terms of a balanced reciprocity between dualistically conceived social components. The ritual system of the Muria village is predicated upon the division of the village population into kin and affines, or saga and dadabhai.

Where marriage within the village is concerned, the suitability of Hallami-Korami matches is felt very strongly. In this Manjapur's ideal preferences coincide with the several villages that are to be found in its vicinity where Hallamis and Koramis are regarded as the foremost saga partners of each other. This is perhaps on account of the numerical preponderancy of either Hallamis or Koramis in the respective villages. In the motivations underlying the selection of alliance partners two quite separate factors must be taken into consideration. Firstly, there is competition for the prestige and the social status that can be gained by aligning oneself through kinship to a rich man or saukar; and secondly, there is the strong ideological pressure towards marriage of one's offspring with those of a close affine, especially with those of the wife's brother, and the rewards of consolidating and restricting alliance within an already defined body of kin. The ideal state of affairs is for these two factors to be equally represented in any marriage, but in many instances one or other factor may predominate. Thus the family of Pele Ram of Manjapur has for the past four generations followed a conservatively patrilateral cross-cousin marriage with affines living in a far away village. A similar example is that of Tiri Usendi, who, even though he claims to be dissatisfied with the alliance, gave his sister in marriage to his MBS living near Narayanpur. The extent to which this man allowed himself to be swayed by ideological considerations is striking because of the great economic disparities that exist between him and his brother-in-law. On the other hand, the Koramis of Manjapur have been more enterprising in their choice of alliance partners; they have availed of the alliance opportunities present to them in every saga group in the village. Their choices appear to be governed by practical rather than traditional considerations. During the year that fieldwork was carried out they gave a woman of their group to the agnate of a rich Hallami of Mahima Gwari causing the girl's mother's brother, resident in Manjapur to make
allegations against them of having cast him aside as an affine on account of his destitute economic condition. The Koramis have balanced the advantages of having affines and potential political allies in the same village even though these intra-village affines do not rival the Korami fortune in land and resources, with those of having alliance partners in powerful Hallamis living in neighbouring villages with whom no previous ties of affinity existed.

The Hallamis and Koramis of Manjapur have persistently inter-married with one another. But can the presence of saga in the village be seen as a design of the 'dominant' Koramis intended to provide them with a resource pool of marriageable women? This notion can be easily dispelled by a consideration of the fact that demographically it is the Hallamis and Gotas who benefit from the availability of spouses and not the Koramis. The Koramis gave a woman in an earlier generation to the deceased father of the present Gota household, and the Gotas in turn provided in the following generation, three Korami men of the same household, with wives. Given the fact that there are a disproportionate number of Koramis to potential saga in the village, it is the men of the dominant Korami lineage - the headman's who have inter-married, more than the others, within the village. Other Manjapur Koramis go elsewhere, to certain neighbouring villages to get their wives. Another reason that may be invoked to account for the tendency for intra-village marriages to be confined to the lineage of the headman Korami is the complex of factors governing alliance relations. An affine must be received with an excessive show of hospitality and usually treated to wine and meat for the duration of his stay. Most people dread visits from their saga because of the expense that is incurred. But although the visits by an affine resident in another village are likely to be few and far between, there is no such guarantee for those who live in the same village. The exchange of food and liquor is not affected by disparities in income between two saga as no matter how poor a man may be, he will readily go into debt in order to provide a close saga with the same type and quantity of meat with which he was himself feasted on his visit to the latter's house. It is in the interests of a rich man, all the same, not to have too poor an affine, since although he may not fall short in food exchanges, he may be obliged to offer more substantial assistance to his poor relative, in the form of loaning him
money, or lending him a pair of cows to plough his fields, or giving him some of his own superior rice seed. Patronage expectations form part of the conventional behavior between affines towards one another, even though these are not as marked as they are for some Dravidian societies, nor institutionalized as an obligation by wife-takers towards wife-givers. In the case of one Manjapur family it was the economic patronage extended towards them by a Hallami family that determined, according to the admission of the old father, the structural alliance position they adopted vis-à-vis other groups in Manjapur. As these Usendis were saga to both Hallami and Korami in their villages of origin they were faced with the choice of having one or the other as their saga in Manjapur where they settled. They could not have both as this would have subverted the moiety structure within Manjapur. The old man told me: "Banga's father gave us two cows and made us tenants on his land, for nothing in return. He told us to plough Manjapur land without fear, as he would support us in our bid to become Manjapur's permanent residents. From then on I began addressing Banga's father, who was alive at the time, as samdi (affine), and now I call Banga bato (brother-in-law)". The alliances between the Gotas and Koramis were initiated in a generation when both were fairly wealthy, and thus saga visits would not have resulted in undue economic strain.

The dual opposition between saga and dadabhai clans, is in Manjapur and in the adjoining villages of Bargaon, Atargaon, Mahima-Gwari, Kongera and Palli summarized and simplified as a basic Hallami-Korami opposition. There is an urge to re-classify all Korami affinal clans as "Hallami" and vice versa. For instance, I often encountered Koramis who when asked to state the clan of origin of their wives would refer to it simply as "Hallami" irrespective of whether the affinal clan was a Gota, or any of a number of other clans. The distinctions between Gota and Hallami are seen as secondary ones made only within the affinal category; in the contexts in which clanship is asserted, such as at village rituals and marriage, the further distinctions within dadabhai and saga categories is irrelevant. For the purposes of broadly opposing kin and affines, it is enough that the Hallami-Korami distinction be made. Indeed men may sometimes remain unaware of the 'true' clan affiliations of their acquaintances living in other villages and know of them simply as either dadabhai or saga. (This is not so of the residents of one's own village). People are listed along with
the respondent's foremost affinal clan, and regarded for all practical purposes as members of that clan: all affines, to Manjapur Koramis are "types of Hallami". All the clans within the village are organized into two rigid moieties, and the model is conceptualized on the basis of the supreme affinal and kin clan. All men, belonging to clans other than Hallami and Korami, who subsequently arrive in the village are incorporated into this schema, and it is from this that generalizations and theories about clans in other villages are made.

The fact of being classified along with other Hallamis does not impose any uniformity upon each individual's conceptions regarding the general alliance pattern of all clans vis-a-vis his own clan. I have mentioned the tendency to label different clans and terminologically unite them within a dominant clan, but in some respects even the 'true' and minimal clan is a heterogeneous composition of people drawn from different villages and their perspectives are consequently coloured by the histories of previous alliances their predecessors have contracted. From the responses obtained by the heads of the Manjapur Hallami households, to questions regarding the saga or dadabhai status of clans on a list, it becomes apparent that in so far as other clans in other villages are concerned, each Hallami has a unique conception of Muria social structure.

In Manjapur only sixty two percent of the population claim to be third generation residents; this group is divided into those who are recognized as the oldest inhabitants and the rest take their place behind them. The occurrence of geographical mobility is high in Muria society. Families migrate to other villages and the movement costs are low - i.e. a man does not, as in the Kond example, have to fulfill clan-based criteria before he can become a full-fledged member of another village and be granted land. The reasons for migrating are diverse - and discussed in the following chapter - but of all factors, the migrant's clan is the least likely to act as bar.

Of the five Hallami lineages living in Manjapur, four are third generation residents. All of them originated in different villages. The Hallami group therefore, does not see itself as a solidary group within the village, but as a collection of people of common clanship but made
diverse by their diverse origins. Except in one case where a dispute with the village council precipitated running away, all the Hallami families retain links with the villages of their forefathers. Such villages linger on in peoples' memories and become the subject of fantasies that are passed on to children. An old woman who had left her natal village (which happened to be the same one as her husband's) and migrated to Manjapur shortly after her marriage would never tire of comparing her present village with the one she had left behind. All her problems were due to settling in a place she even now considered strange, where people were mean and selfish. In Boorpal everyone had plenty - there was ample water, no dearth of rice, and numerous palm trees, so numerous in fact that people drank palm wine instead of water, the ground was firm and could withstand the monsoon instead of becoming a soggy morass like Manjapur. At one point her daughter who had been born in Manjapur interrupted and said she had not seen much water or palm trees on her visit to Boorpal. Her mother snapped at her to be quiet and admonished: "If you can't find water in Boorpal you can be sure you won't find it anywhere in this world".

Neither does the previous village entirely forget its emigrants. They are obliged to send messengers out to recall such people to the important annual village rituals of pen karsna and asang regardless of how distant the new village may be. Messengers who have to travel quite considerable distances are cordially welcomed and treated hospitably. Almost always, one member of the 'expatriate' family will visit the village during its ritual season. During the ritual he will be treated for all purposes as a member of the village community - contributing an equal share of the sacrifice to the gods and an equal payment for the feast that takes place later on. Men usually go from their resident village laden with supplies of wine and food and come back after an exhilarating, but exhausting round of feasts and merry making. Contacts may also be revived at market places and gossip exchanged with members of the previous village. For both parties there are advantages in maintaining contacts. The village of one's ancestors is conceived of as a home away from home where one can always break journey and be assured of food and shelter. Irrespective of internal divisions and clan statuses, it becomes suffused with a sort of personal significance that sets it apart from other villages. Active participation in village rituals may decline after the passage of one or two
generations. Nonetheless the ancestral village is always likely to occupy a special place in peoples' sentiments.

Every Hallami family then has traditional connections with a distinctly different village and territory. The implication of this for the definition of their Hallami-ness is not simply that each participates in the ritual system of a different, and to the rest of the Hallami block, a possibly unknown village. The Hallami block in Manjapur is in close touch with different villages, where, as Hallamis, they are accorded statuses and placed within categories of dadabhai and saga. But these categories themselves may be composed of different clan groups and therefore the alignment of groups to one another within the moiety may result in a situation whereby the Hallami group in village A is opposed to the Gotas as their saga or affines; while in village B both Gota and Hallami may form the dadabhai category and regard each other not as affines but as kin. Marriages which are correct in terms of village A may be totally unacceptable in village B. The system of defining one's own group by setting it in opposition to some other would vary greatly from one village to another, as the rules governing the association of clan segments get shuffled up, sometimes to a radical extent.

All this is bound to introduce an ambiguity and ambivalence into peoples' perceptions of what it means to be a Hallami. For example, a man who belongs to the only Gota family in Manjapur claimed that in Kalarpur, the village where his father was born, the Gotas could marry the Hallamis of Kalarpur and elsewhere, and frequently did so. However since their arrival in Manjapur the Gotas have assumed kinship relations with the Hallamis and together form a block against the Koramis and Usendis. This does not particularly bother him, as he says it would be quite easy to slip back into alliance with the Hallamis should his family decide to go back to Kalarpur. His attitude is forthrightly practical: one must adjust to the place. He himself has married a woman who would have been forbidden to him in Kalarpur and thus has exploited the availability of different spouses with as much vigor as could be expected of anyone who is confirmed in his opinion as to the appropriateness of the contract.
The Gotas were in the unique position of being saga to both Hallami and Korami in Kalarpur. But this would have created an asymmetry in the system of Manjapur moieties, as both Hallami and Korami would be united at some level as the affines to the Gotas, while in fact they are the affines par excellence of one another.

The Usendis of Manjapur on the other hand, were, on the basis of the affiliations obtaining in their previous village, dadabhai to both Koramis and Hallamis. On the same principle, this could not be permitted. They and the Gotas preserved their original relation with the Koramis and thereby altered it in relation to the other subsidiary clan segments. Nonetheless such an alteration has not gone unnoticed by the Usendis of Boorpal, who castigate their brothers in Manjapur for marrying Hallamis (although none of the Manjapur Usendis have actually done so) while they strictly refrain from doing so themselves. According to Tiri, the head of the Manjapur Usendi family, the Manjapur Usendis are made to pay a small fine as penalty (dand) whenever they visit Boorpal. They do appear to be a bit self-conscious about their equivocal position. The head of the family attempts to ingratiate himself to the Manjapur Koramis and went so far as to engage a Hallami girl of a neighbouring village for his son, but after a few years broke off the engagement. I did not discover as to whether the Boorpal Usendis dissuaded him from going ahead with the marriage. It may have been that he decided that such a marriage would have ruined his credibility with his brothers in Boorpal, with whom he is very anxious to remain on good terms with.

The clan and the nar

The clan system of the Muria then, is not the remains of a once-flourishing arrangement of corporate descent groups controlling territories, but is a conceptual scheme for organizing alliance. At the highest level it divides the social universe into non overlapping categories of 'kin' (dadabhai) and 'allies' or affines (saga) and it expresses the 'closeness' of each individual to his fellows according to the extent to which there is congruence or complementarity in the alliance relations in terms of saga and dadabhai groupings. "Who are you" in Muria society is a function of how your saga and dadabhai relationships
articulate to other peoples'. Muria clans are socio-centric categories which are articulated in ways that depend on the alliance pattern of each local clan segment, and within the localised clan segment, each gohor, if these have different origins. Clanship therefore, is both socio-centric and ego-centric at the same time, which makes it particularly difficult to conceptualise. The difficulties with the Muria clan arise from the theoretical prejudice in favour of conceptualising groups as either descent-based or locality based, and as either socio-centric or ego-centric. However, the Muria clan, in various respects, is all of these at the same time. Clans are recruited by descent, but articulated by alliance relations which depend on nar affiliations (locality). Clan relationships are the idiom for demarcating Muria society into socio-centric categories—that is to say non-overlapping discrete groups, not overlapping cognatic kindreds—but at the same time each demarcation reflects the 'ego-centric' perspective of a particular clan segment.
The above figure shows the make up of Manjapur in terms of clan segments and the status quo so far as intra-village saga relationships are concerned in the various villages from which these segments originate, which, with the exception of Korami II are all other than Manjapur itself. It will be seen that in the 'close' villages the Hallami-Korami saga relationship holds, whereas in the 'distant' villages it does not. Here we see the complex relationship between clanship, locality, and alliance as it emerges in practice. Manjapur is not an internally homogeneous community, and it is set within a social field which brings the basic elements in Muria society - clans - into constantly shifting configurations from place to place. This constant 'shifting of perspective' on alliance relationships from place to place (from the context of one nar or group of nar to another) is what makes for the ambiguous character of Muria social structure. Clanship and alliance transcend the village, and the moiety arrangement of villages aligns all clan segments in ways which have implications beyond village boundaries; but at the same time the index of 'belongingness' to a village is incorporation into the locally specific way of things. We can only understand the full implications of this structural ambiguity, however, when we consider the nar and its politics in more detail. This is the topic of the next chapter.
MAP OF MANJAPUR TAKEN FROM PATWARI RECORDS SHOWING ROUGH DISTRIBUTION
OF LAND UNITS AND HOUSE STYLES

1. JUGGH (PATEL GROUP); 2. GANGU (NO LONGER RESIDENT IN VILLAGE); 3. CHAMRU (PELE);
4. MOMANDA, MOMKE, GOLI ETC. (GAITA GROUP); 5. RAJMAN; 6. AITH; 7. SOBH SINGH;
8. TIRI; 9. MORI; 10. DAILA; 11. DASRU; 12. VAS VARIYA; 13. PARI; 14. ANDA.
There has for some time been a controversy surrounding the status of the 'village' as the point of departure for studies of social organization in India. The 'village study' has empirically been the commonest framework for ethnographic studies (Srinivas 1960); at the same time it has been frequently recognised that an Indian village is not in any sense an analogous sociological isolate to the Pacific island (Tikopia, Trobriands, etc.) or the African tribe, self-consciously unified, culturally and politically, and demarcated from its neighbours by unambiguous social and geographical boundaries. Before commencing the detailed description of Manjapur village, which is required in order to position the Ghotul within it as the Ghotul is above all a village institution, it is necessary to briefly refer to this controversy, in order to explain, why, among the Muria if not elsewhere in India, the 'village' is quite appropriately considered a fundamental unit for analysis. Among the Muria, a man or woman is, above all, identified with the territorial unit nar within whose boundaries he or she resides. This identification of course, is not with the 'village' as a mere collection of houses, but with the land (bhum), with the political authority of the village (the bhumkal or village council of elders), and with the village as a ritual community, with its own gods and priestly specialists.

The economic, political and ritual autonomy of the nar as a unit is central in Muria life. But more sinister motives have been suggested by Dumont and Pocock in a famous critique for the centrality of the 'village' in Indian studies. They suggest that it is the fact that any anthropologist's study being restricted to a single 'home base' fieldwork village (as a matter of practical necessity) tends to be reflected in subsequent ethnographic reporting in ways which can lead to sociological distortion. Arbitrary considerations of convenience, the by-product of fieldwork traditions, result in the 'reification' of the village as a unit.
of analysis "conferring on it a sociological reality which it does not, in fact, possess." (Dumont & Pocock 1957). They emphatically state that "India, sociologically speaking, is not made up of villages" (1957:25) and warn that a village study which is not situated within the comprehensive all-encompassing framework of the classical values and conceptions of Indian civilization is reactionary and bound to mislead. They make the following bold assumption:

"A temporary conclusion which comes up forcibly in the present state of our knowledge is that the territorial factor, the relation to the soil is not, in India as a whole, one of the primary factors in social organisation. It is a secondary factor in relation to the two fundamental factors of kinship and caste". (1957:18)

There can be little disputing the positive effects of Dumont and Pocock's strictures within Indian sociology generally, but they are not to be interpreted too categorically. Indeed, it is quite paradoxical, that the one kind of ethnography which, at the time that Dumont and Pocock were writing the passages quoted above, might reasonably have claimed to be exempt from their strictures against 'reifying the village', was the old style 'tribal' ethnography exemplified by Elwin particularly. Here - in such ethnographies as "The Muria and their Ghotul" (1947), "The Agraria" (1942) and "Bondo Highlanders" (1950) by Verrier Elwin; "The Birhors" by S.C. Roy (1925), "Kol tribe of Central India" by W.C. Griffiths (1946) and more recently, "The Gond and Bhumia of Eastern Mandla" by S. Fuchs (1960) - is the kind of 'global' perspective espoused by Dumont and Pocock if not, perhaps, the sensitivity to questions of pan-Indian values. In these traditional tribal ethnographies the emphasis is heavily on descent groups and kinship where social organization is concerned, and the village figures as no more than the background against which these 'territorial' kinship arrangements are outlined. Once again, one perceives the influence of fieldwork methods, since Grigson and Elwin gathered their information while 'touring' whole districts, and neither adopted the Malinowskian information-collecting methods of the later village studies of individual multi-caste villages, which constituted the polemical target of Dumont and Pocock. The practice among the tribal ethnographers was to spend a few
nights camping in successive villages, interviewing informants in isolation from much in the way of detailed context, on any topic which seemed hopeful at the time. The resulting ethnographies are catalogues of exotic customs fitted into the broad framework of 'tribal' institutions without any anchoring in village based social organization. One can easily understand the way in which an excessively mobile fieldwork technique, such as this, would throw the weight of the analysis heavily on those features of tribal social organization which appeared to be continuous over the whole 'tribal' territory: that is, 'clans', 'phratries' etc. while tending to obscure the sociologically constraining framework of village loyalties and identifications, that are sociologically more salient to the village-bound informant than to the ethnographer for whom any particular village was no more than a way-station, and whose purview was the 'tribe' as a whole.

One must therefore agree with Dumont and Pocock in their methodological critique of the dangers of allowing fieldwork methods to unduly influence a sociological approach; but the problem with a society such as the Muria is really the opposite of the problem they identified with the classic 'village studies' of multicaste villages in Hindu India, in areas closer to the centres of 'high' civilization on the subcontinent. There, to be sure, the 'village' has less meaning as a discrete sociological entity than the 'village study' perspective might lead one to suppose, but in low-density, predominantly single-caste communities such as the Muria village, the village has more significance than the traditional 'tribal' perspective allows. Indeed here one can make an observation concerning the whole problem of the relation of 'tribal' India to 'caste' India. It is now recognised that the 'tribe' in India corresponds to no structurally definable collectivity: it is a cultural categorization and one which is moreover imposed by outsiders and is not self-consciously recognised by the groups to which it is applied. At the same time, efforts have been made, by writers such as Bailey (1960) to give structural meaning to the tribe/caste distinction by aligning it to the classic Durkenheimian opposition between organic and mechanical solidarity: 'tribal' society is segmentary ('mechanical solidarity') as opposed to caste society which is 'organic'. However, Bailey's approach is misleading in attempting to equate Indian 'tribes' as far as possible with their classic African counterparts;
here one does not find an arrangement of nested, genealogically articulated descent groups as was argued in the previous chapter. Tribal society is more properly understood as ordinary Hindu society, existing under certain special conditions but not essentially different: 'tribal' areas are areas in which a single caste - the 'tribe', proliferates through a territory at low density, with little competition from other castes, no development of landlordism, commercial specialization etc. so that vertical segmentary territorial relations provide the basic organizational lines of cleavage, as opposed to 'horizontal' articulation by caste ranking. Both horizontal (caste) and vertical (territorial) social discriminations are drawn throughout the range of Indian village society; the difference between 'caste' villages and 'tribal' villages is one of emphasis rather than kind, as is perfectly brought out in Sinha's discussion of the development of 'caste' distinctions among the 'tribal' Bhumij (Sinha, S. 1962). In dealing with tribal societies particular attention, therefore, has to be paid to territorial segmentary organization - the Muria nar - because it is the sociological relevance of this particular level of social organization that is distinctive of 'tribal' societies in India as a class. All the differences in cultural values, attributes etc. are sustained, and are socially significant, only because they are related to the organization of social relations founded on territoriality rather than hierarchy.

The approach to an understanding of Muria social structure which places emphasis on the village is defensible on these grounds: the village is the unit of structure which shows the highest elaboration of social rules governing membership, the rights and duties incumbent on village members, and it is only in the light of the village framework that kinship and clanship assume their determining influence on social relations, never independently. The village is the corporate political group, conscious of its prerogatives where the whole village territory is concerned, and the village is administered by its council (bhumkal) whose decisions are binding on all. Every village is also a religious congregation with its own specific responsibilities in the cult of the gods, including the so called 'clan' gods who are never worshipped by congregations exclusively drawn from one particular clan. The relationship of people to the soil, a factor dismissed as secondary by Dumont and Pocock, is heavily emphasized
in the religious system of the Muria and indeed is the basis of the moral bond between people and divinities: it is because the village congregation share 'substance' in that they all draw sustenance from the village earth (nel) that they are obliged to contribute to the ritual tributes paid to the gods by the village collectively. The village in practice is not a simple whole, and the unity of the village is often obscured by the competition and rivalry between families within it. But even the divisiveness of the village in practical situations, speaks for the unity of the village in Muria thinking, in that the lines of division within the village are said to be caused by the divergent histories of prior village membership of various component families (or gohor) present in the village.

The caste composition of Manjapur

Manjapur, like most nar in the vicinity is not exclusively Muria, indeed its population is divided almost half and half between tribals and non tribals who have colonised the land adjoining the river for more than four generations. However the presence of these 'outsiders' does not affect the generalisation made above concerning the absence of a caste hierarchy as a basic organizing principle in the 'tribal' village. Before looking at the Muria side of the village in detail it is necessary to say something about the Hindu presence in Manjapur in order to bring out the specific character of tribal-Hindu relations in this part of Bastar and forestall certain possible misunderstandings. The population of Manjapur is divided by caste as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muria</td>
<td>224</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koitor 'Babalar' Muria</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>47.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria (Vadey)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu Maraar (market gardeners)</td>
<td>223</td>
<td>47.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean castes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rawit (herdmen)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harijan Ganda</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total no. 470
This degree of heterogeneity in Manjapur's population is nothing unusual. Even among the Maria, much further from the Hindu-settled areas along the main lines of communication, according to Jay (1968:42) "one third of Marias live in villages where at least one other caste is present". Manjapur lies directly on the main route from Narayanpur to Chhota Dongar and my experience of driving through Muria territory revealed very clearly the fact that the degree of mixed-caste occupancy of Muria villages is a function of their distance from the lines of communication, the villages, like Manjapur, bordering main roads being more prone to contain a larger number of different groups than villages situated at some distance from the road (Aggarwal gives details of this distribution of population).

But this heterogeneity in Manjapur's population is not visible on the ground in that the Maraar settlement is spatially completely segregated from the Muria zone, and is to all intents and purposes a separate village. This is the invariable pattern, so that one does not find tribals and Hindus living in close proximity in their every day activities. The only exceptions, so far as Manjapur is concerned are the Rawits, one family of which live as clients of wealthy Muria families and pursue their traditional occupation of looking after their patrons' livestock, milking cows and selling milk to Hindus (the Murias dislike milk as a food and give it occasionally as a medicine to sick children). The Rawits have been a service caste to the Muria since traditional times and though 'purer' in the recognised scheme of Hindu values, present no threat to Muria supremacy within their own village. The other non-Muria in the Murias half of the village are the Maria Smith of one family who pursue their specialised occupation, smelting iron from local ores and making ploughshares, axes, and metal implements of all kinds. The Smith is paid in kind by the village (on a jajamani-like arrangement) as well as receiving payment for additional work. The Smith ranks lower than the Muria of Manjapur and belongs to an endogamous service caste of Maria Smiths (Vadey), most of whom reside in Abujhmar itself.
The Babalor Muria (two families) are Muria who accept the teachings of Baba Bihari Dass, a Hindu reformer, and who, in accordance with his message refrain from the consumption of beef and alcohol. This cuts them off from participation in village ritual and they have become an endogamous, or nearly endogamous sect. They refuse to send their daughters to the Ghotul, so no village participation in their marriages is forthcoming. For most purposes they can be considered as normal Muria, but they are a small, rather despised, and consequently resentful minority, with no political weight in the village and no prestige.

The significant group of Hindus inside Manjapur's administrative boundaries are the Maraars, and they must be treated in more detail as I shall argue later that the peculiar, mixed-sex form of the Muria Ghotul in contradistinction to the Maria Ghotul owes much to their proximate presence. As the map of the village shows, the Maraar quarter is concentrated along the river banks while the Muria hamlets are dispersed and relatively un-influenced by the position of the river. This is due to the Maraar dependence upon river water (held in the sandy bed of the river during the dry months) and for irrigating the intensively worked vegetable plots from which the Maraars derive the cash crops on which they depend. The Muria do not use this agricultural technique, and hence the two groups are not in competition for the same kind of land. The Maraars have some ordinary paddy land, and cultivate more on sharecropping arrangements with Muria landlords but economic competition between the two groups is not an issue in the villagers' own estimations.

The Maraar quarter is very different in its settlement pattern with compact streets, and indeed in its general ambience, from the sparsely occupied Muria zone. The track into Manjapur leaves the Narayanpur-Chhota Dongar main road at Dhorai and leads to the river and the Maraar settlement. Here the visitor, (after making a somewhat nerve-racking journey over the river-bed) is confronted with a compact village centre, surrounding the school and water-pump, from which radiate streets in a star pattern, lined with solid, comfortable looking mud houses with verandas at the front and cow sheds surrounding a courtyard at the back. The impression gained is of an attempt to maximise sociability, highlighting the close-knit community bonds of the Manjapur Maraars (most
of the household heads belong to a single, very large, lineage with a strong sense of agnatic solidarity and community of interest). During the day, most work takes place along the belt of atar - irrigated garden plot - land beside the river-bed. This strip is distributed among all Maraar households so as to ensure that each has access to a plot to carry out the gardening on which their livelihood is based. The atar is a most remarkable sight, particularly by contrast with the higgeldy-piggeldy patchwork of paddy fields elsewhere in the village, consisting of a spectacularly neat array of rectangular plots, laid out with mathematically neat rows of vegetables and tiny canals fed by wells. Each family builds a little atar shed to cook, eat and rest in during the day, and mount guard against marauding animals at night. Maraars also cultivate paddy but this, for them, is a secondary domain, and they lavish year long attention on their atar gardens while paddy growing only takes up about five months of the year.

The Murias and the Maraars

The Manjapur Maraars are residents in the same administrative unit as the Manjapur Murias, but they recognise that it is the Murias, and not they, who truly belong to Manjapur. Their primary loyalties are to their caste-community (aukat) which is dispersed over a large region stretching from the Chhatisgarh plains through Kanker to the north, to Chhota Dongar and Orchha in the south. The Manjapur Murias have real roots in the place, while the Maraars see themselves as immigrants whose ties are with the old Maraar settlements at Chhota Dongar, from whence the Manjapur Maraars came, four generations ago following a dispute within their lineage.

The Maraars of Manjapur form an enclave where they preserve intact their Maraar culture and where signs of a Muria influence or presence are hard to find. Both groups come within the orbit of a regional-wide caste system which governs their relations within the village. The Maraars are of undeniably higher caste status than the Murias. It is prohibited for a Maraar man to marry a Muria woman, while the hypergamous rule intervenes to prevent a Muria man being outcasted in the case of such a match of which, however, I have no examples. The other chief restriction is that of commensality; no Maraar would accept cooked food from a Muria while no
Muria would shun Maraar food, despite its being considered inferior in taste, for the same reason. The Maraars maintain their image of cultural superiority in respect of the Murias by professing to abstain from alcoholic drink, and by an abhorrence of the practice of beef-eating with both of which the Murias are strongly identified. The Murias are invited to take the carcass of a dead cow or buffalo away to consume. No Maraars in the village have gone so far as to become total vegetarians, and they relish eating goat and chicken; but their diet is much poorer in meat than the Murias' for the reason that they are not hunters and therefore cannot use meat of rabbits, birds, fox and deer to supplement their daily intake of vegetables. The Murias are aware of the revulsion that their practice of eating cows elicits among Hindus; one perceptive Muria told me: "we rank lower than the other castes because we eat beef". But they, on the other hand find ganja (cannabis) smoking indulged in by the Maraars as bizarre and point to the not uncommon spectacle of a Maraar man making rounds of Muria houses pleading to buy bottles of darngo liquor, which the Maraars are forbidden both by law, and caste statute, from distilling for themselves. To the Murias, at any rate, the image and the actuality of the 'pure' caste Maraar, are different things altogether.

The above rules are the formal dimension of Muria-Maraar relations which are not particularly concerned with intra-village relations in that a Muria from any village is expected to behave in a similar way towards Maraars in whatever place he might happen to encounter them. But there are other aspects of the inter-relations between the two groups which one might put down not so much as the local manifestations of a broader, extra-village caste system, than of being based on specifically village institutions.

In relation to the cult of the gods as it is actually carried out in the confines of the village, the Muria and the Maraars form a single congregation, and their religious activities are coordinated in the light of an encompassing system of religious categories. Manjapur is a singular, united entity whose finite boundaries are preserved and reflected in the Manjapur village that exists in a supernatural space and world, where however it is inhabited by gods born to the village, or married there, and ancestral spirits of departed Manjapur souls. There are three classes of
supernatural beings who reside in this spiritual Manjapur, and it is indicative of the ambiguous relations that Maraars feel towards the place, that they should be the custodians of Yayal Muttay who is a refraction of the State Goddess Danteshwari while the Murias should be put in charge of the cults of the group of pen gods who are more intimately bound to the village, and that it should be the Murias who are exclusively responsible for the crucial cult devolving around Tallur Muttay, the demi-urge who is less of a god than a fertility principle. The latter two 'beings' are regarded by the Maraars as being mati (earth) gods and belonging properly to the Murias whom they sometimes define as "mati" people; but this does not mean that they regard these gods as extraneous and therefore less powerful. If anything, the Maraars feel vulnerable to attack by and at a disadvantage in regard to these most capricious and malevolent gods, to communicate with whom they must employ Muria shamans who advise them on appropriate sacrifices and exorcism rituals in cases where a Maraar has been diagnosed as having been "caught" (paitur) by one of them. The cult of Tallur Muttay is entirely shrouded in mystery but for this same reason, imbued with great mystical potency in the eyes of the Maraars. Maraars are excluded from occasions at which this being is propitiated and must be content to allow the Murias to preside over the pact between men and the vital life forces embedded deep in Manjapur soil. But the Maraars control the state orientated cult of Yayal Muttay. A Maraar man is the official Pujari of Manjapur's Yayal Muttay or Danteshwari, whose temple is located along the banks of the river in the Maraar quarter. The Muria cults of pen and Tallur Muttay are transactional cults between men and other worldly beings in which the effort is to achieve a sort of balance between demands on both sides; hierarchy is however, intrinsic to the cult of Yayal Muttay. The relationship between this god and its congregation was and still is, modelled on that between king and subject, being a mixture of royal patronage conditional upon absolute loyalty and obedience, and parental solicitude - "yayal" stems from "yaya" meaning mother. During the hey day of the traditional kingdom Yayal Muttay gods from each village in the kingdom were taken to Jagdalpur to be assembled before the Raja, who was, it has already been noted, the supreme Yayal Muttay. It was this cult which gave substance to the image of a hierarchical kingdom whose secular functions never really impinged upon villagers' lives, and it was this cult
that legitimised, directly, the status of the king.

Yayal Muttay is consequently a god of high rank who only accepts sacrificial offerings of coconuts, goats, and chickens. Her congregation may be tribal but she herself does not have any tribal attributes. She will never, for example, have liquor sprinkled in front of her image, nor have cows and buffaloes or pigs slaughtered in her name and even her shamans are prohibited from eating beef - although there are no interdictions against them imbibing liquor. But Yayal Muttay is never-the-less a god of Manjapur who keeps company along with tribal pens in another world. The fact that all these gods constitute a fraternity of gods is borne out particularly on some occasions, such as on the last day of the pen karsna ritual at which Yayal Muttay is carried by the Pujari and a procession of Maraars over to the raur shrine of pen gods situated in the Muria section of the village where her shamans dance along with pen shamans.

The straightforward complementarity between Murias and Maraars and their inter-dependence in the triadic system of village gods is complicated by the Murias maintaining their own images of Yayal Muttay and their own official Pujari whom however, I have never seen officiating on formal occasions at Yayal Muttay's shrine (gudi). This would seem to suggest a closure, especially on the part of the Murias towards the Maraars and to invalidate the monopolistic control of the Maraars over the cult of Yayal Muttay. But tribal Yayal Muttays possess the same characteristics of moral and social superiority over the rest of the pantheon of village gods. The centrality of the Maraars in the cult of
Yayal Muttay is assured because of their common identification along with the deity with the State, and regional hierarchies. The presence of Maraars in any village automatically gives them priority in so far as this cult is concerned; they remain peripheral to the cult of the more primitive, but equally powerful gods. The fact that the Muria villagers have their own Yayal Muttay points not so much to the exclusion of the Maraars and segregation of the Maraar quarter of the village, as it does to the entrenched position of Yayal Muttay in the religious system of the Murias - a fact which one might argue gives an incorporating framework to the Maraars in this system. In other words, it is illogical to assume that the Maraars do not fit into the system, when Yayal Muttay is such an important part of it.

There is a set of ritual duties performed by the Murias for the Maraars on weddings which are the service aspect of an otherwise muted caste system. Murias get wood from the forest, cut it up, fetch water, make the marriage booth and the patterns of tumeric with which it is decorated. In all these duties Murias act out their image of being 'forest' people; ordinarily Muria women barter jungle leaves from trees in the forest which are desired as food wraps, and for making leaf cups, as well as other kinds of edible forest produce to Maraars, whose women seldom venture out into the forest. The Maraar exchange these products for garden vegetables and jaggery. Maraar women make rounds of Muria hamlets in the hope of exchanging sweet, cooked snacks, and dried fish for tamarind and corn which are more plentifully found among the Murias.

Muria and Maraar are separated from one another not only by language, customs and physical space, but also socially. Both accuse one another of practising sorcery and each side is convinced that the other's sorcery techniques are the more devious and vicious. Maraars echo the fears of Murias to roaming around in the Maraar quarter saying that one can never tell what wiles the residents might use to make one fall victim to a sorcery attack. The mutual distrust sometimes flares up and a meeting is called to which the person is formally charged with sorcerizing and then made to pay a fine. I was told of a meeting that took place after it had been discovered that a Maraar man had torn a fragment of cloth from the sari of an eleven year old Muria girl for the purpose of 'sacrificing'
pujna) her to the goddess. There was great indignation over this and all
the Muria men went in a show of strength to the meeting and succeeded in
making the Maraar man hand over to the Muria bhumkal a goat that was later
consumed by the Murias and Maraars present, and to give by-and-by a sum of
two hundred rupees to them. Fears of sorcery attacks genuinely constrain
relaxed social intercourse between Murias and Maraars; indeed some Murias
put this down as the reason for them refusing to send their children to
the school in Maraar Manjapur, and a child returning home with a slight
cold or fever is likely to cause some consternation and an immediate
threat of retaliation against the sorcerizing Maraars.

The patwari or tax collector, and the teacher in charge of Manjapur’s
school all live in the Maraar settlement. Manjapur’s school was the
furthest building down on the road leading to the Muria section, but it was
abandoned for safety reasons, and the teacher took to holding his classes,
whose main membership anyway consisted of Maraar children, in a shed
opposite his house in the Maraar settlement. A new school was built at a
point much closer to the Muria section but the teacher refused to move
into the new building claiming that there were no facilities for water
nearby and so the cooking of porridge (which is distributed to school
going children at midday) would become a vastly time-consuming affair. I
was present when a Manjapur Muria requested the Collector to sanction a
new house for the teacher near the new school for which the villagers were
happy to supply free labour. But the teacher confided in me that if the
condition of having a new house was moving away from the Maraar quarter, he
was happy to stay on in his old house; it was not on account of any
antipathy towards the Murias, but because he and his family who came from
Durg, "felt more at home" with the Maraars than the Murias, whose language
Gondi he did not understand in the first place.

The above details give sufficient indication of the relation between
Murias and Maraars in Manjapur, and are typical of other villages in the
vicinity which have more than one caste in residence. The important
general point to make is that Manjapur cannot be treated in the normal way
as a hierarchically organised village with a complex ranking of groups
related through ritual purity/pollution as in the classic studies of
Dumont (1957), or empirically described in such famous monographs as Mayer
The Maraars are an encapsulated enclave within Manjapur, not a 'high caste' group dominating a low caste group. Maraar and Muria partition the religious duties incumbent on the village; the Muria monopolising those parts which have to do with the village per se (especially the land, fertility etc.) while the Maraars deal with the 'regional' cult of the state goddess, which is not specifically a village matter. In short, Muria and Maraar social universes are structurally independent of one another. But there is a more subtle process of Hindu influence at work throughout Muria country, and in a later section I will discuss one aspect of this in relation to the Ghotul. Because of the Maraar presence, the Murias have the Hindu example constantly before their eyes, even if they remain socially apart. And in the domain of marriage this example can be seen to be a potent one, since there is evidence, which will be discussed in due course, that it is the Hindu example of pre-puberty marriage (which is a standard the Maraars strive to keep to) which has influenced the treatment of girls at puberty among the Murias, and has secured them a place in the Ghotul organization, which Maria girls, away from the centres of Hindu influence, do not have. I will return to this topic at a later stage.

The ownership of land

In this part of India, the legal registration of land ownership is a relatively recent phenomena since it was only in the 1930s that the area was surveyed for revenue purposes by Grigson. Manjapur lies on the fringes of an unsurveyed mass of land that is represented on map (II) by the jagged line on the western-most edges of the village and needless to say is a source of some chagrin to the villagers that they should be made to pay land tax while their immediate neighbours escape this onerous duty. The importance of legally ratifying claims of land ownership, known as patti documents, is now appreciated by all villagers, especially since the arrival, some ten years ago, of a patwari or revenue collector in the village. Since that time the villagers have also come to realise that the government is the largest land owner in Manjapur. Registration of land is a complicated and costly procedure, and villagers will therefore only register land when they absolutely have to, such as when land registration goes along with a deed of sale, or when necessitated by a death. Land is
held in big family blocks and the splitting of households or segmentation within local lineages is generally not recorded by a change in the registration of land; in other words the named categories under which land is registered do not give information on the actual claims to land held within the patrilineage. One cannot use land records to provide data on the developmental cycle and the ages at which sons leave to form independent units since the registration of land in these separate names lags far behind the actual point in time at which separation takes place. For example, Dasru, in whose name 15.56 acres of land is held shares his land with his FEBS - a man called Pandru whose own sons have married and one of them moved out of his house, and with his FYBS.

One of the reasons for the lack of concern displayed by individual villagers for using land registration as a means of securing their own inalienable rights over land, is that, by law, no Muria may sell land to a non-tribal, and in the case of land sales to Murias (who are the only Adivasis or tribals in the area) traditional conventions regarding land purchases must be upheld which include a period of stay in the village attached to a resident family, seeking formal permission from the Gaita and giving obligatory sacrifices to Tallur Muttay. Sanctions can be applied against the person who sells his land without consulting the bhumkal or his patri-kin. By reducing the scope of the market in land, and (rightly) debarring land sales to the largest group of potential purchasers - the outsider Hindu merchant traders - the Government has effectively confined land transfers and sales to the traditional system where named registration is secondary to traditional criteria determining both the alienability and inalienability of land. It is unthinkable that any person would risk his standing in the village by using his legal ownership to dispose of land just as it is not likely that anybody would be naive enough to purchase land under such conditions. Land registration is not critical and therefore is ignored, to a certain extent, since there are traditional safeguards which are employed to protect people's interests in the land. These safeguards would have been impotent against outsiders; but happily this is not the case due to the Government's strict control over land sales.
Traditionally rights to land were, and still continue to be, transmitted patrilineally. All the sons had rights to their father's property and all daughters were excluded. Patriliny is strongly emphasized, so that it excludes not only illegitimate sons, that is, the illegitimate sons of women married to a legal owner, but also all step-sons as well, from becoming land owners and transmitting land to their sons. These non-inheriting sons may cultivate, however, along with their step-brothers. Widows without sons have no share in their husband's landed property, but those with very young sons expect that their sons' claims be recognized and respected, although this is not automatic and requires acrimonious negotiations between the widow and her son on the one side, and the father's brothers and their sons on the other. Such claims are even harder to assert by widows should they have left the village to be married off elsewhere subsequently. A widow is usually supported for some years by her husband's brothers. But such support - after several years since the husband's death have elapsed - is usually conditional upon her marrying one of his younger brothers. Women sometimes prefer leaving altogether and either returning to live with their parents or marrying someone else. In the rare event of divorces taking place after the birth of a son, the son is still legally entitled to his father's land even though he may not reside with him. In Manjapur one such boy was left behind in his father's care when his mother ran away to marry someone near Narayanpur. After his father's marriage the son left on his own, when he was about ten years old, to live with his mother's brother living in Manjapur as well. During our fieldwork he was about sixteen years old and seemed to feel equally at home in his mother's place at Narayanpur, his mother's brother's place where he was brought up, and his father's, where he had undeniable property rights. On the other hand, there is also a man in the village who is in the unfortunate position of being the son of a man in a Maria village who was eaten by a tiger when he was just a baby. His mother left the village and married a Manjapur man who had already a son from a previous wife who had died. The two men lived in a joint household and cultivated the land in common, but the issue of to whom the land belonged sprang up when the younger brother (son of the Maria man) ran away with his elder brother's wife to a distant village and sent word that he would postpone compensation payment to his step-brother unless the latter divide
property equally between them. The consensus in Manjapur was that although the younger brother had spent his life in Manjapur his land was properly in his father's village - the village where he had been born - and that he had no right to make such an absurd claim. The younger brother was categorised as a "Vayanaria", that is, a man from the village Vayanar although he had left it when a baby of some months old. He did not propose to investigate the matter of his land rights within that village. His mother had not kept up any contact with her first husband's patri-kin (as most women do not) and the two villages were many miles apart. The man therefore realised that it would have been impossible to translate his moral rights to Vayanar land into actual practical ownership. Thus although it is acknowledged that all sons of a man have permanent rights to his property, it is realised that these rights are dependent upon the goodwill and magnanimity of the group of men in possession of the land.

In the traditional system there was no way in which land could be acquired through women but land registration may have enabled some individuals to bypass the traditional arrangement whereby a man's land was inherited by his brother's sons, and not by his sons-in-law, if he had only daughters. So far this has not happened in Manjapur and no land is held in a woman's name. But I was informed by a Manjapur man who had been residing uxorilocally that he stood to inherit his father-in-law's property as his wife was the only child. He reckoned on the bhumkal of the village posing no obstacle in the way of him getting land which was his father-in-law's repayment of a debt to him for residing and caring for him in his old age. However, men residing uxorilocally cannot normally compete with their wife's brothers for shares in land. This man's confidence was based partly on the fact that there were no sons, and partly on the fact that his father-in-law could invoke the law to validate the transfer of land held in his name to his son-in-law. Land registration is therefore sometimes seen as enabling one to negotiate with the village council on one's own terms and as giving one, within limits, the power to act independently.

The traditional rules restricted land transfers to only certain categories of relatives, but the image of land confined to a group of patri-kin was not transposed on to the village as a whole which was open to be settled in by people from other villages who did not have to
maintain real or fictional links of clanship or affinity to any of its residents. Migrants were absorbed into the group of land owning villagers only in gradual stages, and some of them left before reaching this stage.

The only evidence of hierarchical elements in Manjapur Muria society could be said to be the division of its population into the group who claim to have always lived in Manjapur - a claim that is the basis of their moral ascendancy over the rest of Manjapur's citizens and justifies their monopoly over the Tallur Muttay cult - and people who have had their origins in other villages. Some of these people have had their families living in Manjapur for three generations but the status of being a migrant and the moral overtones that it carries of therefore being less of a Manjapur citizen, are hard to shed. There is no specific word for 'migrant' in Gondi, and people speak of migrants as "those who came to the village running" (vita vatur); the indigenous concept emphasizes the motive of seeking escape from an unpleasant situation which lies behind all migrations. A migrant is, by definition, someone who has been compelled to migrate by social, and less directly by economic pressures. The category of people who were most susceptible to such pressures were usually younger people on the threshold of setting up independently. Thus young Ghotul couples often ran away to live as married couples in a distant village and thereby to escape detection by kinsfolk and legitimize a marriage impossible under the alliance rules pertaining in their village of origin; brothers often left home after a quarrel, and sometimes whole families were moved into abandoning their villages after a run of misfortune convinced them of being the target of sorcery attacks by hostile villagers. Wherever these people ran to they could usually rely on their value as suppliers of labour to provide them with patrons willing to accept them as members of the household in return for labouring on the land. The situation in Manjapur even at present is that of a surplus of land but a shortage of labour. The dividing line between rich and poor is not so much the amount of land owned, as the ability to command adequate labour, along with the availability of crucial agricultural capital in the form of ploughing cattle. Outsiders to the village were seen not as trespassers who posed a threat to the political and economic structure of the village, but as potential suppliers of labour and they were readily given food and shelter and accepted into the better-off households in the
village. Running away (vitna), which is such a common and accepted part of Muria life, is sustained by the prevailing conditions of labour shortage; it is this that guarantees livelihood to run away couples or solitary young men, or women in the interval between their first and second marriages. A run away couple is a god-send in the eyes of the Manjapur families who are oversupplied with land and short of labour; one only has to witness the complicated negotiations which people will relentlessly pursue for the sake of hiring for a single season some poor, landless family's son to appreciate how acutely this imbalance is felt by the more substantial of Manjapur citizens. It is common for run-aways to demand some form of payment along with board and lodging in return for their labour. For example, in one case of a couple who came to stay, they asked for a pair of plough cattle to be given to them after they had finished a term of two years work with their patron family.

People who migrated therefore were in an inferior position vis-a-vis the rest of the villagers in that they were landless clients and labourers, and formally dependent upon the good will and generosity of the villagers to allow them to stay. Despite the fact that they were treated as equal members of the household and did not have to defer to them, or to the villagers in any observable way, they did not enjoy the rights that went along with being a Manjapuria, such as being part of the bhumkal and being able to freely exploit Manjapur's forests. Neither were they entitled to the moral privilege of making their offerings of first fruits (since they had none) to the village gods, or of being able to claim to be the 'creations' (putiler) of Manjapur's gods. The autochthonous strain that one finds in Muria religion is due to the Earth being such a key category endowed with life-giving energies, and it is the way in which links to the village of one's origin are conceptualized: people born in Manjapur have been created out of Manjapur. Migrants were not part of the moral community of Manjapur until they bought land and began to participate in rituals on the same terms as the rest of Manjapur people.

Migrants were easily accepted into villages because they did not encroach upon the political rights of Manjapur people, nor threaten the moral hegemony that these people enjoyed over Manjapur. After several years most migrants acquired land in the village and began to maintain
quasi-kinship or affinal links with their earlier patrons. The 'class' distinction between migrants and others in the village was preserved for the first few years while families were building up resources and usually combining working for others along with working on their own land; but given the vissicitudes of fortune to which all peasants are subject the distinction between the two groups of 'original' versus later arrivals to the village was represented as a social rather than an economically-based one. At present it is impossible to use the criterion of wealth to distinguish those of Manjapur villagers who were migrants from those who claim to have always lived there - although it is true that the three landless families in the village who are full-time labourers on other people's land have all originated in other villages. In a later section I will describe how a big quarrel which erupted in the village was based on the feelings of jealousy and resentment by the core group of original citizens against the group of migrant families who have overtaken them economically. In other words, patronage forms an abiding element in the conceptualization of relations between relative newcomers and earlier citizens from the point of view of the latter group.

It is clear that although in the past the village was not closed to outsiders they went through a transitional stage of being affiliated to a resident family before they became land-owners in their own right. So far as is known, no immigrants arrived in the village and bought land immediately. No land has been registered as having been sold to an outsider; whatever land there has been for sale has been bought up by families already living in Manjapur. Another fact about land sales in Manjapur is that land has not passed hands internally within the village between people residing there. That is to say, the only land that has come up for sale has been that belonging to emigrants leaving the village and there is hectic politicking and bargaining for such land with intense competition between prospective buyers. This might seem irrational in view of the fact that people have more land than they can cultivate, and more than is needed to allow fields to be fallowed as necessary. But just as people are loth to sell portions of their estate to buy cattle and seed with which to increase the returns on remaining land, so people regard the buying of more land as a political venture and not necessarily as an economic investment. The person who is accepted as buyer is considered to
have scored a minor victory over his rivals and to have fortified his position within the village. The bond between the emigrant and the village survives for several years after the emigrant leaves. These people may sell their land in bits and pieces leaving themselves with the option of returning some time in the future. Since such people often leave brothers behind it is in their interest to make a sale which would conform to the political alignments of their own resident lineage. The selling and buying of land is more a social and political, than strictly economic transaction between families. As land tends to be bought, not by individuals, as much as by family blocks, the selling of it to a particular group is either a gesture of friendship or a return for a debt of obligation or an expression of political solidarity between the two parties involved. Often the smaller, migrant, and politically insecure families tend to lose out to the larger, entrenched ones who dominate Manjapur's scene. This was what happened when Tiri, a second generation immigrant, vied with his well known enemy and rival Panku Ram to buy land off Kolu who sold his share of land held in his brother Sobh Singh's name, before leaving the village. Tiri courted Kolu several months before he left and promised him a higher price for his land; but Kolu rebuffed him and gave the land over to Panku Ram who belongs to the headman's lineage and is a powerful man in the village, though less well-off than Tiri, Manjapur's richest man. This confirmed Tiri in his feelings of paranoia regarding the jealousy and hostility that his phenomenal success incited in other villagers who were therefore determined to prevent him from getting more land. However Kolu may have reasoned that it would be politically expedient to ally with Panku Ram's lineage who are the most numerous and united family block in Manjapur as well as belonging to the core group of original Manjapur people.
### TOTAL LAND OWNERSHIP OF MANJAPUR (acres)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Land</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MANJAPUR MURIAS:</td>
<td>389.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MANJAPUR MARRAARS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>non-resident MURIAS:</td>
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<tr>
<td>CROWN LAND:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>cultivated</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) MARRAARS</td>
<td>59.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) MURIAS</td>
<td>36.51</td>
<td>[very unevenly distributed only 4 MURias have such land. Majhi has 19 acres of it.]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total cultivated</strong></td>
<td>95.58</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nilati Van (Forest):</td>
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<tr>
<td>Land under water:</td>
<td>3.29</td>
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### LANDOWNERSHIP BY MANJAPUR MURIAS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>bera</th>
<th>marhan</th>
<th>kablikast</th>
<th>total acreage</th>
<th>No. of shares</th>
<th>Average per share</th>
<th>Total no. persons</th>
<th>Average per person</th>
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<td>Juggu</td>
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<td>23.41</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>52.37</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5.81</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chamru</td>
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<td>14.82</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30.10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10.03</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gola</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>13.72</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.26</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohanda</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>9.82</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohke</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goli</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.38</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selik</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.99</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anda</td>
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<td>3.13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12.59</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ginjire</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.64</td>
<td>19.64</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Altu</td>
<td>16.98</td>
<td>16.49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>33.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.47</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6.69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sobh S.</td>
<td>8.87</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>16.42</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>10.95</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.43</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahima</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7.47</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mori</td>
<td>15.80</td>
<td>18.99</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>34.79</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34.79</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5.79</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daula</td>
<td>12.21</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>5.62</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pandru</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>Parla</td>
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<td>1.92</td>
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<td>Dasru</td>
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The land ownership table of Manjapur confirms the corporate nature of legal land ownership and the fact that land is almost always registered in the name of one person, usually the senior most member of a patrilineage. This tendency gives a distorted picture of the disparities in amounts of land owned, and the inevitable breakdown of the estates into their component shares, on the basis of the number of heads of households, gives a more realistic estimate of the relative size of individual estates. For example, at first sight the Juggu estate of fifty two acres appears disproportionately large. Not only is it 17.58 acres more than the second largest estate in Manjapur it puts Juggu (in terms of Indian standards of land ownership generally) among the top bracket of land owners. However once Juggu's estate is subdivided into the shares held by his five brothers and three of his father's brother's sons, the average size per share is less than the Manjapur share average of .711 acres although the size of each share is in the middle range of Manjapur shares per head of household. Sometimes the registration of land in different names gives a misleading picture in an opposite direction: leading one to incorrectly conclude that the amount of land registered in a single name records the total amount of land held by that person when, in fact, it may be a very minor portion of land owned in addition to shares held in the registered estate of some other person. For example, Mohanda, Mohke, Goli and Selik are related as brothers and brother's eldest son, and although two of them, Goli and Selik, have their own separate estates, Mohke's registered 1.36 acres of land are over and above what he shares along with Mohanda in the latter's estate of 13.95 acres. Similarly Somaru is the younger brother of Tiri and is the registered owner of only 0.18 acres of land which is actually a small piece of common estate cultivated by him and his brother in the name of their father Bali Ram. Some years ago the government turned over about five acres of protected forests to be cultivated by landless villagers and Somaru qualified as one of these, although he is a de facto owner of land along with his brother Tiri, the richest man in terms of wealth of cattle in Manjapur. Thus although the tendency to group individual estates in a single name might predispose some of the larger corporations to the danger of colliding with land ceiling laws, it enables others to declare themselves 'landless' and benefit from the periodic distribution of land by the government to this category.
Dividing each registered unit into its component shares has the effect of smoothening away some of the disparities in amounts of land owned; but there are still the two largest estates of Mori and Aitu that require comment on account of their great size relative to the others. Paradoxically both these two, who have far more land than anyone else in the village, are also counted among the poorer of Manjapur’s residents. The very factors that are responsible for making them such substantial owners of land, work against the profits they can draw from this land. Both are handicapped by an acute shortage of labour that prevents them from farming efficiently. Mori belongs to the main, dominant group of Koramis, but he is the only one of his brothers to have survived and it is this demographic accident that accounts for his possessing so much land. Mori is the only able bodied man in his family; a young son died shortly after his own marriage, and another son is about ten years old. He has three daughters who used to lend a hand at ploughing as this is not tabooed to women in Muria society. But two have been married and only one Ghotul-going daughter remains. The upshot of this is that Mori is able to cultivate only a tiny fraction of his land and make a modest living out of it. Aitu on the other hand, is the son of a Hallami migrant from Tekapal, and is now the oldest man in the village. He has no sons to cultivate his land because of the tragedy, some years ago, of his son killing his own elder brother and being taken to prison thereafter. Since he is himself too old, he invited his step-son living in Muhlamar to manage the land, and it is presumed that the land will go to this man after his death. Aitu’s affairs are in disarray: his step-son is a notorious alcoholic whose capacity for liquor at all times of the day, so disgusted his own son that he left his father and now lives with his wife’s parents in the village. Aitu and his step-son do not get along and Aitu spends his time roaming around villages in the vicinity of Manjapur where he is sought after as a diviner and ouer. Aitu’s house is used as a hospital where people bring their sick family members to be looked after by him. It is the payment in kind that he gets from these people that supports him and his step-son as very little cultivation of any kind gets carried out on Aitu’s land. One of the complaints made by Aitu’s grandson against his father was that he had sold his small stock of ploughing cattle in order to buy liquor, and indeed Aitu has only three cows left - far too few to enable him to plough any land.
Aitu and Mori refuse to sell their land and both prefer to use their scarce resources of cattle, rather than land, to obtain credit when necessary. Aitu is heavily indebted to the Bank and Cooperative Society and uses his land as collateral with which to get himself bigger loans which he patently is in no position to repay. The hopeless state of Aitu's finances probably renders the selling of some of his land inevitable, but at the time being, he, like Mori adamantly refuses to consider offering it for sale. Mori's affairs are solidly under his control and he gets enough to feed his family; in all probability he will not feel any pressure to sell his land especially since land tax is exempted on fallow land. Both give as their reason for not selling land, the irreversibility of the transaction - the fact that once land is sold it cannot be bought back again whereas while one still has land one has the option of selling it and can be wooed by others for it.

One is tempted to think that both Aitu and Mori could use their assets to augment their meagre incomes by selling part of their land in exchange for livestock which would then make it possible for them to enlarge the scope of their cultivated estate. But they would not be able to overcome the problem that dogs them both viz. the shortage of labour hands, and the fact that it is impossible to buy labour and be assured of a regular supply of labour in Manjapur. The imbalance between fixed assets of land and the assets needed to exploit it is also the problem that people like Tiri and Panku Ram face but in a rather different way. Tiri is able to cultivate every bit of land he has but because he cannot buy more land in the village he buys cattle instead with the result that he now has more cattle than he has use for, but less land than he could cultivate.

The resistance to selling off land must be seen in the light of Muria beliefs regarding the intrinsically brittle, transitory nature of family fortunes and the dubious security afforded by the possession of material wealth in the form of food stocks (which are depleted as soon as they are accumulated) and livestock, which though coveted, are subject to the hazards of disease and death. Against the uncertainties of agricultural livelihood land is the only enduring resource, and it is therefore the only ultimate security. No matter how destitute a person is, he can always hope for a turn of fortune so long as he has land in his possession.
The idea of sudden reversals in the wealth of families is a recurring theme and Murias will often season their observations about some family's economic affairs with remarks that their present state is quite the opposite of what it was in some previous generation. This idea is encapsulated in a Muria saying that "where there was a sandbank in the river there is none, where there was shade there is none" (dug tey dug hillay, saya te saya hillay); this was poetically expounded by Tiri who one day, while speculating on what would happen to his family in the future, said that the lives of people like him were subject to the same alternating patterns of sunlight and shade as were created on the ground by the passage of the sun across the sky in the course of a day, so that a place which was in shade at one point in time would have sunshine at another and vice versa. Everyone says of Tiri that when he came to the village with his parents as a little boy his family were living on jungle vegetables and had only one cooking pot to call their own; "and look at him now" they conclude with expressions tinged with both jealousy and admiration. On the other hand it is said of several other families that they have suffered a steady decline in their fortunes: Aitu's father, for example, is said to have employed several full-time labourers in his hey day and to have lived in the smartest house in the village instead of the ramshackle hut that is now his son's home. Likewise the story is recalled of a Dhol Saukar who was the richest man in the village when Tiri was a mere kamiyaal labourer himself, who died leaving two sons, both of whom were alcoholics and who quickly sold all their father's land and went wandering away to some unknown village never to be heard of again. The only trace of Dhol's presence in the village are the carved wooden stumps of his house-posts which still remain and the stories of his great wealth that are told today. Tiri has become rich through prodigious efforts and careful planning on the part of his acutely intelligent mother who passed on to her sons a strong work ethic and strictly forbids frivolous expenditure of any kind, insisting that the first priority must always be the acquisition of land and cattle. It is noticeable that Tiri will not buy gold although he can much better afford it than the other villagers who invest in beautiful gold necklaces obtained from the bazaar jeweller. Tiri prefers to buy more buffaloes instead - which in Manjapur is almost as prestigious as gold. The slide of Aitu's fortunes was precipitated by the
death of his wife early in his life, his more mystical, less practically orientated bent, and the acrimonious domestic relations within his household.

All this has consequences for political relations within the village. Beliefs about the cyclical nature of wealth and relative poverty, and the assumed impermanence of wealth, make it harder to consolidate permanent inequalities or divisions between rich and poor in the village. Almost everyone who is rich now, is said to have been poor in the past, and those who are now poor have nonetheless been well-off in their past history. Despite the substantial disparities in standards of living that one observes across the village community there is a noticeable ideology of egalitarianism at all levels. The differential between those who count as 'rich' and those who merely live adequately, is the ability to harvest a surplus of food, which is not sold for cash, but which goes to recruit extra labour - labour which is also needed to produce more food. The benefits to the successful producer is simply a self-sufficient domestic unit, not a larger cash income which would imply a markedly different pattern of consumption from the normal one. The 'rich' household has a better ratio between producers and consumers in that the extra hands (kamiyaal) are all young adults at the height of their working lives, while poor families still have to support the same average number of dependent infants and old people. This added efficiency allows the richer household to support itself entirely from agriculture throughout the year, while the poorer household's food supplies have to be augmented by seasonal wage labour and by hiring out workers.

The consensual rate for labour on a daily basis is one measure (pyali) of rice (approximately 300 grm.) of unhusked rice per person, plus meals for the labourer. A permanent kamiyaal is given board and lodging as a member of the family. The payment in rice is of roughly equal value to the standard rate of money wages (Rs. 4.50 per day in 1979) paid for casual labour by the Forest Department and the Department of Public Works, who thus compete directly with the richer Muria.

The time during which labour is most in demand in the village is during the ploughing and weeding of the rice fields, and during the rice harvest.
At such times it is only the totally landless families who are available for hire, since otherwise even the poorest are occupied with their own fields. There are only two families in the village who are totally without land, and both are recent migrants from other parts. One is a family from Vahker in the Abujhmar, and the other have come from Sonapal, a village on the main road to Kondagaon. From the first family there are two members, a son around eighteen years old and a fifteen year old daughter, who are capable of work, and in the second there are four members - a mother, father and two sons. The father of the Vahker family died and his widow is blind. The family from Sonapal contracted their son, Akri over to Tiri's family when Akri was about eight or nine years old as a kamiyaal, that is, someone incorporated into the domestic household as a labour hand. Even at that age little boys are capable of putting in their share of work and are especially employed in the grazing of cattle, and the chasing away of birds who swoop down to peck at freshly sown rice seed or who come down in large numbers at the time of the ripening of the corn crop. Both these jobs are crucial but require no special skills and are usually given over to children. One does not find hierarchical discrimination between kinship roles within the Muria nuclear family, and kamiyaals as well are not treated as servants and there is no degradation attached to being one. There is no qualitative or quantitative difference in work between kamiyaals and other members of the family. No one oversees the amount of work put in by a kamiyaal who nevertheless are expected to work as hard as everyone else in the family, but not harder. During the first months of our stay in the Tiri household, Akri was regarded as a member of the family but was subject to bouts of depression during which he would talk to no one and usually leave the house to visit his parents who also lived in Manjapur. His coming back for meals after spending the day away would arouse ascerbic comments from Tiri's mother who nonetheless took care not to display her annoyance at his truancy in front of Akri himself. Akri's moods, it was obvious, were signs meant to indicate his wish to leave Tiri and become independent and they were taken as such with some consternation on the part of Tiri's family who clearly wanted him to stay on. Tiri's mother thought that it was disloyal for Akri to leave now when she said that she had brought him up as her son and bathed and fed him throughout his childhood years. The agreement with Akri's parents had been that Akri
would stay on with Tiri until the latter arranged his marriage. Akri's wife however ran away and a divorce was subsequently negotiated through her second husband. After this Akri decided to return to his parent's house, or set up on his own somewhere. Tiri's family grudgingly consented to his decision, but the impression I got was that Akri did not have to wait for them to concede before leaving and that no one could have stopped him from asserting his independence at an age at which it is normal for every mature boy to do so. After two years of unsuccessful searching for a kamiyaal to replace Akri, Tiri managed to obtain a boy of about fifteen years, from a poor family belonging to his mother's natal village near Narayanpur. The deal had been negotiated with difficulty and with cash expenses involved: in front of me Tiri gave two hundred rupees to his parents, but Tiri refused to give a straight answer to my questions as to the actual terms of the contract. It is only boys who go as kamiyaals to other people's homes, never girls. The other boy from the Vahker family spent several years as a kamiyaal with the Chamru family but relations between him and them soured when he eloped with the daughter from the Ghotul, and was refused permission by her parents to marry her, even though he was a member of the correct affinal clan. (She was married to her FZS who had engaged her previously). He left them and his place has now been taken, ironically, by Aitu's grandson. Aitu had employed Chamru as a kamiyaal on his land and the reversal in the fortunes between the two is not forgotten.

These two families, and now Aitu's grandsons, are the only people whose full-time occupation is labouring for others. There is a wide enough field of possible clients for their labour, and they are therefore not destitute despite their having no land of their own. But the decline in their capacity for labour which coincides with their steadily increasing age, is reflected more acutely in their standard of living, than it is for those who make a living from their own land. That is to say, since the demand for their labour decreases as they get older, they become poorer and poorer with age especially since their sons leave to be looked after and fed by richer families, and do not get a surplus of cash or food with which to support their parents as well. The standard contract between the kamiyaal's family and the family with which he is employed is that the expenses of his marriage, and engagement to a suitable girl will be borne
by his employers. The only *kamiyaal* in the village were young, Ghotul-going boys who were at the peak of their productive capacities; at this age there are no observable differences between them and other boys in the village, since they eat and dress alike. The differences emerge when they become older at which age people are reluctant to hire them even on a daily basis. Migrant couples, and families are welcomed as additional labour and household dependents, only so long as they are fairly young and capable of putting in a reasonable amount of labour.

Apart from these families, there are others in the village who combine labour for others with work on their own land, and it is these people who form the bulk of labourers in the village. Usually such people are able to cultivate only a small fraction of the land they possess and consequently are left with spare time during the agricultural season which they use to work on a daily basis for some richer patron. It is these people who are avidly pursued by richer men to draw upon the credit of obligations established by them throughout the year to compel or bind such labour to work for them during peak times. Such labour, unlike *kamiyaal*, is temporary, uncommitted and erratic. Since labour for others is always in competition with other profitable and more enjoyable ways of passing time, such as making trips to the forest for mushrooms and other edible substances, building or repairing houses, constructing fields, etc. the decision to work for someone is seen more in the light of the fulfillment of a social obligation, and as a favour. To a large extent residence determines the choice of employer as people in one hamlet become affiliated to a resident richer man and partly because the density of social contacts within the village is a function of physical distance, and the advantages of having good relations with one's neighbours is perceived by both rich and poor alike. Richer men establish their reputations as 'rich men' by treating their neighbours to a measured generosity in the form of small quantities of cooked or uncooked food, and as lenders of money, cattle and rice seed. This is not confined to, but certainly most concentrated within the hamlet (para).

At the time of fieldwork there were two families in the village who were definitely considered 'rich' - the Chamru family and the Tiri family although there was a consensus of opinion that Tiri was the wealthier of
the two. The more numerous Patel family, though still politically and socially prominent, were slipping from their position of being one of the richer family blocks in the village. Practically everyone in Manjapur feels compelled to protest their poverty, especially to the anthropologist but also to each other; but avowals about the problems of making ends meet cannot be credibly maintained in Tiri's case although this does not stop him from making them all the same. However in Panku Ram's case it was possible to confirm this by the fact that he was buying rice from the market from money got through daily work with the Forest Department, and at one stage, all adult members of his extended family, men and women, were so engaged, which suggests less than sufficiency as far as stocks of food went. Neither Tiri, nor his younger brother, nor any of Chamru's family had felt the need to augment harvested supplies of rice, with rice bought from the market; nor did they suffer the shortage of cash that sent all of the headman's and Panku Ram's families to work outside the village. Apart from such observations it is not possible to make reasonable quantitative estimations of the wealth of the richer families, as one invariably comes up against the policy of grossly underestimating the amount of harvested grain, and the conscious effort on the part of the richer to preserve the myth of their modest standard of living.

The legitimization, or social endorsement of a situation whereby wealth is possessed in greater quantities by a few men is problematic in Muria society because it sets up disjunctions in the social fabric between rich and poor that cannot be easily reconciled with the ethos of egalitarianism which is such a strong element in the social and psychological make-up of the Muria. All rich men feel the tensions and strains of occupying the socially anomalous and ambivalently regarded position of 'rich man'. There is an unmistakable current of hostility directed towards rich men who are caught in a self-contradictory situation of trying to achieve social merit by acts of generosity and patronage which, while gaining them widespread social approval, also contain, or are felt to contain, an insult directed at the person who is at the receiving end of a rich man's largesse, as they bite into the armour of self-sufficiency that constitutes 'honour' in Muria eyes. The socially appropriate role of a rich man vis-a-vis his community is that of "Saukar", which roughly means being both rich and generous. It is only through their generosity that rich men create a
network of clients with obligations to fulfill which constitute the substance of the status attaching to a rich man. But although there are overt signs of wealth, such as the possession of a large, comfortable house, gold and silver ornaments etc. by which people can advertise themselves as being better-off than others, care is always taken to show an inconspicuous instead of ostentatious style of food consumption, manner of dress etc. For example, Tiri's mother who can afford to eat vegetables from the market instead of those gathered in the jungle every day will nonetheless join in with equal vigour in the housewifely chorus of complaints about the shortage of jungle produce and the monotony of having to eat rice and lentils, or tamarind soup, every day. Likewise Tiri convinces everyone that he is on the verge of bankruptcy and that he is mad with worry over his financial affairs. Tiri takes care to not flaunt his wealth by being overly generous; whenever he does someone the favour of loaning money (which is often as good as giving them it) or when he brings out the odd bottle of dargno liquor or kills a cock in honour of his guest, he makes it a point of protesting that he is in the same situation as that of his guest or client, and thereby attempts to cancel out the obvious, but silent statement made about his privileged economic situation, contained in the very act of hospitality. The main reason for him doing so is fear of arousing the antagonism of his clients and neighbours since no man's dignity will permit the suggestion that he is at any sort of disadvantage vis-a-vis any other fellow villager. Rich men have to be especially tactful about making comments about someone else's financial state as every statement, no matter how innocently made, is likely to be taken as a statement making invidious comparisons concerning relative wealth. When one day Tiri's mother came back from the forest after an ant-collecting expedition and told him that a tree had fallen on her head while she was felling it, they promptly arranged for a shaman to remove the curse, which they were convinced had been planted on her after she casually remarked to a neighbour she saw herding a buffalo that he must have bought it the day before, adding "so you too have a buffalo now". According to her sons, it was this casual remark that had been felt as an affront and sufficient provocation for the neighbour to arrange for some black magic to bring harm to the Tiri family. But it is not only out of consideration for other people's sensitivities that Tiri's family tries
consciously to downplay their greater economic strength: the real motive underlying their efforts is the conviction that they are the target of jealousy or *kaer* solely on account of the wealth that they are known to possess. *Kaer* is the most negative of all social dispositions and the cause of sorcery attacks against people. Tiri's family put down all their misfortunes to sorcery, and this has resulted in a complex of paranoia uniting them against the villagers whom they see as hostile and envious. In another section I will discuss how they rationalized their implication in a murder as evidence of the *kaer* which others had towards them, but for now it is sufficient to say that this aggravates their unease and their sense of loneliness within the village. After one daughter died suddenly at a time when Tiri's harvest of rice and millet looked particularly good "much better than anyone else's in the village" so I was told, and a son became very ill also, Tiri and his mother began to seriously discuss the possibility of migrating to another village.

It might be that Tiri's problems are due, not so much to him being rich, as to his being a rich immigrant, and certainly this does seem to be a barrier to his acceptability within the village, as its rich man. At the moment, the rich men of a previous generation, the Patel group who are now in decline are regarded relatively benignly by all, but one doubts whether this would have been the case during their most prosperous years. However the factions that characterize village politics are not constituted on the principle of opposing those who are relatively well-off from those who are not; people do not participate in village politics as the occupants of restricted, one-dimensional social categories, such as rich man versus poor man, and there is even a point beyond which kinship or common clanship becomes irrelevant in the formation of factions which are the dominant feature of village politics. In other words, although a wealthy man is regarded with some hostility by those not wealthy, who at their most peevish might almost view being rich as a fault, the same attribute is subjected to shifting evaluations according to the constraints of political expediency and the interests of the parties involved. People are therefore not dogmatic about such matters and in making political alliances exploit the multi-strandedness and historicity of their relations with others. At this point it is necessary to offer a more detailed description of political processes within the village.
The politics of Manjapur

The institution in which the political system of the Muria nar is anchored is that of the bhumkal or land council that is the ultimate political authority on every matter of debate in the village, whether it be secular or sacred and pertaining to the timing of ritual events, sacrifices etc. The bhumkal is synonymous with siyan which is the category of adult, married men in all of whom, theoretically, political authority repose. Siyan are opposed to women of all ages, and to Ghotul-going boys (laiyor), and to senior men past their prime (mudiyaal). Membership within the bhumkal is conditional upon village membership since the jurisdiction of a bhumkal is confined to its own village, but is complete within it. Operationally, the bhumkal is the consensus of opinion established among siyan present at the political meetings (nivaying) convened to discuss a dispute, or decide a communal course of action for rituals or inter-village meetings etc.

People are informed about the timing of nivaying two or three days before they are held; usually the word is passed around (gudna) by the persons involved in a dispute who make it a point to invite those of their acquaintances they feel would be most sympathetic to them. Not all disputes are deferred so that the village at large can gather to discuss them and some issues are settled on the spot with only two or three men to act as adjudicators, and some family disputes are decided by important members of the lineage. However some matters must be thrown open to the village community as a whole and these are cases of elopements from the Ghotul, or pregnancies within it, or serious conflicts between brothers, and between villagers in which there had been the threat or use of physical violence. Nivayings are usually well attended as they provide entertainment to those not directly involved and a welcome break from the monotonous rhythm of domestic life.

Nivayings provide the most vivid illustration of the egalitarian principle that underlies Muria society, and of its de-centralized political controls. At meetings there is no overt emphasis on social distinctions to define and regulate political participation; all siyan, by right of being village siyan, are equally entitled to a say and to express
their opinion, although of course there is always the odd group of people who stand by without saying anything, being either uninterested, or apathetic, or inhibited, lacking confidence in speaking out. The de-emphasis on strictly social criteria, increases the scope for the assertion of individual personalities publically on such occasions. The man who is able to command attention to himself amidst the confusion and simultaneity of shouts and suggestions at a nivaying, and is able to focus upon the issues at hand by the use of an arresting and lucid rhetoric, is the one most likely to dominate the meeting although not necessarily determine the settlement arrived at. On account of possessing such qualities, some people become professional adjudicators whose services are sought after even at meetings being held in different villages. Tiri is one such man whose coolness of temperament, and impressive intelligence and rhetorical style make him much in demand at meetings both in the village and outside, although etiquette demands that he refrain from such a role at meetings in which he is directly implicated. In other words, a person's impartiality, coupled with his own personal traits, are determinative of whether he will be arbitrator or not. In Tiri's case the obvious conclusion that one might jump to is that it is on account of him being a successful and wealthy man that he is assured of a captive audience, or that it is not his personal style as much as what he represents to villagers, that makes them pre-disposed to take him more seriously than they would a poor man. This is obviously a factor that cannot be ignored, but it is one that is not present in the cases of other men who adopt a similar role at meetings. One such man in Manjapur is the village majhi or shaman, called Rajman whose gregarious nature, perhaps more than his debating skills, lead him to seize the opportunity to act as impartial mediator on those occasions at which Tiri is absent. Mediators only mediate; they do not in any way act as judges or pass sentence. Their performance is that of an investigative arbitrator who cross-examines both sides involved in a dispute, and who then leaves it up to the consensus of the meeting to decide. The role of the mediator in nivayings is to enlighten everyone present as to the cause of the dispute and give a chance to the disputants to express themselves on their own behalf. After the end of his interrogation the person usually steps aside and joins the small group of siyan who gather in a huddle some distance away from the
main body of spectators, and who are the ones who formulate a verdict, although it is one that people have by this time been prepared to expect. The group of siyan who break away can be joined by others who have a vested interest in the verdict, or who wish to join out of curiosity. But in Manjapur this core group of influential siyan is made up of four or five men who have maximum political stature, but who otherwise have diverse social and economic backgrounds. The five men in Manjapur who comprise this dominant clique are Pele, the eldest son of the Chamru family, Tiri, the Patel, Rajman and Panku Ram. All five of them are roughly of the same age and apart from the shaman, Rajman, are, or have been, rich.

There is a procedure that is adhered to at meetings called for marriage negotiations at which the men seat themselves in a semi-circular, or circular arrangement and there is much less intervention and shouting, than there is at the chaotic meetings that involve confrontation between disputants. At such meetings the only convention is to leave the ground open for maximum participation. However, there usually comes a point when this convention breaks down. This occurs when people begin shouting at one another and the level of noise prohibits hearing, or when the meeting itself fragments into little groups and the original focus is lost. Usually at this stage one of the five men in the clique is either called upon to intervene, or himself takes the initiative to do so.

It is the five men in the clique who control - if anybody does - Manjapur politics. The only quality that they have in common is a proclivity towards political maneuvering and a desire for achieving social prominence. They always seem to dominate in social gatherings, and appear eager to take on responsibilities that involve negotiations even when they are not personally involved. For example, the shaman Rajman travelled sixty miles to search for a couple that had eloped from the village, and later it was he who organized a party of siyan to seek compensation for the sake of the deserted husband. Likewise it was Pele and Tiri who volunteered themselves for arranging labour to have the new school built, and Tiri later agreed to organize the building of the new road. They have also more sociable, outgoing personalities and spend more time visiting one another, and others, than most men in the village. Of the five, Pele is perhaps the least aggressive in his attitude towards people
generally and seems to get along with all four equally well. He is a neighbour of the Patel's and both spend a lot of time together, but he is equally liked by Tiri who nonetheless considers the Patel, and his brother Panku Ram to be among his sworn enemies. Rajman has a charming personality and a consuming thirst for liquor that makes him an inveterate attender of all social gatherings; but he is also feared by everyone on account of his known versedness in sorcery techniques. Panku Ram is perhaps the most overtly ambitious of all, and there is little doubt that the main source of his influence is his large extended family of six brothers whom he represents. Panku Ram is hot-headed, and is more likely to be amongst the agitated members of a meeting, than the one who calls it to order; he does not communicate the coolness of temperament that the Patel, Pele, and Tiri and to a lesser extent Rajman do, and which is regarded as their most admirable trait. Panku Ram and Patel act as a united group in village politics, but privately air grievances about one another. The variety of perspectives that individuals adopt in their relationships to each other, and the fact that a person's attitude is shaped according to his or her interests at hand, is a truth that emerges constantly in Muria political and social life. All members of this clique are both bitter enemies of each other, and good friends as well. But all five of them are community men who have a strong consciousness of being Manjapurias.

Against this background of informal, competitive politics the political office of the Patel or headman stands out. The Patel gets a small salary (Rs. 50 per annum) from the Government, and his position is that of government representative within the village. Most of his duties concern the collection of revenue and passing on to the villagers information about government promulgations as well as attending to government officials in their visits to the village. The present Patel's father was Patel before him, and although none of his sons match their father's commanding presence, it is quite likely that one of them will become Patel after him. The reason for this is that the style of Muria politics is incompatible with consumate leadership achieved through political contest, and one which is moreover authorized and legitimized in the form of a fixed office. The Patel's word in Manjapur does not carry more weight simply as a result of his being the Patel, at least in matters which do not involve the government. The Patel is a prominent member of the bhumkal but
he does not preside over it. The office is destined to be passed on automatically to his sons in an arbitrary manner which however, is the least likely to be the cause of resentment. The Patel is a respected member of the village who is admired for the boldness with which he stands up to outsiders and to Government officers, both high and low. He is popular in the village and probably more often is at the receiving end of hospitality than other men, which is the most noticeable perk that his office of Patel enables him to enjoy. As Patel of the village his appearance at meetings at which people from other villages are present is symbolically necessary since he should represent the village in such contexts. Outsiders often ask for him to be specially sent for in cases when they have some business to negotiate with a Manjapur man. But he is not seen as an authoritative head of Manjapur by its citizens, nor one who possesses any rights or privileges over and above those possessed by any other Manjapur citizen.

Four of the men in the clique are eldest sons; only Panku Ram is the second son, but even within his extended family is regarded like a first son, his elder sibling being a very submissive individual. The Patel, Panku Ram and Pele all belong to the Korami clan of Manjapur, while Tiri is of the Usendi clan and Rajman comes from the only family of the Gota clan in Manjapur. No one from the sizeable number of Hallami clan people in Manjapur is included in the clique.

A man's clanship and lineage, his personality, whether he is a recent migrant from elsewhere or not, a rich or poor man, and his factional allegiances in the past, are all issues that are grist for the political mill of Manjapur. Manjapur politics are waged by factional groupings which crystallise on a temporary basis according to the issues and people at hand. The conflict described below provides examples of these issues and shows how they become rallying points for faction formation. The conflict clearly brings out the confusion and lack of consensus regarding the criteria for establishing social precedence in the village which might otherwise be applied to clarify political relations between competing groups by lending more weight and legitimacy to the claims of one side against another. There is a vague notion that the Korami people whose ancestors are believed to have founded Manjapur are entitled to certain privileges over and above the rest of Manjapur's population. Such notions
lie behind the selection of ritual offices of Earth Priest, and special shaman to the pen gods (Vadder) all of whom are Koramis, but in regard to actual village land and matters that threaten people's economic and political rights, the same idea is vigorously resisted and counter-claims are made against it. The ambiguous and laissez-faire character of community rules and the absence of political offices with authority to enforce sanctions, enlarges the areas of competition between individuals and groups within the village. The fact that the village is, on an analytical level, the most coherently structured of all extra-domestic social groupings in Muria society does not imply, or result in actual solidarity and harmony in its internal relations. Village membership is without doubt the most important group affiliation of any Muria and one which constitutes for men at least, a vital part of their social identity and the point d'appui from which participation in Muria society becomes possible. But although the village is in a sense all-powerful vis-a-vis its members (in that no one can continue to defy the bhumkal indefinitely) it remains true that Muria society is essentially open, or is believed to be so, in that severing relations with one village and starting afresh in a new one, with a new commitment, is always possible. Murias have what can be called an 'escape complex', the belief that a single act of will, accompanied by physical removal from the scene of their troubles, will suffice for all ills. The social mosaic of the village is indeed believed to have originated from the accumulation of such 'running away' episodes which are a basic theme in the Muria attitude to life. This propensity to indulge in running away lends an instability to village politics and to the commitment of the individual to his political unit (or marriage, see below). And just as voluntary removal is considered feasible at all times, so is involuntary removal through ostracism and expulsion by others considered possible at all times. Running away is often the sequel to a conflict in which the person voluntarily executes a decision to expell him from the village which he believes come from vague external sources within the community. The village in the Muria system is both a potent moral principle, as well as an extraneous, superordinate political entity which becomes identified, from any one person's perspective, with the complex of social relations obtaining between himself and significant others in the village. The vulnerability of the social foundations of a man's position
with the village community emerges when there is a disturbance in his network of relationships and then very little provocation is needed to provoke a panic reaction, so that he believes that it is time to move on to another village.

The following case history brings out the complex pattern of rivalries and resentments in Manjapur, and also illustrates the role of sorcery accusations (cf. Epstein 1959) in dramatising political confrontations in the village, as well as the strong underlying motive of village unity and the need to maintain the fragile consensus upon which it is based.

The main characters involved are:

1. Tiri (35) The richest man in the village, a Usendi and respected siyan, the son of

2. Bali Ram (55) a landless immigrant when he arrived in the village some twenty years ago. Despite his son's success, politically unimportant. A heavy drinker, always at odds with his wife and son.

3. Joli (35) Tiri's neighbour, a Korami, but an outsider all the same to the village because of being a member of the Baba Bihari sect who are anti-drink and anti-beef. Is the younger brother of Kopa, also a sect-member all of whose young sons died in the preceding year from a mysterious illness. Both brothers belong to the Korami lineage of Pele.

4. Patel (50) a Korami and respected village headman but member of an economically declining lineage.

5. Panku Ram (35) Dynamic, aggressive FYBS of the Patel and leader of the largest and most united sibling group. Elder brother of Umkal, a hot-head.

6. Pele (40) Korami. Prosperous and respected siyan, son of a Korami who was once poor and servant at Aitu's place.

7. Daula (50) a Hallami and one time client of Pele's now settled in Manjapur.
8. Rajman (45) a Gota and village shaman and siyan. Brother-in-law of Joli. Rajman considered to be potentially the voluntary or involuntary agent of malign individuals wishing to use his powers for sorcery purposes.

A meeting was held at the Ghotul, at the instigation of the Patel's group, to apprehend the murderers of the Patel's father, an event which happened fifteen years previously. The ostensible reason for holding the meeting was that the head man's ghost (hanal) had communicated through a shaman a desire to be avenged. Accused were Bali Ram and Joli, and the Koramis turned up in force to denounce them, the attack being led by Panku Ram. Both men are in a weak position in the village, but their association with the former Patel's death has a circumstantial basis. Bali Ram had been drinking with the Patel's father in Palli on the night he died, but had stayed in Palli that night, while the Patel's father had set out to walk back to the village. The next morning he was found dead beside the track from Palli to Manjapur and the police arrived to investigate. No signs of violence were found on the body, and it is quite likely that he died naturally in an alcoholic stupor from cold, inhalation of vomit, or snakebite. However, when last seen, he was being led along the path in an inebriated state, by Joli. Bali Ram was arrested on suspicion, but was cleared when he established his alibi, and Joli was never even questioned.

The accusations were levelled at both men, by Panku Ram and his brothers, and the rest of the villagers present took little part. Tiri did not speak for his father - and indeed is never so reticent on any occasion as when his father is involved, nor did Kopa, Joli's elder brother, speak up in Joli's defence (later Kopa joined in the sorcery accusations against Joli). Joli was in more serious trouble in that it was alleged that he had cajoled a shaman into 'arousing' a village goddess in the temple (raur) - it is a heinous matter to invoke the pen in secret for private ends - which goddess Joli then bribed with promises of gifts to prevent him falling into the hands of the police over the affair of the Patel's father's death. This had a certain verisimilitude as Joli, though an obvious suspect, had been ignored in the police investigation. But Panku Ram, the main accuser, intensified his attack by widening the scope of interest in the meeting so as to draw in everybody who had suffered a death in the family in the ensuing fourteen years - in other words more or less every adult present. He suggested that Joli's bargain with the pen goddess consisted of his allowing the goddess to
live in his house where he had become its slave, committed to satisfying the goddess' insatiable cannibalistic lust for human flesh. Having no longer been able to promise the conventional 'good' offerings of gold and silver ornaments to the goddess, he was compelled to provide victims instead. Thus Joli was plausibly represented as the scapegoat for everybody's subsequent bereavements, and his evil doing the rational explanation for the inexplicable chances of death. Voices were raised, decrying the alarming rate at which little children had been dying of late, and (ironically perhaps) no better instance of this was to hand than the deaths, within a month of each other, of Joli's elder brother's two young sons. The goddess had 'eaten' his brother's children, and had blighted every house in the village. Kopa, responding as excitedly as everybody else to the image of the cannibalistic goddess, devourer of his children, turned on his younger brother Joli and bitterly denounced him. Besides threats and abuse, the question most insistently directed at Joli was "will you mix with us or won't you" (nima mava sung milay maiki ki maivi). The question related both to village membership in general, and to Joli's adherence to the Baba Bihari sect as well. His refusal to admit guilt in the affair of the Patel's father was seen by his accusers as evidence of his not 'mixing' with the village, but on the other hand Joli's refusal to budge in the face of his accusers was simple self-preservation. Eventually Rajman (biased in the matter because his sister is married to Joli) took on the mediating role and said that compromise could not be reached while the Patel's side refused to accept anything short of a clear confession of guilt from the accused pair. Joli and Bali Ram - the latter more diffidently - denied their guilt, but were fined Rs. 30 by the bhumkal which fine they were obliged to accept. The money was to be used to finance a feast for the village siyan to signify their repentance or their willingness to accept village authority.

I left the meeting at this point, but as I was walking back to our house I heard a commotion coming from the direction of the Ghotul, and I learned that both men had been beaten, though not at all seriously, by certain of Panku Ram's brothers, including Umkal, whose proneness to assaulting people was the starting point for the next stage of the affair.

That afternoon the men busied themselves preparing for a feast to be held with the money, and a group of them,
Pele, Panku Ram and a few others, came over to Tiri's house to collect cooking pots. As I watched, Pele jokingly thumped Panku Ram on the back with his closed fist, and Panku Ram immediately returned it; both ended up wrestling with each other, and although they reassured me that it was just 'horseplay' (kovna vahchar) it did seem to me that there was an element of real aggression involved as well. I did not go to the feast attended by all the village men, but I heard the next morning that a quarrel had broken out between Panku Ram and Pele.

The cause of the quarrel was an altercation between Pele and Umkal. Pele had seen Umkal leaving the feast with two parcels of meat instead of one (the meat is distributed on the basis of one share per cooking hearth or per nuclear family). On being questioned by Pele, Umkal had replied that the parcels were "for the siyan." This was insulting, because it contained the suggestion that the true siyan of Manjapur were the Koramis of the Patel-Panku Ram group, casting aspersion on the rest of the village at the feast. Pele said that "the siyan were present at the feast and could help themselves" turning Umkal's remark around whereupon Umkal struck Pele on the back, and he was supported in the ensuing melee by his brothers and the Patel.

The next morning, Tiri was paid a visit by Daula, who though a Hallami and no kin of Pele, sided with him as he had lived in Pele's house as a kamiyaal and was loyal to his old patron. Sitting around the embers of the fire he discussed this new development with Tiri and his family in hushed, conspiratorial tones. He voiced the concern of the rest of the villagers about the bellicose posture of the Patel and Panku Ram's group (the 'old' Koramis), and said that he thought that they had overstepped the bounds of decent behaviour by showing aggression against Pele, one of the most generally liked and respected siyan of the village. It was clear that it was now no longer a question of retribution, directed at marginal individuals such as Joli or Bali Ram, for supposed acts of sorcery in the distant past, but had become a factional confrontation between the Patel's Korami group who regarded it as their right to have dominion over Manjapur, versus the remainder of the village. It was a question of jealousy (kaeer), which Daula diagnosed as resentment arising because of the relative poverty of the Patel's group, who could not tolerate the fact that Pele's
father had started off being much poorer than them, while
Pele was now much richer than they were. This was a message
very close to Tiri's deepest concerns, since his family
history is identical to Pele's in this respect, even though
Pele was himself a Korami and an 'old' Korami at that, but
from the rival lineage to the Patel's; while Tiri is an Usendi.
Daula asked rhetorically whether the 'immigrant' families were
truely to be held responsible for the misfortunes of the
Korami lineage of the Patel's in Manjapur "if there is to be
less rice in our houses, does that necessarily mean that there
will be more in theirs?" The immigrant families, he protested
were not "weighing down upon the ground they stood on" (mat
nel tey boj antoron). Tiri's mother, architect of the family
fortunes, added philosophically that "everybody in the village
is of one blood and will end up being buried in the same earth"
(mamat undi natur, undi kodra tey koitor antoron). The
references to "the earth" in these speeches are basic to the
rhetoric of village factional quarrels, since they evoke
the common physical substance which unites villagers of whatever
clan or lineage (undi natur) as a consequence of deriving
their substance from the same earth. Daula left after urging
Tiri to support a move by all the villagers to ostracise the
Patel's group as a counter-attack to what was perceived as a
threat by the Patel's group to mete out the same kind of
treatment to them. Everyone in the village should refuse to eat
or drink in their company until they changed their attitude and
behaved as co-villagers should. When Daula had left, Tiri and
his mother spoke recklessly of leaving the village altogether,
fearing that their position would become intolerable. Later that
day, I visited Panku Ram's mother, who was glumly contemplating
the same prospect, fearing that Panku Ram's aggressiveness would
lead to them being ejected from the village. However, Panku
Ram's mother, who was, as an in-marriage born elsewhere,
invoked the same idea as Tiri's and rejected the idea of a move at
her advanced age: through long residence she said "she is now
of one village only" (undi narta antoronoan),
rooted to the spot, so to speak, and incapable of moving
howsoever bad things became.

Meanwhile Tiri and Joli decided to hold an exorcism so as to
dissipate the ill-feeling which had been aroused by the
implicit allocation of responsibility on their households for
the death of the Patel's father. This exorcism (katar) was
to remove the influence of the goddess, diagnosed as resident
in Joli's house and the cause of the deaths of the children (Tiri's own daughter had died about a year before these events, and his son had been ill, both occurrences which he privately held Joli responsible for). The question of Joli's responsibility for the presence of the vengeful goddess in his house was left unclarified: Joli could have been in debt to the goddess for allowing him to escape over the affair of the Patel's father's death; or alternatively the goddess could have come unbidden (Joli's own version). Tiri's mother maintained that Joli's troubles with the goddess arose from the fact that, because he was a member of the teetotal, vegetarian Baba sect, he had withheld the customary offerings of goat's meat and liquor at village festivals, and that in return the goddess was persecuting him, and Tiri as well. Tiri and Joli both complained of vague maladies as well, which they attributed to the goddess likewise.

Tiri and Joli, therefore, both had good reason to hold the exorcism: they were both conscious of the threat from the Patel's group, and they had both lost family members; but they had different views as to which shaman should perform the exorcism ritual. Joli wanted the rite to be performed by the shaman Rajman, but Tiri feared that this individual was too closely identified with Joli, and might, while in trance, try to explicate his affine from all blame by throwing responsibility for the death of the Patel's father wholly on Bali Ram, Tiri's father, so that he would have to bear the whole brunt of the Koramis anger. Tiri's mother thought that Joli was desirous of having Rajman go into trance because he was confident that the shaman's divine counterpart (by whom he would be possessed) would be sufficiently reticent about the failings of his own brother-in-law not to speak only of his past crimes and ritual shortcomings. Tiri wanted the ceremony to be conducted by a neighbouring village's shaman whose patron he was.

The exorcism was the occasion for a general demonstration of village solidarity, made public and legitimized by the sending of invitations to important saga groups from neighbouring villages, and by the participation of shamans from different localities as well as the village shaman Rajman. The ritual cannot be described in detail here; the sagas spoke to the shamans on behalf of Tiri and Joli, negotiated with the divinities possessing them so as to ensure the removal of the resident goddess at Joli's place, and confirming the absence of any malign divinities at Tiri's
house. The role of ritual go-betweens between Tiri, Joli and the gods was played by Bajju and another man from the Hallami clan who were not identified with either side in the conflict. Following the exorcism, Tiri and Joli gave a feast to the whole village (which was also a cause of dissension between them, since Tiri felt he had to contribute more than his fair share). Panku Ram continued his vendetta even at the feast, complaining to Tiri that there was insufficient rice to go round.

Despite these incidental arguments, the effect of the feast and the exorcism was to take the pressure off Tiri and Joli: the role of sagas as mediators in intra-village disputes is crucial here since every village has a certain collective interest in showing up well, as united and harmonious in the presence of important men from outside. The exorcism provided ritual catharsis for the various tensions which had been building up in the village (a device which has obvious affinities to the analogous rituals of social re-adjustment analysed in Turner's classic study of Ndembu village politics Turner 1957). After a few weeks the strained relations between the Patel and Pele were also formally restored. A special ritual form is followed in such cases (it is also used, for example to heal the breach between a woman's ex-husband and her new husband in the case of divorce, once the latter has agreed to the terms of compensation to the former). Both men place their feet on a stone, between their feet is held a knife, and, with the help of their sagas they pour wine around the stone as a placatory offering to the gods and a sign of their mutual peace. The same rite was performed by Pele and Panku Ram, and subsequently by the Patel and Tiri's father, Bali Ram. In this way the disaffected Patel group were bought back into solidarity with the rest of the village.

Tiri's view, which he confided in me, was that there was no substance to the original claim that the Patel's father's spirit (hanal) had demanded vengeance. The old man had not been killed by anybody, and the whole affair was the outcome of the Patel's group's feeling of resentment against the recent rise in fortunes of himself and Pele. Tiri was not personally implicated in his father's crimes, if he had committed any, but Tiri was convinced that it was he who was the real target, and that an attempt had been made to drive him from the village by underhand means.

The politics of the village, as this example shows, oscillates
between two overriding themes: on the one hand, the feelings of 'victimage' (Burke 1945), of being singled out for covert attacks, felt by the siyan heading households and jostling for power, respect, and prestige; and on the other hand, the idea of the village as a unity established by the mere fact of co-residence and sharing the same earth. The Patel's group expressed their victimage by resurrecting the issue of the Patel's father's death, and Tiri, in his paranoid conviction that the dispute had been concocted in order to destroy his position in the village. "We have not violated (nashamaina) the Manjapur earth", said his mother, using the same term - nashamaina - used to refer to girls made illegitimately pregnant in the Ghotul. The image is one of the village as a living being, and this is the second overriding theme in village politics, which is reaffirmed in the peace-making between siyan at the conclusion of the quarrel.

It would require a separate, detailed, study to pursue the theme of village politics and the ways in which ritual reconciliation takes place between factions. The case history related above is designed simply to convey the general feeling inherent in Muria village politics. The important point to stress, so far as the main theme of this thesis is concerned is the constant struggle to reaffirm village unity in the face of the conflicting interests and ambitions of particular families and households. Village unity is a paramount value, politically, for Murias, but it is one which is continually under threat. There is considerable movement between villages, and considerable social heterogeneity within them. This makes for sectional interests and accusation against newcomers of being disruptive interlopers.

This chapter has mainly been devoted to detailed description of one particular village and its sectional interests and conflicts. But there is an important general point which needs to be stressed because it is crucial to the analysis of the place of the Ghotul in Muria society - the main problem to which this thesis as a whole is addressed. We have seen that although the village political unit (nar) is the primary social group for Muria, and that it is to a village, (rather than a clan or landed corporate unit) that a Muria actor is essentially identified, 'belonging'
to a village is something which is never absolute or unproblematic, but which is always under some kind of threat. Even the dominant Korami lineages in Manjapur are not autochthonous, but are simply the earliest of a series of subsequent groups of immigrants, and among the most important men in Manjapur there are those, like Tiri, whose families are only recent arrivals, having been there for less than three generations. And just as some families have arrived, so have others left to establish themselves elsewhere. This kind of mobility is an inbuilt feature of Muria adaptation to their environment, but at the same time the solidarity, unity and permanence of the nar is a paramount value in their eyes, underpinned by the sacred quality of the village earth and the fertility-assuring powers of the demiurge Tallur Muttay, who resides under the village earth. The 'ideal' village - harmonious, unified and prosperous - is not something which exists of its own accord, but which must be continually re-created by the leaders of village society through practical and symbolic actions; each asserting the legitimacy of their own activities in the light of village ideals and attempting to prove the anti-social nature of the challenges to village unity represented by the activities of rival families. The factional conflicts just described disturb village harmony while being, at the same time, carried on 'in the name of' village harmony - this inevitably means that they cannot cease while the village-centred values upheld by the Muria remain paramount. But while factional disturbances are an inevitable fact of life, it is generally recognised as important that village harmony should be eventually restored, if only symbolically. Members of all factions concede that they are essentially dependent on the village as a whole and that this dependence must be given expression in symbolic acts of reciprocity. The two areas in which this symbolic reciprocity is expressed are a) in relation to the Ghotul which is the 'all-village' institution par excellence and b) through participation in 'village' ritual propitiating Tallur Muttay and the pen (divinities) of the village. Put very crudely, village-dependence is expressed by giving wealth and labour to the gods, and by giving people (grown up children) to the Ghotul.

Non-participation in ritual and in the Ghotul constitutes a reflection of the primary duties owed to the village: individuals who fail in these duties, partly or wholly (such as the Manjapur followers of Baba Bihari
Dass) can expect no support from village-mates, even if they are not actually ejected - as no doubt they would be were the rest of the villagers to take the law into their own hands. 'Siyan' status is impossible for such persons, i.e. achievement of the eminent life-objective of the Muria male. In ensuing chapters I will describe the ritual system (briefly) and the Ghotul (in much more detail). What is notable about both these institutions is that they create intra-village reciprocity, a non-competitive kind of exchange-relationship in which the overt 'recipients' are not identifiable sectional interests within the village but the village as a whole.

There is another parallel between the Ghotul system and the cult of the pen in their relationship to the village, in that both, in different ways, give an idealised or encapsulated representation of village society itself. The cult of the pen is essentially a 'drama' in which divinities enter human actors and/or images, objects, etc. and come to a series of villages to feast and dance. But the underlying 'text' of this dramatic performance is set by the alliance fabric of Muria society and the political framework of nar units. The pen, like living Muria, belong to the clan-based saga-dadabhai alliance scheme, and their marriages - remembered in divine genealogies, such as the one given below (p. 223) are carried out in accordance with it. And pen likewise belong to particular villages, between which they may, again like actual Muria, migrate if the need arises. I will return to this subject again - though rather more briefly than it deserves - but the point I wish to establish here is only the simple Durkheimian one that Muria pen divinities constitute collective representations of society, which they reflect in elaborate, if idealised, institutional detail. From the village point of view, therefore, paying cult to the pen, with wealth and ritual labour, is paying cult to a consensually approved, idealised image of social relations. In this service, i.e. to establish the ideal order of intra- and inter-village relations, people are prepared to contribute generously, both because the divinities require it, and because by doing so the giver's position in the village at a mundane level is made more secure.

Turning to the Ghotul, we find the same thing. The Ghotul, like the pantheon, is a representation of society: not an 'ideal' order, over and
above the human (in the porro bhum) but down here, in the middle world (nadum bhum), though somewhat removed by being 'on the margins' (bhat). The Ghotul, by virtue of its marginality, is in a peculiar relationship to the pen, but is, nonetheless, a secular institution rather than a ritual one. But it is also a representation of society encapsulated within village society itself, one which, by re-creating the village in microcosmic form, provides a model for social relations on the wider scale. By contributing members to the Ghotul (at a certain social cost, as we will see) village households maintain a continuing focus of village unity and engage in reciprocal relationships with one another.

But it is against the background of the essential instability and factional nature of village politics that the cult of the pen and the Ghotul come to the fore as integrating factors in village life. In the final analysis the cause of this instability is the fact that the unit for production and consumption (the extended family, described in the next chapter) has interests which run counter to those of the village as a whole, while also being in various ways dependent on it. This varies from family to family, since while Muria villages are all structurally similar to one another (having a moiety-division, Ghotul, pen, and the usual complement of village offices, a clique of big men, and so on) households within the village differ markedly from one another, and in the relationship they each stand to the village as a whole. Extended families (of one or more households or 'hearts') are very variable in composition, and have different kinds of interests (in land, labour, cattle etc.), which may be highly conflicting. In the next chapter this intrinsically 'variable' level of Muria social structure is examined in more detail.
6. THE EXTENDED FAMILY

The upper limit of genealogically specific kinship relations, leaving affinal relationships with saga out of account, is the lineage (gohor). The gohor is the maximal agnatic unit. The minimal kinship unit is the nuclear family (the hearth, one for each wife and her children). But in between these upper and lower limits lies the extended family, more difficult to define but at the same time a crucial unit for practical organizational purposes. It is in the extended family context that the domestic routines of production and reproduction are carried on, and this chapter is devoted to describing this basic aspect of Muria social structure.

The definitional and conceptual problems posed by the extended or 'joint' family are not peculiar to the Muria. In Indian sociology generally there have been many approaches adopted to the definition and measurement of 'jointness' - which is generally agreed to be a fundamental feature of family organization in almost all sections of Hindu society. 'Jointness' has been seen, on the one hand as a behavioral norm, a set of values, and on the other hand, as an attribute of a specific entity in the Hindu legal code. 'Jointness' has been seen in terms of residential cohabitation by a plurality of nuclear families in a single dwelling or compound by certain authors, while others have seen 'jointness' as compatible with residential dispersion, so long as the families involved have economic assets in common and function corporately in ritual. These approaches are not incompatible in all respects, but they leave undecided just which aspects of 'jointness' - as understood in the literature on the Hindu joint family - are typologically crucial, and would enable one to say whether the Muria extended family is a 'tribal' variant of the standard Indian type. The most widely accepted authority on these matters (Shah 1979) has emphasized the resilience of the joint family in the modern context, which he sees as arguing against the joint 'household' (residential jointness) as the crucial element in defining the institution. The non-residentially compact 'joint family' is a collection of 'socially incomplete' elementary residential units, which are not capable of independent action and
decision making. Such 'joint families' may exist even where household surveys reveal a preponderance of nuclear family dwelling units. One can easily grasp the relevance of Shah's point of view in understanding the continuing role of joint family organization in the context of the modern, socially heterogeneous city, and the contrast which exists between the Indian family and the much more isolated and autonomous Western nuclear family pattern in similar contexts. But to define jointness in terms of a commonality of interests and cooperation in action contexts unifying nuclear families at any level, it seems that this approach is too wide and all-encompassing to provide an operational definition of jointness appropriate to the Muria case. Relationships among Muria nuclear families are in any case so involved and multiplex that no outer boundary of the 'joint family' could be specified in terms of Shah's criteria - the entire gohor, even the whole village, is 'joint' in the broad sense; but there are important distinctions which still have to be drawn. The problem, essentially, is that the Muria both recognize irreducible nuclear family units, with their own proper domain of rights and interests, but at the same time they also recognize the existence of extended families with common interests, sometimes residentially compact in a single dwelling or compound, but not always so.

It seems better, in fact, not to speak of the Muria family as 'joint' at all, since this carries with it the implication of the non-existence of the elementary family as an autonomous unit; and instead speak of the Muria 'extended family' as a separate entity from the nuclear family, one which has to be understood as a complex in its own right. The Muria nuclear family is not 'incomplete' socially - nor is the relation between the nuclear family and the extended family that of a part to the whole. The moralistic, patriarchal, implications which 'jointness' carries with it in the context of the standard Hindu joint family are lacking in the Muria case. The Muria extended family is a political bloc, a grouping of nuclear families around a shared social objective of maximising prestige and power within the village, not an authoritarian institution held together by religious sanctions and the hierarchical potestas of the joint family head. The merging of social identities in the joint family as a corporate body is foreign to Muria social attitudes; as I will describe later on, Muria fathers lose all authority over their sons when the latter attain
adulthood. Muria adults are autonomous individuals and the ethos of Muria culture stresses individualism and respects the privacy and privileges of the individual nuclear family, even as it encourages each nuclear family head to show the kind of extended family solidarity upon which political effectiveness in the village depends.

In looking at the Muria extended family therefore, one must disregard the moral, idealistic vision of the Hindu joint family and view the extended family as a practical grouping of lineal kin with their nuclear families. The specific rationale behind the existence of an extended family which is also responsible for giving this body of kin identity apart from the gohor, is economic and political cooperation. But since residential clusters are the visible manifestation of solidarity between lineal kin, and since the house is a vital part of the Muria concept of family, it is necessary to discuss types of residential clusters and houses.

The house is the concrete referent for the indigenous concept of family. A 'house' (Ion) implies a family and all the residents of a single house, or of a cluster of houses physically proximate to each other and encircled by a common boundary fence, are "lota barja" or "people of the house". A boundary fence, whether of the temporary bamboo or wattle type, or of the traditional type made out of slatted logs staked into the ground, is the visible marker of residential unity, although within its confines individual houses may be sited separately as well as adjunct to one another. The Muria do not make terminological distinctions between the occupants of one particular dwelling and those of others living in the same residential cluster within the fence. This, along with the fact that the making of fences is prohibited to women suggests that the homestead and house is identified with the patrilineal group. Women cannot construct fences because these define the agnatic blocs between which women move via marriage exchange. Members of the extended family often, but not always, belong to a residential cluster, and similarly the residential cluster sometimes comprises of individuals outside the extended family, i.e. daughter's husband and their nuclear families, or kamiyaals and their wives. Residence is an important criterion which conveys an impression to the Muria themselves of a solidary extended family which is politically
The residential cluster of households establishes an identifying framework and is regarded by others in the village as an homogeneous social unit. But there is no isomorphism between the relationships within the component nuclear families within the residential unit and the relationships between them: the homestead is not the nuclear family writ large. The residential lon and lota barja does not act as if it were a single, large household and does not have the organically fused quality that is characteristic of the Hindu joint family.

The picture of the Muria extended family and the unit referred to as a 'house' (lon) is rendered more complex by the fact that in Muria country today two quite different styles of domestic architecture co-exist side by side. The traditional Muria house consists of a rectangular hut, usually walled with wattle-and-daub and thatched with reeds, which cannot be subdivided into more than two rooms, usually an inner store-room and a room for cooking and general purposes. A number of such houses can be grouped together within a fence in the case of an extended family, but there is no architectural expression of the unity of the extended family in this case. However, since about 1960 (and earlier in villages closer to Narayanpur and Kondagaon) rich Muria families have taken to building 'Maraar' style houses (i.e. in the style of the peasant houses of Chhattisgarh). These houses are made of mud, of large size, and roofed with tiles. They are much more costly to build than the traditional type and are also much more durable. There is no doubt that the Maraar style is a more suitable habitation for members of an extended family who wish to emphasize their connectedness but not at the cost of relinquishing control over the affairs of the domestic unit to the corporate authority of patri-kin. Such houses are not constrained by the same limitations on space which are dictated by the wattle and daub materials used in the older house style, and they also provide scope for multiple entrances and the partitioning of internal rooms so that the house can be divided into small, almost self-contained units. Theoretically therefore such houses are capable of accommodating not only more people, but more married couples, since they can fulfill the requirement, noticed by Elwin too, that every married couple have their own room to sleep in at night, even before they have children of their own. It is much harder for the traditional house to meet this requirement since it cannot be divided into more than
two separate rooms. In cases where more rooms are needed it is necessary for married couples to be accommodated in a small shelter outside the main house and facing it across a common courtyard, or else to build themselves a similar house elsewhere. Usually a married son or brother needing to set up a new dwelling does so close by within the fence, and remains part of the same production unit with his siblings/parents but the intensity of association between separate dwellings created in this way is always less than can be maintained within a single large Maraar style house.

The Muria attach great importance to the provision of separate quarters for married couples despite the fact that for most of the year the occupants of a house do not sleep in their rooms but in the open courtyard where there is no question of partitions. The function of married couples' private rooms therefore is not to do with a need for sexual privacy, since the rooms are not particularly used for this purpose - except during the rainy season - but with marking the social independence of married couples. It might appear that Verrier Elwin was led by the Muria stress on private quarters for married couples, into his rationalization of the Ghotul as a device for separating adolescent children from their parents at night, lest they witness the "primal scene" (Elwin 1947). This interpretation is quite unwarranted.

In Manjapur, the occupants of a single dwelling, a housefull, are simply by virtue of this fact an 'extended family' if there are more than one married couple present. In other words, common residence necessarily implies a degree of common identity which is all that belonging to an 'extended' family means. But this mode of expression, which is more or less dependent on the architectural style of house and adoption of the Maraar type, to accommodate multiple nuclear families, is by no means the only way of realising the Muria extended family in concrete spatial/residential terms. One also finds extended families occupying separate but adjacent houses in one particular para and it is also common, even where there is a Maraar style house available, for various members of the extended family to construct annexes and shelters for their private use around the main house.
However, it is clear that with the passage of time the possession of a Maraar style house is beginning to have an independent effect on the expression of political solidarity in the extended family which was not present at the beginning of the fashion for this type of building, which commenced with the construction of the Patel's house in about 1960. This is happening because the traditional wattle and daub Muria house had a lifespan considerably less than the duration of the developmental cycle of the domestic group, so there were no significant inheritable rights in buildings as such, traditionally. The Maraar house, by contrast, is more like an investment in a vedang rice field, in that given appropriate maintenance, the house itself becomes an inheritable asset in which all male offspring of the original builder or builders have an interest, just as they have an interest in the family fields. This has a centripetal effect on maintaining close residential ties between adult agnates, which in turn accentuates the formation of 'extended-family' blocs of agnatically related nuclear families. It is too soon to tell whether the fashion for Maraar style houses will permanently affect the complexion of the Muria village in the direction of an increased emphasis on agnatic residential solidarity, but it is reasonable to forecast that it will.

The extended family, even when ensconced in or around one of the Maraar style houses, remains an ambiguous entity however. One 'house' can contain a large number of separate 'hearths', no less than five in the Patel's extended family, and it is not a simple matter to decide whether to call this one family or five. The atomistic, individualistic element in Muria life is always very much to the fore, even within the close residential aggregation of agnatically related nuclear families in the lon. It would be easy to be misled by mere architecture; and similarly the position over joint ownership of land is potentially misleading. All extended families in Manjapur are also co-parcenary holders of land, whether or not this is accurately reflected in the land registration documents (cf. Ch. 5). But the undividedness of the extended family land is not loaded with the same symbolic meanings or implications for social relations as would be the case in the traditional Hindu co-parcenary group (Mandelbaum 1970). Joint land ownership does not necessarily imply joint production and still less joint distribution and consumption of the produce of the land, which remains largely the business of nuclear family units. Among the Muria, land
is allocated for cultivation by particular individuals - de facto - or combined cultivation by groups of individuals cooperating, from the total land available to the extended family, on the basis of practicality, without these arrangements having symbolic significance as 'partitioning' the joint family land. People do not feel anxious about their positions as co-parcenaries in relation to land, because, no doubt, there is more land available than can be cultivated, and because control of land is not a means of exercising hierarchical authority on the part of the family head: senior agnates do not control their juniors, nor do older brothers dominate generally over their younger brothers. They cooperate, if at all, as equals for their perceived common good. The basis for cooperation among co-parcenaries in land is not common interest in land, as such, but the advantages which ensue from pooling labour and animals, always the factors in shortest supply so far as Muria production is concerned. Around Manjapur there is no simple relationship of land to production as one assumes it to be in other parts of India. Land is not seen as a collection of discrete fields, or patches of cultivation, but as an aggregate 'territory' in which diffuse rights to cultivation are held jointly by the extended family. Given the necessity of field rotation and falling, the partitioning of land into individual parcels becomes extremely complicated, if not impossible. But it is not only because the usage of land is so complex, but also because land is meaningless without labour and capital to cultivate with, that brothers do not insist upon legal recognition of their share to it. In other words, it is more by default than design that the extended family remains a co-parcenary group. The socially positive aspect of joint property ownership is economic cooperation manifested by the production unit who pool their cash resources to buy agricultural capital in the form of cows and buffaloes, ploughs etc. and their labour, and who distribute the produce equally among them. There are different degrees of economic cooperation and by no means is it the case that the extended family always forms a single productive unit. One finds some extended families having an informal system of labour exchange within their group, while each household keeps its own herd of cows and its own agricultural implements. (Even Ghotul going boys invest some of their cash in buying cows, goats etc.) The normal pattern however, is for the extended family to function as a group in relation to
production but not in respect to consumption which is carried out by each individual household. Thus, in the case of the Patel's extended family one finds that each component nuclear family cooks and eats independently (though with some informal sharing) but food production is largely a collaborative effort. Land is held in common but each brother has certain fields allotted to him for cultivation; moreover, the plough animals used are individually owned. The ploughing is done collaboratively on each brother's fields in turn by the whole group, and the weeding and harvesting likewise. Each brother takes and stores the paddy from his fields and uses it for his immediate family. However the pattern of distribution is different for crops other than paddy and pulses. Millet (gorang) is grown on dipa and sweet corn (jandrang) is grown in gardens adjoining the lon. These crops are labour-intensive (especially guarding them against birds when ripe) and millet and sweet corn gardens are communally organized by the extended families, the produce being shared equally after the harvest. It is also common for each nuclear family, that is to say each married woman, to have a personal 'kitchen garden' growing tobacco, chillies, tomatoes, aubergines etc. which are personal property, and for men to have date palms and caryota palms for liquor which are also individually owned.

The degree of economic integration of the extended family is therefore a complex matter, and indeed one impossible to generalise about with any confidence, since there are variations in the arrangements adopted by different families, even in Manjakpur, and much depends on the contingent factors of the size of the sibling group and the ratio between sons and daughters in the three generation extended family. It is only possible to give some idea of the variation by looking at paradigm cases.
I. The largest and most complex extended family is the Patel's. A massive, square-shaped Maraar house dominates the settlement which is surrounded by tall palm trees that in themselves suggest years of rootedness on the site close to where they were planted in a previous generation. The house is crowded on all sides by smaller off-shoots of buildings some of which seem to have started life as drying platforms for grain and mahua pods (from which liquor is distilled) but were subsequently converted into enclosures and which now function as verandahs for the one-roomed dwellings that they gave rise to in turn. The Patel and his nuclear family are based in what must have been the front room of the house when it was more of a unity in some earlier time. They face a little hut in which goats, hens and calves are locked up at night, and on the right-hand corner of which is another small, one-roomed hut occupied by the Patel's only brother and his family. As one passes down the alley running on the side of the Patel's rooms one comes to another little hut that has been built across the alley way from a side entrance to the main house. This hut, and the room of the main house that it faces, belongs to Larka, the only son of the Patel's father's brother. The two rooms on the back of the main house likewise have their own out-houses, which are in fact more lived-in than the rooms of the house itself. One of the enclosures, which is sturdy and covered by roof tiles, but which is deliberately framed only by a bamboo matting that allows the light in, was occupied by the Patel's only married son, but is now lived in by his widow and children. Adjoining this outhouse, but completely separate to it, is another smaller hut that has been built opposite to the furthest room on this side of the house and is occupied by another FBS of the Patel (who is also without siblings in Manjapur). There is no more than four to five feet of ground separating the main house from its subsidiary quarters, and there is consequently an impression of intimacy which is heightened by the arrangement of outbuildings so that they gravitate towards the house, and by the human chaos that reigns over the entire homestead. There is always a confusion of dogs and children belonging to the five households who inhabit the settlement, and by the presence of strangers who come to visit the Patel from other villages. The house was built during the lifetime of the Patel's father when he was village headman, and it was lived in by Panku Ram's family as well. However they separated (algay maina) from the Patel because,
according to Panku Ram, there were far too many of them to fit comfortably into the place. Panku and his five brothers were helped by the Patel, and those living in the Patel’s homestead, to build their own Maraar style house which by now has also succumbed to the usual division of rooms and the typical mushrooming of annexes. Although the Patel’s gohor (the Patel–Panku Ram extended families taken in conjunction) could not be all accommodated within a single residential site, their division does not only reflect the demands of practicality, but also the growing competitiveness between the two blocs. At present, there is a balance of power between the two blocs as a result of the balance in the number of people on each side. The source of strength of the Panku Ram group are their numbers — six brothers, more than any other sibling group. The Patel has only one brother, Larka, and the other resident FBS both have none.

II. The Gaita group who belong to the rival Korami lineage of 'original' Manjapur inhabitants, are fragmented at the same genealogical level at which one finds the Patel group being residentially cohesive. Each brother lives in his own self-contained, separate house, and two brothers — there are four in all — live in different hamlets altogether. They are also divided in terms of wealth, some being fairly well-off and others counting amongst the poorest people in the village. Although the registration of land in separate names has lagged behind its actual division, there are independent production units centred around discrete units of land, which, as far as it is possible to know, are equitably distributed between the brothers. None of the brothers extends economic cooperation to another in the form of reciprocal labour as is practiced by the Patel and Panku Ram group. The tendency to dispersion of the family is evident at all levels, and one sees married sons setting up house in contradistinction to the natal unit, rather than as a separate but integral unit of it. The Gaita family has always been subordinate politically to the Patel group. At the time that the Patel's father was village headman for example, they were employed as kamiyaal, two in the house of a rich man of Muilnar and one of them at Aitu's house.

III. The Rajman extended family is unique in the village in that they have adopted a kind of intermediate form between the compactness observable in
the Patel family and the fragmentation of the Gaita one, and the sibling group is split up into two brothers who live in the same house and another brother who lives in his own house in a different hamlet. Rajman, the village shaman, lives with his younger brother in a Maraar style house which has been divided between them such that each brother has his own suite of rooms and his own courtyard. Rajman has a reputation in the village for being an alcoholic and gossip, and for devoting most of his energies to the obtaining of liquor rather than to the cultivation of his land, and it would seem that this does indeed come secondary to his occupation as healer and diviner which is more compatible with his personal proclivities. The brother who lives apart has married Pele's sister and appears to prefer the company of his affines, whose house adjoins his own rather than his brothers. Rajman blames Pele's sister, his sister-in-law, for stirring up trouble between him and his younger brother and for instigating the latter's accusation that it was Rajman who had sorcerized his son when the little boy died suddenly. The brother arrived at Rajman's house with a bow aimed at him, and for many days after the event Rajman carried around a crumpled piece of paper on which was recorded the verdict of the bhunakal to the effect that the younger brother was forbidden to go near the Rajman house, and that he would have to pay a fine should he do so. The brother who has stayed on with Rajman is a quiet, non-interfering sort who attends to the fields and manages the estate which he shares with Rajman. The other brother is not involved in economically joint activity with the other two. In a sense the Rajman family is even more fragmented, than the Gaita's: Rajman's son from a previous marriage does not live with him but with his MB in the village (Larka), and Rajman's old, decrepit mother lived by herself in a little hut in a different hamlet until the death of her grandson threw her into a panic about lurking malevolent gods, and she moved to live with Rajman.

IV. The most effective extended family in Manjapur is the Tiri family who are a single household - i.e. only one hearth - as well. There is about ten years age difference between the two brothers, and the younger, Somaru, is treated more like a son by Tiri, who is held in awe by him. The most impressive character in the family is the mother who actively prevents the two brothers from splitting up. She told me that she had threatened the
first to separate with dire consequences: he would be ostracised and prevented from getting access to the supplies of grain or to livestock over which she considered she had ultimate control. She said that she had given them permission to separate (algay maina) on the day following her death - "the minute they get back from burying me" - but not a day earlier. Both brothers have an independent business on the side - Somaru acts as middleman on behalf of villagers wishing to sell kosa silk pods, and Tiri engages in deals with Narayanpur traders whose details he will not disclose but which must bring him a handsome profit judging from the amount of cash he seems to have. The profits from their respective businesses are not pooled together. They are however a single productive team, and a very successful one. Despite Tiri's mother's fears it is unlikely that the extended family would disintegrate to the extent that the Gaita's or Rajman's has simply on account of the burden of being isolated from their kin in Boorpal and of being recent migrants to Manjapur. Both brothers share in the paranoia of being disliked by others in the village for their wealth and their relative 'outsider' status, and this, if nothing else is likely to keep them together even after their mother dies.

V. The last example is of a family who have never been, nor are likely to come together as an extended family, on account of their low ambitions and their inability to sustain effort in any direction, and who have more-or-less come to accept the domestically disorganized, hand-to-mouth existence that they lead. This is Malu's family which is a section of the Patel's gohor related to him as FFBS. The two married brothers divide their time between trips to other villages and Manjapur, and their trips are not planned to synchronise with each other. They do hold enough land in the village, in fact legally more than Tiri, but are disastrously incompetent at cultivating it. Kolu sold his land to Panku Ram and left with his family for his wife's village in Kondagaon tehsil and has not been back to Manjapur since. Malu's father hires his labour out to Maraars and struggles to grow rice on his land with his meagre stock of ploughing cattle. He lives in a shabby little hut and is criticised by some villagers for the lack of concern that he shows for keeping his house and domestic economy in reasonably good shape. Malu's father too is a shaman and has passed on
to his son a poetic, rather than worldly temperament, which sadly, does not augur good for his son's chances in becoming a prosperous and politically influential siyan when he marries and becomes old enough to compete with other siyans.

In the Muria section of Manjapur at the time of fieldwork there were six Maraar-style houses (The Patel, Panku Ram, Tiri, Pele, Vas Variya and Rajman), 48 old-style Muria houses occupied by married couples, mostly with children, and two households (also in small, old-style houses) which were 'sub-nuclear' i.e. occupied by elderly widows plus unmarried children. Seventy-seven people occupied the Maraar-style houses and 154 the smaller dwellings. However, many of the small dwellings are grouped together in extended-family clusters, bound by strong ties of economic cooperation to closely related households of agnates (usually brothers). These clusters of agnatically related households are the 'raw materials' which may be combined to set up new Maraar-style dwellings, though in recent years no such new houses have been built. There remains a small number of households containing individuals who do not have close agnatic kin in the village and whose families are too small and poor to contemplate building a large house. There are 13 such households in Manjapur, headed by men who are either immigrant kamiyaal or remnants of gohor once more numerous but which have since declined. Most such households possess some land, but lack the labour and cattle to farm effectively except by entering into an arrangement with richer households. One may conclude therefore by saying that there are three socio-economic categories of households in Manjapur, though not sharply-defined ones.

1) 'Rich' extended families occupying Maraar-style houses expressive of agnatic solidarity. All five of the major siyans of the village belong to this category though the village Majhi Rajman is lacking in wealth.

2) Extended families, not resident in a single house but extending cooperation to one another and living in close proximity. Sometimes the degree of 'jointness' in the activities of such households is high, where brothers get along with one another well, but in other instances (such as the case of the Gaita family described above) the extended family fragments into nuclear family units which are practically, if not legally,
3) Nuclear family units. These arise either when there are no brothers or close agnates to cooperate with, or when this cooperation breaks down and brothers go their separate ways. Such households are vulnerable due to a lack of sufficient labour and are often too poor to engage in farming. They are dependents of households in the first category, and also rely more than others on government wage labour for their subsistence.
The Life Cycle and Relationships in the Nuclear Family

The Muria life cycle can conveniently and realistically be divided into a number of stages. These stages do not differ for men and women, but their chronological span does, as does the relative status of members of the two sexes at different stages of their respective life-cycles. This can be most simply expressed by means of a diagram showing the life cycle as four 'phases': 1) infancy and childhood; 2) the Ghotul phase; 3) maturity; 4) old age.

Relative status of the sexes over the lifecycle

The most important points to note are first of all the brevity of the period spent in the Ghotul by girls as compared to boys - that is to say, they are 'children' longer and marry earlier, on average, than boys. Secondly, one notes the relative equality of the sexes in the Ghotul period followed by a rise in the boys' statuses once they marry, contrasted with a drop in the girls', whose marriages result in them becoming...
subordinate members of households probably dominated by parents-in-law and brothers-in-law, at least for a period, not to mention by their husbands. After this, one notices a rise in status for men to the status of siyan (though of course, this is attained, to the fullest degree, only by a minority of men) and also a slow rise in female status as women become identified as established women of the village, the mothers of children, and the controllers of independent households. The final period (old age, from about the age of fifty five onwards) is particularly notable, and perhaps rather peculiar to the Muria in a general Indian context. Men begin to decline in status sharply once their sons are sufficiently mature to compete for siyan status, and their status drops precipitately once they lose their youthful vigour. Older women, on the other hand, do not share in the social eclipse of their ageing husbands, and on the contrary, they become important village matriarchs, particularly if their sons have become key siyans dominating the bhumkal. Old women (muitar) are seen as powerful architects of their sons' successful careers, and they continue to dominate the household and extended family into old age, by which time their husbands have sunk to the status of ineffectual parasites. There is, in any village, a distinct clique of senior women of this kind, resident as wives in the village for such a long time that they have become totally identified with it, who are capable of exerting tremendous influence in village affairs, not directly in public debate, but indirectly, via their sons. These important old ladies regularly meet and hold private drinking parties, to which junior women will not be invited. This is the female equivalent of siyan-hood.

It is possible to look at this same life cycle pattern from a slightly different point of view by juxtaposing the life line of a) a father and his son, and b) a mother and her son.
Thus, the son's rise to siyan-hood signals the demise of the father in the village arena, but simultaneously brings the mother into her own as a member of the clique of important village women, the matriarch-ate. However, this pattern of life-cycle events does not occur smoothly, and the pattern of intra-family relationships among the Muria are often marked by serious conflicts between the generations. These stresses and strains can be looked at in greater detail.

The mother-son relation over the life cycle

The mother-son relationship is a complex one, and difficult to analyze for it appears to oscillate between two opposed and contradictory emotional states. On the one hand, it is to the Muria, the primary emotional bond, unsurpassed in warmth and intensity by any other. On the other hand, it also contains hostility and aggression that often erupts into outright violence and leads to a temporary severance of relations between mother and son. It is a multi-faceted, emotionally complex relation ridden by ambivalence and conflict, at the same time as being the most indulgent and enduring bond of all.
Of all relatives within the family, it is the mother who stands out as the bastion of material and emotional security for the infant son. Muria fathers are extremely indulgent and devoted to their children, but access to them is restricted to those times of the day when they happen to be at home and not engaged in entertaining neighbours or attending to cattle etc. Fathers cannot exclusively confine their attention to the upbringing of the child and most participate in the wider and (to the child) unknown and fearful world. While women have little children the social life of the young wife is suppressed almost to the point of becoming non-existent: their lives contract to routine activities around the house and the caring for their children becomes the primary concern, over-riding all else. Women are loth to leave infants behind and would much rather suffer the weight of carrying both child and bundles of firewood or water pitchers on their head on their daily trips to the river and forest. Mothers therefore become an inexhaustable source of love and succour as they are always responsive to the child's needs.

In later childhood, once the child has some degree of independence and is performing the economic tasks delegated to children (mainly looking after domestic animals and guarding the crops against predatory birds and goats) the mother continues to indulge the child in every way possible. Such conflicts as arise are generally over the need to induce recalcitrant children to go out to the fields when they are disinclined to do so, and rather more frequently involve the adjudication of disputes between siblings - or cousins, in the case of extended families - in the course of which one child or the other is almost bound to feel victimised, and hence may store up resentment against his or her mother. But in general relations between mother and child remain warm, intimate and physically indulgent throughout the childhood period, despite the inevitable sibling rivalries. Children are weaned at two or three years, and births are spaced to accommodate this. Children long past the sucking stage are permitted free access to the mother and the physical side of the developing relation between mother and child does not seem to present problems. Physical chastisement, either by mother or father, is very rare, and of a very minor kind if it occurs - a light cuff around the ears.
As the children grow up and leave the parental hearth, first for the Ghotul, and later to get married, the relationship with the mother slackens in intensity, and in the case of sons assumes more and more a practical, instrumental tone, since mother and son or sons become mutual partners in the management of the family land and other forms of economic enterprise. It is at this point that the elements of ambivalence, not to mention downright dislike, which characterise the relationship between Muria adult males and their mothers, begins to enter the picture. The mother's political ambitions vis-à-vis the village matriarchate hinge on her son's success in life, and hence this means that she is liable to become more and more critical of his shortcomings (e.g. excessive drinking and inattention to the main goal of raising the family in village esteem). At this period too (cf. below on husband-wife relation) the wife is beginning to dominate her husband, and generally to assume a dictatorial role in household matters, all of which can become a potent source of domestic conflict, into which the son is inevitably drawn. The following case history, which is not by any means unique (parallel cases were seen even during the fieldwork period, and details of others were mentioned by informants) shows the extent to which mother-son conflicts can develop once the son is a responsible adult (in this case, an important siyan). The protagonists are Tiri, and his mother Yaya a woman of enormous intelligence and drive, and without a doubt an important factor behind her son's success. Yaya is quintessentially a matriarch of the Muria kind, though, like her son, she suffers from the fact that she has no close kin in the village.

We were having the finishing touches done to our newly constructed house. Yaya, her grand-daughter and daughters had been working since the early hours of the morning on putting a final plaster of clay to the walls. The work was messy and arduous: all four were splattered with mud and their hands were raw from rubbing the wet clay on the hard mud surface of the walls. They could not abandon the work even though they were clearly exhausted as the building of the house had gone on into the monsoon season, and there was the danger of its completion being indefinitely delayed if the spell of fine weather were not taken advantage of. While Yaya was hard at work, her son Tiri had been engaged in a drinking party with his friend Pele, on the verandah of their house. It was separated from our house by only a narrow courtyard, so Tiri and his friend were within sight of his mother. From time to time, Yaya would stop her work.
and urge Tiri to plough the fields. When she got no response from him she would mutter a string of condemnatory remarks about his being a lazy, good-for-nothing son. Tiri went on drinking and mumbling incoherently to his friend and appeared on the surface, to be oblivious of his mother's periodic public admonishings. After some time, when he was fairly besotted with drink, Tiri yelled out to his young daughter, helping his mother, to fetch him some water. Yaya spoke back to him in an angry, agitated voice: "You fetch the water yourself. Do you think we have no other work to do?" At this point her son suddenly got up and rushed across to his mother, and catching her, with all the force he could muster caused her to fall to the ground. He then caught her hair and proceeded to bang her head on the ground. She, on the other hand did nothing to resist him. Suppressing whatever instincts of self-preservation one assumes emerge naturally in such a situation, Yaya locked her arms securely around his legs and taunted him to kill her there and then. He kept up with the head banging, until she was forcibly extricated from him by her daughters and me, and Tiri was distracted by my husband offering a cigarette. However the lull in the fighting turned out to be brief. Yaya continued to let loose a stream of derogatory and provocative insults that only added fuel to the fire. Tiri turned upon her again and this time gave her a heavy blow with a thick stick that just narrowly missed her head, and landed on her leg instead.

By this time the drama of the situation was at its height and neighbours and friends had gathered, but only the daughters made any attempt to disentangle the mother and son from one another. The mother, whose physical and mental resilience was remarkable in the light of all she had been through, was eventually spared any further physical attack. She sat just outside the gate of the house and refused to enter the house compound saying that the house was no longer hers, but Tiri's. Someone offered her some water to drink but she refused it. When a bystander tried to give it to her forcibly, in the hope of 'cooling' her hot-headed state of mind, she caught the hand with which he was holding the water, and shook it vigorously, causing the water to spill on the ground. She said all the time that she wanted her younger son, Somaru, to see her in exactly the condition in which she was. Somaru was away with his friends and he was sent for. It was only after his arrival that the old woman allowed herself to be taken inside the house. Somaru scolded his brother for his shameless conduct and did not disguise his own displeasure. Tiri was in a defensive and somewhat calmer mood. Instead of focussing on his mother's
provocation to justify his aggression, he said, in a sulking, yet defiant voice: "This house from now on does not belong to me. You two (pointing to his mother) can take it over. Leave me out of everything".

The mother's wound became infected and it was necessary to call in the 'compounder' (someone qualified to give injections of penicillin) from Chhota Dongar, about ten miles away, to give her an antibiotic injection. The wound healed but it was at least a month before the mother was able to move about on her own and go unsupported by someone to the river to wash herself. Her son by his admission to us a few days later, went through an agonising period of guilt and remorse. He promised every sort of enticement, even a buffalo, to the gods to make his mother well again. He swore never to drink thereafter (and throughout our entire stay in the field, and on subsequent visits we have never seen him touch liquor). The mother and son were reconciled to one another about five hours after the fight. She blamed his violence on the liquor he had imbibed which had turned his head: in every respect he was still an exemplary son.

It would be simplistic to base explanation of this phenomenon on a single determining factor. One can only identify certain variables that are part of the overall structure of Muria mother-son relations. For example, it was possible to observe certain differences in the way that mothers tried to stimulate aggressive responses from their small sons and daughters respectively, in the course of childhood games, and one can hypothesize that this might be partly responsible for the occasional uninhibited display of aggression later on. Mothers indulge in hitting games with their sons in which the son is encouraged to strike his mother and she pats or fondles him in return. These games do not carry the danger of inflicting actual physical injury for the son is usually no more than three or four years of age, and are simply considered good fun. However I would hesitate to attribute the visible, if fluctuating, antagonism between Muria mothers and their adult sons to childhood influences, in the manner of the 'culture and personality' school of anthropologists (e.g. Kardiner and Linton 1945; Kaplan 1968). The sources of conflict seem to lie much closer to the surface, in the domestic tussles engendered between the adult son and the mother who are both united and divided by their joint control of the family fortunes.
The father-son relation over the life cycle

The father-son relation goes through two distinct stages. For the duration of the son's childhood prior to the Ghotul years, the father is indulgent and patronising. He is the masculine adult model held in awe and esteem by the child. However once the sons become mature adults there is a reversal of roles, and the attributes of dependence and subordination which had previously been incumbent upon the son transfer to the father instead. The father role, as a parental guiding one, is impoverished and its areas of control become restricted. The father is no longer in effective control of the domestic situation and is largely ignored by his wife and sons. The strained and hostile behaviours found between father and sons stem from the sons' usurping, if the word is not too strong, the father's position during the latter's life time, and usually much before the onset of debilitating old age has rendered it justifiable. Fathers do not put up much resistance to their sons taking over. In fact the ease with which naturally aggressive and domineering men step down for their sons would be inexplicable were it not for the fact that the father-son tie is conceptualized as a transference of energies from one to the other, and the social displacement of the father is only part of the more profound offering or surrendering of the father's self to his son.

The social ascendancy of the son over the father comes out in many different ways. Sons assert this dominance when in the mixed company of the father and their own friends, by cutting the father short, or by some other device such as making fun of his statements. The most conspicuous expression of status ranking within the family is the order in which meals are served. The sons, in line with their exalted position, are served before the father, who may however eat along with them. The father also gives over his personal adornments, such as earrings and wrist bangles to his sons. Fathers are expected to be passive and uninterfering. The old men with adult sons who were most respected were those who possessed some skill or knowledge such as house-making, or divining that enabled them to be gainfully employed outside the home.

Fathers are socially avoided by their adult sons. Sons sometimes stay away from feasts and weddings at which they know their fathers will be
present. Older men are the most voracious drinkers and eaters, and although the raucous abandon with which they comport themselves is culturally prescribed on such occasions and provides much fun and amusement to bystanders, it makes the sons visibly uncomfortable. In one case I observed, after a particularly self-indulgent display of mildly obscene behaviour on the part of the old father, his sons subjected him to a severe reprimanding upon his getting home. This did nothing to inhibit the regularity with which this particular old man would launch into his 'funny' act at weddings, and I wondered whether the indecorousness of his behaviour increased in direct proportion to the discomfiture he knew it produced in his sons.

In a patrilineal society we would expect there to be in existence notions of family honour and with it the concomitant idea of filial loyalty between father and son. However in this respect Muria society is somewhat aberrant: the prestige of a father is not linked to that of his sons, and honour is not an emotionally charged complex uniting members of the nuclear family to one another. For example, it was noticeable that when the village Patel was being tried before the bhumkal on a charge of adultery, his adult sons watched the proceedings with an air of detached complacency. They made no attempt to side for their father even when he was the butt of a particularly nasty tirade that depicted him as being a morally depraved and licentious man.

The relationship between fathers and sons is on the whole a difficult one to provide a stereotype for, as it is more sensitive to the personalities and public statuses of the actors themselves than many others. The same Patel's sons give their father a deference that is certainly atypical. None of his several sons have acceded to the Patel's position and he remains, even within his domestic family, its undisputed head. This is perhaps due to his political standing within the village as a whole. In comparison with his own bearing, which is proud and resolute, his sons appear weak. Nonetheless they conform to the same etiquette of social avoidance and would be loth to mix with him in the company of their own friends.
The mother-daughter relation

In childhood, the same close and indulgent relation as exists between mother and son applies equally to daughters. In later years, the relations between mothers and daughters are straight-forwardly close and affectionate and uncomplicated by the rivalry that mark mother-son relations. The 'natural' affection that exists between a parent and child is reinforced, in the case of a daughter, by the commonality of their tasks which throws them frequently into one another's company.

Mothers supervise their daughters in matters connected with household work. Daughters are expected to be obedient and hard working, but rights to the labour of the daughter are not as absolute, or as rigidly defined, as they are for the labour of wives and daughters-in-law. Daughters are permitted to spend the days away from home working with the Forest Department for cash wages; this concession is seldom granted to daughters-in-law, who may sometimes be seen working for cash wages, but with the difference that their earnings, unlike the daughters', are the property of the husband and family. If the brothers are not married and the brunt of household work must be shared between mother and daughter, then daughters are not given such laxity in the amount of work they put in at home. Women without daughters are pitied almost as much as women without sons, for they have no one who can share the burden of housework with them while their sons are growing.

I once asked an old woman what the comparative advantages of daughters and sons were, and she replied: "Sons give rice, daughters, sagas" (mar gato tihintor, miar saga tohinta). Apart from exposing the completeness of this old woman's personal identification with her husband's group (since her daughter's affines would be her agnates, and not her affines), in this statement she is also acknowledging the instrumentality of daughters in bringing to life the entire network of alliance relationships. Of course no Muria individual's universe of acquaintances is without affines: there are those with whom actual alliance has already been negotiated and successfully concluded, and those who are categorically or theoretically 'affines', but with whom no marriage has, or will probably take place. But
interest in these affines is either suppressed for the time being, or regarded as being entirely formal, and the types of behaviour that are found in an actual, ongoing affinal relationship, are here indulged in for their own sakes. These 'affinal' relationships have only a symbolic value. It is the affines with whom alliance is uncertain and negotiations are at a delicate, inconclusive stage, who are most vigorously pursued, and of these especially those whose daughters one would like to have as daughters-in-law. The parents of unmarried daughters are in a position of relative, but temporary power: they have to be courted and feasted and it is their conditions that have to be generally abided by. For mothers especially, the bargaining and transacting that takes place between affines is the most enthralling aspect of alliance. However, while men are preoccupied with marriage alliance in the broader context of village affairs, women are more preoccupied with the particular alliance relationships contracted by their own households: that is, their own kin, their husband's brothers' affines, and the families to whom their own daughters and their co-wives daughters within the extended family are betrothed and will marry. Women are particularly instrumental in pressing the claims of their own brother's children as suitable matches for their daughters (the 'correct' FZD marriage pattern) or, failing that, renewing the tie with their natal group in some other way.

After a daughter is married, the mother will visit her daughter when the opportunity offers. In the case of a FZD marriage these visits are made to her natal home. The mother's presence is needed at all life cycle rituals in her daughter's home, and even at important ritual events in her married daughter's village. Mothers with daughters married in villages within reasonable distance are envied on account of the chances for holidays with the daughter that exist for them, and the more than cordial hospitality which they are in a position to command. Mothers may also in a fit of pique at the state of domestic affairs go to their daughter's home. When women are beaten by their sons, and no reconciliation between mother and son has taken place, they turn to their daughters for help. An old woman who was beaten by her drunk son was pitied by the villagers, not only on account of the trauma she had gone through, but also on account of her daughterless state, which forced her, in the end to rely upon a distant and dubious ally - her friend Yaya living in another village from the one she
was. It was possible for us to observe that during her entire stay of about two weeks, the old woman remained restless, uncomfortable and disorientated in the strange household. She bemoaned to us the fact that all her daughters had died, and she had no one who would really welcome her in her time of distress. She made every effort to adjust to the pattern of life in the Tiri household, and worked much harder than her constitution allowed, in order to repay the family for taking her in and feeding her. With a daughter, the question of such 'repayment' would not have arisen.

The father-daughter relation

Like the relations between mothers and daughters, those between fathers and daughters are warm and tender. There are no structurally induced strains arising out of inheritance or power battles within this category. Daughters are not given anything (apart from the sari in which they are married) upon their marriages, and expect to retain no share in their father's property. The daughter-father relation is a purely sentimental attachment, and one valued by fathers as it compensates for the neglect suffered at the hands of their wives and sons in later life.

Physical contact between a father and daughter is discouraged from the age of about six or seven years. This is the age at which little girls take on feminine roles and responsibilities and are definitely identified as young women, rather than as children. Daughters are expected to stay in the company of their mothers and grandmothers and to perform their share of female household tasks. Fathers often treat their little daughters severely, raising their voices against them and complaining about their laziness. Little girls are not treated quite as indulgently as their brothers especially once they have passed the age at which it is permissible for their fathers to coddle them. The obvious differences in the ways in which fathers relate to their sons and daughters may reflect notions about female inferiority versus male superiority. However this seems unlikely, as such attitudes run counter to the characteristic pattern of adult male and female relations among the Muria. It is more plausible that avoidance behaviour on the part of the father towards his daughters is intended to push them more securely in the 'woman' category which should be separate and distinct from that of men.
The distance and formality which is introduced into the relations between father and daughter is lessened when the girl becomes an adolescent and starts going to the Ghotul dormitory. She then takes on the role of intermediary between her father and mother, and when verbal exchanges between the two are at a minimum, is used to relay messages and information. It is quite common to see fathers cajoling their daughters to lend them some money to buy liquor with, and sometimes, even inducing them to part with uncooked rice from domestic supplies to which daughters as cooks have greater access than the father, in order to barter the rice for money at the market. In this way, fathers and daughters become involved in little conspiracies of mutual help, which they keep hidden from others in the family. Most daughters are kind and considerate to their old fathers, but those who identify very strongly with their mothers, model their behaviour on that of their mothers, and accordingly treat their fathers a trifle contemptuously.

In one respect the fortunes of fathers and daughters are similar: the father has had to abandon control over his house to his adult sons, and the daughter, in a less dramatic fashion, to the incoming wives of her brothers. Given the fact that these two events often coincide in time, this heightens the sympathy which exists between father and daughter.

Relations between brothers

A great deal of stress is placed on the quality of the relations obtaining between brothers. The success and resilience of the extended family is said to depend upon amity and harmony within this group. Unlike the Hindu patrilineal joint family which emphasizes the duties inherent in the hierarchical father-son relationship, among the Muria it is simply the relatively egalitarian male sibling bond that is all-important. Thus a son, who would remain a detached spectator on occasions during which abuse was being meted out to his father by an outsider, would rush to the defence of his brother were he so threatened. Muria culture, on the whole, encourages the growth of close personal friendships between related males of roughly the same generation. Despite the fact that often considerable disparity exists in the ages of siblings, the inter-generational opposition within the family is such that it divides the father and all
his sons into two clearly defined camps. While the distinction between elder and younger brothers is significant, it does not rival the much more profound distinction between senior and junior generations within the family.

It is conventional for the elder brother to adopt a paternal and protective attitude toward his younger brother. This role is thrust upon him by the demanding nature of agricultural work which forces parents into allocating child minding duties to their older children, who look after their younger siblings. The younger siblings become the charges of their elder brothers and sisters who are expected to maintain an uncompromisingly solicitous and patronising attitude in relation to them. The responsibility for the younger brother or sister is keenly felt throughout life, but is more evidently operative for the period of childhood and immaturity of the younger sibling. During my observations on play among Muria children, I noticed that elder siblings were generally reluctant to quarrel with their younger ones, and the aggressive responses and actual physical violence were usually one sided, with the elder brother or sister being on the receiving, rather than giving end. In such encounters, the passivity and tolerance of the elder brother would be in proportion to the age gap between him and his younger sibling. The terms by which elder siblings address those younger to themselves are those employed by members of the senior generation towards the junior: peka (male child); pila (female child); or the common terms nona (male child) and nuni (female child) which contain an element of endearment as well. Outside the sibling group the terms are never used to refer to persons who although younger to ego, are nonetheless members of his generation; the terms are used only when the disparities in ages are sufficient to warrant an inter-generational child-adult distinction being made. Elder brothers continue this habit of addressing their younger brothers by terms meaning 'child' even after their younger siblings are adults.

At this point it is worth mentioning the rather unusual features of the Muria kinship terminology which seems designed to reflect the distinction between elder and younger siblings by classifying elders with the senior generation and younger siblings with the junior generation, outside the immediate family. Thus the 'agnatic' (ie 'non-saga') terms for males show
the following equivalences:

Pepi = FeB, FeBSSS, eBSS, yBS, FyBSS
Kaka = FyB, FeBS
Babo = FyBS, eBS, FeBSS
Dada = eB (≠ yB)
Tammur = yB (≠ eB) (see diagram page 69)
Dadi = FF, SS, etc.

As the diagram tries to show ego classifies as 'babo' (brother's son) the sons of the men in the senior generation who call ego's father 'elder brother', although they actually belong to different generations: thus identifying 'dada' (elder brother) as belonging to the same generation as kaka (FyB). Again, Kaka is used for FyB and the children of men whom ego's father addresses as dada (elder brother) on the same principles. Pepi shows the same phenomenon in a different way, classifying as 'grandparents'/‘grandchildren' the elder members of ego's father's generation and the children of the junior members of ego's own generation. Pepi is a 'grandparent' term in that it is applied reciprocally, like the terms dadi (FF) akko (MF) but it is used to cover individuals who are senior members of ego's father's generation (FeB) and junior members of ego's son's generations (yBS, FyBSS etc.) as well as individuals who are two generations removed from ego (EgSS, FeBSSS). Thus, on the basis of ego's father's usage of dada (eB) and tammur (yB) ego's male patrilateral cousins are 'uncles' (Kaka) if they are children of dada and as 'nephews' (babo) if they are the children of tammur of ego's father. Similarly, ego's tammur's children are 'grandchildren' (pepi) along with ego's dada's children's children. I mention these terminological details at this point because they seem to underline the idea that elder siblings are in a quasi-parental relationship to younger siblings. This applies to terms for males only: the terms didi (eZ) and helar (yZ) are applied on the basis of relative age and/or respect.

Does this create an ordering of brothers on the basis of their seniority? Is it possible that enclaves of hierarchical social relations exist within the prevailing climate of egalitarianism in Muria society? Younger brothers are supposed to be deferential to their elder brother and treat him as a siyan. But there is only a very small fraction of the Muria
behavioural repertoire that is expressive of deference and submission and one would be hard pressed to identify it in the daily interactions between elder and younger brothers. Younger brothers are treated indulgently, not authoritatively by elder brothers. Elder brothers never adopt the role of disciplinarian towards them. There is no sphere of control within the family which belongs exclusively to the elder brother. Younger brothers are given an equal share of the property, and they always have a say in land matters, such as, for example deciding what proportion of the crop shall be kept for sale at the market and what proportion of it for home consumption. It is common to find younger brothers compliant and submissive towards their elder brothers. However this is not an overt manifestation of an authority power structure within the family which is skewed in favour of the eldest brother. It should be seen rather as an aspect of the cultural bias towards affectionate and amicable relations within the sibling group, and a tendency to carry over into adulthood (rather than sever) the dependencies and sentiments that characterized childhood relations between elder and younger brothers. In the public, extra-familial realm, the set of male siblings constitute an unitary body.

A large and solidary group of brothers is the professed family ideal. Apart from the material benefits that can be expected from a large number of sons, (by Muria reckoning, family income is proportional to the number of productive hands a family contains, that is, the number of adult sons), sons mean important political advantages as well. A family blessed with several sons is regarded enviously and somewhat fearfully by other families in the village on account of the formidable political strength they can jointly muster. In Manjapur the family which comes closest to realising this ideal is the Panku Ram family which consists of six brothers, each married and with children, living together in a large house on a slightly elevated patch of land overlooking their fields. Even though the actual wealth of this family has steadily declined and they are no longer in the position of being able to afford kamiyaal as they had at one time in the past, they are still politically dominant. This dominance they assert regularly at meetings when all of them present a united front on what ever issues are being discussed. The brothers are certainly treated as a single corporate group; usually questions are directed at only one of them - Panku Ram - and it is believed that his views represent those of his
brothers as well. The individual who acts as spokesman is never challenged by any of his brothers. It is interesting to note that he is not the eldest brother.

Although age and seniority are not allowed to create divisions within what should ideally be a united group, there is an observable tendency for differentiation to take place in other lines, most specifically in terms of the social personae adopted by each of the brothers. For example, the eldest brother is a shy, retiring man who shuns company and devotes his energies to cultivating tobacco which he sold at the market. He was the only Muria in the village (and the market) to do so. His tobacco was reputed to be of a superior quality and brought him good profits. The second son, Panku Ram, was more of an extrovert, seeking out information about the affairs of people, which he used to lend colour to his participation at meetings. He was therefore spokesman for his family, and his social and political competence complemented nicely the reticence on the part of his elder brother. The third brother was an accomplished story teller and possessed a poetic, genial nature. The fourth and fifth brothers had no exceptional distinguishing personality traits that were apparent. They conformed to the basic type: were hard working and restricted their socializing to only very few houses, being content to work on the fields instead. The sixth brother was regarded by all as a rogue and hot-head. He lived up to his reputation by picking quarrels time and again with others in the village. He would usually have to be extricated by one of his brothers before it became necessary for the extended family as a whole to take his side against his opponent. The variability that arises from the distribution of personality traits between brothers, in this and many similar cases known to me, reduces the areas of competition between them. The ordering which is often seen among brothers is not a conventional imposition based on notions of hierarchy and authority, but is the outcome of intrinsically divergent personalities, made more pronounced by the dynamics of a large family group.

There is an element of formal etiquette in the relations between brothers especially when there is a marked difference in age between them and they do not share the same circle of age-mates or friends. Men in Manjapur were quite emphatic about one aspect of the etiquette between
brothers; they should not drink together although in fact one often observes that they do. The wisdom of this measure was confirmed by an incident that took place in the village about two years before we arrived, and is still firmly engraved on people's minds. It involved the Aitu family which at the time consisted of two brothers and their old parents. Shortly after Aitu had married his younger son to the Patel's daughter, his sons quarreled with each other. They both came drunk one day from the market, and the younger brother accused the elder of keeping for himself some of the money that he had received from the sale of jointly cultivated mustard seeds to a middleman in the market - a sale that was negotiated by the elder brother. The accusations led to violence and blows. The younger brother killed his elder brother with a massive blow on the head with an axe and was subsequently removed to jail where he is currently serving a twenty-four year term.

The brother-sister relation

The brother-sister dyad is the most symbolically charged of all consanguineal relations in the Muria system and the preference for father's sister's daughter marriage is the continuation and reaffirmation of the strength of this bond. Its depth and emotionality is partly the outcome of the Muria emphasis on horizontal, rather than vertical solidarity within the patrilineal joint family, and partly Muria socialization techniques which foster a close social and psychological inter-dependence between siblings. Another factor which contributes to the tension-free and warm nature of cross-sex sibling relations is the general position of women among the Muria, and indeed in tribal groups generally, by comparison with their counterparts in Hindu society. Among the Hindus an ambivalence attaches to sisters on account of their critical structural importance and the mixed influence they are capable of exerting on the lives of their brothers: as family members they arouse the fiercest passions of devotion and solicitude, but as the repositories of men's honour, and by extension too of the purity and caste ranking of their group, they are threatening and dangerous (Yalman 1961). It is vital for men in these societies to continually assert their control and dominance over their sisters. In Muria society the sentimental ties are uppermost and the structural power of women to effect the status aspirations of
their brothers is negligible. A sister who reneges on a marriage pact made by her brothers and parents by running away with a boy friend from the Ghotul is bitterly reproached by him, when she is found. The act is outrageous, but not because it degrades her brothers in the eyes of their fellows. Honour is a very shallow concept in Muria ideology, and men's honour does not reside with their womenfolk. The insult is felt acutely but personally, as a betrayal of the brother's trust in his sister, and her act of running away as a symbolic rejection of the brother (especially as it precipitates her marriage). Sisters are expected to be cooperative and obedient, but are given great independence as regards their conduct towards outsiders and non-members of the family. Indeed so long as their loyalty and concern for their family members remains intact, they are given great latitude in the matter of their relations with outsiders. Muria society delegates the controlling of this aspect of sisters' behaviours to an extra-domestic institution, namely the Ghotul. One has only to witness the different reactions of the brothers and the Ghotul boys to accusations that girls have flouted Ghotul (and village) rules to appreciate the truth of this statement. Brothers laughingly dismiss accusations that their sisters have been sleeping with boys from other villages, not because the notion is seen as absurd, but because it does not affect them in any way - except if the sister is expelled from the Ghotul or were to become pregnant on this account - and is a matter which is properly the responsibility of the members of the village Ghotul. On the other hand, the ire of the Ghotul boys in such cases is real enough for the girl has insulted their collective authority. Brothers then, are concerned with the non-sexual, domestic attributes of sisters: the sexual, potentially dangerous and disruptive aspects are removed away from the home and taken over by the Ghotul. I will return to these points in a later chapter. The relations between brothers and sisters are not, theoretically at least, conceived as those between male and female kin, but simply as kin.

From a very early age the values of sibling solidarity and the preservation of the exclusivity of the family are instilled in children. Siblings are forced to rely upon one another as play mates, for although participation of other children is not actively discouraged by parents, it is not particularly encouraged either. Moreover the settlement pattern of
the Muria village is such that it inhibits constant social intercourse between neighbours who are likely to be separated from one another, not only by distance but by man-made devices such as fences, fields etc. Until the age of five or six such obstacles hamper the ease with which children move between houses, and seek one another's company. Coupled with this is the traditional reservation about children's mobility on account of their susceptibility to attack by ancestor spirits who may be lurking around other people's houses. Play groups often consist solely of the sibling group.

Until the ages at which the division of labour separate brothers and sisters, and makes it necessary for boys to spend time in the company of their father or their own male friends engaged in 'masculine' pastimes, and for sisters to accompany their mothers on their trips to the forest, or river, brothers and sisters spend all of their time together. The consciousness of the family as a group separate and distinct, with definite boundaries between it and other family groups, is imbibed by siblings who are brought closer on account of this awareness of their shared identity. More leeway is given to the physical expression of tender feelings between brothers and sisters of not too widely separated ages: brothers allow themselves to be massaged and scratched by their sisters and both may engage in closer physical encounters than take place between say, the father and daughter, or the son and mother after infancy.

Relations between husbands and wives

The subject of personal relationships in Muria marriage, especially during the initial period, is inextricably and inevitably bound up with the question of the role of the Ghotul in shaping the Muria life cycle and attitudes between the sexes. Full discussion of the Ghotul and its effects on individuals I have reserved for detailed treatment later on. In this section I will only anticipate the later discussion of the Ghotul to the extent of pointing out that the difficulties and instabilities which are a marked feature of first marriages for Muria are often, if not always, precipitated by the previous entanglements of the bride and groom with their Ghotul partner (jor). The present section is concerned to show the development of the marital relationship as it typically occurs over the
lifetime of the marriage. We can distinguish three phases generally. Muria marriages go through a liminal period that begins after the marriage ritual and lasts until to the birth of children when marriages are considered prone to breaking-up and wives are even expected to make efforts to run away and to spend days or weeks at their natal home instead of with their spouses. Couples avoid one another, and given their experience of the Ghotul, are likely to be genuinely antipathetic to each other. The consequences of a marriage are more disruptive for women, but men are equally resentful of being forced to surrender a Ghotul liaison and of no longer having any real say in Ghotul matters on account of their 'married' status, although they may continue to visit the Ghotul and indeed go on spending nights at the Ghotul as they did before. In this climate of resentment, sexual relations may not be a feature of marriages at this stage. Women are given license to demonstrate their rebelliousness, and the onus is felt to be on the husband to make the marriage secure through tireless efforts to fetch his wife back from her parents' home every time she runs away. It often happens that a wife will run away on the afternoon of the morning that she has been brought back to her husband's home by him, and he has then to make another trip to fetch her back, knowing fully that the sequence will be repeated dozens of times before the wife eventually settles down, or runs away permanently and begins living with another man. Marriages are, it will be shown in a later chapter, often preceded by a running away, and although girls do not run away alone but with their Ghotul partners it is they who are believed to be the instigators. There is some basis for this suspicion in that in all but one of the running-aways I knew about, it was the imminence of the marriage of the girl in a Ghotul partnership that precipitated the running away; elopements were seldom preludes to a marriage when it was the boy in the partnership who was about to be married. But although this indicates that boys are reluctant to give their Ghotul partners to others in marriage, and that they are not so blind to the ultimate benefits of getting married themselves, and are not quite so averse to being married to some other boy's Ghotul partner - the female disposition towards running away is taken more-or-less for granted. Whenever a wife leaves her husband's house to go to the natal home she is thought to have "run away" (vititu), and newly married husbands are often made to be the butt of jokes about them being forever in pursuit of
their wives, and the sight of a wife leaving the house to fetch water or making a trip to the forest to collect leaves will provoke visitors to laugh and speculate that she is running away yet again. There is no stigma attached to the wife who keeps running away – provided she is not a mother – and her repeatedly running away for a year or so after the marriage, is quite in accordance with everyone's expectations. I remember being told in a very casual way by an affine of the Patel's, in the midst of a well-attended marriage ceremony for the Patel's sister, that the bride would now spend "at least one year roaming around" (valina) and he added, matter-of-factly, that she would perhaps not stay on eventually. Similarly Ghotul girls speak about running away after their marriages almost as if it was a foregone conclusion that they would do so; they do not give the impression that running away is a last-ditch, desperate course of action necessary only when all else had failed. Their unmistakably self-confident and fatalistic attitude towards running away comes from the assurance that they do not have to face condemnation by their kin, or even society at large.

Running-away by women after their marriages either creates a courting relationship between husband and wife since the husband is forced, literally and metaphorically, to pursue his wife, or else leads to a divorce. A wife is discouraged by her in-laws from running away especially when there is need of extra labour in the fields, but there are no domestic responsibilities that inhere in the role of 'wife' in relation to the husband. The concept of 'wife' in Muria society has very little formal content vis-a-vis the husband, but a great deal in relation to the domestic unit established by husband and wife when they become parents. A wife is not really a wife unless she has produced children which is also the event which terminates the post-marital wandering of young Muria wives. Although the Muria do not see pregnancy as a simple cause and effect arising from a desire, or a positive feeling towards the husband, Murias suspect that women who do not get pregnant somehow do not wish to accept the consequences of becoming mothers – which are that divorces are allowed, but effectively prevented since a woman cannot take her child with her but must leave it at her first husband's home. In other words, a marriage, that is to say, a relationship between two individuals, can be dissolved, but not a family, since it is so fundamental to the Muria
A wife is also only marginally absorbed into her husband's family—i.e. her husband and his parents' unit. Wives have formal, distant relations with their sisters-in-law, and are expected to submit to the mother-in-law who can bring the force of her personality, (but not customary rules) to bear upon the daughter-in-law and allocate her with work tasks which she is expected to execute. The only way in which a marriage becomes truly operational, and the relationship of husband and wife given a concrete social basis, is after the birth of their first child.

One might often get the impression, from watching the behaviour of a newly married couple towards each other, that they were either ignorant of each other's existence, or went to some extremes to convey the impression. Their own backgrounds and prior acquaintance determines the extent to which they will go on studiously avoiding each other, but it is quite common to find husbands who have not spoken (in public) to their wives for several months after the marriage, and for wives to remain equally taciturn. When both are less estranged or embarrassed, the husband, and only rarely the wife, will make feeble attempts to say something in passing to each other. Husbands and wives at this stage have only the most minimal verbal contact with each other and spend most of their time staying out of each other's way. The duties of husband and wife to one another are not specified, but their obligations to the kinship group of which they are a part, are. Thus husbands are expected, both by their own kin who have borne the expenses of their marriage, and the affines who have given a daughter, to show some interest in the wife and to express (indirectly) a desire to remain married by bringing the wife back from her parents' house every time she runs away. A husband who reneges on this duty is condemned by his affines and regarded as irresponsible by his kin. Failing to bring a wife back after an absence of a few weeks is seen as desertion by the husband of his wife, rather than vice-versa, and can cause her and her parents embarrassment. When this happens, the wife must choose to return of her own accord, thereby losing face, or alternatively she must take steps to find herself a new husband. This she generally does by taking up residence in the house of a married sister or other relative who will act as a match-maker for her. Murias are extremely emphatic about the rule that forbids married women to stay on indefinitely at their natal home. I have observed married women on visits to their natal home being told, much
to their annoyance, that they are not welcome there and pressures are put on them to return to their husbands, whether they themselves wished to or not. This creates friction between brothers and sisters. However, brothers do not have the same degree of control over the fate of their sisters' marriages, nor do they express any positive interest in keeping the first marriage alive. Brothers are mainly concerned to preserve a respectable image for the family vis-a-vis their sisters, which is possible only so long as they can continue to treat them as if they were married off and domiciled elsewhere than in the natal home, once a first marriage has been celebrated and the sister has been firmly given away. Brothers are easily reconciled, especially when they feel this serves their sisters' interests, to them running away to a brother-in-law's house and for him to serve as match-maker for a later marriage. But when newly married husbands refuse to fetch their wives back it is generally acknowledged that the husband himself has other plans, and wishes for his wife to leave him. In such cases, a second marriage for both is inevitable but there is an awkward and trying period in-between for the parents and elder brothers of the girl, who feel obliged to recommend that she returns to what they appreciate is an unhappy situation, and for the girl herself, who does not usually have a marriageable Ghotul partner or lover she can take up residence with, and must rely upon the initiative and help of an agreeable brother-in-law (ZHu) to begin the process of re-arranging her life. It is often girls who have become pregnant at the Ghotul and who subsequently deliver their babies at their husband's home who have to face the rebukes of their in-laws and husbands, and who have a more difficult time finding a second husband with money enough to pay the cash compensation (usually about Rs. 700) to their first husbands. This payment is always made by the second husband regardless of whether it was the wife who was deserted by the first husband, or vice-versa. There is therefore very little to prevent a man determined to marry someone else from abandoning (virchna) his first wife, since he is assured of a cash compensation with which he can "buy" (assna) himself another wife — although there is usually a time lag between the two events. Just as there is no stigma attached to the girl running away frequently during the first few years of the marriage, there is none to the husband refusing to take her back, and eventually to making it obvious through his actions that he would prefer her to run away
permanently. As a general rule, the survival of a first marriage is more the result of positive action on the part of the husband - revealed through his assiduousness in recalling her back to his house - than on the wife's part, since there is very little that a Muria wife can do when her husband has no interest in the match. Moreover, Muria women are unlikely to remain married to a reluctant partner: even though they do see themselves as martyrs in marriage, they are not used to accepting subordination to men. First marriages which end in divorce account for more than half of all completed marriages in the genealogical sample I collected.

The second phase in Muria marriage is initiated when the wife becomes pregnant to a recognised husband, after what has usually been a very delicate period while the marriage teeters on the brink of dissolving altogether. Then the relationship between husband and wife undergoes an often dramatic change which it is possible to observe in the case outlined below.

This concerns Tiri's brother Somaru and his wife, Somaru Muttay (SM) whom I was able to observe at close quarters as I was part of the same household, and living along with them. Somaru was married at what was considered a very young age (16 years approximately) by Muria standards. Tiri had engaged him to SM and had given her parents the customary mahala feasts prior to the wedding. Somaru ran away two days before the wedding day, but alone (simply to show opposition to being married) and not to express preference for some Ghotul partner. SM had a little boy, about 2 months old, who was the illegitimate child from her Ghotul partner, and whom she brought along to Somaru's house after her marriage. When I arrived, SM and Somaru had been married for about three years, during which time SM had never been spoken to by Somaru. SM was extremely unhappy and told me so in fractured Hindi, that she missed many things she had been used to at her father's home which was close to Hindu settlements at Benur and where she said people had sophisticated Hinduised eating-habits. She never complained about Somaru's attitude towards her, but did about her mother-in-law who was always bullying her into doing too much work, and her sisters-in-law who were always either stealing her things, or accusing her of stealing theirs. Somaru simply ignored her and did not abuse her, verbally or in any other way, though he was less than kind to her little
son. I was told by everyone that Somaru never spoke to his wife and he certainly never did in my presence. Once SM left to visit her parents (having not seen them for a year or so) and was gone for about two weeks, when Somaru was persuaded by his mother, and much against his will, to go and bring her back. His mother was worried about the loss of a labour hand to gather mahua pods during the brief season they have when they fall from trees and it is women's work to spend the mornings gathering them. Somaru gave in only reluctantly, and only after his elder brother pleaded with him saying that he would have fetched SM back were it not for the fact that as a younger brother's wife, it was improper for him to do so. But SM had often gone to her parents' house and returned by herself; she persisted in staying on when few other women would. I often wondered why SM did not run away like other women and decided that it was probably on account of the decided material advantage to her of staying in a very rich household; it would have taken a less judicious woman than SM to throw away the security that came from belonging to a well-off family, and besides SM was obviously patient and biding the time until she herself became a mother: Somaru was never mean to her and there was always enough food to eat in the house. When I left the field after my first trip, SM was quietly carrying on in the house as before and never speaking, or being spoken to by Somaru.

However, when I returned to the village after having been away for two years, I was pleasantly surprised to find a different, much more self-confident and assertive SM, who had given birth to a son in the interval. Instead of taking the child along with her on expeditions to the forest and river, and much to the annoyance of her mother-in-law, SM would leave the child in Somaru's care. By so doing she was making demands on her husband that, it was obvious, he was only too happy to comply with, and she would even venture to raise her voice and tick him off for slight negligences, such as failing to notice that the child had eaten dirt, or how filthy he had got. Somaru was much more responsive to her than he had ever been before. SM later gave birth to a little girl and she, Somaru and the two children formed their own small, united nucleus within the larger extended family. Somaru even accompanied SM and the children on trips to his father-in-law, something he would have scorned to do earlier.
After the birth of a baby, both husband and wife are committed to upholding taboos that ostensibly have to do with warding off spiritual danger to the baby, but which have the effect, both socially and psychologically, of making the husband–wife–child triad an indivisible whole. Thus husbands, as well as wives, are confined to the house for the period until the child’s umbilical cord falls off, after which it is permitted for the husband to go to the river to wash and to attend to work in the fields. Since the normal time taken for the cord to fall is about four to five days, Muria fathers find this an irksome duty which they all, however, comply with. After a month has passed the father is supposed to hold the naming (satti) ritual for the child at which kin are invited to a feast and the name given by old women (muitar) who call out the names of ancestors and believe that the name that coincides with the movement of the baby’s hand upwards towards its shoulder indicates the existence of a special relationship between the baby and that particular ancestor. The muitar women however, give the child a name other than that of the particular ancestor whose name was called out at the moment of hand raising by the baby. After the satti the father must make arrangements for the hatum tohna (literally, "showing in the market") ceremony of the child, and distill, or buy darngo liquor, while the wife pounds rice and prepares rice beer (barkar) to take to the market. Some distance away from the market plaza the group of invited affines and kin sit in a circle, while the father, and then the mother, salutes each person with the customary "johar" with the right hand extended to touch the person's extended right hand. The father's sister ties a small bracelet of plaited palm-leaf on to the hand of the baby and salutes all in the same manner. The hatum tohna confirms the rights of the father’s sister to her brother’s child, and establishes a transformation in the status of both women in the eyes of their natal groups: the father's sister becomes an affine to her brother, the father of the child, and the wife, an affine to her brother. There is therefore an assimilation of the social position of the wife to the husband, and both are united in relation to the body of affines. Apart from clarifying the positions of husbands and wives in terms of structural categories, a separation is effected between the nuclear unit and the wider group of kin. This is evident from the way in which they are treated as guests by the father, and do not themselves participate in hosting the
ceremony along with him. It is usually the father, and not any of his kin, who has the duty of ladling out rice beer and wine, and who bears all the expenses of the liquor.

Couples do not set up a separate kitchen immediately after the birth of a child. The process is gradual, and is often completed after one or two years have elapsed. The household pattern in Manjapur is predominantly composed of single nuclear units for purposes of cooking daily meals. Out of a total of 48 married couples, 38, or almost 70 per cent had their own kitchen, and of the remaining 10 living jointly, two couples did not yet have children. A separate kitchen is a spatially, as well as socially segregated area within the larger home complex. It is also the focus around which the mutual cooperation of husband and wife, and the complementarity and coordination of their work activities, hinges. Being able to make decisions regarding the food which is cooked enables women to become partially independent of mothers-in-law or elder sisters-in-law (HeBW) since they are able to organize their days more-or-less as they wish, and can indulge in food-gathering expeditions which are, after trips to the market, the activity which wives most look forward to. Control over food gives women dominion over their households; emphasizing independence and separation from the extended family with whom they have had, in all probability, tenuous relations prior to this. Since it is in relation to work activities that the dominance hierarchy between the women in an extended family becomes clearly manifest, when women no longer belong to the same cooking unit they are liberated from the demands of synchronising their work (within certain limits) which has socially liberating effects as well.

Murias do not blame, except under unusual circumstances, incoming women for being responsible for dividing, in this way, a solidary group of brothers. The tendency to separate is inherent in the way in which Muria men, as much as Muria women, relate to each other. In fact, institutionalized separation safeguards the unity of the sibling group as it acts as a buffer against the personality clashes which are more threatening to the fundamental solidarity of brothers. The separate hearth arrangement is a Muria convention - the right of every brother regardless of his position in the agnatic sibling group. This also enables brothers
to be equals of one another in regard to all mundane matters, and to accept more readily the subordination to the brother who acts as spokesman on behalf of his brothers at times at which they must present a united front to the village.

The years during which children are growing up are the most compatible years of a couple's life together and despite the often-made complaint of Muria wives against their husbands that they must "fight them if they want to satisfy their stomachs" (vahch vahch tindana) it is predominantly the case that a genuine and long-lasting affection grows up between them, despite occasional quarrels. I have never heard of a husband beating his wife, even while drunk, and although women continue to 'run away' when peeved over something, the running away is more of a pointed gesture than a serious, or even half-serious attempt to actually do so. Apart from one woman who left her son with his father and then ran away to Narayangpur to marry someone else, no Manjapur woman has left her husband after having had children.

Husband and wife do not normally address one another by personal names, and use teknonymic names, when referring to each other. Thus husbands will speak of their wives as "the mother of x" or simply "mother" (avhari) and likewise women their husbands. Husband and wife may, within limits, demonstrate their affection for each other - although never physically.

The third phase in the marital relation occurs in the latter part of their lives, once the children are themselves married and established. At this point an instability creeps into the marriage which reflects the weakening position of the father in relation to his sons, and the ascendancy of the mother. The process has already been described. After menopause a woman joins the category of muitar women, who are considered as being intermediate between men, and women proper, that is to say, women who are fertile and capable of reproduction. Muitar are free from the taboos that bind women who have monthly periods: at any time muitar may take paddy from containers made from coiled rice hay (dolongi) which is forbidden to all other women even while they are not having their periods, and muitar are also able to thresh paddy by the male technique of crushing and grinding a bundle of paddy stalks between their feet, as well as being
able to carry paddy from fields to the house on their shoulders, instead of on their heads as all other women must. It is the wife, and not the husband, who at this stage is more securely entrenched socially and domestically. The effect of all this on husband-wife relations is indirectly the result of the typical response of old men to their decline: the stereotype picture of an old man is of someone who spends his time drinking and this contrasts with the avidly energetic and productive preoccupations of old women. An old man whom I asked for the reasons for his abstemious nature said that if he drank then his speech would lose its effectiveness; literally, he would "not be able to hammer others with it" (kohk paddo). A great deal depends upon the personalities involved, but simply in terms of the antagonisms that spring up between fathers and sons at this stage, a woman is more likely to be inclined to her sons, than to her husband, and for this reason a rift takes place in their relations.

Relations with Saga

In a previous chapter it has been established that the Muria think of marriage in the context of an already-established framework of alliance relationships between segments of clans who stand in a saga relationship with each other. The precise pattern of these saga relationships is locally very variable and undergoes change when families migrate to a new village outside their original neighbourhood. Within the category 'saga', from the standpoint of any one family, will be included a large number of other families, all belonging to saga clans, with whom a relationship is recognised, ranging from the tenuous or merely formal (in instances where there have been no marriages or engagements in the recent past), to very close and intimate ones (as in the saga relationship between actual brothers-in-law or the clan-segments of a mother's brother/sister's son pair). 'Formal' (inactive) saga relationships between clan segments will be kept alive, if possible, by the use of the appropriate kinship terms (mama: MB, sango: 'cross-cousin'/'friend' and the use of 'didi'/'helar': eZ/yZ for the wives of saga) and the exchange of pleasantries and small gifts of liquor, tobacco etc. on the occasion of casual meetings at market and during the festival season. Such saga relationships are a social resource and are kept in being because they may become useful in some way in the future. But it is only with a few families in the saga category that
relationships of an intimate character, involving a more considerable investment of resources and time are maintained. These are a) the families of close affines (ZH, WB, MB, FZH, SW, DH - all of whom may be closely related to one another if not actually identical, as they will tend to be if the preferred FZD marriages have taken place), and ii) families of prospective affines with whom the exchanges of feasts (mahala) leading up to the performance of marriage (marming) are currently taking place.

In this section I will deal with two of these central saga relationships, firstly that with the MB, and secondly that with the mahala partner (SWF or DHF) with whom engagement feasts are exchanged.

The relationship between the actual mother's brother and the sister's son is a close and affectionate one. As an infant and a child the ZS will be made much of in the house of his MB when the mother makes visits to her natal kin, and the sister's son is later always sure of food and welcome, and refuge if need be (as for instance, after running away from the Ghotul) in his mother's village. The mother's brother is considered to have some claims over the labour of a sister's son or daughter at peak agricultural seasons, and conversely the latter may have access to their mother's brother's wealth and resources in time of need. Normally, however, the sister's children confine their demands to the right to pick irukh (mahua) from their mother's brother's trees for making liquor, this resource being otherwise jealously guarded. But the MB/ZCh relationship is not given heavy institutional emphasis in ritual contexts, and is mainly a friendly, social affair. The mother's brother is not in authority where his nephews and nieces are concerned, as close paternal uncles are. The relationship is recognised, however, in the idiom whereby the sister's child, of either sex, is said to be 'born of' (putler) his or her mother's brother's village, as opposed to being a member of the village of the father.

After the child has grown beyond infancy a new element is often introduced into the relationship, deriving from the fact that according to the ideal scheme, the mother's brother's son will be betrothed to ego's sister (i.e. ego's father will be receiving mahala feasts from the MB). But since the mahala arrangements are more salient to the senior generation which does the arranging, than to the younger people whose marriages are
being arranged, this has little impact on the MB/ZCh relation at first. However, it is one of the duties of a mother's brother to take an interest in the marriages of his sister's children, especially his sister's daughters, and failure to do so is perceived as a slight. Moreover, the mother's brother has every reason to do so because the burden of mahala feasts is likely to be less if he follows the practice of engaging his son to his sister's daughter because the 'return of the sister's daughter' is considered to be the mother's brother's rightful prerogative, not a favour for which he must sue by offering expensive feasts. If the relationship between the mother's brother and his sister's husband is a harmonious one, the engagement between the MBS and the ZD may proceed without mahala feasts, though usually some do occur, since both sides have an interest in acquiring the social prestige which comes from offering and receiving mahala feasts, if at all possible.

During the marriage ceremony itself, the relationship between matrilineal cross-cousins is ritually important. The bride is given away by her brothers, who stay with her and support her during the ceremony. They count the rice which is given as payment for the girl (rice which is consumed at a public feast in the girl's natal village) and they lead her to her new husband's home. The groom is supported by his siblings in a like manner, so that the 'members of the wedding' in ritual terms are two sets of cross-cousins, the elder generation acting as ritual officiants, rather than participants. After the sister's marriage, the relations between maternal uncle and nephew may sour somewhat, if the latter is not convinced that his sister is being well treated in her new home, but usually this relationship remains warm and friendly.

The preferred marriage

The discussion of the mother's brother role in Muria kinship is the appropriate place to raise the question of the preferred marriage between the MBS and the FZD (patrilateral cross cousin marriage), because the social effect of this marriage, in Muria eyes, is to express the attachment of a brother and sister through the arrangement of a marriage between their offspring. But before I can fully clarify this point it is necessary to raise certain background questions, namely the nature of the Muria
cross-cousin marriage system and the distinction between 'preferred' and 'prescribed' marriage.

The Muria alliance 'system' prescribes marriage between saga, i.e. between classificatory cross-cousins. No marriage which is not between saga is legitimate (this being the meaning of 'prescriptive' in the context of alliance theory: cf. Needham 1958) but at the level of the prescriptive alliance system no genealogical relationship between prospective spouses is specified, only a categorical relationship of saga/saga between the clan segments from which they come. Because of the tendency of marriages to take place within a circle of known kin, it is usually possible to trace actual genealogical linkages between the parties to a marriage, and in the case of mahala betrothals, this is almost universally the case. Moreover the links involved are known to the parties concerned. But it is not the genealogical links which make the marriage or mahala relationship legitimate; in the entire absence of such linkages the existence of a recognised saga relationship (or the non-existence of a recognised dadab'nh relationship) is sufficient so far as legitimacy is concerned. So far as the typology of marriage 'systems' is concerned, the Muria system is classifiable as bilateral cross-cousin marriage (restricted exchange) with one additional rule, that direct exchange of sisters is forbidden. In this respect the Muria conform to the general south Indian bilateral pattern, associated with the occurrence of Dravidian systems of kinship classification.

The next question to consider is the problem of the expression of status relationships between intermarrying groups. Dumont (1961) has provided extensive discussions of the relationship between hierarchy and marriage, and it is now commonplace to associate matrilateral cross-cousin marriage in south India with the perpetuation of status inequalities, i.e. wife-givers (headed by the MB in a system of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage) ranking higher than wife-receivers. Among the Muria however, permanent, intra-group status inequalities are attenuated to the point of non-existence, and the concept of hypergamy has no currency. Clan segments may be in de facto unequal relationships with one another prior to a marriage, but this is not pertinent to the saga relationship between them. Muria society is formally egalitarian and actual relationships between
intermarrying families fluctuate on the basis of contingent factors of wealth and political prestige. Marriage—choices are not used to set the seal of permanence on the intrinsically labile relationship of rivalrous competition between saga groups enmeshed in the historically contingent processes of village politics. For this reason, matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, which has an 'elective affinity' with the perpetuation of status differentials, is inappropriate to the social and political context of Muria society: the MBD 'option' is not so much rejected, as not perceived, since it corresponds to no 'possibility' of permanent political superiority which would be available to a local clan segment to exploit in this way.

The option which is perceived as a 'strategic' choice is the patrilineal one: though one should stress that this is a strategy within the general framework of saga alliances, not a formal rule which circumscribes certain alliance possibilities and makes them more legitimate than any others. The FZD is a morally excellent choice, if available, but not out of the need to obey rules of legitimate marriage, but the need to preserve the niceties of moral behaviour. The preference for the FZD belongs with the value-judgements which dictate that it is 'good' to marry a girl who is healthy, docile, unlikely to run away, or who comes from an important and wealthy house, not with the category-rules which dictate that it is 'legal' only to marry a girl who comes from a saga group.

The FZD preference is the genealogically-specific form of the more general preference felt by the Muria, and explicitly stated by them, for marriages to be arranged between close genealogical relatives. It is felt that there is compatibility between people who belong to a narrow social circle, and who have grown up in the same places, who have been brought together as children, have been passed from hand to hand by their respective mothers, and so on. This is the common topic of women as they sit together and chat during visits between close saga. The mahala (betrothal) institution (described in the next section) only sets the seal of formality, in most instances, on prospective marriages between children which have been long anticipated and discussed, usually in a light-hearted manner, among their parents while they were tiny babies. Only later, as will be described in Chapter 10, does 'reality' in the form of marital
incompatibilities and Ghotul-entanglements, cast a shadow over the pleasant fantasies about children's marriages which are such a source of pleasure to Muria parents.

The Muria preference for marriages between close relatives is not a matter of 'structure' or rules, but of 'sentiment', in particular the value placed on the enjoyment of sociability, which is so central to the Muria tribal 'ethos'. Muria would like it if marriages sprang directly out of shared, positively-evaluated social experiences, the enjoyment of eating, drinking, and amicable conversation. Again, it is not so much the genealogical links which predispose Muria to favour close marriages, though the physical kinship bonds are recognised and important, so much as what these links imply in terms of face-to-face social interaction over a prolonged period. And the betrothal feasts, which may be offered to relative strangers, are, it is important to note, public 'consumption rituals' (Douglas 1981) and although they have a money value attached to them (which should be repayed if the betrothal does not eventuate in a marriage, or if the marriage breaks down), it is not the exchange of wealth, so much as the establishment of amicable face-to-face relationships in a context of commensality, which establishes the moral bond between partners in a betrothal.

In short, the Muria marriage preferences spring out of the implicit context of face-to-face social relationships between related individuals established via commensality or, even better, long-term social interaction. They are 'sentimental' rather than 'structural', but this does not mean that they are not backed up by principles of morality which if not 'legally' obligatory, are felt to be obligatory in terms of kinship etiquette. At this point we can return to the Mother's brother's role vis-a-vis the sister's daughter and consider the precise nature of the FZD marriage preference.

The real father's sister's daughter is singled out from the remainder of eligible female cross-cousins of a male ego as his guda which we might gloss as 'appointed one'. This term has meanings in non-marriage contexts: for instance, a shaman addressing a spirit during an exorcism ritual will say that the house from which he wishes to remove the spirit is "not your
guda" (i.e. the spirit has no business to be there) or alternatively, when people are trying to make a point of saying how close they are, they say that they are "of one guda".

The real father's sister's daughter is therefore a special case of 'closeness' within the general preference for marriage between close relatives. There are two ways to approach the interpretation of FZD marriage. One can look at it in terms of its exchange-implications (following Levi-Strauss, 1969, who cites Russell and Hiralal's (1969) account of Gond practice in this connection) and one can also look at it from the point of view of its significance in terms of kinship sentiment, morality and etiquette. I will examine it from both points of view.

Muria are aware of the fact that the effect of FZD marriage is to return in the second generation a woman received in the first. The daughter goes in reciprocation for the mother, the mother's brother is recompensed for the loss of his sister by the receipt of a bride for his son. This balancing of accounts is recognised and positively evaluated by the Muria, but the question remains as to whether the 'loss' of the sister gives the MB a 'right' to the ZD as a bride for his son. That some kind of moral right exists can be seen from the fact that the MB, in seeking the hand of the ZD for his son, is a) not to be refused, which would be possible in the case of less closely-related saga and b) need not contribute the usual mahala feasts, and even if he does do so, not in the otherwise-required numbers (six being the standard quantity of feasts demanded).

The MBS/FZD marriage is therefore not prescribed in the sense that other marriages are not legitimate, but there is a 'prescriptive' element in the non-refusability of a suit by the MBS (via the MB) for the actual ZD. Should the MB be refused, and the ZD go elsewhere, her marriage is legitimate, but a breach of morality will have occurred. The MB in such a case would be able to make a case before the bhumkal for subjecting his obdurate brother-in-law to a fine, but in the instances of disputes between brothers-in-law known to me over the disposal of the ZD, no retaliation was feasible because the wronged families concerned were too politically weak and geographically distant to exert any pressure.
On the other hand, this moral duty cuts both ways, in that the MB is morally obliged to ask for the ZD for his son, if that is clearly the wish of his sister's husband. The parents of a girl are often anxious to manoeuvre the MB into making the request, which he may be unwilling to do because he wishes to contract a mahala partnership for his son elsewhere (e.g. with a family with whom he has current political relations which he would like to cement via an alliance). The parents of the girl in this case have no claim on the MB, should he neglect them in arranging his son's marriage, but a moral affront will be caused, and relations will become strained thereafter.

In both these instances the obligation is not to return 'a woman for a woman' in any crude sense, but to respect the moral claims inherent in the relations between close affinal kin, who are constrained by the morality of kinship to respect each other's wishes vis-à-vis the marriages of their children. But this moral claim, it would seem, would apply as much to a matrilateral cross-cousin marriage as to a patrilateral one. Indeed, this can happen; if the MB has no son and the sister no daughter, moral pressure would exist to perpetuate the relationship between the families via a MBD/FZS match, and a number of the mahala relations in Manjapur were between matrilateral rather than patrilateral cross-cousins (See table below).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>mahala Relationship</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MBS/FZD</td>
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<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBD/FZS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other saga</td>
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<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Distribution of mahala relationships in Manjapur

However, matrilateral cross-cousins are not each other's guda in the way patrilateral cross-cousins are. How does one explain this strong patrilateral bias?
Structurally speaking, the patrilateral preference is the outcome of the absence of the institutionalisation of hierarchy in marriage alliance among the Muria. FZD marriage balances the account between intermarrying groups after one generation. At this point we may ask whether there is inequality even during the period of the marriage, which is, after all, an asymmetric transaction. (Given that sister-exchange is excluded). During the mahala period, before the ritual is consummated, the Wife-givers (i.e. the ZH) side seem to rank higher than the wife-takers (the MB side). The MB side's contribution to mahala feasts are conventionally ridiculed as much too small, and it is usual for the girl's party to make outrageous demands for food and liquor, and for the boy's side to show deference through words and gestures. But this inequality is neutralised at the marriage ceremony itself, when the girl's side (i.e. the ZH) are put in the position of accepting a 'price' for their child.

Early in the ritual the groom's father produces 19 kurvas of uncooked rice and offers them to the bride's father. He calls on the elder brothers of the bride to count the baskets and satisfy themselves that the correct amount has been given, and continually exhorts the assembled public to witness that the 'price' (kharcha) given for the girl is the right one. This demonstration is very embarrassing (and is intended to be) for the bride's kin. The brothers count the baskets in a shamefaced way, because the clear implication of this scene is that they are accepting material reciprocation for their kinswoman, and that 19 kurvas of rice is not too much of a 'price' for a daughter or a sister. The ordinary implication of receiving uncooked rice - either at the market where it is bought for money, or in the village where it is received in payment for a day's labour - is that the recipient is a) in need and in some way economically insufficient and b) in the hierarchy of buyer/seller, it is always the buyer, or in this case, the recipient, who ranks lower than the giver of rice who is superior. This humiliating 'payment' of uncooked rice during the wedding ceremony has implications which are quite the opposite of the gifts of cooked food and liquor given during mahala feasts, even though in both cases the transactions pass in the same direction (i.e. from the boy's side to the girl's). The effect of putting the girl's side into a quasi 'client' relationship to the boy's side during the wedding ceremony (of which the boy's side are the hosts/patrons) is to cancel the inequality.
which seems to exist in the mahala relationship.

Subsequent to the ceremony, relations between brothers-in-law are equal, irrespective of whether they are in a wife-giving or wife-receiving role. Decorum and mutual respect should be shown in this relationship, despite inequalities of real wealth or power, so that marriage has the effect of neutralising inequality between affinally related men rather than affirming or perpetuating it. It would be reasonable to suppose that consistent matrilineal cross-cousin marriage would be inconsistent with this degree of absence of status-differential between wife-givers and wife-receivers, though of course it is possible to integrate a rule of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage with a wide variety of structural contexts, and this reason alone would not compel Muria to prefer FZD over MBD marriage. For the really clinching reason for the Muria FZD preference one must look once again at moral, even 'sentimental' factors, rather than structural or political ones.

The Muria account for the FZD preference on the grounds that the Mother's brother sees in his sister's female child the image of his helar, his 'kid sister' whom he loves and protects, while she, conversely, sees in her brother's male offspring the image of her dada, her big brother, whom she admires and looks up to. The FZD marriage is preferred over the MBD one because of the sexual parallelism between the B/Z relation and the BS/ZD relations, which is preserved in the MBS/FZD marriage and contradicted in the MBD/FZS one:-
A man wishes to see his son married to a woman who has the qualities of his sister, who is 'like' his helar and whom he can consequently view with maximum indulgence; and a woman likes to see her daughter go to her brother's house, where she herself grew up. The FZD marriage, in Muria eyes, arises out of the affectionate relationship between brother and sister, which is consummated and perpetuated via the marriage of their same-sex offspring. The claim of the MB over ZD is a recognised extension of his undoubted prerogative vis-a-vis his sister, and conversely the somewhat weaker claims of the FZ with respect to the MBS are extensions of the sister's prerogatives vis-a-vis her brother. The Muria regard it as being a natural consequence of cross-sex sibling loyalties that FZD marriages should be preferred above all others; and in cases where this expectation is flouted by one side or the other, it is the affront to the values of sibling loyalty which is deplored, not the non-reciprocation of 'the gift of a woman' in the first generation by an opposing 'gift' in the second.

In short, the motivations underlying Muria FZD marriage have to do with the dynamics of consanguinal (sibling) ties, not the dynamics of affinal alliance, which are as well served by any legitimate marriage with approved, but not necessarily related, saga. The rights of the mother's brother are moral rights based on siblingship, not rights stemming from the general legal requirement that marriages be contracted only with saga groups. Nonetheless these forces play a very important part in determining the actual pattern of betrothals, if not lasting marriages, as the figures quoted above show.

**Mahala (betrothal) and marriage**

The second half of this thesis, concentrating on the Ghotul, will deal at length with the subversive effects of Ghotul liaisons on the best-laid marriage plans made by parents on behalf of their children: plans which are formalised in the contracting of betrothals and the giving of betrothal feasts (mahala) and which culminate in the performance of marriage rituals (marming). In this section I will deal with the betrothal system as a formal expression of marriage-alliance between families, with the system as it 'ought' to work out, leaving the question of how it actually does work out in practice (in particular, due to the complicating
effects of the Ghotul) to a later stage. But it must be borne in mind, when
discussing mahala (betrothal) and marming (marriage) that only a
proportion of marriage ceremonies have been preceded by the betrothal
feasts theoretically required, and an even smaller proportion of lasting
marriages. Of 112 married people in Manjapur, 32% had been betrothed to
individuals other than the ones with whom they went through the marriage
ceremony, and 48% had abandoned their mahala partners after being married
to them, leaving only 20% actually married to the individuals to whom they
were originally betrothed. The full explanation of this state of affairs
must be left until later, but it is worth pointing out that the fact that
there is less than a 20% probability of betrothal actually eventuating in
a durable marriage does not mean that the betrothal is an unimportant
institution. The period during which families exchange mahala feasts may
extend over ten years or more, while the betrothed individuals pass
through childhood and the Ghotul years, and during this lengthy period a
formalised affinal relationship exists between the families concerned,
which in its own way is quite as important as an actual marriage would be.
In a way, the mahala system could be said to enable the Muria to eat their
cake and have it: they can maintain formal 'moral' alliance relations with
saga while their children grow to adulthood, thereby performing their
kinship duties in the public arena and acquiring prestige, while the
actual marital destiny of adult Muria remains subject to quite different
constraints (including the likes and dislikes, economic interests, etc. of
the persons concerned) within the general framework of the moiety
opposition of saga and dadabhai. The mahala system can therefore be viewed
as an 'ideal' alliance system, relatively unencumbered by the need to
result in workable marriages, though this is of course the overt (and
desired) objective.

The mahala process can itself be divided into two stages: there is the
preliminary stage of talikhna or informally asking for the daughter which
normally culminates in a mahala feast being given by the boy's parents. The
age of the girl and boy at the time of talikhna or the first mahala may
range from one year to eighteen years, and the gap between talikhna and the
first mahala, and between mahala feasts varies likewise, being dependent
primarily upon the financial capacities of the boy's parents. After the
first mahala, the mahala period lasts up until the marriage of the
offspring, or until the marriage of one of them. The mahala period is punctuated by mahala feastings and renewals of pledges between saga.

It is always the boy's parents (both mother and father) who make the first moves. The girl's parents never seek out a potential suitor, but wait to be contacted. In fact some of the shame attending a daughter's pregnancy or elopement, as far as her parents are concerned, is in the reversal of their temporarily superior position as 'wife-givers' which shows itself in them having to plead the marriageability of their daughter and take her physically to the boy's place, in the manner that boys parents are expected to. (However this is so only when the boy's parents express real anger over the pregnancy or elopement; the normal procedure is for the girl's parents to hand her over to the village bhunkal who then negotiate the giving over of her to her mahala partner in marriage). Although it is more than likely that the parents of the girl feel honoured and flattered at the interest shown in them as desirable alliance partners, they do not display enthusiasm for the alliance and make no verbal promises to reserve their daughter for their saga. At the encounters which take place between the two saga, especially during the initial and final stages, the impression conveyed is of the boy's parents having to work hard to overcome the reluctance of the girl's parents to part with her; the boy's side to do so by reassuring the girl's side of their honourable intention to host the maximum number of mahala feasts and by stressing continually the correctness of the alliance, in terms of whatever criteria, secular or traditional, that best define it. Once the girl's side have signalled that they are not altogether averse to allying themselves - which they do by sharing a bottle of darngo liquor bought by the boy's father - it is up to the latter to seal the contract by hosting a mahala feast.

The boy's parents, along with relatives and friends from their own village (in cases where this happens to be not the same as that of the girl's parents), arrive at the girl's house with a quantity of liquor, rice beer, and rice and lentils to be cooked by them, and consumed by the girl's parents and invitees from her village during the day. During the eating, drinking, and merriment that takes place, there is a brief ritual in the form of the girl's and boy's father making an offering of liquor to the ancestors of the girl's father, housed in an earthen pot kept in the inner
room of the house. Both girl and boy play no part in the ritual, and if they wished could be entirely absent from the proceedings throughout. During the feast there is no formal declaration made that inaugurates the binding of the two families in an affinal relationship to one another, or in the more common case of true mother's brothers, reaffirms it. Verbal promises are unknown in Muria culture, the only real obligations being those created by consuming someone else's food. 'Hiyana', the word meaning 'to beat' and 'iyana' meaning 'to give' unite at an explicit level the act of food-giving with acquiring supremacy over rivals and establishing binding obligations. When the girl's parents have partaken of the food and drink that their saga offer them at a mahala they are morally committed to honouring the alliance, and cannot change their minds about it, or give their daughter to someone else, without prior permission from their mahala saga and without offering them compensation.

Mahala feasts hold advantages as well as disadvantages to both parties, although one must presume that in the minds of those people who do involve themselves in mahala transactions, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Firstly mahala feasts provide only a minimal assurance that the process will culminate in a marriage and not be disrupted by the death of one or other party, or elopement, or, as sometimes happens, by backsliding on the boy's side, for whom there is no stigma attached to switching to someone else's daughter. The moves and counter moves that take place between the two affines during the mahala period are always set against a background of uncertainty; for the parents of the girl there is no way of telling how many mahala feasts they are likely to be the recipients of, although a single mahala effectively removes their choice in the matter, and for the parents of the boy, there is the anxiety concerning the outcome of the girl's years at the Ghotul and of the extent to which their desires for an early marriage are going to be accommodated by the parents of the girl.

Each village, or group of villages establish their own conventions regarding the amount of food and liquor that it is customary to take to a mahala. In Manjapur the quantities are fixed at seven kurva (approx, 100 cc.) measures of rice to be cooked at the saga house, and rice beer made out of five kurva of rice, along with about ten or fifteen bottles of
darngo liquor. One kurva of rice costs about Rs.4 in the market - the same amount that a labourer was paid for a day's hard work on the roads or at forest sites, and a bottle of darngo liquor costs Rs. 2.50. The total cost in cash terms to a man of a single mahala would therefore be in the region of about Rs. 85-90, not counting the additional cost of lentils or meat, and salt, spices etc. The only way in which a poor man can hold mahala feasts for his sons is by becoming indebted to a rich man who then hosts the feast on his client's behalf - in fact, this is one of the ways by which richer men assert their patronage and build up a network of clients obligated to them. A poor man may also give over his young son as kamiyaal to a rich man in return for bearing the expenses of the son's mahala feasts and eventual wedding. While mahala feasts impose a financial burden on all families, rich and poor, it is naturally more easily borne by the rich. The poor economise by holding mahala feasts for only one son, as against all of their sons, and they minimise the risks present in any mahala arrangement, viz. of the girl either dying, or subverting her mahala by running away with a marriageable Ghotul partner, by ensuring that their saga have more than one daughter, since in such cases the mahala can be passed on to the younger or elder daughter. Poorer men are likely to hold only the minimum number of mahala feasts - the initial one and the mahala that is a prelude to the wedding - while richer men host several mahala feasts for their more fortunate mahala partners. Six mahala feasts, from the time of the first mahala to the marriage is regarded as being the ideal number, but it is also appreciated by everyone that only very few individuals have the resources to achieve this. In Manjapur there was no one who had had six mahala feasts and was still unmarried. The man reputed to be the richest in the whole area, a man called Duba Saukar, had given six mahala feasts but was still waiting for his saga to settle on a definite wedding date. The girl's parents continued to give excuses and hold on to their daughter. They were thought of as being greedy, but were grudgingly admired all the same for their shrewdness in using to advantage their bargaining power over Duba who, after all, was not likely to leave them in favour of a more compliant saga when they had already consumed six of his mahala feasts. The decision as to when to give the daughter in marriage is solely in the hands of the girl's parents and one which they often use manipulatively. The point that the above example illustrates is that although the boy's
parents might feel that they can buy their saga's compliance with more mahala feasts, there is no guarantee that this is necessarily the case; therefore it is foolish to give one's saga more than the minimum number of mahala feasts without extracting definite promises from them as to when they plan to release their daughter. The timing of the marriage is a contentious issue, and there are pressures both for and against the giving away of daughters as soon as possible permanently in marriage. The risks of entanglements in the Ghotul will be discussed in due course, and these may induce parents to accept an early marriage. But in other respects, it is in the interests of the girl's parents to hold on to their daughter especially when she is at the height of her productive power, given that labour is such a scarce commodity generally; parents will often not let a daughter go until they have been assured by their saga of gaining a daughter-in-law to replace her. But those without sons, or with very young sons, to whom this mechanism of keeping female productive resources in the household within balance is not available, keep their daughters with them for as long as they can and turn a deaf ear to their saga's pleas for an early marriage.

It is within the rights of the girl's parents to demand mahala feasts. But the potentially demeaning social consequence of being food receivers even in non-normal and ceremonial contexts, acts as a constraint on them brazenly exercising these rights. Nevertheless there exists a definite feeling that it is only fair and proper for the boy's side to give something in return for reserving, and ultimately receiving a wife, and in the absence of any bride-price or marriage gifts the only 'price' paid is that of a mahala feast. Consequently girls' parents expect more than the statutory two mahala and are likely to feel chagrined if they are denied this.

Mahala feasts are also seen as payment for the burden of commitment that they carry for the parents of girls. A father told me that it was better to be free of any mahala responsibilities and to let one's daughters go where they wished. He was debating the advantages of being paid a brief homage by saga at mahala feasts, against the loss of good name which followed when daughters either got pregnant at the Ghotul or ran away with a Ghotul partner, or both. The structural relationships between
men in Muria society are not as sensitive to female misconduct as they are in Hindu society where they constitute the basis for a firmly maintained code of sexual conduct. However, when a relationship is created solely with reference to a female link, the behaviour of the inter-linking woman—in the case of a mahala, the daughter—affects interpersonal relationships by causing embarrassment which indirectly constrain further social intercourse. Parents whose children try to take their marital affairs into their own hands do not escape the trauma of an elopement even when the daughter has not previously been engaged, but at least they do not have to contend with the shame (nisma) of being unable to reciprocate the hospitality they have received at mahala feasts. The inequality in any unresolved debtor-creditor relationship between men is a factor that

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<tr>
<th>No. of mahala feasts</th>
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Total sample size of 114 unmarried members of Manjapur village.

Murias are acutely aware of, and one which they consciously strive to avoid. The chances of ending up as a debtor do not obviate the social payoffs to be had during the mahala period for the girl's parents, not the least of which consists in them being able to build up a credit in feast invitations, by inviting and excluding those of their village
acquaintances they wish from these feasts.

Mahala feasts are not a necessary pre-condition to marriage. The most pertinent feature of the mahala system is that it enables parental choice to be exercised in the establishment of alliance relationships with particular families and in many ways, as has been said earlier, an ongoing mahala relationship with its feasts and opportunities for conviviality and negotiation that it gives to each side, provides social satisfactions that are independent of whether the mahala will or will not culminate in a marriage. Mahala saga are also supposed to be mutual allies, in any matter - political or economic - that involves either of them; the system is not biased though in favour of either boy's or girl's parents. The most crucial fact about mahalas is that one finds that it is in relation to them that the purest expression of the real preference for cross-cousin marriage exists: 55% of mahalas were between families linked by real or close classificatory sibling ties in a sample of mahalas between individuals about whom I could obtain genealogical information. This preference is not reflected in the marriages extant in the village, of which only 15% were between cross-cousins, the reason being the complicating factor of choice being exercised by the betrothed cross-cousins themselves, which leads to elopements or desertions before or after the first marriage.

As the above table indicates, mahala feasts are by no means a universal phenomenon: almost half of the unmarried population of Manjapur had no mahala undertaken on their behalf by their parents, or their parent's saga in the case of girls. Although mahala feasts are distributed unevenly across different ages, with a greater percentage of the 10-15 age group having been given them, the figure of roughly 50% gives a more-or-less accurate picture of the prevalence of mahala arrangements within the population at any given point in time. In terms of Muria conceptions, a mahala does not increase the chances of an individual's getting married, since, according to Murias, everyone gets married, regardless of whether they have had a mahala done for them or not. Even the mother of a deaf and dumb girl in the village assured me that her daughter would definitely get married despite her obvious handicaps. But it might be argued that the parents of boys see the matter in a different light since for them there exists the problem of finding a spouse for their sons, and that
consequently mahala partners provide greater surety of their efforts not being frustrated, or ending up in failure altogether. This is certainly a factor in the decision to undertake mahala feasts, but even boys' parents would not insist that a) without a mahala their son would remain unmarried, and b) a mahala guarantees that his marriage will take place according to the terms of the mahala agreement. It is possible that boys without mahala partners have slightly delayed marriages compared with those with them, but even this might hold for only a minority of mahala cases since the timing of a marriage is a matter of negotiation between mahala saga. Ironically, though, the parents of daughters might be more agreeable to having an earlier marriage when their daughter has not been engaged in order to minimize the amount of time spent by her at the Ghotul, and so, by their own reckoning lessen the risk of her becoming pregnant or running away. In other words, they may decide to make the most of a good thing when their Ghotul going daughter is free from the stigma of a pregnancy, by being more responsive to the attentions of a respectable saga, while the parents of girls with mahala, having been assured of a saga who would not give up his rights to the daughter even if she were to become pregnant, might be inclined to feel less concerned about the timing of their daughter's marriage and the amount of time spent by her in the Ghotul.
8. THE STRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE GHOTUL

In the conclusion to Chapter 5, I raised certain questions about the symbolic integration of the village through two key institutions i) the cult of the village gods (pen) and ii) the Ghotul. My general point in this connection is that the village political unit is both the paramount focus of Muria social life, but is at the same time unstable and riven with factional conflicts due to the competition for prestige and power between component clan segments and extended families, and the fact that the component groups in the village have widely divergent origins and interests. Village solidarity has to be continually reinforced by symbolic actions, namely, the performance of ritual duties and contribution of material wealth to the Pen, and the relinquishing of grown up children to the Ghotul. In this chapter I will explore these ideas in a little more detail. I will argue that at the symbolic level, there is a convergence between the framework of ideas associated with affinity and alliance, and the framework of ideas surrounding both the God/man and Ghotul/village relationships. That is to say, there is symbolically an 'affinal' relationship between the village gods and the mortal occupants of the village, and between the adult population and the adolescent members who belong to the Ghotul. This places the Ghotul boys and girls in a particularly close relationship to the Gods, and this is also borne out.

First of all I will state the argument in terms of the Village/Ghotul relationship. The Ghotul is the most famous and perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Muria society. But it is a theoretically difficult problem to put the Ghotul into the perspective of Muria village society as a whole. Elwin's exhaustive compendium of cultural lore associated with the Ghotul, much of it not trustworthy at an ethnographic level, fails to provide a systematic overview of this fundamental question. There is, of course, no real answer to the question "Why do the Muria have a Ghotul?" The Muria Ghotul is a cultural and historical given of Muria society. Similar dormitories are found among many other tribal groups in peninsular and Himalayan India (Furer-Haimendorf 1938) and it is possible to find
ethnographic examples of roughly comparable institutions in other parts of the world in extra-domestic residential arrangements for certain members of the community at large, such as 'mens-houses', 'initiatory lodges', 'age-villages', 'warrior encampments' etc. Elwin provides a comparative perspective in Chapter Nine of his book and there is no need to recapitulate his discussion here. The Muria and Maria both possess the adolescent dormitory known by the word Ghotul in Muria and Maria Gondi alike, and it is presumably an intrinsic feature of the cultural traditions of both groups, though the Maria dormitory is a single sex (males only) institution, unlike the Muria Ghotul. It is worth noting that the Manjapur Muria are entirely ignorant of any mythical charter for their Ghotul. "The Legend of Lingo Pen" provided by Elwin (page 225-265) as the charter myth for the Muria Ghotul appears to be a Halbi folk tale, not an indigeneous Gondi product at all. This suggests that the institution is so much a 'given' of the general scheme of things that it requires no further explanation or legitimization.

However, the fact that the Ghotul is an intrinsic feature of Muria society, while indisputable, still demands theoretical elaboration. How does the Ghotul fit into its context? One does not have to take an extreme functionalist stand, holding that all features of a society are minutely accommodated to all the rest, nor an extreme position on the other side and view culture, as in Lowie's famous dictum as "a thing of shreds and patches", when attempting to consider the place of a particular institution in its general cultural and social setting. There is a sensible middle course, which I will attempt to follow, which is to suppose that any deeply-entrenched institution, such as the Ghotul in Muria life, is to some extent adjusted to the other major social institutions among which it is set, while also having a dynamic of its own to the extent that it can independently be a source of disruption in these same institutions. That is to say, the Ghotul can be seen in 'functional' terms as an institution which promotes certain socially desirable objectives, of which the Muria are to some extent explicitly conscious and about which they make verbal statements, but at the same time the Ghotul can be, and indeed is, the source of certain social difficulties and problems, particularly in relation to marriage, since, as will be shown in detail in Chapter 10, Ghotul girls and boys form relationships which tend to subvert the
socially approved pattern of marriage alliances.

The most straightforward way of approaching the Ghotul is to look at it in terms of the life cycle of the individual: the Ghotul is an institution which prepares the Muria boy or girl for adult status in society and the social responsibilities that it implies. The Ghotul is not an initiatory institution, nor is the status transition from adolescence to adulthood mediated by the Ghotul primarily in terms of symbolic or ritual events. Instead, this transition is bought about by equipping the adolescent with a certain kind of social experience, acquired not over a few weeks or months of initiatory seclusion or ritual instruction, but over many years of nightly attendance in the Ghotul, which is entirely in the hands of the adolescent Muria themselves, quite away from adult or parental authority. The Ghotul is a mini-society within a society, and the Ghotul allows the Muria adolescent to enact what is in many ways a dummy run of their subsequent experience as adults. But in order to see how this takes place one has to examine the internal aspect of the Ghotul in more detail. What I want to focus on first of all is the place of the Ghotul, not in the life-cycle of the individual, but in the developmental cycle of the domestic group, (the nuclear and extended families) and in the village as a whole. The point I wish to emphasise is that quite apart from its effects on individuals, the Ghotul is of great importance to the village as a collectivity, in that through the Ghotul a level of village wide coordination in the developmental cycles of the constituent domestic groups resident in the village is achieved, giving the village a focus, and a degree of mutual participation, which would otherwise be lacking. In short, it seems to me that one of the factors which has favoured the retention and elaboration of the Ghotul institution over the historical development of Muria society up to the present, is the role of the Ghotul in establishing a level of social communication, i.e. a mode of reciprocal exchange relations, between constituent households within the Muria village. This strengthens the internal cohesiveness and stability of the pattern of intra-village relations, and thereby promotes both the 'social reproduction' of the Muria village in this specific form and of the Ghotul itself.
As I hope will have become clear in the course of previous chapters, Muria society can best be understood as a framework of alliance relationships underpinned by exchange relationships between units. In the chapter on clanship, it was argued that the Muria clan is not a corporate unilineal descent group, but a schema for the coordination of marital alliance within a locality: clanship is important because it is an indicator of a certain established and enduring pattern of exchange relationships between saga and dadabhai. The 'on-going structure' of Muria society, the pattern of social relations which is perpetuated from generation to generation, consists of exchange relations between segments of clans located within specific village configurations. When we come to look at the village itself, the same themes are repeated: the village is bisected by a moiety division, and relationships between clan-segments, extended families and households within the village are structured according to the degree of congruence and complementarity which exists between the alliance pattern of each segment outside the village, and by the actual exchange of women between component segments of the village itself.

Following recent discussions by Meillasoux (1981) and Sahlins (1974) one can account for the dominance of matrimonial exchange in the structuring of Muria society, by positing that under the 'domestic mode of production' characterising subsistence agriculture as practised by the Muria, the minimal units of exchange relations, that is to say the extended families, are in effect, self sustaining economic concerns, whose only real dependency on the outside world arises from the need to recruit wives in exchange for daughters (Meillasoux 1981:38). If the theme of marriage exchange dominates the external field of relationships surrounding each unit of Muria social structure, this is as a result of the objective fact that it is the transference of rights over women which enables these units to reproduce themselves, not only physically, in terms of personnel, but also as productive units with the correct ratios of male and female members at appropriate stages of their productive capacities. From this point of view, marriage alliance is the coordination of the developmental, or more accurately, replacement cycles, of the domestic production unit. As I have remarked before, it is not possible to perceive a regular 'cycle' in the gross structure of the Muria extended family such as those described.
by Fortes for the Tallensi, or closer to home, Madan (1965) for the Kashmiri Pandits. However, it is clear that the extended family is the minimal unit of production and exchange in Muria society, and is dependent for its existence on its ability to coordinate its replacement cycle, or developmental cycle, with units of like order, such that each supplies the other with what the other lacks. This is institutionalised as long-term alliance obligations between units and the social specification of preferred marriage choices (FZD marriage).

Society-wide coordination, via coordination of the developmental cycles of domestic groups (the exchange of members during the replacement cycle) one can term the 'primary' level of coordination in Muria social structure. The institutionalization of these processes is what constitutes Muria social structure. However, it is time to turn one's attention to the Ghotul, which is, as has been said before, a 'given' of Muria social life.

Certain elements of the basic pattern of 'primary' coordination are recurrent here. First of all, the Ghotul institution implies the transference of rights over members of extended families at a certain stage in the developmental cycle to an institution lying outside the extended family itself. That is to say, there is a partial analogy to the system of marriage which obliges families to cede rights over their daughters to their pre-ordained affinal partners at a certain stage in the daughters' life-cycle, and the Ghotul obligation which obliges families to give up their sons and daughters to the village Ghotul during the 'Ghotul phase' of their life cycles. In other words, just as marriage brings about a primary coordination between the cyclical replacement process that takes place internally within the extended families bound to one another in an alliance relationship, so the Ghotul institution coordinates these same processes, but in a slightly different way, since the 'debt' is owed not to a specific affine but rather to the village or nar as a collectivity. Murias are explicit about this aspect of the reason for the existence of the Ghotul: it is an obligation to send one's offspring under the moral pressure exerted by the 'debt' owed to the village, all of whose households have, in their turn, ceded members in the same way. The Ghotul is founded on the ethos of exchange, just as marriage is, and the fulfillment of the obligation is essential to complete acceptance and
participation in the society. However, there are differences between marriage and alliance obligations and Ghotul ones: first of all, the Ghotul 'exchange' involves not one-to-one exchange between alliance partners, but an 'exchange' between each component household of the village and the village as a whole. However, it has already been made clear how central a preoccupation it is for Muria heads of households that their relationships with the village as a collectivity should be on a proper footing. In the case-history given in Chapter 5 above, it is apparent that the continued viability of a household in the village is crucially dependent upon the restoration of amicable relations in the case of conflicts that arise. Sending children to the Ghotul is a social debt whose payment comes eventually in the form of social acceptability in the village. In the last resort this can be interpreted as a material necessity, just as the provision of wives by affines is a material necessity.

Secondly, Ghotul exchange differs from marriage exchange in that it is both boys and girls who are given up to the Ghotul, not just girls who are given as wives in marriage. Neither are girls and boys ceded totally. They continue to contribute the greater proportion of productive labour to their natal households while they attend the Ghotul, though, to some extent, the Ghotul is a labour pool for village purposes and Ghotul girls and boys enjoy a good deal of economic independence. Adolescents are ceded to the Ghotul only temporarily, while they are given permanently in marriage.

Despite these differences, it seems appropriate to consider the Ghotul in its overall social context as a form of 'secondary coordination' of Muria society, operative not on the wider social field, but internally within the village. The Ghotul can be considered as an exchange institution which binds the component households of the village together via a network of obligations, owed not to each other, as households, but to a 'super-household' which encompasses all the adolescent members of all the households of the village. We can summarise this argument in the form of a diagram (below).
1. Households A, B, & C as autonomous units reproducing themselves via developmental cycle through three generations, I, II, III.

2. Developmental cycle of household A & B coordinated via marriage exchange (primary coordination).

3. Households A, N. coordinated via pooled exchange of adolescent members at one stage of developmental cycle (secondary coordination).
I propose, as a basic analytic idea, that the Ghotul boys and girls are placed 'outside' ordinary village society during their stay in the dormitory. They acquire new names, are subject to a different authority, and no longer reside in their parental homes. They are 'on the bhat' on the margins of the village, but at the same time they are 'central' to the village, because the Ghotul is sited (notionally rather than physically) at the 'centre' of the village, on the nadum bhat the 'central margin', a paradoxical expression which captures better than any other perhaps the Muria conception of the place of the Ghotul in their society. The Ghotul boys and girls are also marginal because they are adolescent (laiya, leyor) neither dependent children nor independent adults securely positioned in the categories of village society. Indeed, at this stage of the life cycle their village identity is ambiguous: this is particularly so where girls are concerned, since they have left their parental homes, but have not yet gone to their eventual husband's places. While girls remain at the Ghotul they are domestically in a betwixt-and-between condition. Where young boys are concerned, it is their natural fate to eventually return to take up their position in the parental household; but while they remain in the Ghotul they 'wander around' (Valli daina) and it is recognised that the Ghotul period, and immediately following it, is a period in which they are likely to migrate to other villages, to take up residence (e.g. after running away with a Ghotul lover, or fleeing from an unwelcome marriage). Moreover, unmarried boys capable of independent action are like to spend considerable periods living away from home with their matrikin, among whom they have ritual and social privileges. As was noted earlier, they are said to be 'born of' (putler) their mother's brother's clan and village, and moreover they are able to carry the gods of their maternal village on ritual occasions and to perform sacrifices to them. These privileges in the maternal village cease once they are married and established in their own village. Thus during the Ghotul period boys as well as girls are poised between different village identities.

This marginality of adolescents results in them becoming, collectively, 'affinalized' with respect to village society. Thus, when a particular family 'gives up' one of its members by sending them to the Ghotul, that particular family member is not wholly cast off (nor are daughters wholly cast off when they become the wives of sagas) but the institution to which
rights over the family member are ceded (i.e. the Ghotul) becomes, by the either/or logic of exchange, the equivalent of an affinal group.

We can see how this works in practice by anticipating the case history of the quarrel between the siyans of the village and the Ghotul over feasting obligations cf. below Chapter 9 p. 278. This conflict arose over the failure of the Ghotul to 'reciprocate' with a feast, the indulgence shown by the village siyans in permitting the Ghotul to exist. This failure to reciprocate led to a meeting which was conducted in exactly the same spirit as altercation between affines over mutual feasting obligations. The sanctions which the siyans threatened, in this case, to impose were a) not to provide the wedding feasts for the Ghotul boys ('You can just stay in the Ghotul') and b) not to feed the Ghotul boys and girls at home. The Ghotul boys eventually gave the feast, but later got their revenge by fining the siyans for certain derogatory remarks made about them during a wedding, that had resulted in the Ghotul boys leaving the wedding early and missing the wedding feast which they had themselves prepared. These quarrels about reciprocal feasts and feeding obligations convey the idea that an exchange relationship exists between the Ghotul and the village, and this is also expressed in the kind of language with which the Ghotul, as a body, is addressed by senior men. This idea suggested itself to me on one occasion as I observed the siyans pleading with the Ghotul boys to take back two girls who had been expelled from the Ghotul for infringements of the rules. Just as if they were addressing affronted saga, they employed the most exalted language of respect, calling the boys mahaprabhu ('great God'), bowing towards them with cupped hands. On this occasion too, they called the Ghotul girls the 'wives' of the boys, just as if the girls in question had been sent to their saga, whom they were seeking to appease in this matter of 'a husband-wife quarrel' (ar-koitor vahchana). Although the Ghotul as a body are treated like saga, it would not be true to say that they are (collectively) saga, since this category belongs to the wider adult world, not to the encapsulated society of the Ghotul. The Ghotul boys and girls belong to a social category on their own (leyor/laiya) with its own special status vis-a-vis the adult world. But the point I wish to make is that there is a structural analogy, which emerges in practice, between the category of affines and the category Ghotul-goers. At a later stage, I will return to the relationship
between the Ghotul and marriage in connection with the jor relationship which is instituted in the Ghotul, between particular boys and girls. For the moment I am only concerned with the 'affinal' implications of the Ghotul/village relation.

The next step I wish to explore in this introductory chapter to the Ghotul concerns a similar 'affinal' element in the relationship between the village and its Gods. What I want to argue is that the social implications of this 'neutralization of primary village identities' which one can see affecting the Ghotul girls and boys by virtue of their being fed into the internal Ghotul exchange, has parallels where the relations of the pen Gods to the village are concerned -- parallels which in turn give rise to a close relationship between the Ghotul girls and boys and the Gods, which is manifested in ritual practices. Essentially, three oppositions are involved: between men and gods, between kin and affines (or more generally insiders vs. outsiders) and thirdly between the village and the Ghotul. These three oppositions can be seen as forming a series as follows:

However, in order to substantiate this picture, it is necessary to add further details to the discussion of the pen gods. The important point to note is that the gods of the dominant clan in any village are categorised as affinally related. This factor of 'affinity' in the relation of a village to its pen gods is the key factor in understanding the logic of the left-hand members of the three pairings displayed above. At this point
let me describe the situation of the Manjapur pen gods as an example of the phenomenon, which seems to be general.

The main Korami pen god of Manjapur is Maria Dev, who is said to have originated from the Hallamis (i.e. the Korami saga) of Mangwar, a village to the south-east of Manjapur in Hallami dominated country. Meanwhile the 'true' god of Manjapur resides with the Hallamis of Mangwar. This means that in religious terms ultimate jurisdiction over Manjapur is vested in the Hallami of Mangwar - believed also to be the original inhabitants of Manjapur itself, and the Manjapur cult of Maria Dev (said to have been 'bought' (assna) by the Koramis of Manjapur when they took up residence there) is directed towards a Hallami god, i.e. a god in an affinal capacity. The Muria strongly associate gods, women, and land, insofar as all three are linked to affines and are said to come from them. It is worth noting that gods of whichever sex, are addressed and referred to in the feminine/neuter gender and indeed the word pen is etymologically related to the Gondi word for female genitals, penda (Burrows 1961). The logic which associates the provision of fertile wives and fertile earth with a single source is not difficult to follow. The present day Koramis of Manjapur acknowledge the fact that they are indebted for the land they live on to the Hallamis of Mangwar who were there before them, and they explicitly state that they "give daughters to the Hallamis" in return for the land they received from them many generations ago, in the mythical past. But land, by itself, and without divine protection is useless. The cult of the pen gods is a lengthy and at times acrimonious series of negotiations with the gods to secure their blessing, by a mixture of cajolery and bribery, much like negotiations with saga groups over marriages, in fact. It is not necessary, and would take far too long, to give details of the cycle of ceremonies involving pen gods which fill the Muria ritual calendar. Some details have been provided already in Chapter 3. The main religious festival which involves the pen gods is the annual pen karsna (the play of the gods) ritual, which is the occasion when the gods of the village, and of neighbouring villages linked by affinal ties, congregate to dance and receive worship, as well as making their wishes for the ensuing year known through the mediumship of the shamans (lesk).
The system of pen gods establishes a relational network linking clusters of villages to one another according to their position as affines or kin. Thus the gods of the following villages are 'kin', that is, in a brother-brother relation, or as the Muria term it "kaka-pepi" (FYB-FEB) relationship: Atargaon, Besemeta, Kasurnar, Manjapur, Bergamar, Tadonar, Tirjul, Hakkur, Kumar, Kangal Parpa, Durveda, Varma, Jara, Hirningai, Rajpur, Talper, Hidnar, Gulum Kodo, Mankek, Irko and Himir. All these villages act in concert to decide when the pen karsna will take place in their respective villages so that there is no possibility of pen karsna being held in two of these villages on the same day, and the gods are free, in theory, to visit their kin on every occasion. Messengers are sent to each village to invite its elders to a meeting presided over by the Majhis and held at the bazaar at which dates for pen karsna are fixed. It is not possible in fact for all these villages' gods to be present at every village pen karsna (although the Ghotuls of these different villages make it a point to be present), and the group divides into smaller groups consisting of four or five neighbouring villages between whom there is an agreement to have a common manda or dancing booth whereat the special shamans of the gods go into trance. The gods are accompanied by a few village siyan and the shamans to the particular village selected as the manda of the event. The manda may be a permanent site, or it may rotate from village to village. Manjapur was for all the time that we were present in the field, the manda for the village gods of Besemeta, Muiyulnar and Bargao.

The affinal or Akko-Mama (MF-MB) pen gods to this constellation of village gods are the gods of the following villages: Kongera, Kajum, Mangwar, Marranar, Dandawandi, Ilpura, Mallinar, Kulanar, Nayanar, Remanar, Garanj, Gutapr, Gardapal, Maramnar and Mahima Gwari. It is between these two groups that divine marriages are arranged. One can be certain that there is no Muria who is aware of the precise genealogical connections between the gods that make up these two clusters but nonetheless, all Murias believe that such persons exist. The knowledge of the Manjapur villagers regarding the divine genealogy was extremely limited and it was only after asking the head shaman that I was able to piece together the genealogy of Maria Dev given below. The fact that this genealogy can be extended indefinitely to encompass eventually all the divinities in every
Muria village is what is important rather than the particularities of the precise inter-connections between gods.

Maria Dev's genealogy provides a structure of kin-affine linkages between gods which recapitulates the pattern of exchange-relationships between affinally linked groups here below, though in idealised form. It would require much further research in order to establish the genealogy of all the gods in the pen category, but enough can be seen even in this fragmentary example to suggest the pattern of the whole. Maria Dev, via the
link to Varum Mudiyaal's daughter, links Manjapur to Mangwar in a wife-receiving capacity, while other alliances, e.g. the daughters of Maria Dev to Pens in Tadonar and Dhorai place the Manjapur god in the role of wife-provider. However, the point to note is that the Manjapur god (Maria Dev) though resident in, or associated ritually with, Manjapur, is not thought to have originated there at all, but in Mangwar, where he is supposed to have worked for Varum Mudiyaal as a lamsena (a live-in son-in-law) before taking his wife with him to Manjapur. The essence of the situation with the gods is a paradoxical relation between clan affiliations and residence: Maria Dev is a Korami and a Manjapuria, but he is an outsider: the 'true' Manjapur god (Varum Mudiyaal) is a Hallami and lives in Mangwar. This paradox was cogently put by Manjapur's shaman Rajman thus: "For the Korami god, the Korami is a Hallami, and for the Hallami god the Hallami is a Korami" (Korami na pen kaje korami hallami, hallami na Pen kaje hallami korami antor). The paradox reflects a fundamental feature of Muria thought: the fertility of the land, and the perpetuation of the dominant clan (here, the Koramis) is ultimately dependent on outsiders as providers (in the case of gods) of divine blessing and (in the case of mortal affines) of wives. The moral integrity of the village in religious terms, and the political integrity of the village in terms of affinal alliance, can only come about through establishment of a compact with the 'outside elements' upon which the internal system of the village depends.

Both the Manjapur Gods and the Manjapur Ghotul are thus, in a sense, 'outsiders' in Manjapur. The next, and final, step in the argument is to consider the relationship between the Ghotul and the Gods. What are the religious duties of the Ghotul, and do they indicate a convergence between the structural position of the Ghotul boys and girls and the village Gods?

One general point which can be made here is that merely by virtue of being young the Ghotul boys and girls are associated with the divine. Very small children are commonly referred to as 'pen'. For instance I once saw a small girl of about two and a half chewing an unripe mango before the village first-fruits ritual for mangoes had been performed (i.e. before the pen had been asked permission for mangoes to be eaten). Normally this would be a grave offence, but when I questioned her father about this, he replied "What of it? Little Pulbatti is a pen herself - she has no need to
ask permission." Dr. A. Gell showed me the well known verses from Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode' which seem to strikingly echo the Muria idea:

Not in entire forgetfulness
And not in utter nakedness
But trailing clouds of Glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison house begin to close
Upon the growing Boy,
But He beholds the light, and whence it flows
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest,
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the Man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

Muria (cf. below on conception beliefs) believe that children come from God by means of mysterious, non-physical, processes, and that children consequently have pen-like attributes. We note too that the village priest who performs the most sacred acts at first-fruits rituals, is not an adult, but the child-gaita, too young even to go the Ghotul. Children therefore have sacred properties as such.

The Ghotul boys and girls do not have this degree of sacredness. They must obey the rules on eating first-fruits like the rest of the population, and the child-Gaita is forbidden to come into contact with them, just as he is forbidden to enter the houses of married women other than his own mother. But they can still be seen as 'nature's priests' attendant upon the Gods if not actually numbered among them. The religious duties of the Ghotul are to sing and dance prior to, and during, the pen karsna (God-play) rituals, and to dance with the anga images of the Gods, thereby becoming filled with their divine frenzy. To call these activities 'duties' perhaps puts them in a wrong light, in that Ghotul boys and girls delight in performing them; and the strongest sanction against
infringements of Ghotul rules is the threat of expulsion from the Ghotul during the festival season from mid-February to the middle of May. But dancing, drumming, and singing are duties owed to the pen nonetheless, and failure to perform them would be offensive to the Gods. Insofar as the Ghotul has a role to perform on behalf of the village as a whole, singing, drumming and dancing at pen karsna is the most significant one. (The other main duty of the Ghotul is to sing, dance, cook the food, and serve it at the weddings of Ghotul members; but this reciprocation is directed primarily at the family of the Ghotul member being married, rather than towards the village generally.) As soon as the ritual season is officially opened, by the performance of pen karsna at Hirlingai in Abujhmar (traditionally the first to perform the ritual of the group of Kaka-Pepi villages to whom the Manjapur gods are related) nightly practice-sessions in the Ghotul commence. From about 9 p.m. until the early hours, sometimes even until dawn, the Ghotul resounds with singing and drumming. New songs are composed (in Manjapur, most notably by Malu, the poet whom I quoted at the end of chapter III). The drums are refurbished and new ones are made, and the boys practice the many different rhythms. Ghotul-goers are heard to complain, during the day, of the heavy burden imposed by so many sleepless nights and such hectic activity at the Ghotul; but there is no doubt that this period is the high-point of Ghotul life. All this culminates in the pen Karsna ritual itself. The most important, for the Ghotul, will be the pen Karsna of their own village. For two weeks, there is a total ban on ploughing the earth, and every night the Ghotul must dance, attended by spectators from the village, and the Majhi, who will become possessed by the village pen. This cycle culminates on the day of pen karsna proper, when all the gods from neighbouring villages arrive, borne thither and accompanied by the Ghotul members from their respective villages, to receive offerings and to dance together. On the day of pen karsna not only the Ghotul of the home village is active, but also all the Ghotuls of the surrounding villages, either accompanying their own Gods, or, if these are not present, simply swelling the massed ranks of dancers and singers. In the festival season during which we were resident in Manjapur, the Ghotul visited a total of 24 neighbouring villages to attend all-night dances in honour of the pen. Some of these villages could only be reached on foot and were more than 20 miles distant – moreover it is
common for Ghotul parties to be too poor to afford the bus fare, even if there is transport available. It is in this way that young Muria acquire their knowledge of Muria country and meet their counterparts in many different villages (though there are Ghotul rules prohibiting excessive fraternisation with members of other Ghotuls). While visiting, the Ghotul girls and boys are compelled to sleep in the Ghotul of the village they are in, even if they have matrikin, or other kin, resident there. Ghotul members from elsewhere are offered hospitality while on these visits, which they repay when the visit is returned. There is, in short, a widespread network of inter-Ghotul reciprocal visiting and hospitality as an adjunct to the honouring of the Gods of the district at pen Karsna rituals in neighbouring — and not so neighbouring — villages. Trips to distant villages are particularly looked forward to because they mean that no adults from the 'home' village are likely to be present, and the Ghotul members are entirely on their own.

During these major song-and-dance expeditions, the Ghotul girls and boys act as ritual ambassadors for their own village, and much effort is expended on ensuring that their appearance and skill in song and dance do them maximum credit. Dancing gear is both precious and bulky and must be carried along with the party and guarded against thieves. Boys wear heavy dancing-bells, elaborate headdresses made of pig's tusks and rare feathers, and long, neatly pressed, dancing skirts, as well as carrying ceremonial axes and drums. Girls wear their best saris, cowrie-shell hair ornaments, silver jewellery and many wool pom-poms (known as 'flowers'). In the past, though regretably to a lesser extent today, each Ghotul wore a 'uniform' style of dance adornment and girls wore matching saris, so that each individual dancer merged with the group. In dancing and singing, the Ghotul acts as a body: there are no solo roles. Singing is carried on in alternating massed choruses of boys, then girls, and most dances involve each sex linking arms abreast and moving as a single chorus-line through a sequence of steps. At the height of the night-dance at pen Karsna, massed Ghotuls form an enormous circular configuration, all linked up and singing and moving in unison. Such a dance line may contain a couple of hundred individual dancers. In an article on possession at pen Karsna A. Gell (1980) has argued that the Muria dance style is indicative of a certain 'mode of religious awareness', which is seen at its most extreme in
possession of the shamans by the Gods, but which also shows itself in less extreme forms as a loss of 'individual' self-control in making bodily movements, as when a dancer is swept up in the movement of the long line and loses the normal sense of where his or her bodily boundaries lie. A. Gell argues that this 'vertigo' is essential to the Muria conception of the divine.

This leads me to the next point about the relationship of the Ghotul to the Gods. Not only are the prime 'duties' of the Ghotul connected with singing and dancing at pen karsna, and travelling widely through Muria country in order to do so: it is also the case that in devoting themselves to these particular activities (dancing, travelling about) the Ghotul pursue activities which are exactly those characteristic of the Gods themselves. The essence of A. Gell's argument in the article mentioned previously is that the Muria conceptualise the divine by projecting onto them the kind of 'vertigo' experiences that they (the Muria) have when seeking access to them. Thus the Gods are shown as seated on swings in temple sculptures: and the shamans, in order to become possessed, seat themselves on swings. Similarly, the basic idea of pen karsna is that the Gods arrive in the village, from all over the neighbourhood to dance and celebrate (i.e. to 'play' - karsna). But the people who actually perform these functions are, precisely, the Ghotul boys and girls, accompanied by shamans. When the Gods 'dance' they do so in the anga images ('log-gods' Gell: 1980 224 ff.) borne by shamans, who perform an ecstatic dance which is 'willed' not by them but by the heavy wooden images they carry on their shoulders. Sometimes a possessed shaman (who is the 'horse' of the God who has entered him) leaps onto the line of linked Ghotul dancers and is carried back and forth by their movements, as if he himself were an anga (ibid: 235). In short, insofar as the Gods visit the 'middle world' during pen karsna, they do so through the earthly participation of the Ghotul dancers, in whose dances they are experienced as real. Muria religion, A. Gell argues, is essentially about singing, dancing, visiting, and conviviality, at least so far as pen karsna is concerned, and in being among prime actors in this 'play of the Gods', the Ghotul boys and girls are identified with the Gods themselves. While pen karsna lasts, the village gods are said to 'fall to earth' at the Ghotul, and dance there nightly along with the boys and girls. The pen are powerful, and dangerous for
ordinary adults, but the Ghotul members are immune from these dangers. They (and shamans) can approach the Gods, while others must keep their distance, away from the plaza outside the Ghotul hall. On one occasion when I went to the Ghotul along with several married women during the build-up to pen karsna, Ghotul girls were made to walk at the head of our little procession so as to shield us from the many Gods who were said to be in a mobile and restless state that night. The Ghotul girls, being identified with the Gods, were able to protect us from their otherwise malign influences.

In Chapter 2 pen karsna was contrasted with punang, the first fruit ritual for rice, on the lines of one emphasising the 'outer-frame' and the other, the 'inner frame' of the village respectively. At punang the pen gods are not bought out at all, and the Ghotul plays only a very minor role — indeed most Ghotul members remain confined to their domestic groups for the day, celebrating the occasion with family members. It was also pointed out that the first fruits of pen karsna are conceptually marginal — pulpulkku lentil grown on dipa or bhat land, and jaddang castor seeds grown on the nadum bhat that separates a house from the surrounding fields, houses. On punang moreover, it is to domestic cattle, and not to the gods, that offerings are made. The indispensibility of the gods along with the Ghotul on pen karsna confirms their outwards-looking orientation and their conceptual marginality.

Following up a suggestion made by my supervisor, Dr. J. Fox, one can ask whether the Ghotul period in the Muria life-cycle cannot be seen as a period of 'temple service' (Fox: pers. comm.) which could be seen as a duty owed to the state, via the pargana Majhi officials appointed by the Raja of Bastar, and linking in with the Royal cult of Danteshwari. There are certainly grounds for accepting the first half of this suggestion, i.e. that during the Ghotul period, boys and girls owe specific and onerous duties in the religious sphere, and that the entertainment of the Gods is a special responsibility of the Ghotul, even if, as is actually the case, these 'responsibilities' are ones they take particular delight in honouring, and involve no elements of asceticism or deprivation. Without the Ghotul, the cult of the pen vanishes, and is replaced by 'orthodox' Hindu practices, as has been observed by A. Gell in villages near Narayanpur where Ghotuls have been abolished. The maintenance of the
'tribal' religious system is crucially dependent on the Ghotul. However it would be going too far to see the Ghotul as an appendage of the religious system per se. All adults, and particularly shamans, have religious roles to play both in pen karsna and in other contexts, and there is much to Ghotul life, as we will observe, which has nothing to do with religion. And in particular, the cult of the 'state' Goddess Danteshwari involves a different organizational framework than the village/Ghotul one. In the Jattra ritual, in honour of the local refractions of Danteshwari, the main officiants are pujari who may have no role whatsoever to play in the cult of the 'tribal' Gods, and they are most frequently not Gonds but from old-established Hindu castes, such as the Maraar or Kallar. To be sure, the Ghotul will dance at Jattra as well as at pen karsna but the Jattra ritual does not give them the same prominence as in pen karsna. It is really only the tribal pen cult, not the 'state' cult which involves the Ghotul centrally; and where the Ghotul has disappeared (or in non-Gond Bastar villages where it has never existed) the Danteshwari cult retains its hold. The Bastar state was a multi-caste entity, and the Danteshwari cult brings these castes together in a common religious framework, but although Gonds are included in this scheme of things (and the pargana Majhis were Gonds) ritual supremacy in relation to Danteshwari is in the hands of higher castes, including court Brahmins, who have no links whatsoever with local-level tribal religion and who would, indeed, regard the Ghotul and all its works as beyond the pale. The Raja and his court indulged the tribals, ceding 'autonomy' to a population over which it had little control, but the central religious cult, even though it involved blood-sacrifice and certain unorthodox elements, was not a 'tribal' affair at all.

In conclusion, one must return to what has been the central contention of this chapter, viz, that it is in relation to the nar (village) that the Ghotul assumes its structural role. The religious role of the Ghotul is played out (literally as well as metaphorically) in the village arena, and in relation to the 'village' Gods, whom the 'marginal' Ghotul boys and girls both celebrate and embody. In order to keep this essential institution in being, families must cede control over their members to a village institution, thereby entering into indirect relations of reciprocal exchange with the other families comprising the village, for which they
are recompensed by the ritual services performed by the Ghotul on behalf of all.

This chapter has attempted to locate the Ghotul, structurally, in the village. But the abstract (and inevitably somewhat speculative) picture which emerges as the result of such an exercise only shows one side of the picture. Until we have examined in detail the actual impact of the Ghotul on the lives of particular individuals, both the Ghotul goers themselves, and also their parents, siblings, prospective in-laws etc., the true social consequences, and indeed social costs, of this intriguing institution cannot be properly assessed. The Ghotul is no mere formal institution, but one which makes direct and insistent moral and emotional demands, as well as affording pleasures and pains of a most personal kind. To the description of the Ghotul in its day-to-day functioning, and its effects on the individuals who attend it I shall therefore now turn.
To the outsider the sensational reputation of the Ghotul seems to be belied by its plain physical appearance: from afar the Ghotul looks like a smallish, unpretentious and often unkempt Muria house. Its roof and walls are constructed in the manner of all (except the most 'modern') Muria houses. The roof is thatched with layers of kar rushes and the walls kept upright by an inner framework of bamboo plastered with thick coatings of mud. At closer quarters however, it becomes immediately obvious that the building in question could not function as a Muria house. This is so not only because it remains totally devoid of domestic or personal artefacts and is normally deserted and empty during the day, but on account of the fact that one misses even the elementary amenities of the simplest and poorest Muria dwelling. The Ghotul is a single, squarish room with none of the partitioned areas that serve in Muria houses the functions of storage places for grain, rice or ancestors, or which serve to demarcate the areas within the house occupied by separate nuclear units in the case of extended families. Nothing is ever stored in the Ghotul. Even the drums and bells that are such a vital part of Ghotul activity are put in charge of individual members who keep them in their homes and bring them out only when they are needed. The Ghotul is therefore only a temporary abode for village youth. One looks in vain for efforts at artistic adornment of walls or roof posts, for any evidence of its being regarded as the communal showpiece. When space cannot be exploited to advertise personal (or communal) wealth in the form of stored stocks of surplus food, it is not likely to be over-emphasized. One finds that Ghotuls are typically less spacious, with less floor space per person than many of the more splendid houses belonging to the richer residents of the village, though comparable to the small houses of the less well off. At night, during the winter months, and at times of peak Ghotul attendance, the Ghotul can become fairly cramped.
It is the extensive fenced-in courtyard that surrounds the Ghotul hall which is really the focal point of Ghotul life. The courtyard is much larger than that found in individual homes and is likely to have a swept and even appearance owing to the care and attention which are given to its maintenance. This emphasis on the courtyard versus the inner hall is predictable, given that the Ghotul is essentially a sleeping place and that the Muria prefer to sleep, in all except one or two of the coldest or wettest months, out-of-doors rather than in-doors.

My informants said that the Ghotul is always at the centre (nadum) of a village. But the existence of a physical centre that might impart unity and coherence to the arbitrary and scattered arrangement of house-sites is however, more notional than real. It would be easy to give the lie to informants' statements as very often the Ghotul is obviously situated at the periphery, rather than at the centre of the inhabited sections of the village. Manjapur's Ghotul could have been said to be roughly at the centre of the village, in that it stood between the Patel Para and Nadum Para and thus divided the village into two halves, each with its own two hamlets. In the neighbouring village of Muiyalnar one comes upon the Ghotul as one enters the village from the east; the Ghotul is very close to the outer margins of the village, although it is bordered on its eastern side by one of the village's three hamlets. In Muiyalnar the Ghotul was moved from its former, more 'central' site to its present one when a new, more modern Ghotul was constructed in 1976-77. The location of other Ghotuls that I visited appeared to be random and usually asymmetric in relation to the territorial layout of hamlets. The factual evidence therefore does not bear out informants' assertions that the Ghotul is at the centre of the village. In interpreting such statements however it must be borne in mind that the conventions of the linguistic medium in which informants express themselves, i.e. Gondi, make it difficult to distinguish the 'ought' from the 'is' without resort to circumlocution. It makes sense in such instances to regard these statements as normative rather than as descriptive ones; in other words what is meant is that the village centre is at the Ghotul, rather than the Ghotul being at the village centre. This is so because the Ghotul is the symbol of the unity of the village community, as it is also the theatre or physical field for the enactment of communal occasions, whether they be discussions about conflicts, or mundane affairs such as
the collection of land taxes or contribution to forthcoming ritual feasts. It is always at the Ghotul that villagers are summoned to adjudicate collectively on a dispute, or to pay homage to a passing Government officer. As an institution the Ghotul expresses the priority of the village; as I have said, and will show in more detail later on, it does so by qualifying the authority and autonomy of its component households and by regulating interactions with other village members. The values that it strives to instill in its members are those of loyalty to the village and the importance of harmony in intravillage relations.

Ideologically therefore, the Ghotul may be said to be at the middle of the village, but there are more prosaic reasons offered by some informants as to why the Ghotul should be so strategically situated which have to do with its equal accessibility to all village residents so that no one should be particularly inconvenienced in travelling to it. This is an important practical consideration when young boys and girls have to travel in the dark every night from their homes, and when failure to attend the Ghotul can cost money, in the form of fines. One young girl whose house was situated at a solitary corner of the village blamed the distance and the hazards of venturing out alone every night as the reasons for her sluggish attendance at the Ghotul. The area covered by a single Muria village is not extensive, and at a rough guess it would take about 15 minutes to walk from one end to the other. But journeys undertaken at night, no matter how short are always feared as even the most sceptical Muria cannot entirely discount the stories that are circulated about sightings of animal predators stalking the village at night.

Going to the Ghotul

In Muria terminology, the membership of the Ghotul consists of all the laiya and laiyor resident in the village. Both terms are loosely applied to pubescent and post-pubescent, but unmarried girls and boys, and are negatively defined: laiya and laiyor refer to girls and boys respectively who, in their behaviour and deportment, can no longer be said to be properly children. For girls and boys the transition is expressed in greater independence from parents, more mobility outside the home and more time spent in the company of age-mates, and greater competence in
performing their work tasks such that little or no adult supervision is required. Of the two terms, laiya has more positive connotations and denotes the arrival of girls at the threshold of femininity and womanhood. Laiya-ness is associated with menstruation and with acquiring the sexual attributes (breasts etc.) which are unmistakable signs of menarche. However it would be misleading to regard this linkage as being made emphatically or verbally by the Muria themselves. Despite the fact that the biological component of women's maturity is more conspicuous, it is not over stressed. There is no precise moment at which a girl is reckoned as being a laiya coinciding with her first period, and this is not because menstruation is kept secret. Menstruating women are subject to special taboos whose non-observance is regarded as highly anti-social. When women have to eat and bathe separately from others, are forbidden to touch cooking pots or to fetch water from the river, their condition becomes easily known to all members of their own households and often to others as well. But Murias would regard it as indelicate to let this fact dictate a change of attitude towards the young girl. It is an attitude that conforms with their observance of extreme discretion in the matter of all sexual functions. Laiya and laiyor then are to be taken as informal statuses ascribed by adults to persons whom they judge to be past childhood, rather than seen as terminological markers of discrete, rigid social age categories. These terms are applied interchangeably with those used for children at first, and only gradually come to displace them.

Ghotul membership is not mandatory and there is no set age at which it is enforced. A number of contingent factors, that differ for different individuals, determine the ages at which they enter the Ghotul. Younger siblings may be cajoled into going to the Ghotul before their age mates, in order to keep an elder sister company in her daily journey to the Ghotul at night. The fact that an elder sibling is already part of the Ghotul softens the trauma of going to it; it establishes a personal link with Ghotul society and reduces the apprehensions of initiates in becoming members of a group in which social interaction is more demanding, and is conducted on different lines than the young girl or boy has hitherto been accustomed to at home. Ghotul-going siblings may have the reverse effect, however, in that they may provide the excuse for basically unwilling adolescents (particularly girls) who want to put off the trauma of Ghotul
initiation. One girl we knew delayed her entry into the Ghotul until her elder sister had married and left it. When questioned she said she now had to "take her sister's place" in the Ghotul. Here the idea is that the children of a household 'represent' their family at the Ghotul (a village institution) and that her non-attendance did not matter so much when her sister was there, but would reflect adversely on her family once her elder sister had left. Had she not gone, she said, people would have accused her family - relative newcomers to the village - of being stand-offish and not "sending their women to the Ghotul". The temperaments of individuals differ and so do the appeals and attractions of Ghotul life. Those who are gregarious and self-confident by nature need little encouragement to go whereas those who are timid and introverted tend to prolong their stay at home.

Girls and boys decide for themselves when they will enter the Ghotul. Those who lag behind their contemporaries and join only when they feel their absence at the Ghotul has become a social embarrassment to both themselves and their families, or who refuse to join at all, are in the minority. This is not to deny that there are pressures at work that influence even the shyest boy or girl to join the Ghotul. Of these the most effective is peer group pressure to conform, and a certain amount of irritation expressed by parents and elder brothers towards recalcitrant boys and girls who isolate themselves at night from the rest of their generation in the village Ghotul. In considering the inclinations and disinclinations of the village youth toward the Ghotul it should be borne in mind that the image of the Ghotul, current among Muria of all ages, is an extremely attractive one. The Ghotul is seen as the special province of the young, as a place of entertainment and merriment. This image is imbibed by all Muria children and long before they enter the Ghotul, fantasies about Ghotul life, about dancing trips and dressing up, are constantly enacted in their play.

The amount of room that is left for individual choice in the matter of Ghotul attendance is bought out by the complete absence of supernatural sanctions connected with it. Failure to attend the Ghotul is not presumed to bring about supernaturally induced disaster just as going to the Ghotul does not inspire the benevolence of the gods. Of all the rationalizations
that are offered for human sufferings, such as sickness, death, poor harvests etc., going or not going to the Ghotul is never one. It is because people look forward to having a good time that they go to the Ghotul. Ultimately the vitality and persistence of the Ghotul stems from the secular pleasures to be derived from it: the Ghotul is a social club that caters to the special dispositions of the young and unmarried in Muria society.

Nor must one leave out of account, when discussing the immediate reasons "why" Muria youths and girls attend the Ghotul, the intrinsically embarrassing nature of the question for them: an embarrassment which has to do both with the slightly suspect aspect that the Ghotul has in Muria eyes, and even more with the reputation which they know it has among non-Murias. Consequently direct questions on the Ghotul are most usually met, by married men and women, with evasive, impersonal answers - "maybe this" or "perhaps that is the case" - with many reminders to the anthropologist that things have changed, and that the Ghotul was different in their own times - disclaimers that are usually not very credible. Their caution is understandable in that Murias are fully aware of the image of the Ghotul held by all outsider Hindus, namely that the Ghotul is a place of orgiastic, sensual indulgence and titillation. The anthropologist asking questions about the Ghotul is therefore regarded as yet another outsider wishing to satisfy his curiosity which to the Muria is always suspect, for the above reasons. It is only when the Muria are convinced by the demeanour of the anthropologist that this is not the case that any information at all on the Ghotul is forthcoming. Nonetheless, verbal questions about motives for Ghotul-going remain a rather fruitless line of approach.

The most common response to a "why" type question on the Ghotul is a fatalistic one: "everyone goes to the Ghotul before getting married", and "this is the way things have always been". The fundamental conviction of all Murias is that the Ghotul exists because it has always done so. The Ghotul is part of an inexorable, pre-ordained scheme of things. The issue was not of whether one was personally inclined to go to the Ghotul or not, but whether one was a conformist or non-conformist who wanted to break with established tradition in this matter. Going to the Ghotul is something that is fixed at birth - it is tied up with the identity of being
The only formal sanction against refusal to join the Ghotul is one that is instituted by the Ghotul itself. The Ghotul council of boys insists that none of its members will take part in the marriage of a girl or boy of the village who has not previously become a Ghotul member. The Ghotul is indispensable to the performance of marriages: Ghotul girls and boys are collectively put in charge of the cooking and distribution of food at the marriage feast, and it is they who lead the festivities by providing music and dancing, besides having ritually significant duties at many stages in the ceremony. This is a potentially effective sanction but one which carries less weight with the young boy or girl than with the parents. Their own future marriages are not an overwhelming preoccupation of the young at this stage for the sake of which they are likely to suffer any present inconvenience. For parents on the other hand, marriages of sons and daughters are crucial events. They provide opportunities for aspiring big men (saukar) to show their generosity to both kin and affines, and to the poorer men unable to afford the expenses of a lavish feast, a chance to acquire respectability by at least doing what they can in that direction. Although a boycott by the Ghotul members does not mean that a son or daughter could not be married (the minimal requirement is that the saga feed the immediate patri-kin of the girl), it does have social consequences for the parents that can not be regarded lightly. Every self-respecting Muria man enjoys the position of playing host to his village and the temporary power which benefactors acquire over the recipients of wedding hospitality. But in a society which de-emphasises authoritative control and values individual autonomy, which has only a weak and nominal authority structure embedded in its kinship institutions, it is unlikely that one would find another institution, such as the Ghotul, endowed with sufficient power to be able to enforce these sanctions. To my knowledge the sanction has never actually been applied. Parents can always negotiate a last minute withdrawal of the threat of the sanction by appealing to the Ghotul boys directly and offering to pay a fine, the sum of which is never ruinous. By itself therefore the sanction is not sufficient inducement to enter the Ghotul for a boy or girl but it is nonetheless given as a reason by some for their having joined. These are people who are more vulnerable to the threat of the sanction than others. They are the later immigrants to
the village, or those who belong to a clan which is in a minority, and therefore politically subordinate to others in village society. Members of such clans are self-consciously punctilious about village rules, for one of the ways in which their rights to complete village membership is confirmed is by their participation in its group organisations, of which the most formalized is the Ghotul. For them, the accusation of non-partisanship is more damaging than it is for others who belong to a more historically rooted section of village community. The only adamantly non-attending girls in Manjapur come from the families of the Korami Gaita and Patel lineages, that is to say, from the most 'original' of all families there.

**Becoming a member**

Boys start going to the Ghotul at a comparatively younger age than girls. Part of the reason for this is that boys, unlike girls, escape the trauma of being assigned a female partner during their first day and often go for several years without one. Boys are allowed to make tentative appearances at the Ghotul in the beginning and they usually become fully fledged members only after having acquainted themselves with the ways of Ghotul life. A group of younger boys (usually between the ages of 8 to 10) may decide to visit the Ghotul on the days that they suspect some event, such as a Ghotul dispute, or dancing is going to take place there. On their arrival at the Ghotul the group sits obscurely on one side, listening avidly to the proceedings but being for the most part ignored by the rest of the girls and boys present. Occasionally the younger boys are bullied into doing odd-jobs, such as bringing the wood from the wood-pile to keep the fire alight, etc. In the gradual process of an individual boy's attending the Ghotul, perhaps two days in a month to begin with, then more frequently, the only juncture that marks him as having become a Ghotul 'regular' is the day when he arrives at the Ghotul with a sleeping mat folded into a neat bundle and tucked under his arm, for it is this sleeping mat that is the true insignia of the Ghotul laiyor. The mat (gig) is one that must be woven for him by his mother and from kar rushes, which were hard to obtain in Manjapur and involved a special day-long expedition to the river many miles away.
A girl's appearance at the Ghotul is more dramatic and conclusive; it has definite disruptive consequences for a girl's life and involves the renunciation of her natal home to some extent, and concomitant with it, a real social displacement. This renunciation is of a physical kind: the rule that prevents the girl from sleeping in her natal home at night has, along with other extraneous factors, the net result of replacing the home as the physical locus of an unmarried girl's life. Once a girl starts going to the Ghotul at night she may no longer sleep in her parental home in ordinary circumstances. Of course sleeping in the house during the day time is not tabooed and quite often Ghotul girls are to be seen catching up on their sleep (during the ritual season their nights are more occupied with dancing than sleeping). But daughters are discouraged from such abject self-indulgence by sisters-in-law and mothers who expect them to put in their share of household work. Ghotul rules prescribe that a girl must remain at home when she is sick or having her periods, but at all other times girls have to attend the Ghotul daily and they run the risk of incurring a fine should they not do so. Girls do sometimes leave the village for short trips to relatives in other parts but such absences are of a different order and provided they are not too frequent, or of too long a duration, they are ignored. As far as the Ghotul is concerned, a girl's day is her own, but even then several factors not strictly connected to the Ghotul limit to a minimum the amount of time actually spent by a girl within the physical confines of her own home. There are seasonal fluctuations in the amount of time spent at home: during the peak agricultural season all the women of the household are employed for most of the day in the fields (often eating their food there), and only when the dry season is at its height do daughters along with other family members take refuge away from the sun in their homes. Daughters (unlike wives) are allowed to work for a daily wage with the Forest Department on work sites that are often a distance away from the village. At such times girls leave their houses shortly after sunrise to return only late in the evening and one or two hours before they depart for the Ghotul. Ghotul girls complain of boredom at home and it is considered normal for them to apportion only as much of their time to the home as is necessary for the performance of their share of household tasks, such as fetching of water and the preparation of the raw materials for cooking, and for them to spend the
remainder of their day in the company of their friends. The frequent opportunities available to Ghotul girls to move freely between households in the village, and their gregarious life style contrasts sharply with the seclusion experienced by married women who must wait for special occasions, feasts, naming rituals etc. to bring them into social contact with villagers outside the extended family or in the immediate neighbourhood. Of course there is always the chance meeting at the river, or more rarely a gathering expedition organized by the women of a hamlet to the forest, but generally it could be said that their access to others in the village is severely curtailed by domestic responsibilities. In fact the separation of ask (woman) from laiya is manifested in the disparities in the amount of time spent by each at home. This gives impetus to the conceptual dissociation of laiya from her parental home which begins with a girl's entry into the Ghotul and is realized at her marriage when she must leave the parental home for good.

Girls leave the Ghotul only to get married. For them, therefore the Ghotul cannot be just a social experiment as it can be theoretically at least, for boys. In other words if a boy finds the Ghotul experience disagreeable he can, at the risk of suffering a permanent social stigma, stay at home, but a girl can only get married. Once having started going to the Ghotul girls cannot be admitted as full-time members of their parents' household except as married women, and that too on a temporary basis. After marriage the Ghotul is taboo for girls, but it is quite common for young men with children to visit the Ghotul and spend the evening there engaged in lively discussion with Ghotul boys about some matter of common interest, and newly married boys persist in sleeping nightly (but alone) at the Ghotul for several months after their marriage. Married girls who return to their natal villages on visits are expected to conform to the stereotype of ask and devote their time to domestic concerns. Individual friends of theirs, still unmarried and going to the Ghotul, may stop by for a visit, but generally an avoidance of married friends is practised by Ghotul girls and they are seldom seen together even in extra-Ghotul contexts.

Thus the social significance of Ghotul membership is more pronounced for girls than it is for boys: boys after their Ghotul years return whence
they came, though with enhanced status, whereas for girls the moment of joining the Ghotul is the first venture in the radical hiving-off from the natal home which culminates in marriage, and which is the central social and emotional event of Muria women's lives. Accordingly, the Ghotul 'initiation' of new female members is a much more notable, and noticeable, event than the arrival of one more shy little boy who will not count for much until months or years have passed. The arrival of new girls in the Ghotul is the occasion for certain laid-down procedures of induction, which I will now describe as I witnessed them in Manjapur.

Induction of girls

Three Manjapur girls joined the Ghotul simultaneously. The time they chose to do so was the season when ritual festivities are concentrated and the Ghotul is very much in the forefront of villagers' lives. Every night after supper families walk down to the village Ghotul to sit and gape at Ghotul girls and boys as they dance, along with village shamans, in tight formations to the quick rhythm of massive drums bought out of storage for the occasion. The week of nightly dancing at the Ghotul heralds the arrival of the main ritual event of the year, pen karana, and all the village is agog with excitement. Routine Ghotul life with its rules and regulations is more-or-less suspended; Ghotul girls and boys expend all their energies in dancing, often till the early hours of morning and come home at day break to catch some sleep. Individual dancers drop off to sleep at the Ghotul, but it is not uncommon for girls to sleep huddled together or with whichever boy happens not to be engaged in dancing at the moment.

After the girls had been dancing at the Ghotul for three nights, the obligatory jaanch kiyana (literally, "finding out") took place. This is a public and formal announcement by the girls of their intentions to join the Ghotul and a recognition on the part of those already attending of the girls' place in Ghotul society. Ghotul dancing had come to an end the night before and the girls knew that by arriving at the Ghotul on a 'regular' night their presence would no longer be taken as simply an excuse to get in as much dancing as they could, but would be regarded as signalling a desire to become properly initiated into the Ghotul. Having been forewarned that such a jaanch kiyana was going to take place I arrived at the Ghotul to
find all the girls, including the newcomers, sitting close to
one another and at one end of the courtyard with the boys
squatting in dispersed and small groups at the other end. The
boys were not deliberately confronting the girls; they sat in
relaxed fashion around the fire. After some irrelevant chit-chatting,
Malu, one of the Ghotul boys, looked vaguely over his
shoulder at the girls and asked of the new girls why they had
come. Was it, he said simply a whim (jah lai) to which should
be attached no special importance that had brought them to the
Ghotul, or were they here for the specific purpose of becoming
its law-abiding members, "like us"? Would the girls attend
the Ghotul whenever it pleased them or would they make sure to
come regularly? Another girl, Janki, spoke up on behalf of the
new girls and said impatiently, as if to get over the preliminaries:
"Yes, yes they will come every day". (rojay rojay vainung)

Malu then came to the heart of the matter. Turning to one
of the girls, Maina, he asked her: "nima bona sudo dera kiyak"
literally, "with whom will you take place"? Maina did not
reply at first and everyone waited expectantly. Malu repeated
his question and this time Maina again made no verbal reply, but
covering the lower half of her face with her shawl (sapi),
made a perceptible gesture with her head in the direction of
a group of four boys, glancing at them sidelong and lowering
her eyes. By itself the gesture was not pointed enough and
could have been taken to mean any of the four of them. However
Malu immediately comprehended the gesture as aimed at Karu
on account of his foreknowledge of Maina's liaison with him, a
fact that became obvious later on. Karu was one of the older
boys of the Ghotul. Most of his contemporaries were married and
Karu himself had had a partnership with a girl who had left the
Ghotul two years ago to get married. Karu's reaction to
Maina's proposal was sharp and emphatic. He stood up and
yelled, "I will not sleep with her" (nana gurhon) repeatedly
several times. Maina kept on sitting with her friends and
displayed no consternation at this (to me at least) unexpected
turn of events. Malu, in a conciliatory and reasonable tone of
voice, enquired from Karu the reason for his sudden change of
attitude towards Maina. Why, he asked, was Karu rejecting her
now when it was known to all that he had slept with her these
past three nights? However Karu was not proffering any reasons.
He said adamantly that he would not sleep with Maina.

At this point, Janki, who could not be counted as one
of Maina's special friends, but who had taken it upon herself to
act as spokeswoman for the girls intervened. In an indignant outburst addressed at all the Ghotul boys she said: "Then let these girls go away from here and dance in other villages. Let them find their husbands that way. You all don't want to give them place, so if they run away don't call a meeting." Turning and facing the girls she said to them: "from now on don't bother to come to the Ghotul. Why should you come when the boys won't give you place!" This was obviously the opinion of all the girls who spoke up heartily in support of this proposition.

Malu, who was acting in his official capacity as Ghotul Porter (kotwal) then moved to take charge of the situation and appease the girls. He affected a vigorous agreement with Janki's suggestion, and said: "Yes let the girls leave the village that way. Why don't you sleep with her?" and then in a humourous, debonair manner added: "Now if it was up to me I would sleep with her". Malu's ingratiating efforts fell flat as another girl, Balo, retorted: "You are no better. How many girls have you refused?" Malu, putting on an expression of wounded pride said: "What's this? When did I ever refuse to sleep with you? It was you who didn't want to sleep with me! Right now I desire you very much (isal nana nikun vichar kintonan)". All the girls exclaimed at this outrageous speech and covered their faces with their shawls in amused embarrassment.

At this stage, other Ghotul boys stepped in and urged Karu to sleep with Maina. Someone was heard to say that Karu had 'loved' Maina (maiya kindi) but Karu rebuffed his Ghotul mates and said nonchalantly that he would not sleep, and that anyway he did not have his sleeping mat with him that night.

When I left the Ghotul that night, matters were still unresolved. Karu had absolutely refused Maina, and Maina had quietly indicated that she would sleep with no one else. In the morning Malu told me that Karu had been suspended from the Ghotul. He had eventually grudgingly condescended to sleep with Maina last night, but it was expected that he would not show up tonight. I asked another boy Iti, whether they had not tried to persuade Maina to make a second choice as a way out of the stalemate. He looked amazed and said that one could not throw out girls who had just arrived, and that it was up to Maina to make up her own mind. All the time that I was at the Ghotul, I had not heard anyone bring up the topic of the two other girls' placements. Janki told me later that the second of the three girls had said that she wanted to sleep with one of the Patel's sons, and he was more agreeable to partnering with
her; the boys did not have to force him to do so. The third girl had had the nerve to state outright that she would come to the Ghotul only if she would be permitted to sleep alone! Janki said that the boys had told her that in that case she had better stay home. In the end she agreed to sleeping with Jalia, whose name was suggested by a third person and who was also willing.

Choosing and refusing a Jor

The preceding account of the arrival of the three girls at Manjapur Ghotul reveals that the crucial determinant of membership for girls is the establishment of a relationship with a particular Ghotul boy: Ghotul initiation is entirely social and secular and has no ritual accompaniments. At jaanch kiyana a girl's likes and dislikes are investigated, with a view to finding her dera (place) - which is explicitly understood to mean simply place on a particular boy's sleeping mat.

The official, publicly endorsed sleeping relationship of a girl and boy is known as "Jor". The word has been borrowed from Hindi, and despite its being grafted onto the Ghotul context, it retains its original Hindi meaning, of a "pair" among the Muria. It is also used, for example, for an abiding friendship between two people of the same sex, and both girls and boys will often answer the question "who is your Ghotul jor?" by giving the name of their same-sex special friend at the Ghotul. The traditional Gondi term for cross-sex Ghotul partners is pari but nowadays this word is seldom used. The word is somewhat puzzling because of its other connotations. It is used by the Muria in everyday discourse to refer to the mud embankments constructed around paddy fields, and by the Maria to mean clan-groupings. No simple explanation can be provided for the configuration of meanings, but it would appear that the analogy resides in the fact that all three have circumscribing, retentive functions: pari is fundamentally a bounded (physical or social) entity.

In theory it is up to girls to establish a partnership with a boy of their own choice. Boys are adamantly unequivocal about this particular Ghotul rule and say that girls only sleep with whomsoever they wish. But
the power and independence seemingly vouchsaged girls by this privilege is reduced and sometimes negated by an equally abiding, if less overt and formalized convention, that states that boys should refuse the first girl who points them out. Refusing a girl is part of the bravado expected from boys by other Ghotul boys. Most boys refuse a girl once or twice in their Ghotul career and many boast of having refused more than that number. It would almost seem that, the fines and expulsions from the Ghotul notwithstanding, a certain respect and admiration is given the boy who has many refusals to his credit. Almost in the same breath in which they solemnly swear that they can only be partnered with girls at their specific bidding, boys say that they must not sleep with the girl who singles them out. A refusal may be brief and temporary, or it may be more seriously conclusive. Boys who say that they will not sleep for the sake of good form and to not appear over-soft or eager, need only a little persuasion from other boys in order for them to change their minds, but there are others who will not be budged. These boys prefer being suspended from the Ghotul for several days, and even paying a fine in the form of small sums of cash or firewood, to sleeping with someone they do not find attractive.
I questioned Malu about his notoriety as a girl-refuser. He grinned and holding up his four fingers said that he had refused four girls. He had been going to the Ghotul for three years when a girl (now married for four years) asked to be given place with him. He said he had not wanted to sleep with her as she was "too big" (ad mai laiya aiylar). He was made to pay a small fine of firewood. Some time later he was given another girl (also currently married and a mother) but he said he did not like her - nak vichar vayo - so he had not slept with her. The third girl (Balo) he refused at first, but was reconciled to later and had been sleeping with for about six months, when he made it known to the boys that he did not want to continue his partnership with her. He was heavily fined, and the partnership was terminated. The last time he said "gurhon" (I will not sleep) was when Bela chose him for her jor. The reason he gave was that she was "not beautiful" (sobo). He was again fined. But now, he said, he was happy with his jor Malika and did not think of changing her.

It is only if a girl's fondness for a particular boy and a desire to become his partner is reciprocated by him, that the partnership is established: a boy's sentiments are as decisive, if not actually more so, than those of the girl's as far as such pairings are concerned. While the only options available to girls are those of leaving the Ghotul altogether (which to my knowledge has never been adopted), or of sleeping with another more amenable partner, boys are suspended and made to pay a fine. Fines are given as a matter of course by the senior boys of the Ghotul as punishment and are not regarded with much anxiety by the person fined. Boys may spend a week or two weeks away from the Ghotul and they return to it after having accumulated a certain moral advantage over their other more pliable mates.

It is routine practise for other boys to try to persuade the recalcitrant boy to acquiesce to the girl, no matter how often they have themselves - like Malu - taken the very same position. Despite the appeal that the masculine ideal of not giving in to a girl's choice holds for individual boys, it does take a certain temerity to place oneself in
opposition to everyone in the Ghotul, and not all boys are capable of such heroism.

Salki had refused Piusa when she had said she wished to be partnered to him. But he was bullied into giving in to her and slept with her for about two months. One day he put his foot down and told his friends that from now on he would not sleep with her. He was thrown out of the Ghotul for about a week. However the next day he appeared at the Ghotul with his father's younger brother, who pleaded with the Ghotul boys on his behalf, but to no avail, as he was again made to sleep with Piusa.

The embarrassment of being tied to one another in a sleeping relation, when it is likely that the girl and boy have had very little social contact with one another previously is mutual. However I think it is fair to say that the emotional costs are far greater for a girl and that she achieves her entry into the Ghotul by suffering some loss of confidence in herself. The girl Malika, who was refused by Karu in the case discussed, could be described as a beautiful girl with no physical disfigurements and with every sign of being a girl of good family and accomplishment. She came from the rich Hallami family in the village and wore her wealth on her person in the manner that Muria fashion dictates, with heavy silver bracelets and a solid silver necklace around her neck, as well as silver clips and pins arranged artfully around the red pompoms on her hair. She came to the Ghotul that night with her skin well oiled and with sparkingly clean and expensive clothes. But despite her indubitable claim to being considered attractive, she was not spared the humiliation of being rejected by the boy she had named. Most girls cannot claim to have Malika's beauty, and there are some who have obvious physical handicaps. Such girls have to brace themselves to accept the possibility of being rejected by several boys.
Sukia has been going to the Ghotul for three months. She is as old as Janki, but looks deceptively young. Sukia has a skinny, flat and girlish body. Perhaps on this account she never achieves, in her behaviour and toilette the sophistication and comportment of most of the other girls attending the Ghotul: she has either too much powder lathered on her face or her hair pins are awry, and her dancing is jerky and lacking in grace. I was told no one was willing to give her place. All the most obvious boys, who were members of her own village moiety, were asked and they all refused. So it was decided to ask the boys of the other moiety, i.e. those in the opposite moiety and potentially marriageable to her who are usually not favoured jor partners in the Manjapur Ghotul. Dobi was therefore asked but he also refused and was thrown out of the Ghotul. Dobi said that he would never go back to the Ghotul if he was made to sleep with her and kept his promise by leaving Manjapur for a time, staying instead in Narayanpur with his matrikin. In Sukia's case it was the Ghotul boys who themselves had jors who were making the effort to find a willing partner for Sukia. But Janki said that the boys had admitted defeat - "haray matur" - in the matter. Sukia does go to the Ghotul every night and when it is time to sleep she finds place for herself on different boys' mats every time. Although no one denies her place on their sleeping mat for the night, no boy is willing to have her as his official, 'permanent' jor. I asked Janki whether she thought Sukia must feel very shy at having to take the initiative every night, and she said: "Of course she does, but what else can she do?" Janki said that she had heard some talk about the boys intending to ask Jani, the smallest boy in the Ghotul to sleep with her but that Jani had already let it be known that Sukia was "too big" for him!

Another girl, Alosa, the village smith's daughter, had an almost equally hard time finding a jor. Alosa suffers from a physical disability: she has a slightly clubbed foot that gives her a sideways twisting gait and affects her dancing, though not to a marked extent.
Alosa asked to be paired with Lakku who refused. Lakku was made to pay a fine of about forty pieces of firewood - a considerable fine. Malu was then asked, but he refused her as well. There were three other boys who said that they would not sleep with her. The boys then had recourse to the drastic step, regarded as a last resort, of asking a boy in a marriageable moiety to sleep with her. He agreed and it seems that Alosa has now endeared herself to him. The pair seem to be very happy together. I was told that previously Alosa had to be dragged along to the Ghotul every night by her friend who lived in her neighbourhood, but that nowadays she never failed to turn up every night, with or without her friend.

The experience of these two girls make it seem likely that a third girl, Keli, who is blind in one eye, would have an even more harrowing time finding a jor. It is perhaps her own awareness of this fact that inhibits her from attending the Ghotul. She is well past the age at which it is considered 'proper' for girls to start attending the Ghotul, but Keli has steadfastly refused to listen to her parents and her brothers' pleas to do so and continues to sleep at home.

The negative, unyielding attitude of the Ghotul boys towards these girls is of a different order to that taken by them towards the average Ghotul girl. Usually saying "I will not sleep with her" is a conventional gesture of masculine independence aimed at impressing the other boys rather than expressing real antipathy for the girl - on the contrary it may mask a sentimental inclination - but the refusals of girls who are in some way disfigured or simply unattractive are a matter of pride, and likely to be inflexibly maintained. Every boy desires to have as his jor the most beautiful, most vivacious and presentable girl in the Ghotul, and every girl wishes to have the most handsome and richest boy and one with dynamic leadership qualities. It cannot be stressed too much that the principle underlying the selection of jor partners is that of sentiment and appeal, although these are mediated by external circumstances over which the individuals may have only a little control. Thus an occupational hazard of boys saying 'no' to someone with whom they perhaps are not
altogether averse to, or quite likely positively desire, is that the girl may end up paired with another boy and a second chance may never arise; similarly it often happens that girls' so-called first choices are compromises anyway as the boy they have their eyes on is already attached to a jor and therefore unavailable.

Janki told me that she had always wanted to sleep with Salki, but that when she went to the Ghotul for the first time he was sleeping — unwillingly — with Piusa. Knowing that he already had a jor and thinking that Piusa would be angry if Janki tried to take Salki away from her, Janki asked to sleep with Kalu. She slept with him for a week but changed her mind about him and said that she was not going to sleep with him any longer to the boys present at the Ghotul. She was punished by the boys and told to stay away from the Ghotul for a week. When she went back she was asked whether she had changed her mind but she replied defiantly that she had not. The boys fined her Rs. 1.50 but she brought it down to one rupee. However before breaking with Kalu she had had the opportunity to sleep with Salki on a night when both their partners, Kalu and Piusa, had been absent from the Ghotul. It is common for girls to sleep with a different boy on the night that their jor happens not to turn up. Salki had told Janki that if she asked to be made to sleep with him, he would not refuse. Salki had been waiting for an excuse to get rid of Piusa. After handing over the one rupee, Janki confidently stated that she would like to sleep with Salki. Salki agreed but not without putting up a show of resistance and giving in only at the last minute. Janki said he had to do so in order to impress upon the Ghotul boys his innocence in the matter and to forestall any criticism of his having instigated the disruption of Kalu and Janki's jor relationship. All this took place about a year ago and since then Kalu has remained without a jor. He was asked to sleep with Sukia put refused.

The transactions that lead up to the establishment of a jor partnership between the three parties, the girl, the boy she chooses to name, and the rest of the Ghotul boys acting as arbitrators, are delicate and involve the interplay of several factors. The process is complicated by the fact
that the Ghotul council is compelled to uphold the basic rule governing jor selection viz. that of letting the sentimental choices of the girl (mainly), but also those of the boy prevail, while at the same time ensuring that the exercise of choice is within reasonable bounds and does not ruin the chances of a girl's being incorporated into the Ghotul. After all, girls are the salt and spice of Ghotul life and they are always in short supply. The indifference displayed by the Ghotul boys towards the new girl cannot conceal an eagerness felt by all parties towards keeping her within the Ghotul fold. Therefore it is essential that a girl be coaxed into sleeping with another boy and that the good intentions of the Ghotul boys as a body, and their efforts to respect her choice be publicly demonstrated. A Ghotul boy told me that it would be more shaming to the Ghotul (in effect, all the Ghotul boys) than to the girl herself were she to return home that very night. Such an act would be interpreted by the siyan of the village as meaning that the boys were unable to sleep with the girls, or to control them. The way in which the boy phrased this — "nate siyan indanur makun or ghotul laiyor tan gur parror" (the village elders will say that the Ghotul boys could not sleep with her) seems to suggest that the masculine authority of the Ghotul boys would be called into question. Another reason why a girl must be prevented from leaving the Ghotul is that it gives grounds to the other villagers to suspect the Ghotul as being ridden with division and discord, when in fact the public image cultivated by the Ghotul boys is that of a strongly united body.

The Ghotul as an Institution

We have now, so to speak, gained entry to the Ghotul and examined the initial hurdles which membership involves, especially for girls. It is now time to consider the Ghotul as an institution, a framework of rules, duties and offices, with which henceforth the new entrant will have to come to terms. This institutional framework transcends the individual, who is supposed to acquiesce in the stereotyped role relationships and age-sex categorizations which Ghotul membership imposes, but at the same time is never absolute enough to constrain the innately intractable spirit of the average Muria adolescent. An account of the Ghotul as an institution is inevitably also an account of the conflicts which continually arise within this institution. Some of these will be described later. But in a sense
this tension between institutional arrangements and individual motivations is the whole point of the Ghotul, as an institution which, among other things, socializes adolescents into a particular adult social and political milieu. Muria society decrees that the Ghotul, within limits, is the arena within which the young take responsibility for their own affairs. But the ground rules of the institution inevitably recapitulate the basic institutional format of the society at large — it is from the society at large that they derive their ultimate legitimacy. It is here that the essential ambiguities arise, both because the Ghotul is always a secondary, half-serious, half-playful reality, never an absolute or 'total' institution which would exact total commitment, and, more deeply, because Muria society itself is essentially 'open' never making demands on the individual which are not in some way negotiable in the last resort. I will return to these matters in the next chapter, but first of all it is necessary both to outline the Ghotul institutional arrangements and, in the process, give case studies of the working out of these arrangements in practice.

The Ghotul is a territorial institution: each village has its own Ghotul and it is from the unmarried girls and boys of that village that the Ghotul draws its membership. Sometimes however the territoriality of the Ghotul becomes more narrowly defined as when a group of physically proximate hamlets of a village establish their own Ghotul in contradistinction to the Ghotul that caters to the village population resident in the remaining hamlets. The village is divided into two halves with each half having its own Ghotul. For this situation to arise the village has to have a large population (so that the Ghotul membership is not too small), and cover an extensive surface area. Both the villages of Bargaon and Mahima Gwari, which are known to have two Ghotuls, were more populous than the average Muria village, and their populations were spread out, with hamlets placed at considerable distance from one another. Having two Ghotuls is in such cases a convenient arrangement that renders a Ghotul accessible to all the village residents, although these practical advantages may lead to political disadvantages as far as the unity of the village is concerned. Villages, such as Bargaon, which have two Ghotul houses have only one Ghotul (that is, only one social category of Ghotul girls and boys) and major Ghotul activities are carried on not separately,
but conjointly. An individual's residence in a particular hamlet of the village determines which Ghotul he would attend: it would be forbidden for girls and boys to exercise choice in the matter of which of the Ghotuls they would attend.

Ghotuls make claims not only upon the permanent residents of a village, or more rarely, a section of the village. In theory, even temporary residents who are unmarried and regular members of the Ghotul of their own village are not exempt from the rule that it is at the village Ghotul that they should spend their nights. Enthusiastic efforts are made by the Ghotul boys to enforce this rule, particularly when they have learnt of a young girl visiting their village. A contingent of boys is dispatched to the girl's temporary abode to invite her to the Ghotul, or to carry her away forcibly if she should protest. The Manjapur boys once arrived in strength at Tiri's house to take his sister-in-law to the Ghotul but they went away disappointed as the young girl had hidden herself in the dark and was impossible to find.

The reverse of these positive rules are the negative ones which specify categories of individuals who are forbidden access to the Ghotul. Most important in this category are married women who are even prevented from entering the fenced-in Ghotul compound. At village meetings convened at the Ghotul married women may attend, but they remain at the periphery looking in at the proceedings while the men, both married and unmarried, conduct the business of the meeting from inside the courtyard. Menstruating girls are not allowed into the Ghotul for the duration of their periods. They resume their Ghotul going only after washing their hair - an ablution that, in Muria terms, comes closest to being a purificatory rite and marks the end of a girl's menses. The Ghotul is also proscribed to pregnant girls: if a girl becomes pregnant while attending the Ghotul she is supposed to make her pregnancy known to others and to stop going to the Ghotul.

The next set of rules concerns individuals' participation within the Ghotul. The most elaborate of these are ones that apportion duties and labour. All boys and girls are required to bring to the Ghotul a piece of firewood. Wood is a commodity essential to the Ghotul; not only does it
provide fire to give warmth during the cold winter night, but it is also around a fire that relaxed, convivial social gatherings are normally organized. The amount of firewood to be brought was fixed at 120 logs per person for one year at the Manjapur Ghotul, but the quantity to be deposited nightly varied according to the season. A greater proportion of this total was fixed for the cold season and less during the hotter months of the year. The prescriptions regarding the quantity of wood, and whether it should be brought daily or not, are formulated by Ghotul boys at meetings at which boys from other village Ghotuls are also present. The meetings are held at the weekly bazaar. These meetings between Ghotul leaders from neighbouring Ghotuls correspond to similar meetings between siyan from neighbouring villages who also meet at the market when there are inter-village matters to be discussed. Such inter-village Ghotul discussions are carried out entirely by boys.

The sexual division of labour in the Ghotul corresponds to the domestic division of labour between the sexes in the wider society: girls are accordingly allocated the duties of keeping the Ghotul clean, sweeping its floors and occasionally spreading a plaster of mud on the floor and the outer courtyard to prevent them from becoming pitted and uncomfortable to sleep on, and the boys are held responsible for the maintenance of roof, walls and fence. Ghotul girls divide themselves up into work parties of three or four girls and take turns at tidying the Ghotul. The work in itself is not heavy, involving as it does simply sweeping the hall and courtyard and removing the remains of last night's fire, but girls complained about it tying them down and forcing them to hurry back to the village during the season when, during the day time, they are employed at distant forest sites earning daily wages. On such days girls return home at dusk exhausted and there is little time left before they have to join their friends at the Ghotul for the night.

The Ghotul as a whole has specially allocated work tasks at marriages and on ritual and secular village occasions. Ghotul boys bring the firewood for lighting the stoves and cook the food, while the girls go out to the forest to pluck vast quantities of fresh leaves with which to make the leaf cups and bowls on which food is to be served at the feast. Girls, assisted by women of the village, spend their time in constructing these
bowls out of the leaves on the feast day and leave the boys to supervise the cooking. Both girls and boys serve the food on to the bowls and offer these to the villagers present. Ghotul girls as well as married women of the village are expected to help in the dehusking of paddy and in the general preparation of the raw materials for food. The Ghotul is thought of as a labour pool which other villagers can draw upon when in need; Ghotul girls and boys are therefore expected to accommodate a villager who requests them to help him in the building of a new house or cattle shed. In return for some wine or rice-beer the girls and boys then put in a day's work at the site.

Ghotul Offices

The membership of the Ghotul is internally organized by the criteria of age and sex. The basic division of labour in the Ghotul is by sex, and within each sex (particularly among the boys) there are rough age-clusters. It is on the basis of age (and certain personal characteristics, to be discussed in due course) that the formal Ghotul offices are distributed. Within each age-sex cluster one finds a maximum degree of solidarity vis-a-vis other Ghotul members. However, these age clusters are not 'age-grades' with definite boundaries and criteria for inclusion/exclusion such as are seen in the classic African instances of age-grading societies since an individual Ghotul is too small a social unit to sustain such a system. The usual membership of a Ghotul is in the order of 20-30 individuals and at any one time there is likely to be a very uneven representation of individuals of any one chronological age. At one moment in time there may be a surplus of older boys and at other times a lack of them, or a lack of girls etc. The patterning of age-clusters within the Ghotul shifts according to these contingent factors and is not a regular or predictable phenomenon. The Muria do not have a specific concept of 'age-mates' and it is the demands of Ghotul organization which determine the inclusiveness of age-sex clusters at any moment in time: that is to say at a period when there is an excess of older boys in the Ghotul the clique of Ghotul siyan will be exclusively drawn from these older boys, while if the Ghotul lacks older boys, younger boys will be drawn into the dominant clique and be given Ghotul offices etc.
In Manjapur, the Ghotul is dominated by three Ghotul office-holders who are drawn from the senior age-cluster. These offices are Ghotul Patel (either the eldest boy in the Ghotul or among the eldest), Ghotul Kotwal (Policeman) and Ghotul Kapatdar (Doorman). The Patel is the official head of the Ghotul (as the village Patel is of the village); he is entrusted with the duty of mediating between the Ghotul and the rest of village society in the same way as the village Patel functions as a middleman between the external government bureaucracy and the village. He has the duty to negotiate with village siyan on any matter involving the Ghotul. For example, a man desirous of celebrating the marriage of a son or daughter has to approach the Ghotul Patel to request the Ghotul members to contribute their labour to the wedding feast, and the Patel in turn negotiates the reciprocal payment of rice beer to be made. Likewise, at the turbulent meetings hastily convened to decide the fate of a couple who have eloped from the Ghotul or to severely reprimand a Ghotul girl who has become pregnant, it is the Ghotul Patel who is questioned first of all by the village council and very often is bitterly reproached by them as if he were directly responsible for the misconduct of the Ghotul members. The role of the Patel is most in evidence at such public confrontations between village and Ghotul; within the Ghotul on a day to day basis the Patel does not assume automatic leadership, and I have never seen the Ghotul Patel playing a dominant role in internal Ghotul politics. The position itself is potentially a powerful one which might be exploited by individual personalities to establish some effective leadership over the Ghotul members were it not for a check built into the system which exalts seniority at the same time as rendering it impotent and out-of-place. The Manjapur Ghotul Patel was a boy whose own age separated him from the next age cluster in the Ghotul by at least six or seven years. The Patel, it was obvious, had stayed at the Ghotul for a very long time after all his contemporaries had left to get married and establish their own families. He felt left behind and found his place within the Ghotul, together with boys and girls much younger to himself, humiliating. He longed to get married and told us that were it not for the fact that his parents had little land and therefore had not been able to accumulate a surplus of rice necessary for the wedding feast, he would have married and left the Ghotul long ago. He maintained a very low profile in the Ghotul, emerging
only to represent it officially at village meetings. He had not had a job for several years and said that the question of his having one now would not arise as he would feel embarrassed on account of his age. He attended the Ghotul every night but stopped almost as soon as he got married - during the middle of our fieldwork. Unlike most other boys, who do not give up going to the Ghotul for a year or so after their marriages, the Ghotul Patel abandoned the Ghotul as soon as he had the chance. Being the Patel of the Ghotul provided him with little solace as I suspect that he felt that he was 'playing' at being a village siyan when all his contemporaries were actual village siyan or, at any rate, part of the society of village elders. As the last member of his age cluster at the Ghotul, one who has not been able to get married, he is a failure, but on the other hand he is the official head of the Ghotul who could, if he was so disposed, impose his will on the rest of the Ghotul. During our fieldwork there was a change of Ghotul Patels. The former left to get married and nominated the next eldest boy in the Ghotul as his successor. Needless to say the present Ghotul Patel is himself anxious to leave the Ghotul and become a respectable siyan of the village, but he can do little to hasten his marriage on his own behalf.

Of course there is no absolute rule that the Ghotul Patel should be an individual whose age makes him a reluctant Ghotul-goer, though the fact that seniority counts so much as a qualification, plus the fact that the Ghotul Patel, as mediator between the Ghotul and village, should be a person of discreet character rather than a hot-head, favours this. In Manjapur, if the present Patel's wish is granted and he marries soon, the succession will have to be decided between quite a large group of boys of similar age, which may produce a more 'vigorous' leader than the last two Ghotul Patels have been. But in any case the Patel's leadership role would be highly constrained by the political norms and democratic style of Muria politics. The Ghotul Patel expresses but does not determine public opinion: outside Manjapur all the Ghotul Patels that I met seemed to be the same kind of individuals as the ones I have described, with no particular pretensions to outstanding authority.

The next office to be considered is that of Kotwal, literally "policeman". If the Patel is sometimes a marginal Ghotul boy, the Kotwal is usually recruited from among those who are central to Ghotul society. By
this is meant that the Kotwal is likely to be an extroverted and dynamic person and the one with the largest number of friends at the Ghotul. His duties are a replica of the duties of the village Kotwal. They involve taking note of any transgressions of Ghotul rules and informing the other boys who then decide to hold a meeting to discuss the matter. Because of its sensitive nature, the Kotwal's role is also the most formalized, and there is an etiquette that governs the contexts in which the Kotwal's role as 'public prosecutor' becomes operative. For example, at the meetings held to interrogate a girl or boy who had defaulted in some way in the discharge of their Ghotul duties, the Kotwal was asked ceremoniously by the Patel, or some other boy, to state his case, and he usually did so by merely calling out the name of the person concerned and then withdrawing from the proceedings altogether. The Kotwal was expected to be indifferent to the outcome of the meetings, i.e. as to whether fines or other punishments were meted out to the offenders. When the Kotwal is personally involved in the case, he is subjected to a cross-examination by the rest of the boys to confirm the truth of his allegations in the same way in which any other girl or boy would be. Thus the credibility of the Kotwal is dependent upon his maintaining a certain personal detachment, and he runs the risk of losing it should he be seen to have a personal stake in the issue at hand.

The third office of Kapatdar is the only other formal office within the Ghotul to which attaches a definite set of duties. Kapatdar derives from kapat meaning door, and Kapatdar is literally 'keeper of the door' or Porter. The Kapatdar has control over the rights of entry into the Ghotul. Specifically, he sees to it that every girl and boy brings a piece of firewood when they arrive at the Ghotul (on the weeks nominated for wood bringing) and that the wood is stacked neatly into a pile. In theory, he should refuse to admit anyone not bringing the daily quota of wood to the Ghotul, but this rule is usually waived, and, provided the stack of wood is not becoming dangerously depleted, people are allowed to just walk in without the Kapatdar checking up on them. Kapatdar officiates at the meetings at which new girls are inducted into the Ghotul. He is also in charge of seeing to the comfort of guests from other villages - travellers who have broken their journey at the Ghotul - and to make sure that they are provided with pots and water to do their own cooking at the Ghotul. The
duties of the Kapatdar overlap with those of the Kotwal and therefore both work closely together.

These are the three genuine official positions in the Ghotul. However, before continuing the description of the internal organisation of the Ghotul it is necessary to comment on a distortion present in Verrier Elwin's account of the Ghotul which arises from his failure to distinguish between Ghotul offices and Ghotul names (or nicknames). These nicknames sometimes sound like the names of offices (e.g. Havildar, Raja, etc.) and they circulate continuously in the Ghotul, but they are unlike genuine Ghotul offices in that no official duties are incumbent on the individuals who bear them. Elwin's failure to distinguish between names and offices explains, I believe, his representation of the Ghotul as far more organised, hierarchical, and rule-bound than it is nowadays, or, I suspect, than it was even in his day. Consequently this is a good place to go into the whole question of Ghotul names.

It is common for Ghotul members to acquire a nickname. In fact this is not so much an aspect of the Ghotul as such, but of the Muria fondness for nick-naming, since many Muria, both before and after their time in the Ghotul, are widely or exclusively referred to and addressed by names other than the ones conferred on them at their naming ceremonies. Thus a lame man will get to be called 'lame' (koriyaal), a fat child 'fatty' (motu), a thin one 'lizard' (dokkay). Such names do not mean the adoption of a 'new' identity but simply reinforce public awareness of an identity already established. Consequently it would be wrong to interpret the acquisition of a Ghotul name as Elwin does, as a sign of a new status in line with the common initiatory practice (but not Muria practice) of re-naming individuals at life-crisis ceremonies. The nearest the Muria system comes to this is the tendency for most Ghotul girls to acquire nicknames which circulate within a particular Ghotul, names which do not have symbolic meanings but which form part of a 'set' of pretty names suitable for young girls. The set in Manjapur includes, Piusa, Dulosa, Malko, Jalko, Jallaro, Mullaro etc. These pet names for girls are a pan-Indian practice, no less common among the anglo-phone upper echelons of Delhi society than in 'primitive' Bastar. Elwin writes, however, as if being the 'Belosa' of a Ghotul was an office, rather than being simply the girl in the Ghotul who
Elwin also gives what must be an over-elaborate account of the structure of male offices, giving three lists of between 12 and 15 distinct titles, each charged with particular duties. Thus one has the Munshi "who keeps an account of all that is done", the Havaldar who "must recover anything lost during a dance", and even the lowly Jamadar ('sweeper' in Hindi) who "sees that the girls have a proper supply of combs" - curious duties for a sweeper! It is impossible to reconcile these elaborate lists with what one knows of the organizational fluidity of Muria society. Elwin does not make clear how these duties are performed and what sanctions are available for punishing non-compliance. Elwin says at one point "the names given in these lists are given in order of precedence, an order which is strictly observed", (p 356) yet he confesses that no cultural consensus exists as to the order of this "strictly observed" hierarchy. "In one village the Kotwar may be subordinate, in the next he may be the leader. The Raja may rank below the Diwan, or the Tehsildar below the Constable". In a society notably lacking external models of hierarchy it does not seem likely that a sub-system, such as the Ghotul, could maintain "strictly observed" rules of precedence; and with a division of labour as little elaborated as the Muria one, it is hardly possible that the Ghotul could maintain a division of labour having such a miniscule separation of tasks. One has the strong feeling that this is the Ghotul seen through composite Hindu/British spectacles, stressing the hierarchy and division of labour implicit in the ideologies of both these groups but rather more foreign to the Muria.

But it might be asked how Elwin could have been so wide off the mark in this matter, since he was a meticulous researcher, making use of trained assistants. No doubt Elwin did correctly record the lists of names he received from informants, but I feel he made insufficient distinction between mere nicknames and real official duties. In Manjapur, at any rate, there is a clear difference between the set Patel/Kotwal/ Kapatdar and
role names which are, in fact, nicknames. Thus, in Manjapur there was a Ghotul 'Manejar' (Manager) - a role name which has filtered through from the world of business with which Muria adolescents have little contact. This nickname belongs to a boy who was talkative and liked to take the initiative, so its meaning is obviously relevant. When he leaves the Ghotul it will no doubt be re-assigned to someone with similar qualities. But there is no office of Manager. Again, the boy who is actually the present Kotwal, is more usually referred to by his previous nickname of 'Kapten' (Captain) - another nickname which tacitly encourages leadership ambitions. There is also a Ghotul 'Majhi' (shaman), a role name given to a boy who is liable to go into a trance at rituals. The present village 'Majhi' was 'discovered', so to speak, as a Ghotul boy, and was nicknamed Majhi in advance of actually becoming the official Majhi of the village.

However these nicknames are not evidence of the proposition which Elwin would like to prove, viz, that the Ghotul is an intricate, hierarchical, rule-bound, disciplined organism; they are more evidence of the Muria tendency to satirise and mock the long succession of externally imposed officials who have come and gone, attempting to exert their authority on the Muria in one way or another, as 'managers' 'captains' 'Havildars' and so on.

Elwin was a great, but misguided supporter and defender of the Murias. He tried to defend the Ghotul as an institution, by depicting it as the kind of 'total' (rule-bound, commitment-demanding, hierarchical) institution of the type admired in official circles in his day. At the same time, for reasons connected with his personal stance on sexual matters, he was determined also to see the Ghotul not just as an institution which reflected adolescent sexuality, but also as one which fostered a paradisical free love, an unbridled eroticism which is no closer to true Muria mores than to the puritanical code from which Elwin was seeking escape. Elwin's biases and his self-appointed advocacy of 'Tribal' living led him to over-emphasize both the regimentation and the freedom of Ghotul society. In the next sections I will show how, if the Ghotul is institutionally much less elaborate than he suggests, at a moral, emotional, and personal level it is much more complex.

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But before turning to a description of the crucial jor relation, it is desirable to see 'the Ghotul as an institution' from a slightly less rigid perspective than that of its formal offices, duties and roles and to discuss the ways in which the Ghotul machine is mobilized in cases of non-conformity to the rules. Characteristically, Ghotul officers are not invested with the power to enforce sanctions unilaterally. They are more-or-less impotent as individuals and their role is mainly confined to pointing out infringements. The innocence or guilt of a person is adjudged, and a suitable punishment decided by a process of discussion and debate into which all Ghotul members are drawn, and which may go on, intermittently, for a few days or weeks depending upon the seriousness of the offence. Eventually it is the consensus of opinion among the clique of boys who are able to dominate and override opposition which is decisive in deciding the case in hand. Punishments range in severity from a firewood fine which requires the person to bring an extra share of firewood to the Ghotul within a fixed period of time, to a cash fine, to actual expulsion from the Ghotul which, although temporary, is deemed the most severe punishment (dand). But the deprivation suffered by the expelled person is less or more depending on the activities of the Ghotul at the time. For example, girls and boys will do anything to prevent themselves being expelled during the ritual season which lasts for three months - February to April - as this deprives them of the pleasure of accompanying the Ghotul on dancing trips to other villages which are a regular feature of Ghotul life at this time, but at other times the expulsion may be taken as a blessing in disguise.

When an individual is held to have failed in the discharge of a Ghotul duty, or to have deliberately disobeyed Ghotul rules this provides an occasion for a general review and reinforcement of the conditions of Ghotul membership, and also a ready-made issue for political competition between Ghotul boys who try to dominate Ghotul business. The performance put up by influence-seeking Ghotul boys in the context of such debates spills over into their later role in the village arena as siyan. They cannot, as yet, challenge the elders (but cf. the case history recounted below of a confrontation between the Ghotul boys and the village siyan) but in due course, after the passage of years, a group of Ghotul boys will become a new cohort of village siyan, and relationships of dominance and
the accompanying skill in open debate, first established in the Ghotul context, will stand them in good stead later on. It is also during such discussions, and the controversies that they inevitably arouse, that the pattern of clique-formation and cross-alliances within the Ghotul society become clearly manifested.

There is no doubt that seen from the outside, each individual is strongly loyal to his or her village Ghotul. Internally, however, individual loyalties are more narrow and sectional. The most comprehensive and easily observable division within Ghotul society is that between the sexes: alliances tend to take place within, rather than between, sexual categories, although in some cases cross-alliances may develop between a section of boys and girls, which usually take the form of the eldest boys siding with the girls, or more rarely, the girls as a group defending the youngest boys at the Ghotul. The cross-alliances are seldom between girls and boys belonging to roughly the same age clusters - i.e. between the group from which jor partners are selected.

Some girls exercise some influence over other girls, and the group is broken up into small friendship cliques, but on the whole, female solidarity was more regularly noticeable at Ghotul disputes than male solidarity. The reasons for this may be, firstly, the fact that Ghotul girls do not have the political aspirations of boys, which makes competition and conflict between them so necessary and secondly, there are no structurally induced differences in the objective situation of one girl as against another at the Ghotul, as there are for boys. Boys pass through three distinct phases in their Ghotul career which coincide with their position in the Ghotul hierarchy.
As fresh initiates the boys are powerless and under the elder boys, and as Ghotul seniors, on the threshold of exit from the Ghotul, they command a generalised respect as Ghotul siyan but are largely politically ineffective and unable to play a prominent part at the meetings called to discuss a transgression of Ghotul rules by a girl. Not having girl partners at the Ghotul (their own have since left to get married), the older boys do not have access to the kinds of information that boys with current jor partners have about the behaviour of girls; the channels of information regarding such matters are mediated via the cross-sexual jor relation. Moreover the older boys do not have a personal stake in the extent of freedom exercised by the Ghotul girls, and their feelings of sexual jealousy - if they have any - are likely to be directed as much
against the group of boys with girl partners at their own Ghotul as much as against the boys from other Ghotuls who are suspected of having fraternised with their Ghotul girls. The Ghotul boys are therefore divided into two distinct factions, each of which adopts a different stance at Ghotul meetings: the older boys who may belong to the age-cluster of the Patel and who do not have any girl partners, and the younger group with girl partners who assume the more aggressive and active role at all Ghotul discussions, but especially when these involve the Ghotul girls. One gets the impression that the uncompromising, no-nonsense attitude taken by the younger boys towards truant Ghotul girls is motivated very largely out of possessiveness towards the Ghotul girls in general, and their own jors in particular.

The most serious offence which provokes the most lively discussion is when a girl is suspected of having struck up a liaison with a boy from another village and Ghotul. At such discussions one invariably finds the younger boys pressing for punishments to be given the girl, with the older group adopting a more moderate, sympathetic stand against punishments. The younger boys may perceive a personal threat in the advances of other boys towards their Ghotul jors, particularly when it is more likely that those boys, and not themselves, qualify as their jors' potential spouses. By advocating stern punishments the younger boys can demonstrate too their incorruptibility by the girls with whom they sleep, and impress everyone with their righteous impartiality in expelling their own jors from the Ghotul. On the other hand, the older boys cultivate a decorous detachment from the entire business of girls' affairs. These boys quite explicitly denied, when I asked them, that they felt deprived or resented their jor-less situation within the Ghotul. It would be far too embarrassing for them now to acquire partners, and, anyway, how could they ever acquiesce to sleeping with their "younger sisters" (helar), which simply in terms of the age structure of the Ghotul these later girl arrivals would be? Just as the younger boys lose prestige by showing themselves off as soft and pliable, the older boys gain prestige by being just that in relation to the girls, but being the opposite in relation to the rest of the boys. The tutelary role that the boys with jors adopt towards all Ghotul girls is adopted by the older boys in relation to the younger boys. The relations between the two groups of boys are strained and conflict-ridden owing to
the different positions that they occupy within the Ghotul vis-à-vis the Ghotul girls.

Ghotul girls have a subordinate position to all Ghotul boys; this is in line with the jurally inferior status that women have in Muria society generally. Within the Ghotul individual rights over particular girls, whether they be sisters or jors, are vigorously disclaimed, but proprietary rights over all the Ghotul girls are collectively held by the Ghotul boys. The conduct of girls is open to the scrutiny of the boys and should conform to Ghotul regulations formulated by them. In Manjapur Ghotul rules encompassed even minor items of girls' dress: the petticoats and blouses favoured by the more 'modern' Muria girls around Narayanpur were forbidden, as was the practice of lining the eyes with black ash (kajal). But the most important rule in this connection was one which forbade Ghotul girls from mixing freely with boys from different Ghotuls. Girls are not supposed to engage in clandestine drinking parties with such boys, although there is no harm seen in them drinking or interacting in the presence of boys from their own Ghotul. This role is structurally important in that it enables a distinction to be maintained which might otherwise get blurred viz: as far as the girls are concerned, the jor relation and sleeping with boys of one's own Ghotul is very different from doing the same with boys from other Ghotuls. As there is no equivalent rule for boys it would appear that what is being expressed, at a deeper level, is the positive value of female sexuality which is within-bounds and under male control, versus the negative value on female sexuality as embodied in illicit inter-Ghotul cross-sexual relations. But there is a more important reason for preventing girls from making themselves equally accessible to boys from other Ghotuls. By making rights in Ghotul girls dependent upon Ghotul membership - which in turn is secured by means of residence in a particular village - critical in-group/out-group boundaries are established which give substance to the primary, structural importance of the village in the 'placing' of individuals in Muria society. The exclusive, proprietary rights that are exercised in the unmarried girls of a village by the unmarried boys of the village enhances, on a social plane, the physical and social discreteness of each Muria village. Since all the boys, irrespective of their clan or origins, share in the body of unmarried girls, who are in one sense the 'corporate estate' of the group, intra-
village loyalties are cemented at the same time as inter-village cleavages are being stressed. Women are used, before marriage, although with opposite effect, to articulate relations between men. Thus, while in the marriage system they are used as items of exchange to establish relations between groups, before marriage the most salient feature is the absence of inter-group exchange. Instead the unmarried girls circulate in a way which reinforces the internal solidarity of the village, rather than being fed into the external exchange system. The following case history demonstrates some of these points in practice.

The day before the market fair (mandhai) was to be held at Chotta Dongar, Janki and Malika had spent their time in making rice beer (barkar). They set off for the fair carrying a large pot full of the beer, and took with them six bottles of darngo liquor as well. The next day Janki's mother, Yaya, spoke to her in front of me and said that she had heard from some neighbours that the Ghotul boys were going around saying that "Janki and Malika have spoilt us and will spoil the Bargaon boys next", (makun nashamatung and ijjek vagamarialor kun nashamainung) and also that a "big fight" would result from all this "when our girls will be found to have Bargaon babies in their stomachs". Yaya seemed very perturbed by the news. She did not reprimand Janki for her blatant breach of Ghotul law; it appeared to be more the economics of the affair and the amount of money that the Ghotul boys would extract from Janki before allowing her back into the Ghotul, rather than the possible loss of face for her daughter, that was uppermost in her mind. She guessed that the price of re-entry into the Ghotul, or the fine, could not be less than one hundred rupees, almost enough to buy a small calf. Janki said that if it were fixed at that, then she and Malika would not be able to pay and so would have to stay out of the Ghotul. (maat milay maiya parrom aiykom - literally "we will not be capable of mixing with the Ghotul girls and boys").

Janki told me that she and Malika had drunk the liquor and rice beer with Mangi (a Manjapur girl), another girl from Mahima Gwari and two boys from the Bargaon Ghotul. Later in the day Malika arrived at Janki's house and the two spent a long time whispering to each other. Malika told me that she was certain that there was going to be a
"big fight" (pokai vachchna aiyar). Apparently last year when the two had drunk beer with some Mahima Gwari boys, the village aiyan had been invited by the boys to the Ghotul meeting to decide the case, and they had recommended that the Ghotul boys fine such girls one hundred rupees and that the next time they "chase them away to Bargaon". Janki and Malika discussed the amount of money each would be willing to pay: Janki said that she would be more-or-less willing to give ten rupees, but Malika looked horrified at the thought of parting with so much money and said that she would only give three rupees, and that only if they had absolutely no other way out.

That night, Somaru, Janki's elder brother accompanied her to the Ghotul. Janki had pleaded with him to do so several times during the day, but he was persuaded only when his mother insisted that he go along as he would probably be able to prevent the Ghotul boys from throwing Janki out. When we arrived at the Ghotul and the meeting began, the first issue that was discussed was about the shortage of firewood and whether or not the Kotwal was keeping a count of the wood brought in daily as he was meant to. When at last everyone turned their attention to the incidents that had occurred at Chhota Dongar it was obvious that the matter was more complex than I had been led to believe. It was not only a question of two girls having fraternised with boys of another Ghotul, but that this had precipitated a quarrel between two groups of boys inside the Manjapur Ghotul itself, with one group siding with the girls and the other against them.

The main opponents of the girls were the two younger boys, Iti and Malu. The girls had on their side meanwhile a few of the elder boys who accused these two boys of taking the law into their hands and punishing the girls by "making up" (jora kiyana) songs insulting them and singing these out loud enough for everyone to hear during the night dancing at Chhota Dongar. The one line that was brought up again and again as an example of the humiliating nature of these songs was one which said that Janki and Malika were not of Manjapur village but were strangers there. The girls had complained to the elder boys who decided to upbraid Iti and Malu. Iti and Malu got into a tussle with them and defied them. At the Ghotul meeting, for a time it seemed that the girls' original crime was forgotten in the
enthusiasm of the boys to settle matters between themselves. It was apparent that there was a consensus of opinion against Iti and Malu, and from time to time, Somaru spoke up condemning their aggressive and independent action against the girls.

When Malika was eventually asked to give her version of the drinking incident she surprised me by making no mention of the main allegations and speaking instead of events that had taken place some time ago when a similar accusation had been made against her and Janki at the Mahima Gwari fair. It is quite common for Ghotul disputes to extend indefinitely into the future; instead of being concluded and then forgotten they are often allowed to remain unresolved and are re-opened at subsequent meetings. But when a dispute is serious enough it is usually settled, and it is considered in bad taste to refer to it at any future meetings. I learnt afterwards that the previous Mahima Gwari accusation had ended with Malu taking back what he had said against Malika and Janki and pronouncing the whole affair closed. At that meeting the talk was considered 'finished' (poloing dugtu) as opposed to cases at which the talk may 'remain' (poloing mandar). Malika may have realised that the Dongar incident would be seen against the background of the Mahima Gwari one; what was at stake, and therefore to be confronted, was the tendency that was being imputed to both herself and Janki to break Ghotul rules in the matter of having drinking parties with boys from other Ghotuls. This may have been responsible for making her start off by recounting the very first time that they had been accused of so doing which was at Mahima Gwari. She therefore pointed out to everyone that Malu had been mistaken in saying that she and Janki had drunk with the Bargaon boys then, probably with a view to establishing his fallibility in the present case.

After she had finished, Tilok, one of the elder boys mentioned above, said that it was a shame that the earlier episode had to be brought up. Then Malu spoke. Instead of bringing the attention of those gathered around to the cast-iron case he had at the moment (after all Janki and Malika had intended to hold a party with the Bargaon boys at Chhota Dongar), Malu when back to the Mahima incident and said that he had indeed said then that Janki and Malika had not been drinking, but he had since learnt from a
Ghotul girl, that Janki and Malika had asked another Ghotul girl, Mila, not to reveal the fact that they really had been on a drinking spree with the Bargaon boys, after all. The girl who had confided in Malu was Bina, the younger sister of Tilok whose own interest in the case, one could not but help suspecting, was to settle old scores with Malu. Tilok therefore immediately started rebuking his sister Bina. He was restrained by other Ghotul boys. Tilok said he had every right to talk to his helar (younger sister). But the boys replied that the Ghotul was not Tilok's home but the bhat, and that on the bhat he could not behave towards his sister as he could at home. Bina was asked to speak and confirm Malu's statement. She made the most effectively vague reply that I have ever heard at such a meeting. Since it was incomprehensible to all present as well, she was ordered to stop beating about the bush and help clarify the issue. This time she came out and said that Janki had told her to keep quiet about the drinking affair as Janki was scared that "this time the boys will kill us".

Somaru had been keeping a low profile up until then, but he reacted immediately to Bina's statement and shouted at her that then it was her fault that she had kept quiet at the previous meeting and allowed the boys to be misled. Had she spoken out then, as now, the boys would have settled the matter then and there. He said that she had not business to make all this public now. Tilok then came to the point and asked: "Did the girls drink or not?" Before anyone could answer, Somaru said that of course the girls had been drinking, at least this was what one could infer from Bina's evidence. The next person to speak was the Ghotul Patel who said in a disgusted but bemused tone of voice: "These girls make the boys fight between themselves so we should not sleep with them in the future. Let this be a Ghotul for boys only. Turn out all the girls". Several male voices replied to this by saying that how could that be done when "no other boys were capable of sleeping with such girls", (bor dusra laiyor gur parnur); or, in other words, what would happen to the girls? Eventually it was decided to ask the Bargaon boys themselves at the Dhorai market the next day.

Nothing happened for a few days after this meeting; the Bargaon boys were not consulted and neither were
Janki and Malika prevented from attending the Ghotul. But later, Janki left the Ghotul of her own accord as she had sores on her legs and was not feeling well enough to attend. Malu took this opportunity to come round one day and tell her casually that the boys had thrown her and Malika out of the Ghotul. Janki said to me that she had retorted: "Which boys! It was you who threw us out". Nonetheless Janki planned to go to the Ghotul that night. She said that she would say that she had heard nothing of their decision and so force them to spell it all out for her again. Some time before we were to leave, Somaru's family had a visitor who also decided to come along for the sheer entertainment that such a meeting promised. It was he who incited the boys at the Ghotul to start the proceedings as soon as possible. There were only a few boys present this time and the ones there feigned ignorance of having thrown out any girls - "which girls?" they said. But the visitor was impatient to see the fun and urged them to begin. When the meeting began, it was conducted in a light way with much joking and good humour among the boys; the tensions between the two groups of boys had dissipated during the interval between the two meetings and there was more male solidarity in evidence now. Somaru attempted to make the boys abandon the entire affair by reminding them that this was "daglay poloing" (finished talk), but none of the boys took this up as they had the last time. Somaru then asked them why they had let Malika and Janki enter the Ghotul hall (lappa haurina) if it was true that they had been expelled from the Ghotul. Didn't that show a certain carelessness on the part of the boys, and the Kapatdar especially? Bukka, one of the Ghotul boys whose marriage had taken place only two or three months earlier, but who faithfully turned up at the Ghotul every night and who was keen to show off his newly acquired siyan status in respect of the other boys there said: "You all will start a fight with the Bargaon boys over this matter. At the market Godi spoke to them and they said that if we make pregnant a girl of your Ghotul, the only way you will retaliate will be by doing the same to one of our girls. That is the only way this fight will come to an end". But another boy rebuffed Bukka by saying that the Ghotul boys were willing to take advice only from the true village siyan. Salki
also said that the boys wondered why Bukka persisted in coming to the Ghotul after his marriage. In other words, the boys were telling Bukka to mind his own business and let the Ghotul boys (among whom he could not be counted) conduct theirs. Somaru asked whether the boys intended to throw the girls out of the Ghotul or not? The boys whispered amongst themselves and eventually one of them said: "pasiing" or "lets throw them out". All the girls broke out in spontaneous protest at this, and Somaru's visitor asked them point blank as to whether there was any truth in the allegations. Janki said that they had drunk the beer in the morning when her brother Somaru had also been present, but that they had not drunk any darngo liquor or beer during the night. The conversation then turned to the songs that had been invented by Iti and Malu, but the weight of the opinion was much less condemnatory of the two boys at this meeting than it had been during the last one. Malu said: "During the kundus paina (a fast dance) it is normal to make up songs and the girls have no right to object to us doing so. Instead of getting angry with the girls, the boys piled on top of us for making the songs up. The girls make the boys fight amongst themselves. From now on we should not let them dance with us during kundus paina". Both Janki and Malika replied defiantly: "We will dance. Kundus paina is the most enjoyable dance". As it was clear that the boys were not going to change their minds over the decision to throw Janki and Malika out of the Ghotul, Somaru left soon after, but not before spending some time in amiable chit-chat with the boys to dispel any suspicion that they might entertain of his anger towards them for having thrown out his younger sister.

The next day I asked Janki whether she would be attending the Ghotul the following night. She said that she would but if the boys insisted that she go home, she would have to. Otherwise she intended sleeping that night and the next at the Ghotul and then spending a few nights at home as her sores were becoming more painful. However, she and Malika were stopped just outside the Ghotul and ordered to go home by the Ghotul boys.

Janki's mother seemed to be just as affected by the events at the Ghotul as her daughter. In her anger and agitation she was provoked into blaming everything that had happened on Malu's jealousy (kaeer) of the Tiri family. "If only he
ate and slept as well as we do!" Malu's family was very poor (see case V. page 162) in comparison with Tiri's family: they had only two cows and a decrepit hut while Janki's family had over two dozen head of cattle and a magnificent house. She also said that it was only because Somaru had not accompanied Janki the night before to the Ghotul that Janki had been refused entry. She told me that Tiri, Janki's eldest brother had been very indignant about her being expelled from the Ghotul, and had said to her: "its bad enough for you to have to put up with nagging from your mother and father at home about not having done the house work; but you go to the Ghotul for the sake of enjoying the companionship of your friends (got got kajey) and not in order to listen to such nonsense from the boys. I'll see to it that you are taken back".

After dinner that night Janki left for the Ghotul and about half an hour later her two brothers, Somaru and Tiri, (and I) followed. Malika and Janki were waiting for us at a point about half way to the Ghotul. Malika let Tiri know that her father had not been able to come as he was drunk. Tiri then asked both girls whether they had really drunk wine along with the Bargaon boys, and both girls said they had not.

We all entered the Ghotul courtyard as a group and sat down with the boys around the fire. Tiri immediately launched into a discussion with the boys present, about which day they considered suitable to start the nightly drumming and dancing for Pen Karsna which was only a fortnight away. Tiri was being particularly affable; he laughed and joked with the boys in a deliberate effort to show that he had come with no hard feelings towards them. Then Tiri came to the point with a direct: "What is this fight we've heard you Ghotul laiyor have been having with your ask (women)? After all aren't Ghotul girls your ask?" None of the boys responded to Tiri's authority. A group of them had left just before this perhaps to hold a drinking session some distance away from the Ghotul, and the few left, lay about in sleeping postures and mumbled incoherently in reply to Tiri's query. If Tiri (who commands respect in village politics) felt slighted he did not show it. He pressed on with his questions in the slow, step-by-step style which is his speciality - each question being short, precise and proceeding logically on from the one put before
it. The set of questions were put in the following order: what day did the girls drink, where, when (night time or day), with whom, and lastly, did anyone see them drinking. The boys were warming up and taking more interest in the topic by the time the last question had been asked. No one could say that they had seen the girls drinking. Someone said that he had seen the girls being led by the hand by the Bargaon boys. Somaru came in at this point and asked whether any of the Manjapur boys had tried to stop the girls from going along with the Bargaon boys. Had they tried to 'reason' (samjha kiyana) with the girls and make them realise the mistake they were making at that time? The boys replied that they had stayed away because they had felt it humiliating to try and restrain the girls in the presence of the Bargaon boys. Tiri latched on to this and said with mounting excitement: "Yes, we can understand that you felt shy. But it was your duty to stop the girls from going along with the Bargaon boys then. You'll see that even when you're married and your wives drink with other men you all will feel "too shy" to confront them. Isn't that right? None of the boys could counter this and they admitted that they had erred slightly ("maat udduk juktom").

Once again Bina's part in the affair was discussed. Tiri asked her to say where the drinking had taken place. She said that she did not know and Tiri made the most of her confusion. At last the boys gave in and admitted that they just did not know whether the girls really had been drinking or not. This was a personal triumph for Tiri who had proceeded with the polish and self-assurance of an urbane solicitor defending his client. His style was conciliatory and pointedly deferential to the ultimate authority of the Ghotul boys in this Ghotul matter. Before putting forward an objection of his own, he would concede a point to the boys, so the interrogation went on in a "Yes, yes you are absolutely right on this, but -" fashion. In the end it was with the greatest of ease that he succeeded in making the boys accept the girls back into the Ghotul, and without having to pay a single rupee as fine.

What this case history brings out clearly is the absence of clear, executive authority invested in Ghotul offices, and the consensual not to
say factional nature of Ghotul politics. But perhaps, more striking than this even, is the extent to which the political authority of the Ghotul boys in Ghotul matters is qualified by the influence exerted by older men, such as Tiri and Somaru, who intervene on the basis of kinship ties with particular Ghotul members - Janki in this case. In the Ghotul itself, there is no kinship, no brother/sister solidarity cutting across the divisions into age/sex factions. But the autonomy of the Ghotul is only relative, and in this case Tiri evidently felt it justifiable to bring his well-honed political advocacy to bear in support of his younger sister. But the relativity of Ghotul autonomy is a persistent theme. This is also brought out in the following case history of a dispute between the siyan and the Ghotul boys.

The Ghotul has a rice 'income' every year as a result of payments which are made to Ghotul boys and girls for dancing at the pen karsna ritual held in the village and in neighbouring villages, and also at the first fruit ceremonies. At these ceremonies it is customary for each house in the village to contribute one soli (about half a kilo) of uncooked rice to boys and girls from any village's Ghotul who dance at people's homes. Because of the number of villages visited by the Ghotul each year during the pen karsna season, the Ghotul is able to accumulate a substantial stock of rice. According to the village siyan this rice stock, as well as being used by Ghotul members to hold Ghotul feasts, should also be used to feast the siyan periodically, as a mark of respect. No such feast had been given by the Manjapur Ghotul for a period of three years and the siyan decided to demand one, and also to impose an extra fine on the Ghotul for their lax behaviour in this regard. "Who else" they said "allows the Ghotul girls and boys the luxury of dancing night after night?" As extra punishment they demanded that besides rice and rice beer being provided for them at this feast, they would have to be given meat to eat as well. Meat is an expensive item that is included at feasts only when it is a rich man who is playing host; for the Ghotul it entailed finding someone willing to sell a cow - a difficult task in itself - and to get together at least Rs. 100 to pay for it. It was this, rather than the giving of the feast, which the Ghotul
boys felt was excessive punishment and a demand with which they found it difficult to comply. Accordingly, Malu arrived at Tiri's house one day when I was present and discussed the matter with Pele and the Patel, all three men happening to be senior siyan of the village. Malu pleaded with them, folding his hands and assuming a humble posture about the question of meat saying that the Ghotul should be spared from having to provide it. But the siyan were adamant and refused to relent in this matter. They were obviously relishing the anxiety they had caused the Ghotul boys and were determined to not let go the opportunity of pressing home their own indispensibility. Pele told Malu: "You may be the siyan for our daughters but we are the siyan for you," and at another point, he pithily summarized the Ghotul/siyan position by pointing out "if you can't do this much for us then we won't hold your marriages for you either. You all can stay at the Ghotul". Malu left after being bullied by the siyan who re-affirmed their demand for meat.

Two days later the village siyan gathered at the Ghotul at midday. Trenches had been dug into the Ghotul compound and large pots of rice were being cooked by the boys, while the girls and smaller boys sat inside preparing mounds leaf-cups. I asked how much rice was being cooked and was told by a siyan that it would amount to a "khandi (about 40 kilos) full", whereupon a Ghotul boy standing nearby shook his head and said that it was much less than that. The siyan said "then we'll see that the Ghotul boys don't get any food at their homes". While the food preparations were going on apace the siyan sat down in a large circle in the Ghotul courtyard and were served rice beer by the Ghotul boys. I heard the girls whispering that the boys had watered the rice beer being distributed and had kept an undiluted quantity of it hidden away for themselves. The drinking proceeded amiably and peacefully until a hubbub of voices coming from the courtyard became audible to those, like me, sitting inside the Ghotul hall. It was apparent that a quarrel had broken out among the men. People sitting outside got up to enquire but all we could see was a knot of people, boys and siyan, shouting angrily at one another.

By and by, as the number of people involved grew, it was clear that the siyan were provoking the Ghotul boys with
aggressive taunts, while the boys were behaving in a more defensive fashion. The group of boys, of whom Iti, Malu and Karu were prominent, directly facing the angry siyan were giving one another reassurance and saying: "We won't be bullied by them. Let's give them a fine". The siyan, once the boys had uttered this threat, turned their backs and made as if they were going to stage a walk-out, saying: "Let's not eat here". They did proceed in a group outside the Ghotul fence but were pursued by the Ghotul boys who tried to prevent them from leaving. (All the rice had been cooked by this time). The siyan asked them sarcastically: "Have we burdened you all too much? We should have realised that it was too much to ask you all to do this much."

At this stage the siyan also reminded the boys that they were the one's on whom the Ghotul boys were materially dependent: "Tell us where you live - at your homes or at the Ghotul", and "Who are your fathers - we are, are we not?"

The fine which the Ghotul boys proposed to extract from the siyan - and which they actually did extract from them eventually - arose from certain derogatory remarks made by the siyan at a wedding which had been held in the village a short while previously. At this wedding certain siyan had grumbled about the cooking (always done at weddings by the Ghotul boys) saying that the boys had kept the best rice for themselves, serving the guests with stale food and carelessly handled the cooking pots so that several of them broke. Hearing this the boys left the feast preparations in the middle, saying that the siyan should take charge themselves and slept that night at the Ghotul without eating any food. The boys claimed that as a result of having been forced by the siyan's words into going hungry at the wedding, they had grounds for fining the siyan subsequently, and they demanded, and received, rice beer in compensation at the siyan's expense. In this way equitable relations between the Ghotul boys and the siyan were re-established.
The Ghotul Jor relation: the rules of etiquette

I now come to a description of what is undoubtedly, the most controversial aspect of Ghotul organization, both to the Muria and to others, namely, the Jor relation. The regulation of sexual relationships within the Ghotul is a difficult subject to discuss adequately because of the fact that Murias keep their sex lives private and because individual factors rather than overt rules are all-important in actual physical relations - where these occur, which, as will be seen, is by no means universally, as Elwin believed. At the outset it is best to confine the discussion to the idiom in which the Muria themselves discuss it, i.e. the idiom of "sleeping" with a jor without prejudging the issue.

In theory, a jor relationship is meant to be nothing more than a practical sleeping arrangement. The sense that the words - ghotul jor - convey to the Murias themselves is of a boy and girl sleeping together at the Ghotul. The sentimental meaning, let alone sexual implications of the bond, is suppressed by rigid etiquette concerning behaviour between jor in public. Despite the seeming illogicality of such an attitude, it is essential that the dissociation be made between the physical closeness which is pre-supposed between a girl and boy and their emotional involvement in each other, in order for Ghotul partnerships not to subvert or pre-empt entirely subsequent marital ones, and for marriage to survive as an institution in Muria society.

The way in which attempts are made to confine the jor to a definite context i.e. that of sleeping, and to limit its sphere of influence to a single activity emerge in informants' statements about what the jor relationship should ideally be as well as from observation of the etiquette which is practised between a jor couple in front of others at the Ghotul. I was told that a girl must sleep with her jor if he should be present at the Ghotul on that particular night. The boy, however, has only a priority over other boys as far as rights to sleep with the girl is concerned. A male jor has no permanent, absolute, rights over his girl partner. For example, if he fails to attend the Ghotul his place is taken by another boy and it would be considered as extremely devious for the boy to coerce his jor to stay away from the Ghotul so as to prevent that from
happening. Possessiveness by boys towards their jor is discouraged; although boys may denounce their jor in front of the assembled Ghotul for mixing with boys from other Ghotuls, they have no right to object to their jor wishing to switch to another Ghotul boy. Should their partner wish to terminate the jor relation they must gracefully accede to her desires. Girls take the initiative and instigate a change by complaining to the Ghotul boys that they no longer wish to continue sleeping with their jor and name another boy to replace him. Boys are not supposed to ask for a meeting to be convened so that they can discuss their likes and dislikes in the matter of their jor partnership because boys should be indifferent about the particular girl - they should like all the girls in the Ghotul to the same degree and view sleeping with a girl as a necessary routine.

The proper decorum between girl and boy jor at the Ghotul consists in their avoiding or ignoring one another until the Ghotul 'closes', as informants put it - "Ghotul band atu" - and it is time to sleep. There is always an hour or two of socializing when members engage in amiable conversation with one another while sitting around the Ghotul fire before spreading out their mats on the floor to sleep. At such times it is possible to observe a segregation of the sexes similar to that found at collective occasions outside the Ghotul. Girls are seated together on one side of the Ghotul courtyard while the boys form groups around the fire. Girls and boys seldom partake in joint discussion but usually across a physical dividing line that separates them from each other. In fact the physical propinquity and close body contacts that are indulged in by girls and boys with their own sex highlight the restraint that is normally exercised in physical contacts between the girls and boys. Girls sit with their arms interlocked and heads resting on each others shoulders, while it is common to find boys using another boy's lap as a head rest and to see boys hugging one another in the course of an evening. But there are special conditions which moderate these rules, which are self-consciously adhered to, allowing physical closeness between boys and girls to occur in public. This happens when girls approach the boys to massage them, and when they comb the boys' hair - two duties that are enjoined on Ghotul girls. I was always impressed by the distracted, indifferent way in which boys responded to girls' attentions - while a girl was hard at work, rubbing, squeezing and pummelling the muscles of a boy's arms and legs, the boy
would carry on a conversation with his friends in the normal way. Massaging and hair-grooming are not every day events. At Manjapur they tended to take place at fortnightly intervals. It is thought to be indecent and outrageous for a girl to massage her jor. Girls massage only those boys who are not their jor. Thus the physical accessibility to one another that is forced on girls and boys during massaging and grooming of hair is denied between jor.

The etiquette that minimizes interaction between jor within the Ghotul hours, is supplemented by rules that discourage certain kinds of social contact even during the daytime outside the Ghotul. Although it is quite common for girls and boys to work together and for them to go in a party to markets in other villages, a jor couple must take care to ensure that they are part of a group. A party of Ghotul girls and boys seen drinking together or embarking on a dancing trip to another village does not arouse villagers' suspicions as it is seen as activity conforming to the stereotype of the convivial and irresponsible life style that is the special privilege of the young, but a solitary pair, or even a trio consisting of a jor couple along with a friend, is viewed as a clandestine, covert meeting of lovers for the purpose of furthering their amorous interests. Ghotul boys said that the Ghotul 'elders' forbade this because it aroused the animosities of the girl's or boy's parents towards the Ghotul. The parents would condemn the Ghotul as encouraging illicit relations between young people which might have serious, disruptive consequences for parental designs regarding the marriages of their children. By making parents anxious about the influence of the Ghotul on their children, the Ghotul was given a bad name, and parents began to regret having ever sent their children to it. I was told that it was the duty of any Ghotul member witnessing such a meeting between a jor outside the Ghotul to report it immediately so that the couple could be admonished by the Ghotul elders or siyan.

Given these rules of avoidance between jor in ordinary everyday society at the Ghotul and outside it, one might expect the contexts in which it is mandatory for the couple to come together to be highly specified and equally rule-bound. The signal that the Ghotul is going to 'close' and that it is time to sleep is given by the girls when they go round to every boy
and salute him formally. Sleeping is a solemnized activity; there are rules that prohibit jor from talking to one another, and especially laughing with one another. One of my informants, Janki told me once that she had been fined forty sticks of firewood for having laughed out loudly in response to something her jor had whispered to her while they were lying together. She said that laughing or any expression of frivolousness between jor was offensive to the other girls and boys and seen as vulgar behaviour. Her jor was fined twenty five sticks of firewood.

The Jor in Practice: Malika/Malu

These are the rules that appertain to the jor relationship within the Ghotul. It is obvious that the rules are intent on segregating the jor relation and confining it to as narrow a sphere as possible. In this way the opposition between the jor relation (which in terms of Ghotul orthodoxy, is conceived of as an impersonal, temporary and unexclusive relationship) and the marital one, which is ideally a permanent, exclusive bond imbued with sentiment, can be maintained. But having elucidated the official theory and rules we must now refer them back to the actors themselves. The rules say nothing of the actual transactional content of the relationship and it is to this that one must turn for any understanding of the system as it works out in practice. The question that must be dealt with is the emotional weight that a jor carries, and the perceptions of Ghotul girls and boys regarding its influence on their lives and sentiments. Can the stringency of Ghotul measures against personal involvement in jor partnerships circumvent the sentimental predispositions of boys and girls towards one another which are surely incipient in any jor relation?

The first time that Malu volunteered to talk to me about Ghotul affairs was when he gave me the news that he had been fined heavily by the Ghotul boys. But the fine was given retrospectively for Malu's behaviour at a wedding which took place about two years ago. Malu said that during this wedding, he, along with his friend Iti and Malika, his jor, left the wedding house and went to the forest to drink a bottle of darngo liquor. Some people who saw them informed the Ghotul boys then dancing at the wedding house, and the news eventually filtered down to Malika's father who was at the
wedding. The Ghotul boys organized a party to seek them and beat all three of them. Malu told me that the boys accused him of "jong kiyana", or of trying to form a 'pair' with Malika. I said that surely they would not object to the three of them being together as they were all of the same village Ghotul, but he replied that it made no difference, they would be accused of "doing things on the sly" - (maks maks kiyana arro). It was being secretive about one's activities and not inviting other boys and girls to participate as well that gave everyone reason to suspect that illicit deeds were being performed.

But the matter did not come to an end with the beating that the three received at the hands of infuriated Ghotul boys. Malika's father called for a meeting at which the siyan reprimanded the Ghotul boys collectively and hurled abuse at them saying that the boys ruined their daughters and incited them to elope with them. The siyan fined Iti and Malu Rs.40 each - a sum almost impossible for them to pay and equal to the fines given in punishment to boys who actually did elope with their Ghotul jor. Malika's father and his brothers gave Malu a severe beating. Malu said that as a result Malika had "separated" (virchtu) herself from her father. She returned all the silver ornaments that had belonged to him and which she used to wear, and never uttered a word to him. Malika had given some of her silver clips and anklets to Malu for keeping in his house, and occasionally he said he would look at them.

On another occasion Malu confessed outright to me that he was desperately in love with Malika. When he said this tears came to his eyes and I could see that he was very rapt in her. Malu said that everyone knew about his love for Malika and that the women in the "big house" (Malika lived in the Patel house-complex) talked about it. He was scared of her father who sought him out on every public occasion to see who he was with. Malu said that he could not apply himself to doing any work - he thought of her all the time. Malika lived in another hamlet and did not come to fetch water from the river that flowed on the side of the hamlet in which Malu lived. If she did, he would at least get a chance to see her in the day time. These days however they were able to meet quite often and spend a lot of time in each other's company as it was the ritual season and there were mandhai fairs being held in other villages. Today, he said he would be going to Vayanar with her (and others of the Ghotul), and that in the next few days other opportunities would arise to go on trips to distant villages.

At one time Malu expressed his fear that everyone in the Ghotul was aware of his and Malika's love for one another. He said that
the boys deliberately harassed Malika for every small offence she committed although they would overlook it being committed by some other girl. For example he said the other day Malika had forgotten to sweep the Ghotul so she was thrown out of the Ghotul. She asked the boys to give her a fine which she could pay but they refused to listen. Malu saw in this a conspiracy to prevent the two of them from seeing each other. His story was later confirmed by Janki who is Malika's best friend. Janki said that Malika was very anxious to get the whole affair sorted out as any delay would mean that she would not be permitted to accompany the Ghotul girls and boys on a dancing trip to Gardapal which had been scheduled to take place before the period of her suspension was over. Malika had asked Janki to show solidarity and boycott the Ghotul, but Janki obviously thought the request a bit far-fetched. Janki said she felt sorry for Malika who she would have to avoid talking to, or sitting next to at the market for instance, until the issue was resolved. Malu was very angry over this incident. He said he had not been able to prevent the boys from throwing Malika out — in fact he had been forced to assume an attitude of whole-hearted support with the boys over their decision, but actually he had been seething with anger inside. He wanted to run away with Malika as he felt that they both could not carry on their romance in the village with everyone out to persecute them in such ways. He asked me to take him and Malika to Kondagaon in my car and I said I would think about it.

A few days later, on his return from the dancing trip to Gardapal, Malu told me that Malika had also been there, despite her having been expelled from the Ghotul. Malika had set out from Manjapur with another (non-Ghotul going) girl and had arrived there before the Manjapur Ghotul group. She stayed with her aunt living in Gardapal and was not allowed to mix with the Manjapur Ghotul girls and boys. She had had to dance with the Bargaon Ghotul group, as the Manjapur boys had refused her a place in their dancing line. Malu said that Malika had invited the Manjapur girls and boys to her aunt's place and served them rice beer. Malu said that Malika had cried in front of them and asked why they had thrown her out of the Ghotul. Janki later told me that Malika was willing only to pay a fine of firewood and not a cash fine. The night after the group returned from Gardapal, Malika's affair was discussed at the Ghotul and she was given a 'small fine of twenty sticks of firewood.

About a month later, during which time no further dramatic episodes involving Malu or Malika took place, Malu came to see me one day and announced that he had just come from a small drinking
party that had been held at Malika's house. It was liquor that Malika had offered him and another boy, Tonde, as payment of a fine which Tonde had imposed on Malika. Malu said that it all started by him telling Malika that she should never sleep with other boys because if she got pregnant, he, Malu would be made to take the blame. Malika objected to this and complained to the Ghotul boys the next night about Malu's having told her not to sleep with any of them. Predictably, they threw Malu out of the Ghotul, saying to Malika at the same time that she was not Malu's "wife" and should therefore not have to listen to such nonsense.

About that time a little girl died in a house neighbouring Malu's. Malu was sent as a messenger to Benur to inform the bereaved families. Malu said that when he got back from doing this service the siyan encouraged him to participate in the preparations for the mourning feast along with other boys from the Ghotul, and they reassured him that they were there to see that the Ghotul boys would not object. This was during Malu's expulsion from the Ghotul. A few days later the boys asked Malika whether she still wished to have Malu as her jor. According to Malu, Malika had said: "Don't change my jor. I am in love with him" (aga maiya atu). Thereupon the boys gave Malika a fine for so outrageously declaring her love (maiya) for Malu. It was this fine that Malika had been paying with liquor which she had given to Tonde and Malu, although it was unclear as to why the other Ghotul boys had been excluded.

In the next few days Malu's entreaties to me to take him and Malika to some distant village and leave them there, became more and more frequent and pressing. They would live as man and wife in the village and no one would know better. They would come back to Manjapur to see their friends after several years had elapsed and their families' tempers had subsided. Malu suggested that I introduce them to some family and ask that they be given food and shelter in return for labour; I was also to insist that Malu and Malika be well treated and threaten to bring the entire police force of Bastar on their would-be patron's head if any harm came to them. Malu also came asking me for medicine (mati) to prevent Malika from becoming pregnant. He kept saying "if she does, her father will kill me - they all will kill me".

When I saw Malika alone I put the question to her of whether she would like to run away with Malu or not. She said that "of course" she would like to but that it was just not possible. She switched to another topic as soon as Janki walked into the room. At that time both girls had been suspended from the Ghotul and both blamed Malu as responsible for this. He had instigated the inquiry into
whether the two girls had drunk liquor with some Barghoan boys (described earlier). Malika said that I had been deceived by Malu into thinking of him as a "good" (banek) boy. In fact, it was he who gave the Ghotul girls the hardest time. He was the most vociferous advocate of fines, suspensions and other punishments to be given to the girls on any small charge.

A few days after this, when I met Malika again she told me that Malu had indicated to her that he had found a girl in Hangwa village who was willing to run away with him, and that he was just waiting for an opportune time to do so. He would not tell Malika the girl's name, but Malika suspected that she was a Manjapur girl. Janki who was also present said that Malu was obviously deceiving her, and that she, Malika, was the girl he meant to run away with. However Malika remained unconvinced by Janki's efforts at reassuring her and after Janki left, she asked me to find out from Malu and to then let her know. I told her that I was inclined to agree with Janki and that it was really with her in mind that Malu had planned his escapade and that the explanation for his present belligerent stance was his annoyance at Malika for having hob-nobbed with the Barghoan boys.

However aggressive Malu's behaviour towards Malika and Janki at the Ghotul may have been, with me he persisted in repeating his desire to run away with Malika. When I asked him about the girl he had told Malika he was willing to run away with, he smiled and said that it was a story he had invented to test her reaction. My own departure from the village was imminent at the time, and I suspect that this may have had an effect on the urgency with which Malu pressed his case. I had a car, and with me involved to assist them, the uncertainties of a life away from the village would be much reduced. It seemed that Malika, who had once been willing to elope with him, was reluctant now. Malu told me that he was going to have some love magic done to make her change her mind in favour of running away. He even boldly speculated on which of the village shamans he would employ for this devious operation. But Malu did not run away with Malika. By the time I left the village she had not changed her mind and he informed me dejectedly, on the last day of my stay there, that she was too scared of taking such a drastic step.

For several reasons, a great deal of descriptive detail has been lavished in setting out this case study. An understanding of the jor
partnership cannot be derived from informants' statements about what it is as these statements are likely to be doctrinal assertions, and therefore to be somewhat misleading, nor can one appreciate the depth and scope of a jor relationship by direct observation of the inter-personal behaviour of the individuals concerned, as such behaviour is restrained in public contexts and therefore inaccessible to an anthropologist. The jor is a highly sensitive and private relationship and one which cannot be forced into the straight-jacket of a conventional behaviour description. Malu and Malika's story unfolded itself to me in the course of numerous conversations that I had with them. It is from the hints and suggestions (and even frank declarations) contained in their verbal statements, and in the ways in which they reacted to the events that involved them, that one can see the reflections of a lively, often stressful, but on the whole, rather tender jor relationship. But it must be emphasized that this is but one jor partnership and that one cannot generalize from it to establish the character of other jors. This is not only due to practical reasons and the fact that I knew more about Malu and Malika's jor relationship than I did about others, who were more parsimonious in the amount of information they divulged to me, but because of the nature of the relationship itself. As the jor relationship is dependent upon individual choice and initiative, and as it is governed by norms that ensure that it operates secretly under cover of darkness at night, it is intrinsically the most variable and plastic of all institutionalized relationships in the Muria spectrum. It is the one that is most affected by individual dispositions and by a whole host of extraneous factors as well. Because the rules limit its outward manifestations, they inadvertently give free reign to the individuals to allow the relationship to develop as it will: although nothing is permitted, everything is possible in a jor partnership, although these possibilities are not always perceived or exploited.

The kind of behaviour that is expected between jors is simply that of sleeping together on one mat. But sleeping is not a neutral concept in Muria society; sleep is regarded a particularly vulnerable, dangerous time when ancestor spirits try to communicate with the living through dreams (kanisk), and the notion of "sleeping-with" is, just as in English, a euphemism for sexual intercourse. Sleeping certainly does have shades of meaning which even the Muria cannot ignore - namely that of sexual
intimacy between a girl and boy. Because we are taught that sex and love go together in our own culture, and because the linkage between sexual access and sentimental ties is made by the Muria as well, it would be all too easy to assume that passionate romances are the rule, rather than the exception as far as jor partnerships within the Ghotul are concerned. However this is not the case. Only a minority of jor achieve the pitch of romantic fervour expressed by Malu and reciprocated (to a lesser extent) by Malika; there are more couples at the Ghotul for whom sleeping with one another means little more than just that.

Janki informed that of all the Ghotul partnerships, only a few could be counted as "good" (tikam) ones, that is to say, ones who were happy to be sleeping with one another. Among these she included herself and Salki, Malu-Malika, Iti-Sandi, and another couple. The remaining couples were all sleeping with one another simply because they had to, and it was known to all that there was no particular affection between the boy and girl. One of the jor partnerships was between a girl and boy of widely disparate ages. The girl was the eldest girl at the Ghotul and the boy much younger than her. She was the last of her contemporaries to remain unmarried, and as she had not been engaged to anyone, it seemed that she was destined for an unusually long spell at the Ghotul. Her own previous jor had got married, and so she was passed on to a boy eligible at the time, as he had no jor, but who had protested all the same at the incongruity of being made to sleep with a girl much older than him. The other three couples were both in the early stages of their partnership.

A pattern is observable in jor relations which seems to obey a developmental cycle. That is to say, there is an initial period during which a newcomer to the Ghotul (particularly a girl, who is likely to be involved in a jor relation from the moment she arrives at the Ghotul), enters into one or more relatively brief and unsatisfactory relationships, under pressure from the Ghotul 'establishment'. It is only after a mutual sorting out process that there is much chance of a long lasting jor pairing being established. Once this takes place, and once a relation has gone on for some time, a plateau-phase in the individual's Ghotul career is reached and a stable relation is formed which survives until one or other party leaves the Ghotul to get married. This is usually the girl, and the
boy thereafter joins the group of older, jor-less Ghotul boys. If it is the
boy who is married first, then the girl, rather than being left without a
jor, reverts to the original stage of submitting to pressure, and is paired
off with a younger boy not of her own choice, or only 'officially' so.

The initial, and sometimes prolonged, hostility that exists between jor,
must also be seen against the background of generalised hostility between
the sexes at the Ghotul, and the very open demonstrations of sexual
solidarity which are particularly visible during the pre-sleep period of
talk, argument etc. around the fire before the Ghotul is declared 'closed'.
The boys sit together exchanging caresses which contrast, as I have
already said, most starkly with the decorum which restrains behaviour
between boys and girls in the same situation. (I have no evidence of
homosexual relations between boys, and certainly this is not part of
Ghotul life). It might be the case that the close contact between boys
during the pre-sleep period is a device intended to cope with and counter­
act the real familiarity established between boys and girls, so that
inter- and intra-sexual relations are brought into balance. It now becomes
relations between the sexes that simulate prior bonds between members of
the same sex, rather than the reverse. In this way male solidarity is
assured and the myth of female dispensability can be credibly maintained.
Since boys start going to the Ghotul before girls, it will be several years
after a boy has immersed himself in the commaderie of his mates that he is
allotted a girl partner. It is consequently with genuine resentment and
discomfiture that boys give in to the pressure that is put on them to link
themselves with individual girls at the Ghotul. For girls, too, the
prospect of having to sleep with a boy is far from enticing: the girls that
I spoke to said that they had been scared and embarrassed at having to do
so, but that it was all part of the rules and could not be avoided. The
mutual hostility between the girl and boy insofar as their formal jor
relationship is concerned, is reinforced by the cool, taciturn manner in
which the boys behave at the meetings at which girls are partnered with
them and inducted into the Ghotul. It was also obvious, in the occasions at
which girls brought the subject up, that they did not see such behaviour as
merely play-acting but that they continued to bear a grudge against the
boys at whose hands they had suffered the humiliation of being refused.
All jor relations have a hesitant, awkward start. The pattern is usually
the same: the boy is vehemently antipathetic to the girl on account of which he is suspended from the Ghotul for a few days during which the girl sleeps with another boy, but is given back to the first boy when he returns, repentant or not, to the Ghotul. When there is an outright refusal, and the girl is willing, she is paired off with another boy whose reluctance is not so conclusive. In the early phases of the jor relation then, the girl and boy are more likely to regard sleeping with one another as a duty to be discharged and little initiative is taken to develop the romantic potential inherent in the jor relation.

The partnership may carry on in this mildly antagonistic fashion for some time with each person adopting a hostile and defensive attitude towards the other. It may then gradually evolve into one resembling Malu and Malika's jor, and the couple may get assimilated, by and by, into the group of "maiya bitalor" or "those who love". However it is more likely that the partnership will dissolve and the boy and girl drift off to find more attractive partners in the Ghotul. There was no one known to me at the Manjapur Ghotul who had left it without having changed partners at least once, but in many cases, twice and thrice. It is extremely rare for a girl and boy to stick to the first jor they are given. There is a flux and realignment in the pattern of Ghotul jor, although this is not an institutional requirement of the kind described by Elwin for the non-'jodidar' type of Ghotul where it is prescribed that girls should circulate freely among all the boys and where no partnership is meant to last beyond a specified maximum period. (pages 333-351) In Manjapur, transfers of jor seem to have been determined solely by the wishes of one or both of the partners concerned, although it was usually within the girl's and not the boy's rights to set the process going whereby the change is brought about.

The boy who is singled out by a girl on her first day is one who is most handy, who fulfills certain practical conditions - such as being free from a liaison with a girl at the Ghotul, and whom the girl has reasons to suspect is less likely than others, to be averse to pairing with her. Of course the appeal of a boy also plays an important part in girls' first choices, and attributes of appearance, family wealth, and personality etc. are by no means neglected. But contrary to the beliefs entertained by the boys that girls sometimes enter the Ghotul in order to sleep with the boy
of their choice, or to pursue an ongoing romance, girls' naming of a boy on their first day is based primarily on their appreciation of structural processes and Ghotul protocol and has little to do with their true sentimental inclinations towards a member of the opposite sex. "Wishing to sleep with a boy" is a complete misrepresentation of girls' feelings and motives. For girls, the jor partnership is a formality, and being forced to give a name is an embarrassing ordeal that must be endured for the sake of gaining entry into the Ghotul. It is then less the unique and more the generic properties of the boys that girls are concerned with at first and with their instrumentality in ensuring them 'places' or dera within the Ghotul.

The assumption that it is girls' likes and dislikes that are all important to their existence within the Ghotul has therefore to be modified in the light of what has just been said. All the same the assumption does hold in the case of girls' second or third jor pairings which are brought about as the result of a positive and conscious process of selection in which the both the girls' and boys' sentiments predominate. It is common for girls, like Janki, to stand up and demand that they be given another place, i.e. a different boy. The complicity of the boy is essential to securing the change for if he is reluctant, there is little chance of the girl having her way. The fact that girls are less vulnerable after several weeks or months at the Ghotul than they are on their first day, and their increased self-confidence may be responsible for the sudden assertiveness with which they press their claim. The upshot of all this is that if the first jor is bland and indifferent, the second is less likely to be so. But a snapshot of Ghotul jor taken at any point in time is likely to reveal an equal distribution in the number of uneasy jor couples and those who are romantically involved with each other, for the simple reason that girls seldom enter the Ghotul alone; they wait to be part of a duo or trio of girls before they join. There is therefore a bunching of the kind of jor relationships at the two ends of the spectrum and a balancing in the numbers of 'good' and not so 'good' jor.

Before leaving the subject of jor relationships, perhaps it will be helpful to give an account of a relationship which is more typical and more ambivalent than the Malu-Malika one. The relationship between Janki
and Salki is perhaps as near to a 'typical' Ghotul relationship as it is possible to get. It brings out the strong element of half-serious, half-playful conflict which is a prominent feature of jor partnerships. Such jor pairings are neither the resented, arbitrary couplings of the early period, nor yet the 'love' relationships which can have such disastrous consequences.

Janki's relationship with Salki was undoubtedly based on mutual choice. Janki is the youngest sister of Tiri and therefore comes from a family which is remarkably intelligent and articulate. Janki's 'apprenticeship' in a 'bad' jor relationship did not last for long. Her subsequent choice for a partner fell on Salki, son of another rich man, Pele, in the village and another tough and outspoken individual of the younger group of Ghotul boys. This jor partnership was, so to speak, 'predestined' by factors such as similar social position and personal qualities, and was 'good' in terms of alliance in that there was no possibility of Salki and Janki actually getting married, as Janki was Salki's paternal aunt. But despite the quick establishment on a permanent basis of this jor relation, Salki and Janki were continually at odds with one another over minor matters and were always on opposite sides of the fence when infringements of Ghotul rules were being debated. There was a basic clash between Janki's role as defender of her female friends and her role as loyal jor to Salki, and similarly, Salki's solidarity with the boys (whose side he always took in the debates) precluded harmonious relations with Janki, however much he may have wished them. For instance, Janki once involved me in a complicated plot to hide Salki's dancing finery, as retaliation against him after he prevented her from going dancing for infringing Ghotul rules. When he discovered the dancing costume missing, Salki grilled Janki, Janki's mother and me, but got nowhere and he finally left without it. The jor relationship had a value, on both sides, quite distinct from the pleasure or pain it afforded the partners: it was a social necessity. It was not easy to tell what Janki actually thought about Salki, though she clearly admired him, but I gained more insight into the relationship during my second field trip when I had more chance to talk to her about it.
I had not seen Janki for two weeks after my return to the village. She was away working for wages (banni) at Becha, a village many hours walk from Manjapur. When she returned to Manjapur, I asked her whether she had missed going to the Manjapur Ghotul for the three weeks she had spent away. But from her reply I gathered that far from missing the company of their jor at Manjapur, she and the five other Ghotul girls who had accompanied her, had relished their independence and freedom from house chores and from the obligatory nightly attendance at the Ghotul. Becha has only a boys' dormitory, and the girls had slept at night in her cousin's house. They cooked their own food, and when we made a trip down to Becha had come across them fishing in the big river that runs through the village, and it was clear that they were having an enjoyable time.

One day, while we were discussing Malu and Malika, Janki suddenly said: "I know I'll get pregnant (nashamaina). It's not right to sleep with someone one likes at the Ghotul. I should never have gone to it in the first place. When Somaru (her elder brother) and Risi (her elder sister) used to force me to go I used to cry and say to them that they had such a big house and couldn't they give me a little room to sleep. After Risi got married, I started going to the Ghotul on my own. I wish I had not now. It will be so embarrassing to become pregnant."

On another occasion, Janki, Kila and I were engaged in gossip about Bani, a Manjapur girl who had become pregnant while at the Ghotul and had subsequently been married off to a man in Mahima Gwari and was very unhappy there. Bani had given birth to her illegitimate child only three weeks prior to the following conversation which is set out as I recorded it (by hand) shortly after it took place:

Kila: "Bani says she is going to kill the child".
Janki: "Why? Lahri (addressing me) what does it look like? Is it very ugly?"
Kila: "The little boy's naming ceremony has not been held yet". (The reason implied was that the husband was reluctant to bear the expenses of the ritual for the sake of an illegitimate child).
Janki: "But it's been so many days! How sad!"
Kila: "Bani's husband made a girl at the Mahima Gwari Ghotul pregnant. She had to be taken away (in marriage)."
Janki: "Bani should have run away with the boy from the Ulenga Ghotul whom she met on the dancing trip we all made there."
He was so handsome (sobtor)."

Janki: "It is said that four girls in Tadonar are pregnant this year - there couldn't be too many girls left in the Ghotul now. This is what happens when one goes to the Ghotul - pregnancy, and that too for no reason at all with an 'arro' boy (that is, a boy belonging to the same moiety and therefore not marriageable). I'm sure that's how I'll leave this village. By the time you (addressing me) come back I won't be here."

I pointed out to Janki that she had no fiance, and therefore there were no actual affines pressing her brothers to get her married to their son, and that therefore surely, the chances of her being married in the near future were dim. She said: "But it's by becoming pregnant that my marriage will come about. It's not so bad when one has already been engaged - at least then one knows to whom one is going. But in my case I'll be married off to anyone available, a madman (baihal) probably, and everyone will say she had a madman for a husband."

Janki's remarks recorded here reveal perhaps more truly than anything else, what is uppermost in the mind of the average Ghotul-going girl. The Ghotul affords much immediate pleasure and companionship - especially the dancing and travelling about to different villages - and for all this a satisfactory jor relationship is necessary. But at the same time there is always the background of fear, the fear of pregnancy and marriage. The Ghotul, by itself, cannot affect the fact that marriage is the eventual lot of the Ghotul girl, and that over-enthusiastic sexual attachments in the Ghotul far from representing freedom, are the most dangerous threat to it (see below). Janki wishes to be distant and circumspect in her association with her jor and with boys generally because behind every boy there stalks - a husband.

Ghotul pregnancies: nashamaina

Up to now the description of Ghotul society has proceeded along two parallel but opposed lines, viz. Ghotul theory and Ghotul practice. The extent of the hiatus between the ideal system of Ghotul rules and its conceptualization of jor relations, and the way in which these often turn out in practice is dramatically exposed by the occurrence of illegitimate
pregnancies. The problem of the role of the Ghotul and Ghotul participation as being responsible for illegitimate pregnancies is complicated by the notion that sleeping together and having sexual intercourse does not result in conception without the presence of an additional (and proscribed) factor: that of sentimental attraction between the boy and girl. (Muria conception beliefs are discussed in detail below). This safeguards the Ghotul as an institution from blame and places the responsibility solely and squarely on the girl and boy involved, while at the same time reinforcing the official Ghotul morality which does not give its stamp of approval either to romantic attachments or to sexual intercourse at all.

A Ghotul pregnancy is termed a nashamaina, a word that covers a variety of actions outside the Ghotul all of which are 'violations' of one kind or another: for example when a non-villager exploits the village resources for his or her own benefit by poaching in its forest or catching fish in its streams etc. Both the boy and girl are guilty of nashamaina and the illegitimate child is forever after spoken of as the nashamailey child, or the one issuing from a nashamaina.

Obviously pregnancies cannot be discussed as isolated phenomena. The entire issue is connected with one that is at the heart of the problem of the Ghotul in Muria society — namely, the extent to which sexual intercourse is really practised by couples within the Ghotul. I shall therefore first turn to a consideration of this aspect of jor relations.

There appears to have been little doubt in Elwin's mind that the Ghotul in general, and the jor relationship in particular, was a means to achieving sexual satisfaction. But although Elwin always cautioned against the error of regarding the Ghotul as therefore a place of "unbridled license and corrupted youth", and was at some pains to demonstrate that "the Ghotul ?was? regulated by exact and far-reaching laws which are very generally obeyed." (page 654) there is no escaping the general impression which he conveys in many passages of vivid description, perhaps somewhat overdone by modern standards, as well as by the stories, myths and anecdotes with which the book is liberally sprinkled, that the Ghotul permits, indeed encourages, sexual intercourse between boys and girls. The
The Muria has a simple, innocent and natural attitude to sex. In the Ghotul this is strengthened by the absence of any sense of guilt and the general freedom from external interference. The Muria believe that sexual congress is a good thing; it does you good, it is healthy and beautiful; when performed by the right people (such as a chelik and motiari who are not taboo to one another), at the right time (outside the menstrual period and avoiding forbidden days) and in the right place (within the Ghotul walls where no sin can be committed), it is the happiest and best thing in life ... This belief in sex as something good and normal gives the Muria a light touch. Nari's saying that the penis and vagina are hassi ki nat in a 'joking relationship' to each other, admirably puts the situation. Sex is great fun, it is the best of the Ghotul games it is the dance of the genitals; it is an ecstatic swinging in the arms of the beloved ... The very idea of a Platonic attachment is ridiculous. Young chelik and motiari?terms used by Elwin for Ghotul boy and girl respectively? may sleep together for a long time without congress, but consummation is the end and goal. "Thirst is not quenched by licking dew". (1947: 419)

Although I have no material that either refutes or confirms Elwin's faith in the "innocent and natural attitude to sex" of the Muria, my own researches do not bear out Elwin's assertions at all points. For Elwin, the Ghotul was nicely attuned to the psychological need of adolescent Murias for sexual fulfillment and in line with their general free and easy attitude towards sex. Elwin did not make the distinction between the theoretical, idealistic version of jor relations and their practical implications; and though he did note that what ought to take place sometimes did not, his concern is to demonstrate that this is so in an altogether opposite direction. Rather than the problem being one of sexual relationships existing in secret, and in defiance of Ghotul rules which do not condone them, Elwin's problem is that "the scope of sexual opportunity offered by the Ghotul" (page 433) is sometimes not utilized by Ghotul members to maximum advantage:
"Contrary to what the Peeping Tom supposes, the real difficulty of Ghotul life is not an excess of libido, but a deficiency that might well wreck it. In any one Ghotul the boys and girls have lived together all their lives and their capacity for erethistic excitement is naturally dulled ... But the Muria have the wit to put this fact to the best of uses and yet preserve their psychic capacity for sexual happiness. The calm level of affection which they achieve while yet in their teens, expresses itself in the wonderful harmony and fellowship of the best Ghotul, the general diffused affection which leaves no room for jealousy and possessiveness. As anyone who has stayed for a time in a good Ghotul must notice, the boys and girls form a compact, loyal, friendly little republic; they are evidently very fond of each other, there is a large, generous, corporate romance uniting them ... But ideal as it may sound, such a situation has its dangers. A diffused affection does not promote sexual potency. And Muria, and all aboriginal tradition, sets little value on unconsummated love ... The Ghotul routine might have been planned by some great erotic genius, so admirably is it devised to ensure tumescence whenever that may be desired. So apt is the Ghotul method, so finely adapted to its purpose, so stimulating and tonic is its effect that were it possible to send jaded husbands and wives away from civilization for treatment to the Muria, I do not believe one of them would return unchased ... The routine of a Ghotul evening is a carefully devised preparation for intercourse, a tonic to deficient libido. First of all, the sense of touch is vividly stimulated by the combing and massaging ... Beginning with great vigour, almost rough, it grows gentler and gentler until at last the girl's hands are moving caressingly, tenderly over the arms and bodies of their boys, rousing affection and stirring with every gesture new desire ..." (pages 430-432)

Now it would appear that the Murias of Manjapur have, to say the least, very little in common with Elwin's Murias. While Elwin's subjects appear to hold forth quite readily on the subject of sex and think nothing of giving vivid and imaginative accounts of their own sexual experiences (see especially pages 431-437), the Manjapur Murias, both male and female, maintain an abashed and oppressive silence on the subject of sex. This may have to do with Elwin's style as a fieldworker and the assiduousness with which he pursued such information, while my own moral scruples regarding the intrinsic delicacy of the topic of sex, and informants' rights to privacy on it, held me back from probing too far. Of all my informants at the Ghotul, only three, namely Malu, Malika and Janki, gave me straightforward information on sexual matters, and this was invariably
imparted in the strictest confidence, with an aura of secrecy and exclusiveness surrounding the particular verbal exchange, and not without their becoming visibly uncomfortable in having to talk about it. Of course the Muria, especially older men and women do crack jokes about sex, but these jokes are not common, and they are about incongruous sexual partnerships (for example, between an old woman and a young boy), and not about the subject of sex as such. The language that is used to discuss sexual functions is always metaphorical or euphemistic. For example, sexual intercourse is spoken of, by men, as "haukna" or being 'killed' by a woman, and women refer to it in a more roundabout way by saying that it is sleeping the "husband-wife way" (ar-koytor lehka gurna), or more indirectly as being "touched" by a man (kai-kal boyna), which however leaves doubts as to whether the act was consummated or not. There is a common enough word for sexual intercourse - "getna" - but this word is used during aggressive speech, for example when a man was cursing his sister he exclaimed: "duval getsoar mandu" or "while she was screwing the tiger". On the whole, the vocabulary for sexual organs is extremely sparse, and although it would be foolhardy to insist that it is non-existent, the knowledge of it is denied by the average Muria man and woman. I remember the difficulty I had in trying to obtain the word for penis from a married woman who was well known to me. Pointing to her little son's penis I asked her what it was called. She said to me, quite incredibly that it was referred to as "where the urine comes from". I made it quite clear that what I was asking for was the term for the specific organ, and not what function it served, but I was unsuccessful in getting the correct response from her. She convinced me that there was no such word, although of course I found out later that this was not so.

One encounters the same obstinacy in refusing to talk about sex in a direct way when investigating the facts that are known about sexual intercourse, and this even with old women who can be expected to be less shy than younger ones. The phrase linga arinta is a blanket term covering all aspects of sexual intercourse, erection, ejaculation, penetration etc. The word 'linga' one may surmise is connected to the Sanskrit "lingun" which is the sexual organ of Shiva. The fact that it is not the word used in ordinary contexts for penis (bonda) suggests that it has a mystical component and that the whole process is seen in some mysterious, mystical
light which sets further barriers in the way of frank discussion.

All this is very different from what Elwin holds to be true of his Murias. Thus despite opening the section on "The anatomy and mythology of sex" (page 442) with the regret that the "Muria seem to have a rather sketchy knowledge of the sexual organs and their functions", he goes on to surprise us by the exhaustiveness of their vocabulary: there are "half a dozen words for the penis, three or four words for the vagina", words for the labia majora, urethra and clitoris, for orgasm, several expressions for "vagina is itching" and "penis is quivering". Elwin also lists in the same section some sexual riddles which he is convinced show "how direct and forthright are the Muria's references to the genitals and sexual intercourse". He is right in that the riddles are remarkably evocative and risque but wrong perhaps, in attributing them to the Muria. This is suggested by the fact that all, except one, of the riddles given by Elwin are in the Halbi language, and not in Gondi, and therefore may have originated in Halbi speaking groups in Bastar, such as the Maraar, Ryot and Halba, whose cultural traditions are distinct from the Muria despite their physical proximity to them.

Elwin therefore regarded the Ghotul as a place of licensed pre-marital sex, an idea which was consistent, and which he himself placed within the overall context of the disarming innocence and purity of Muria notions about sex. The discussion of Elwin's theory on the Ghotul is not out of place here, as one of the aims of this thesis is to provide a corrective perspective on the cultural interpretation of the Ghotul to the ecstatic account rendered by Elwin. The Murias of Manjapur viewed sex in a serious light and had strong inhibitions about it; in fact it would almost seem that the presence of an institution such as the Ghotul, with its peculiar mixture of restraint and freedom in the relations between the sexes, would foster, rather than relax and break down the Muria reserve on discussion about the subject. As is the case in many societies, Muria concepts about sexual relations are intertwined with those of authority, and with a sharp appreciation of what is permitted and what is not; the Ghotul, very far from being a utopian dream land where nothing is denied, places very exacting demands on individuals that give rise to mental conflicts and social confrontations. Sex in the Ghotul may be "good fun" but it has
consequences, namely pregnancies, which are serious for the persons concerned.

There is some reason to suspect that sex is a bone of contention between jor couples. Defloration, or the loss of virginity is not a necessary and inherent part of Ghotul initiation or routine in the minds of the girls who attend it. Janki, who changed her jor within one week of attending the Ghotul, revealed to me that she felt "scared" of him because she felt that he had attempted to "touch" her at night. Similarly she told me of another change that had been instigated at the request of her friend sleeping with Iti, for the very same reasons - but this was after one year of the couple 'sleeping' together regularly at the Ghotul, and moreover despite the couple being included by Janki in the "maiya-bitalor" category, or those who "loved" one another. I do not have any data on the frequency of intercourse, but there is enough in what my informants told me, to indicate that either it does not take place at all, or is uncommon and resisted by girls during the first stages of their Ghotul career. Janki declared that it was only the couples who feel love, the maiya-bitalor, who may sneakily indulge in sexual intercourse, but the others did not. Sex is regarded as a by-product of love and sentiment and not vice versa. As has already been explained, girls' first partnerships are unstable for the reason that they are not imbued with sentiment and are fraught with problems owing to the circumstances in which they are initiated. This fact, along with another, namely, that girls' cooperation is essential to sexual intercourse, make it seem unlikely that an initiation into sexual relationships takes place automatically with initiation into the Ghotul. Sex gradually, if at all, becomes a factor in jor pairings as couples form strong attachments to one another; it is certainly suppressed for the first few months or even years of Ghotul attendance, depending on the temperaments of the girl and boy.

The idea that love entanglements lead to copulation and consequent pregnancies does not conflict with the Ghotul demand that girls have a jor while they remain there. Essentially, the position is as follows: the boy jor is considered responsible for his own and his jor's good behaviour which, in official theory, precludes either of them having sexual relations with one another or with anybody else. The jor relationship is
to this extent a device to prevent pregnancies, rather than encourage them. Sexual relations, if they do take place between jor, do so outside the Ghotul (a crowded Ghotul provides no privacy whatsoever and is no place to consummate an affair, even if the preliminaries to seduction may be accomplished there) and are entirely unsanctioned according to Ghotul rules. However, it is recognized that jor partners are prone to become attached to one another, and the risk of pregnancy increases because individual initiative and publicly approved sleeping arrangements coincide. Circumstances favour the development of erotic relations between Ghotul jor despite the fact that the official rationale for the jor relation is to ensure that girls are put in charge of particular boys. The 'official' view of the jor relation stops short at the concepts of 'dera' or giving 'place' to a girl on her arrival at the Ghotul, for the purposes of "sleeping". The Ghotul as a whole has the responsibility for preventing too many love-affairs but it is regarded as an inevitable risk that some will develop. Pregnancy in the Ghotul is only thought likely to occur as a result of the development of these love relationships, which cannot be entirely guarded against as they are conducted in relative privacy and secrecy by the boys and girls concerned.

At this point it is necessary to consider Muria conception beliefs. When discussing conception, Muria women usually begin by setting up an opposition between married women, who become pregnant, and unmarried girls, who do not. The fact that women equate pregnancies with a married status reflects value judgements which affirm what has already been said about the injunction against sexual intercourse and pregnancies within the Ghotul. But the before-marriage/after-marriage contrast also enables women to communicate the idea that the bodies of women in these two conditions are in one respect fundamentally different. While the natural physiological rhythm of girls' bodies consists in the occurrence of menstruation regularly on a monthly basis, the tempo of married women's bodies is set by the opposite condition, that is, the absence of menstruation which points to a pregnancy. That is to say, it is normal for unmarried girls to menstruate regularly, but it would be abnormal for a married woman to do so; and indeed in the natural way of things a married woman at the height of her child-bearing career may go for years on end without menstruating more than a couple of times. A married woman who
regularly menstruates, is, in a sense 'cheating'; for an unmarried girl the opposite is true. Of course, there is an element of wish-fulfillment in this category opposition: most married Muria women would like to be pregnant more often than actually occurs, and many an unmarried girl has become pregnant without wanting to, but nonetheless, pregnancy and the married state, menstruation and the unmarried state, are categorically linked in the Muria mind.

The difference between married and unmarried women is believed to be in the constitutional, as well as psychological predisposition towards the giving of birth to children, and not in the existence of a foetus in the womb. All women, once they are mature are considered to have inside their bodies a child and are therefore in a state of permanent pregnancy. Our language is inadequate for expressing this remarkable idea, as the Muria do not distinguish between the infant child and the foetus. When I cracked open an egg and asked for the word for yolk, women said that it was "pila" - the commonest term for 'child'. Likewise it is a child that exists at some unspecified internal part of women's bodies despite its featureless, formless state. When old women were discussing in front of me the childless condition of a young married woman, they said that it was inside her all right, but that it was being denied arms and legs with which to make its way out. Women do not discuss conception as such, but birth, and the growth of women's bellies is indicative of the growth of the pre-existent child and not the presence of one.

Muria conception beliefs can only be described as mystical. They do not acknowledge the contribution of substances from the mother's or father's body to the formation of the foetus. It is there already, although Murias profess complete ignorance as to how that came about and believe that it is only correct for people to remain in the dark about something which is the special province of the highest God (Bhagwan). The standard reply given to any query about conception is: "Who knows! God gives it." (Bhagwan hinta) Such statements should not be taken as mere formal expressions of faith in the omnipotence of God or as the verbal window-dressing of Muria piety. Such statements accurately express what all Murias believe - men and women copulate and that is all; the creation and formation of life in the womb is part of the mysterious doings of the supreme God.
Married women's role in nurturing the child or foetus, enabling it to grow and develop inside themselves is the same as their socially allotted role of rearing children. They stop menstruating, their vulva (tora) closes, and their bodies fill out in proportion to the development of the child. In contrast, unmarried women continue menstruating and for this process women have slightly more elaborate and explicit ideas than they have for explaining birth. Girls attending the Ghotul are commonly referred to as dinda laiya. Dinda pertains to the coagulation of rice water after it has been added to thicken a lentil or vegetable soup - a regular Muria cooking procedure. In its plural form of dindang this word refers to the small lumps that are formed when rice powder is added to a boiling liquid. Just before menstruation the blood inside a girl's uterus (kunday) resembles that of liquid which has thickened and clotted but which is nonetheless loose, unstable and labile. Women say that their bodies become heavy with blood and that it eventually 'leaks' (potata) out, but that once the blood leaves, the body becomes light, clean and cold. Painful periods are caused by the scraping or "combing" (kora kiyana) of women's uterus by some outside agency and at this point one again hears mention of Bhagwan (God).

Exactly how the transition occurs between a dinda laiya, a young girl who menstruates, and a married woman, who gets pregnant instead, is not a matter about which the Muria speculate in a very direct or mechanical way; instead their thoughts on these matters revolve around certain ideas of a metaphorical kind. Copulation as such is not the crucial factor, since girls are not likely to be virgins at the time of their marriages, nor given the unstable start to many Muria marriages (discussed in the next chapter) are sexual relations very regular immediately thereafter. The idea one gets is of a gradual maturation process: young girls are "raw"/"unripe" (kaya) versus married women who are "cooked"/"ripe" (pandi); girls after their periods are "cold" whereas pregnancy, birth and menstrual bleeding are "hot". A girl is spoken of as a flower (pungar) which "drops" (arta) during menstruation or ripens and becomes a fruit during pregnancy.

Muria theories of conception postulate a linkage between emotional states and conception. Accordingly, sentimental attachment between a man
and a woman is seen to be a pre-condition to the conception of a child, and ipso facto, girls who become pregnant within the Ghotul are those who "love" their partners. Women conceive only when the sentimental factor is conducive to a pregnancy: happily married women, and women in love produce many children and correlative, an infertile marriage points to a basic disharmony in emotional relations between a man and a woman. This idea is an expression of attitudes towards the feminine character and life situation, and it spells out at the same time the moral and social implications of pregnancy to the Muria. One of the by-products of the association of sentiment and pregnancy is the suspicion that women only become pregnant when they themselves desire to do so, and that they are somehow in control of their physiology in this respect. It is a suspicion entertained by men and older women in whose interest it is that their wives and daughters-in-law should start producing offspring as soon as possible. Nonetheless the fatalism with which young girls discussed the chances of themselves becoming pregnant in the Ghotul shows that for them it is a case of having all too little power to influence or combat the outcome of their close relationships with boys.

The particular complex of ideas can be traced to the practical consequences that motherhood has for Muria women, as well as to Muria notions about the aggressive, calculating and basically independent character of women. When a woman becomes a mother she becomes firmly tied to the husband and his extended family group. Mothers cannot leave their husbands to marry other men even if they should so desire, as this would entail their abandoning their children. Muria women have no independent jural status; children are the 'property' of the husband to whom they owe their own jural statuses. One married woman known to us lamented the fact that she was a mother of two little children, as this effectively cut her off from contemplating escape to another husband. Although she had a fairly compatible relationship with her husband, she felt harassed by his mother and father. She said that she would have left long ago were it not for the fact that she had heard it said that grave misfortune befell the mother who left her children (dukh putinta). Once a woman becomes a mother she is 'rooted' to her husband's home. In fact, metaphorically children are spoken of as being the roots of the home. Motherhood therefore implies the domestication of women, but the Muria stereotype of femininity depicts
women as wanton and restless individuals who move freely from place to place and who resist taking on the responsibilities of house and family for as long as possible. Pregnancies within marriage are therefore "good" and morally commendable.

The consequence of the idea that women do what they want to do, and may not be made to undergo anything contrary to their inclinations is that the occurrence of illegitimate pregnancies within the Ghotul is not entirely accidental but also self-willed. Because of the pregnancy = domesticity equation, Ghotul pregnancies are particularly outrageous, as the conclusion to be drawn is that the girl had wished for the consequences of normal pregnancies to be attendant to her pregnancy as well, and that the girl and boy have behaved towards one another as if they were husband and wife.

Such ideas as these we may call the emotional pre-conditions of pregnancy. There is no doubt that the Muria maintain a generalized linkage between the moral and sentimental context of pregnancy and the pregnancy itself. But it would be going too far to assert that the linkage is a simple matter of cause and effect. The Muria do not think in terms of a simple cause and effect model, quite justifiably because in reality pregnancies at the Ghotul or outside it do not occur with anything like clockwork regularity. Nonetheless, returning to the question of the Ghotul and the quite conscious fears that girls entertain of emotional attachments which are regarded as 'necessary but not sufficient' causes of socially disastrous pre-marital pregnancies, one can easily see that this association between sentiment and pregnancy has a clear rational basis.

Girls who become pregnant are thrown out of the Ghotul and can never enter it again although their male jor may continue going to the Ghotul for several years after the event. A pregnant girl is supposed to report the matter to the Ghotul boys who in turn inform the girl's father and other village siyan. Girls usually delay revealing the fact of their pregnancy until its physical manifestations make the condition evident, and so a girl may sometimes spend the first three months sleeping daily at the Ghotul - and some continue for much longer to be regular Ghotul goers. There is no taboo against sexual intercourse during pregnancy (like there
is during a girl's periods), and it is generally suspected that the couple have intercourse in the jungle after the girl is barred from attending the Ghotul.

For girls the consequences of a Ghotul pregnancy are disastrous: not only does a pregnancy bring their Ghotul careers to a dramatic end, but it also precipitates their marriages. When girls are normally not supposed to be sleeping in their natal homes, it is extremely unlikely that they would be given license to deliver their illegitimately conceived babies there. In fact the anomalousness of an unmarried daughter's giving birth to her child at her parent's house is acutely felt. It is a categorical fact with the Muria that the child born to a daughter cannot be affiliated with the ancestors of the natal house but must be absorbed into the ancestral body of a saga or affine's house. It is imperative therefore that the girl be married off as soon as possible. A girl's marriage may take place in sometimes less than a week's time (although sometimes, especially when there are fears about the girl's physical condition she is 'allowed' to deliver the baby at her parent's home and is married off only after the event). The normal course is for a husband to be hurriedly found for the girl - he may be the person already engaged to her whose parents have feasted the girl's parents at mahalas, or he may be someone found by word of mouth at the local market. The previously engaged girl is in a relatively happier position to one who is not. Then one can usually assume that the boy's suitability has been confirmed by some conscious process of selection on the part of the girl's parents, while in the latter case there are more chances of any considerations of the boy's eligibility being waived in favour of two conditions which suffice to qualify him as the girl's husband viz. that he be a saga and willing to get married at such short notice.

I estimated that Bani had been attending the Ghotul for about five years (at least) before she became pregnant. Her jor, Akku, was a boy belonging to her father's clan and marriage was therefore automatically ruled out. Bani's father spared her but he, and some of his lineage men from the powerful Patel 'lineage' apprehended Akku and beat him up. (Akku belonged to the rival Gaita Korami lineage). Bani had been more or
engaged to her mother's brother's son, but her mother's brother had shown no interest in hosting *mahala* feasts recently. It was generally understood that he had 'deserted' (*virchna*) Bani and no one tried to contact him, living as he did in a very distant village, during the search for a husband for Bani.

Bani's elder sister had been married to her FZHBS in Mahima Gwari and it was through her contact that Bani was eventually taken by her parents to the house of a relative of this affine, also in Mahima Gwari, and married there. She gave birth to a little boy at his house, but when I saw her a few days later she had appeared wretched and unhappy. Her husband had a taciturn temperament and was totally uninterested in his newly (and cheaply) acquired wife. Bani accused him of abusing her and his family of maltreating her in every way. She claimed that she was not given enough food and that after the birth (when the mother is confined to the house and therefore dependent on other women to bring her water and food and help her wash) Bani said she had been entirely neglected.

The indifference of her husband and his family towards Bani was confirmed by his failure to turn up at her parent's house to escort her back to Mahima Gwari, which is the customary duty of husbands. Bani had gone on a visit to Manjapur and she had spent an embarrassingly long time awaiting him there. All this was causing her parents a lot of concern as they had to insist that she leave their house soon as she had already been a long time (about a month) there. Bani's mother told me that she had been approached by the same family many years ago for the sake of engaging Bani to their son, but she had turned them down. It was Bani's misfortune, she said, to have got pregnant at the Ghotul. During a harangue directed at her son-in-law and her saga, Bani's mother accused them of having sorcerized (*leskiyana*) Bani into becoming pregnant as they had everything to gain from that. They had done magic and "wished Bani to want to go to them" (*tan vay-vay vasler kitor*) and it was this wish which had been responsible for Bani's becoming pregnant at the Ghotul after so many years. In this way Bani's mother expressed the general opinion that women's fortunes and misfortunes are self-determined, although this self-determinism takes place at a deep and unconscious level which can be manipulated by others through sorcery.
Having discussed the context of illegitimate pregnancies we must now turn to the problem of the frequency with which they occur. It is difficult to gain any accurate statistical information on this subject; there is a general conspiracy of silence which is hard to overcome. Wives, husbands and parents will not reveal the truth unless they have been pressed into doing so. It was only after I had been a year in the village that I learnt from a family I visited daily that the elder brother's first wife had been pregnant from the Ghotul. This was after I had come up with negative replies to my queries on the subject several times before. The presence or absence of illegitimate children in the village cannot be used as a measure of the rate of illegitimate pregnancies as there is evidence of parental neglect towards them, with the result that only a minority of them survive to infancy and beyond. In Manjapur there were only two known illegitimate children, one a boy of eleven and another of five years of age, whereas of the four women married to men in Manjapur during the field-work year, three were pregnant at the time of their marriage. Illegitimate children are adopted by the girl's husband but they suffer discrimination and are made to take on the major brunt of work normally assigned to little children.

Another impediment to computing pregnancy frequencies is that it is not possible to relate even the known instances to duration of stay at the Ghotul, which is in turn dependent upon a) the age of entry into the Ghotul, b) the engaged or not-engaged status of the girl and the desire of the parents on both sides to call the wedding. Unless all these factors are known, it is not possible to estimate what the chances of any one girl getting illegitimately pregnant are likely to be.

Verrier Elwin put the statistical frequency at four per cent after eighty men out of his total sample of two thousand men admitted to having caused a Ghotul pregnancy (page 463). This figure is interesting as it would seem to indicate that sexual intercourse is not as extensively practised as Elwin believed, especially since he was not convinced that Muria contraceptive techniques, if they were used at all, had any "physiological properties" (page 461). Elwin describes certain ideas regarding contraception held by the Muria, but I do not have any corroborative information. Elwin asserts that the Muria believe that
frequent changes in partners reduce the chances of pregnancy and that "the most favourable time for conception is immediately after the catamenial period" which, in some Ghotuls, is taken seriously enough to be made into a rule so that it is only seven or eight days after menstruation that girls are allowed back into the Ghotul. Elwin dismissed the belief about sexual promiscuity as being inversely related to pregnancy after discovering that statistically there was no reduction in the pregnancy rate between the two kinds of Ghotul - the jodidar type, like Manjapur, and the other kind of Ghotul where partner changes were enforced and a special, systematic effort was made to make girls circulate around the Ghotul. I am fairly certain that the Manjapur Ghotul girls and boys did not practise any contraceptive techniques; the only 'device' known to them was the extremely risky one of hiring a shaman to pledge a gift to the gods if they used their powers to prevent the jor from becoming pregnant. As this entailed seeking a village shaman (and siyan) to go into trance, and as the neutrality of the shaman could never be taken for granted, it is only the very desperate ones who volunteer to undertake such a course of action. I was asked by Malu once, to supply him with birth control medicine, but was never approached by any of the girls for this purpose.

One does not need precise statistical information to show that Ghotul pregnancies do not occur at the rate expected if it is held that Ghotul couples have sexual intercourse with the same regularity as married couples. If this were the case then sending a daughter or sister to the Ghotul would be synonymous with having her made pregnant, and this inevitability would have to form the central and crucial part of any analysis of the Ghotul in Muria society. As it is, I believe that Ghotul pregnancies are rare on account of the fact that sexual intercourse is rare. The time factor also operates in many cases to prevent a pregnancy from taking place. It is certainly true that the longer a girl stays at the Ghotul the more her chances of conceiving increase. But this must be seen against the fact that so-called 'sexual' partnerships (and it is with extreme caution that one must define them thus) develop only after a varying length of stay at the Ghotul, and that this potentially 'fertile' time is reduced by the phenomenon of affinal interest in the girl and their putting increasing pressure on her parents to marry her off, as well as a certain anxiety on the part of the girl's parents to see her
honourably leave their home, and give her to their saga. One father voiced his anxiety over his daughter's unnaturally long stay at the Ghotul by saying that he had informed his saga that they were welcome to take her, and that if they delayed for much longer he should not be held responsible for any mishap, such as a Ghotul pregnancy or elopement, that might occur. This father was in the awkward position of being willing to give up his daughter but having to bide his time until his saga could drum up the food reserves necessary for celebrating a wedding. When I discussed Bani's case with other people in the village a few said that Bani and her parents had got what they deserved: it was their high-and-mighty attitude that had stood in the way of getting her engaged to their saga when the latter had come asking, so what else could they have thought would happen by Bani's remaining on in the village except that Bani would get pregnant at the Ghotul? They could not have it both ways - Bani could not stay on indefinitely at her parent's home and the village Ghotul without their having to suffer eventually the consequences of their selfish desire not to part with her. For sentimental and practical reasons parents wish to keep their daughters at the Ghotul for as long as possible, but they have also to keep in mind the risks of pregnancy involved. There is a justifiably conscious wariness on the whole topic of pregnancies by parents whose daughters are attending the Ghotul and it was with quite distinct relief that a woman told me that all her daughters had been married off and so now she need have no worry on that score.
10. THE GHOTUL AND MARRIAGE

The previous chapter has concentrated on the Ghotul as a functioning institution, largely from the point of view of its members. In this, my last substantive chapter, I want to consider once again the relationship between the Ghotul and wider aspects of Muria society, notably the mahala (betrothal) system and marriage arrangements. This relationship is a very problematic one. For many, perhaps even most Murias, the most traumatic period of 'crisis' they ever experience coincides with their exit from the Ghotul and derives from the clash between their activities, sentiments and emotional attachments, forged in the Ghotul context, and those required of them by their parents and kinsfolk and connected with marriage alliance.

This is particularly so where girls are concerned. One way or the other, their departure from the Ghotul will mean becoming a subordinate member of a partially or wholly unfamiliar household and the assumption of a completely new status requiring the fulfillment of a new set of demands. For boys, marriage is less drastic an affair, but nonetheless a life-crisis. It is no wonder, therefore, that while still in the Ghotul, young adults make attempts, not so much to stave off destiny in the form of marriage - since marriage is not itself undesirable after a certain number of years in the Ghotul - as to ensure that marriage, when it comes, is of their own choosing. Of course, no marriage is possible except in the light of the social factors which make a match legitimate and acceptable both to the senior members of the families immediately involved and to village opinion in general. This is as true where marriages precipitated by elopements from the Ghotul are concerned as it is for marriages which have been preceded by expensive mahala feasts, given over many years. Elopements, if they are to succeed, must be strategically sound, and conform with the prevailing legalities of saga relationships and with the 'political' factors of the village, since eventually any such love-match must come before the bhumkal for arbitration. In this chapter I will examine the factors which sometimes make it possible for Ghotul girls and boys to convert a jor relationship into an acceptable marriage. But more
frequently the attempt fails and the established system proves stronger than the efforts of Ghotul lovers to undermine it. I describe two contrasted case histories below. But before going on to this, it is necessary to examine the way in which alliance relationships between component clan segments in the village are reflected within the Ghotul. By joining the Ghotul, laiyor and laiya do not lose their clan identities, nor can they act as if saga relationships between clans, or mahala arrangements between particular families simply did not exist. These factors are reflected in the classification of jor pairings into arta (‘good’) and arro (‘bad’) types; and in a strict prohibition on boys and girls who are the subjects of a pre-existing mahala (betrothal) arrangement, becoming jor in the Ghotul.

Having examined the interaction between the jor system in the Ghotul and the marriage system outside it, this chapter will conclude by taking up the problem of just why the Muria permit these two systems to exist side by side when one seems to have such a 'subversive' effect upon the other. I will argue that the cultural context of Hinduism, and in particular the quintessentially Indian conception of 'secondary marriage' may be responsible for the conversion of the single-sex (males only) Ghotul of the 'tribal' Hill Maria into the mixed-sex Ghotul found in the Bastar lowlands, where the Muria live cheek-by-jowl with Hindu groups practicing secondary (pre-puberty) marriage. I must stress the tentative nature of the argument in this final section, which has the effect of making the jor relationship an attenuated version of marriage itself, when the whole thrust of the argument so far has been to contrast these two as sharply as possible. But 'marriage' is a complex, many-faceted, idea, as Leach (1961) long ago demonstrated. What makes the jor system 'like' marriage, is that it involves the 'control of female sexuality', not that it has political or alliance implications comparable to primary marriage. But it seems desirable, in bringing this account of the Ghotul to a conclusion, to at least suggest the possible reasons behind the switch-over from the single-sex (Maria) Ghotul to the heterosexual Muria Ghotul. I have therefore opted to conclude my account of 'the Ghotul in Muria society' with some analysis along these lines, speculative though they necessarily are.
Jor versus Mahala: Sentiment vs Structure

The reason for summarizing the opposition between the Ghotul jor partnership and marriage as an opposition of structure and sentiment is one suggested by the people themselves, who go to great lengths to emphasize that Ghotul jor choices are based purely on sentiment and are voluntary, whereas the decision to marry someone is usually involuntary but necessary all the same. The fact that girls are made to instigate partnerships reinforces the categorical separation of the Ghotul from the system of marriage since women are never formally incorporated into the social groupings of men, either of their parents, their spouses, or their sons. Finally the urge to remove the Ghotul jor relationship as much as possible from the husband-wife one is evident from the fact that off all the partnerships that are possible at the Ghotul, the one between a girl and boy who have been betrothed to one another (and between full siblings) is not, and that these two are likely to practise a vigorous avoidance of one another throughout their co-existence at the Ghotul. Of the nine girls attending the Ghotul in 1978 three were betrothed to boys at the Ghotul (with whom they never slept). In the last chapter I mentioned the difficulty that Hallami or Gota boys and girls (the case of Maina and Alosa respectively) had in finding jor. The demographic minority of their moiety in the village rendered it a strong possibility that their jor would have to be chosen not from amongst themselves but from the opposite moiety and therefore be "correct" in terms of marriage, but "wrong" in terms of the rules of propriety obtaining within the Ghotul. These rules state that it is highly immodest for a couple to sleep with one another knowing that they are going to be married in the near future, but even when the couple are not betrothed but stand in the correct clan relationship to one another for marriage, a jor relationship between them is said to be more embarrassing than that between a girl and boy who are classificatory siblings and between whom there is no possibility of marriage. There is thus a tendency to confine the Ghotul partnership to the Ghotul and to prevent it from "interfering" with the institution of marriage which is strictly the domain of siyan and adults generally. But if this is a genuine attempt at segregation of the jor and marriage - and one must assume it to be - it is doomed to failure on account of the jor being, by definition, the most compatible cross-sexual relationship, which is bound to resist
termination at marriage.

The segregation is never effectively accomplished and the merging of the 'marriage' frame of reference and the 'jor' frame of reference persists. For example a jor partnership between members of the same moiety is spoken of as an arro (bad) one and that between members of opposite moieties as arta (right) so that at one level the standards appertaining to the marriage system are applied to evaluate the correctness or otherwise of Ghotul partnerships. During our first fieldwork there was only one jor which was arta and the then Ghotul Patel rather apologetically explained to me that it was because there had been no other arta possibilities to choose from. Demographic factors must constrain the choices of possible arta or arro partners, but in the absence of a detailed demographic study that takes into account the ages of entry by girls into the Ghotul and the ages at which boys are allotted partners it is impossible to predict the statistical probability of arta or arro choices. Certainly the Manjapur Ghotul would appear to be atypical in the high proportion of its arro jor as compared to the Ghotuls of Besemeta, Bargaon and Mahima Gwari which I surveyed for the purpose. The Manjapur girls and boys steadfastly maintained that they resisted arta partnerships because these were personally embarrassing but I suspect that individuals do perceive the advantage of having arta jor with whom they could be married, and shrewdly exploit the dual system of values to negotiate correct partnerships for themselves when faced with an equal number of arta or arro possible choices. One also encounters here the problem of the influence of Hindu values according to which the Ghotul jor is a kind of secondary marriage (see below). This perhaps explains the shifting between two frames of reference that one observes in informants who say, on the one hand, that one should refrain from selecting maritally eligible jor, and who then classify the ones selected on the basis of such criteria as 'bad' ones all the same.

The arta vs. arro classification with respect to Ghotul jor relations is not solely determined by clanship, since it is also theoretically 'incorrect' that jor relationships should exist between individuals in the wrong generational category: one Manjapur Ghotul boy's jor was a classificatory bachi (daughter-in-law). This was considered less than
ideal, as were relationships between classificatory 'father's sisters'/'brother's son' which also might occur. When asked to name the precise kinship relationships existing between themselves and the Ghotul girls, Manjapur Ghotul boys tended to lump all same-generation non-saga girl
together under the rubric 'bai' a term borrowed from Halbi, which has the convenient property of neutralising the saga/dadabhai opposition, since although it has the literal meaning 'sister' in Halbi, it also has vague marital implications since it is used in Halbi as a term of address for potentially marriagable, non-related women (i.e. it is used after the fashion of Indo-European North Indian kinship terminology, which does not make the kin versus allies bifurcation in the way that Dravidian terminology does). Bai is not used outside the Ghotul except for women who are not closely related, e.g. from other castes, being replaced by didi/helar, terms which unequivocally connote unmarrigability and seniority/juniority. A 'correct' (arta) jor must fall into the kovna (literally, 'joking') category of female cross-cousins, for whom there are no kinship terms as such, other than the set meaning wife/elder brother's wife (ar/ange) only the latter term being actually used. Most female cross-cousins were simply classified as 'joking relatives' (kovna) or 'friends' (sangi). But it is very rare to hear kinship terms of any kind in use in the Ghotul, especially as terms of address. No boys referred to or addressed girls in this way or vice versa, using Ghotul names exclusively, and the only instances I heard of kinship terms being employed involved very junior boys referring to their older male siblings. In general, the linguistic etiquette of the Ghotul seems designed to obviate implications of kinship and marriage as much as possible.

Elopement (vitna)

Within the Ghotul, therefore, there is little which directly reflects the marriage alliance system beyond it, except the negative prohibition against jor partners being also mahala partners. In Manjapur, all but one of the jor pairings were between individuals who could not marry under any circumstances. This, as was noted, could be interpreted as 'bad' in the sense that the pairings were arro in moiety-terms, but 'good' in the sense that the jor-pattern in the Ghotul could not result in elopements which would present a challenge to the arranged marriages of Ghotul members.
Nonetheless, one arta (correct) jor relationship extant while I was in the field did result in an elopement (case 2, below). It is a general complaint against the Ghotul boys that they 'teach' (karihana) the girls to be disobedient and to run away, so the prevalence of arro jor pairings may indeed be a policy to prevent this. But if so, it is a policy which is not very systematically applied, and which does seem to be very prevalent in other Ghotuls. Since the re-arrangement of jor pairings is something which can be brought about voluntarily by the boys and girls concerned, the sanctions the Ghotul can bring to bear on couples who have a mind to become jor to one another and subsequently run away are limited. In this section I will examine two contrasted cases of running-away (vitana) from the Ghotul, before going into the general factors which can, on occasion, make this a successful marital strategy. The first case is that of an 'arro' couple. This incident has all the features of a romantic drama. What is perhaps most puzzling about it is why the boy and girl concerned should have acted as they did, given the extraordinary unlikelihood of their being able to defy custom and marry (they were close patrilineal parallel cousins). It must be said that young Muria are capable of acting in highly irrational ways under the impulse of strong emotions, but also, more importantly, that it is built into Muria cultural attitudes that there is always a possibility of 'escape'. This takes two forms, firstly 'running' (vitana) which is the imagined solution (not usually very well worked out) to all problems with 'authority', and secondly suicide, which is not uncommon among young Muria, though not usually in connection with love-entanglements. There was certainly an element of gratuitous defiance in the behaviour of Nasia and Umra, a complete lack of foresight or rational planning, which makes one think that the adventure itself was what was uppermost in the minds of the young people, not its likely consequences. In other words 'escape' becomes an end in itself, not a means to achieve anything else. Nonetheless, as the case history shows, the couple precipitated a crisis which effectively determined both their futures if not in quite the way they wanted.
Nasia and Umra: an arro jor

Nasia was the pampered, youngest and only sister of the Panku Ram group of six brothers; she shared a room in the house complex with her old mother for whom she cooked and washed.

Nasia had been attending the Ghotul for only eight or nine months, when we were told by her mother that she had run away with Umra, like Nasia, a Korami but from the rival Gaita lineage. This news amazed us as we had only just gone through a hectic four days of attending Umra's wedding which had been conducted in a suitably lavish style with his father going so far as to slaughter two goats for the occasion. Umra had appeared as comfortable as any bridegroom who has had about five pints of oil mixed with tumeric smeared on his head. The picture that immediately came to my mind was one of Umra with his arm around his bride as he escorted her from her village (to which his parents had been called to her meeting since she had become pregnant at the Ghotul) and passed in front of our house. He had appeared happy and laughed along with his Ghotul mates all the while. Yet only two days after undergoing the tedium and trial of a lengthy wedding he had disappeared with his previous Ghotul jor, Nasia. Her mother said that she had left without taking any of her jewellery and with only a few clothes. She said that she had been so angry on discovering her elopement, that she had burnt her daughter's clothes and destroyed her beads and ribbons. She bemoaned to us the fact that Nasia had been engaged to a boy from Mahima Gwari and that his parents had hosted five mahala feasts. Apart from all this, Nasia had gone too far: Umra was a married man firstly, and a Korami, classified as a father's younger brother's son in relation to her. It was therefore wrong on all counts.

The running away was the talk of the village. Everyone cursed Umra and when we encountered his father at another wedding he came up to us and slapping hard his own face, he said, "this is what Umra has done to me". Umra's young bride had gone back to her own village, and I suspect may have been pleased at the opportunity it gave her for doing so.

In the meantime I had heard from Rissi, (a Ghotul girl who had run away just a month before and was on a visit home from her husband's place near Narayanpur), who said that she had met the couple at the Narayanpur market. They had told her that they had "become like her" (niya lehka aatom). Rissi said that she had informed Umra's parents that the couple were probably hiding out somewhere near Narayanpur. (The lack of collaborative effort between friends who had either undergone similar escapades
with their jor or at least admitted the possibility of doing so, was a feature which took me a long while to understand. Far from maintaining a conspiratorial silence, it was often on the basis of the information from Ghotul members that search parties were organized.

Eventually, after two weeks, the couple were brought back to Manjapur. The next day a meeting was planned which was attended by members of Umra's wife's family apart from Nasia's mahala saga and the Manjapur villagers. Nasia's mother stood protectively in front of her. She was made to stand aside and another old lady took Nasia by the hand and remained holding her. Umra arrived escorted by his elder brother. He had a dejected look about him and stood quite still with his head cast down to the ground - a picture of abject humiliation.

It is difficult to say when the meeting began. As soon as the six brothers of Nasia had all arrived, they were joined by the Patel who this time was far from being an objective arbitrator. Nasia was his real father's younger brother's daughter, and like a daughter to him. The Patel got up to speak and to announce the beginning of the meeting. Instead of the measured, controlled tones with which he presided over other village meetings, he choked with emotion and could not utter a word. He stood in front of Nasia and with a violent gesture tore the turban off his head, threw it at her feet, tugged at the bun behind his head which came undone, and spat. He then stepped aside and continued glaring at her with bloodshot eyes. Just then another of Nasia's brothers rushed up and gave her the characteristic thump on the back with a closed fist. It was the first display of open aggression, and while Nasia smarted from the pain, it appeared to have affected the general mood of those gathered. There was an eruption of violent feeling and people run amuck, some heading for Umra and hitting him about the head and shoulders, and others pulling Nasia by the hair and dragging her down to the ground. People wrestled with one another, some trying to restrain the agitated mob and others forming an edifice of bodies around Nasia and Umra, grasping for anything which could be struck at. There was a general pandemonium and what had started as another peaceful meeting soon degenerated into a fight fanned by the fact that two rival lineages of the Korami clan were involved, Umra's and Nasia's. Prominent around the group of men clustered around Umra hitting him was a man we had not seen before. While I was standing next to Umra's mother who watched, dazed, the chastisement of her son, he came up to her and grasping her by the hand hit her hard on the cheek. I recoiled at the harshness of the blow, and seeing me
react, he yelled: "She deserves more than this. Why doesn't she hit her son". I later learnt that he was the true mother's brother and had been one of the people who had accompanied the couple back to the village.

Tiri was instrumental in bringing peace and order to finally prevail. He made a dramatic appeal to everyone present to control themselves, saying: "We have come here to settle an issue, and it is time to settle it". He sat down and asked Umra to stand up in front of him and the assembled villagers. People shouted insults at Umra and commanded him to get up. Umra, however was in no state to move himself up. His Ghotul friend caught him by the shoulder and tried to shake him. He had fainted and some people rushed to splash water on his face. He struggled up and stood in front as he had been told. Nasia's mother wept softly and stroked her daughter's hair in an effort to braid it.

Tiri proceeded with the interrogation: "Tell us, Umra, when did you get married?" and Umra, with some hesitation and very softly, said: "Two days before I ran away". There were derisive comments from the audience. Tiri chuckled and continued to press the matter, rubbing salt in the wounds. "Only two days was it?", in mock amazement, and Umra repeated what he had said. Tiri was a skillful interrogator and he succeeded in enhancing Umra's predicament and demonstrating to all the undisputed deviancy of the act.

When it was Nasia's turn to be cross-examined, she was asked most of the same questions, but even as she stood there with her hair dishevelled and her clothes in disarray, it seemed to me that she wore her insult lightly and managed to maintain an air of quiet, assured dignity throughout that contrasted with Umra's behaviour. At one point when it was asked of her whether she would refrain from all future association with Umra, she refused to reply. After the question was repeated, and there was still no answer from Nasia, Umra's embittered old father walked up to her and spoke through clenched teeth: "Haven't we had enough? Give him up, won't you?" At this stage Nasia appeared lost in her own thoughts. Her brothers however ran up to the old man and catching Nasia pushed her roughly in his direction, challenging him to hit her. Umra's father soon found himself surrounded by members of the more numerous and powerful Patel lineage. There was a cacaphonous explosion, some people screaming insults at one another, and others trying to shout above the noise pleading for moderation. When everyone had quietened down Nasia was asked the same question. But before she could speak, an old lady screamed at her and said: "Why have you sewn up your mouth now?" and catching her ear gave it a violent twist. Another old
lady slapped her across the face causing Nasia's nose ring to pop out at what must have been a painful angle. This time Nasia nodded her head in agreement. Umra was also made to pledge his renunciation of her and promised to pay a fine of five hundred rupees should he run away with her again. His wife's parents and some people from her village sat in a corner with carefully cultivated wounded expressions on their faces. They spoke from time to time but were conspicuously more composed than the Manjapur villagers.

Nasia and Umra were each given a blade of kar grass which is normally used to thatch roofs. They broke the blade with their hands behind their backs, their backs to one another. The ritual signifies, perhaps, that the couple no longer reside under the same symbolic roof.

The meeting concluded with Umra's father giving the Manjapur bhumkal one hundred rupees with which the men bought some rice and lentils and had a feast that same evening.

At the meeting Nasia was not given over to the parents of her mahala partner - the main issue had been sorting out her relationship with Umra. Indeed they had hardly spoken throughout the meeting and went back to their village after the feast. Nasia had not been pregnant at the time of her running away. But two days after the meeting her brothers escorted her to their mahala saga's house where they were made to wait outside the house for a humiliatingly long time. There then followed an altercation between the two sides. The specific mahala partner refused to marry her and no one could make him change his mind. All the while Nasia wept bitterly. Towards the evening her mahala partner's younger brother consented to marry her instead and Nasia was left at this house. The next day her wedding to him was held.

I met Umra and Nasia on a visit to the village two years after this incident. Umra's wife had left him and her place had been taken by a woman who had also had a first marriage previously to someone in Kongera. Nasia however stayed on with her husband, and her mother told me that her visits home had become few and far between suggesting that Nasia was well-settled at last.

This case history shows how the village authorities intervene decisively in a case where elopement threatens the status quo. The outrage shown in this particular case was particularly violent because the affair brought to the surface the latent tension between the Gaita lineage of Koramis (to which Umra belongs) and the Patel/Panku Ram Korami lineage who
are dominant in the village. The dominant Korami group treated Nasia with extra severity because she compromised them in the village by being seduced by a boy from their main Korami rivals. Umra's own kin had little grounds for supporting his behaviour either, since he had shamed them vis-a-vis their saga, by running away so soon after his marriage, and they also had to mend their fences with the Patel/Panku Ram Koramis by denouncing him in the most emphatic and public way available to them. Umra's father acknowledged the collective guilt of his lineage in the affair in giving 100 rupees to the village to feast at his expense. The Ghotul was not fined, but senior men spoke out against the Ghotul boys and the Ghotul Patel for failure to exert their authority and control Ghotul members' behaviour.

This elopement had no chance of being accepted as a fait accompli because it conflicted with too many established interests: the saga-dadabhai alliance scheme, the need to keep the peace between rival branches of the Korami clan, and the need to confirm established marriage and mahala arrangements. The next case, however, shows a different outcome, successful rather than unsuccessful for the runaway couple, but the same set of forces in action, nonetheless, this time operating so as to confirm, rather than reject, the initiatives of the main protagonists.

Ranki and Dakka: an arta jor

Ranki had been going to the Ghotul for at least five years before she ran away with Dakka. Ranki's father belonged to the Patel lineage but was one of its poorer, less powerful members. Ranki was engaged to her real mother's brother's son, a Hallami, who lived in Manjapur and went to the Ghotul. The boy's parents had hosted three mahala feasts for her and it was expected that she would marry him soon. All this changed when we heard that she had run away with Dakka, the son of the richest Hallami in Manjapur, who has a bigger and better Maraar style house than the Patel as well as the largest herd of cattle which he loans out to the Manjapur family of Rauts being incapable of managing such a large herd himself. When I went to speak to Ranki's parents about the matter they appeared unusually subdued and resigned to accept the situation as it existed; but her eldest brother seemed to be genuinely angry.

After a few days of absolute complacency, with no search parties being sent to locate the couple, I discovered that her brothers had
been informed of the couple's residence with a maternal uncle of Dakka in a village some four hours walk away from Manjapur. Normally such information would have led to the organisation of a party consisting of the girl's brother and a representative of the boy's family which would bring the couple back. However in this case no one appeared to be taking much interest in bringing them back in a hurry, and people would casually mention that the couple had been seen at such and such market during the week. Whenever I questioned her brothers as to why they had not gone to bring her back, they would make some excuse, such as being too busy and unable to leave the lentil crop without harvesting it, and so on.

It was only after a month had passed that they were brought back to the village and a meeting convened. At this meeting, the Patel and Pele took a prominent part, and it was they who asked for Dakka to stand in front of the assembly. Dakka emerged from the Ghotul hall accompanied by some of his Ghotul friends who sat down behind him. (The meeting was held just outside the Ghotul fence). Dakka stood in front of the villagers and appeared rather nervous as he continually shifted the weight of his body from one leg to the other, and covered his face with his sapi cloth wrapped around his shoulder, so that it was wound around his nose and mouth in a manner often adopted by women, but never previously witnessed by me in men. The first question put to him was: "Who suggested to run away? Was it you or the girl?" Dakka replied, barely audibly: "the girl". Then the Patel asked why he had run away, to which Dakka made no reply and was not pressed for an answer. The next question was: "From where did you run away? From your homes or the Ghotul?" The boy replied that they had run away from the Ghotul. After asking a few other questions, such as "Do you know whose daughter she is", to which Dakka answered, "Yes, a Korami daughter", his interrogation was over and he was allowed to sit down.

Ranki was next brought out by a few Ghotul girls. She appeared relaxed and confident as she strode over and took her place at the centre of the semi-circle of men. She immediately sat down, and this surprised me as it was inappropriate behaviour and displayed a boldness and over-confidence that I had imagined would be difficult to maintain in such trying circumstances. It was also clear that she was trying to suppress a grin and she continually brought her hand over her mouth and sometimes hid it under her sapi cloth. As soon as she sat down, her eldest brother spoke to her sharply, and told her to stand up. She did and remained standing while she was being questioned. She was asked by some siyan whether she knew that
her parents had betrothed her to Daula, and she said that she was aware of this fact. But then Pele said: "But now you have run away, and he may not want to take you. Where will go now?" Ranki said without any hesitation: "I will go with who ever will take me". (This is a standard line and Ranki may have been coached by her mother to say so, or have remembered from her past experience of village meetings). It was the correct answer and several people nodded their heads in approval. However at this point her eldest brother interjected and said: "I will give her to him" and pointed in the direction of his mother's brother Daula.

The Patel, Dakka's father, Tiri, Pele and Rajman and a prominent Manjapur Maraar who was also at the meeting, moved away from the general assembly and formed a tight circle in one corner away and remained there for some time talking to one another in whispers. They were not joined by anyone from Ranki's or Daula's family. When the men rejoined the group of men at the meeting, Tiri addressed the Daula family and asked them whether they wanted Ranki or not. Daula waited for some time before replying and then framed his reply in a cautious, deliberately ambiguous way: "Yes we want her but she has run away". Pele then asked Dakka's father, whether they wanted Ranki. Dakka's father looked away and spoke in a disinterested apathetic voice: "It would be all right for us to have her". Next the elder brother of Ranki was asked to whom he would give her, but this man simply repeated what he had already said, namely that he would give her to Daula's son, adding: "I have drank this man's liquor. No one should later say that it was I who refused to give her to him". Daula next spoke up and the gist of what he said is as follows: "I have spent a lot of money on these mahalas. Everyone knows that it is very hard to make ends meet these days but still since she was my sister's daughter I went ahead. It would have been good if she had not run away and come quietly to my house. But now she has run away. Can anyone here assure me that she will not run away again? What is the sense in my son marrying someone who will not stay. Because I know that she will run away again, I do not mind giving her away to Dakka's father if he would like to have her. But there is still the matter of the cost of the mahalas that I have done already. I will not say another word about it. I leave you to decide how much I should be compensated." The Patel then turned to Dakka's father and asked him to decide, and to take Ranki if he wished. In reply, after a decent interval of time had elapsed, Dakka's father stood up and taking Ranki by the arm left the meeting and both walked in the direction of his house. I was told by the old women that he would smear some tumeric (tika tasna) on her as formal
recognition of her status as his daughter-in-law and of her right to remain in his house.

There are several reasons why a son's Ghotul jor is regarded as an attractive prospect as a daughter-in-law. Firstly, since the marriage is one instigated by the couple themselves it can be safely assumed that it will become a stable one. Consequently the boy's parents are spared the trouble of coping with a restless daughter-in-law who is also an unwilling and erratic worker, and later with having to go through the business of getting compensation if she runs away. The fact that such advantages more than outweigh the cost of having to renounce a carefully nurtured mahala relationship in which both time and money have been invested was brought home to me at the meetings I witnessed subsequent to elopements from the Ghotul by couples who were eligible to marry, at each and every one of which the boy's father pressed his desire to arrange a marriage between the runaway couple. Sometimes a compromise is reached whereby the boy's father suggests that the mahala saga reserve their daughter for the boy's younger or elder unmarried sons, instead, but this is not transacted at the meeting itself. The very same reasons that make the Ghotul girl attractive to her jor's family make her a risky proposition as a future daughter-in-law to the family of her mahala partner. People rationalize that in such cases when the Ghotul couple are formally eligible for marriage to one another their marriages to their respective mahala partners are likely to be short-lived first marriages, followed by a second marriage to each other. Most men are understandably wary of bearing the expenses of a son's wedding which is seen as doomed to failure from the outset, because of the inevitability of the Ghotul pair getting together eventually. In such cases men may feel that the most judicious course of action to take is to press for a fair compensation for the mahalas they have undertaken in the past, and hope to create an impression of their magnanimity in giving the betrothed girl away to her jor, in front of the villagers assembled at the meeting. Of course this amicable arrangement is only possible in the relatively few instances in which the mahala receiving affines actually live in the same village. More usually the jor relation is simply discounted in relation to mahala partnerships. When both parties, the
Ghotul boy's parents, and the girl's mahala saga live in the same village many other factors affect the decision to assert or relinquish mahala rights in a girl. Since a Muria village usually has a small population and is a socially compact entity, the relative wealth and political backing of either side, and the history of relations and closeness of ties between the two families influence the stand that each side will make.

When the girl's mahala saga happen to be co-villagers as well, and adamantly refuse to give her up to her Ghotul jor, there are certain safeguards that they can instigate to prevent the Ghotul romance from subverting her first marriage. They can extract a promise from the Ghotul jor and from his parents at the village meeting that they will not take the girl even in a second marriage, and that the separation of the Ghotul pair will be irrevocably permanent. Evidence shows that this precaution is extremely effective: in none of the second marriages that took place between Ghotul couples - and there were five known to me in Manjapur - did I record a case of the girl's first marriage taking place in the same village. But despite the relative security that such an arrangement provides, there are certain advantages in deferring to a co-villager's interest in the Ghotul girl, as well as certain constraints which are hard to ignore. The basis of the relationship between the two rivals is crucial to deciding the outcome of the meeting. At one village meeting I attended it was obvious that a mother's brother gracefully relinquished rights in his sister's daughter when she ran away from the Ghotul because of his relationship to her jor's father which had up to then been that of a client indebted to a wealthier man and kinsman. The absence of confrontations between the two families at the meeting was largely due to the difference in wealth between them. Whatever the actual desires of the girl's mother's brother may have been, he may have perceived that it would have been provocative and perhaps futile for him to stress the priority of his mahala rights over his sister's daughter, since his rival could have bought his creditor rights to bear against him - rights which he would have had to acknowledge. Often, but not in all cases, when a villager transfers his mahala rights in a girl to a co-villager he does so under some form of duress. Either he feels morally obliged to return a favour done to him in the past, or he may feel incapable of measuring up to the superior political power that his rival possesses, especially when the latter
belongs to a large, entrenched group of siblings, and he himself is a member of a small and insignificant lineage. In the case of a patron-client relationship a man may have to weigh the benefits to him of remaining as the client of a rich villager against those of having as a daughter-in-law his sister's child who may or may not stay for long.

But possessing wealth or political support is by itself useless: unless a rich man has established concrete obligations by his generosity to a poor man he does not stand more of a chance of coming out the winner than any other man, rich or poor. Similarly a man remains undaunted by the lineage membership status of his rival unless the latter can demonstrate that he does in fact have the active support of his lineage mates - which is never a foregone conclusion. When a villager will not be budged in his resolve to get his son married to the son's mahala partner, it is often indicative of strained relations between the two families who may have been divided over sorcery accusations or a long-standing land dispute. The tensions already present become exacerbated by competition over the Ghotul girl and the two sides are then more likely to engage in long, acrimonious debate with threats of taking the girl away by physical force - as happened at a meeting in Atargaon where the girl's jor's brothers carried out this threat almost as soon as she had been taken to her mahala partner's house and while his side were hastily preparing the marriage booth.

All this demonstrates that although mahalas start off by being separate and opposed to the Ghotul system of jor, at the time of marriage, when practical rather than idealistic considerations are uppermost in people's minds, efforts may be made by the parents to discount their own mahala choice in favour of their son's Ghotul partner, if they see their interests as being better served by such a marriage. However this is possible only between arta and not arro partners as no one is willing to compromise their position among their affines by allying themselves with classificatory clan brothers, a course of action seen by Muria as "desertion of one's community" (jat tun virchna). Of course there would be no problem if the Ghotul system was orientated towards marriage and allowed only arta jor because then parents could simply leave their offspring to decide their own marriages. But this could only be done by
undermining the authority structure of Muria society; being in charge of marriage is the only effective, authoritarian control that elders are able to exercise in relation to their children, and arranging marriages between their offspring is also the stuff of politics in Muria society that forms the basis of the relationship between saga. The above arrangement would make the links between adolescents and their natal groups tenuous, to say the least, as well as render problematic their re-absorption back into the domestic unit upon their marriages. Another effect would be the renunciation of rights in offspring to use them as instruments for expressing parental interest and this would strike at the basis of Muria kinship affiliations.

The jor system and secondary marriage

All the problems of placing the Ghotul in Muria society are connected with marriage and arise essentially from the jor relation. In all other respects the Ghotul appears fully integrated with the pattern of Muria society, but in regard to marriage there is no doubt that jor relations strike a discordant note and are directly responsible for upsets and strains in the system of marital alliance, and for much personal trauma as well. Ghotul elopements and pregnancies are extremely dramatic events when they erupt into public attention at village meetings as the case histories show. But such events are episodic and spaced out in time so that the Ghotul, to the Muria themselves, does not become wholly identified with such disreputable happenings and is not regarded as the source of subversion and confrontation. Elopements and Ghotul pregnancies are seen as crises, similar to sorcery accusations, fights between brothers etc., which occupy communal attention sporadically throughout the year and which the best worked out arrangements are unable to prevent. Elopements and pregnancies are viewed not so much as evidence of the "problem" of the Ghotul, but as aberrations caused by people's manipulating rules and exploiting the possibilities of freedom inherent in them to serve their own interests. This tendency is one that the Muria are sympathetic towards; it is consistent with their emphasis on individual freedom, just one example of which is the ease with which divorce is accepted. Nevertheless the relation of the Ghotul and marriage systems demands analysis because, objectively speaking, there is no denying the fact that the two systems of
mahala and jor appear to be mutually antagonistic and it is interesting to enquire as to why this situation persists. Both systems appear to be equally salient to the Muria scheme of things. Were this not so, one might expect the Ghotul to serve the interests of the marriage system, perhaps through consolidating, under the Ghotul aegis, mahala partnerships contracted by parents, or alternatively the system of marriage could easily accommodate jor partnerships and permit an extension of them in marriage. However, one does not find either to be the case. Why do the Muria acquiesce in the system of jor relationships; or to phrase the question another way, why are they equally insistent upon marrying their sons and daughters to mahala partners? Why do the Muria permit the jor system to flourish, while being equally adamant on the mahala one? Why does the Muria Ghotul take the form it does, and why does it not restrict membership to boys only, as do the neighbouring Ghotulas - the nearest about two miles walk away from Manjapur - of the Hill Maria?

There is no simple explanation that can be advanced for the complex phenomenon of the mixed-sex Muria Ghotul, and the analysis put forward here is only tentative. None of the above questions can be intelligibly posed, leave alone convincingly answered, because, firstly they presume that some degree of choice in the matter exists, whereas in fact, to the Muria none does; and secondly they do not take into account the fact that both the jor and mahala are in the hands of different age-categories, the division and separation of which is rooted in Muria society, and one which results in the situation of relatively autonomous spheres of action and control within each: if mahala affairs are dominated entirely by siyan, the Ghotul jor system is in the hands of Ghotul laiyor and laiya. Neither is it possible to take refuge in the lack of our historical knowledge on the conditions of an earlier, archaic Muria society which gave rise to the mixed-sex Ghotul and departure from a pristine type of single-sex Ghotul of the kind found among the more "primitive" Maria. Historical reasoning, though obviously pertinent, is nonetheless likely to be a frustrating exercise because historical material on Bastar is extremely sparse, and what there is does not shed any light on tribal institutions. The only course of analysis that can be reasonably followed is to see the Muria Ghotul, and especially the sending of daughters (which is at issue here) as consistent with the Muria system of social values as these are
expressed by the Muria themselves. The Muria have definite thoughts on their motives for sending daughters to the Ghotul and the consequences that ensue should they remain at home - consequences which must obviously outweigh the perceived risks incurred in sending daughters to the Ghotul. By examining the stated reasons for sending daughters to the Ghotul by their parents (and brothers) and by assessing the value-judgements that they express, I think it is possible to make some sense of both the Ghotul and mahala systems, although recognizing that such an analysis is provisional only.

The typical responses elicited from informants when questioned as to the reasons why daughters had to be sent to the Ghotul are as follows:

1. Parents and elder brothers deny acting of their own volition in "sending" girls to the Ghotul and say, that on the contrary they were powerless in the matter; daughter/sisters simply went when they wished to do so, and parents could do nothing to stop them when they reached the appropriate age.

2. The parents and elder brothers of girls who had been reluctant and late arrivals at the Ghotul admit that they had put pressure on them to begin their Ghotul careers, but justify this on the grounds of conforming to village niti or custom, and the sanctions of fines that faced them were they to "keep their girls at home."

3. A variant of the above response which cogently expresses what has been left unsaid in the former responses, is that daughters and sisters could not stay at home because this would encourage rumours to the effect that "the men of that house keep their daughters and sisters with them like wives". (hela-miyar tun tai-lar ask lehka kintor)

This last response gives some insight into the reasons why the Muria insist on their daughters attending the Ghotul despite its potentially disruptive consequences. The Ghotul places pubescent unmarried women outside the natal home, which Murias feel very strongly, is their appropriate place. The Ghotul sustains a division of age-categories. Ghotul boys are categorically defined by their Ghotul membership as 'set apart' from the political bloc of siyan; in the case of girls there is a
moral obligation to create this category distinction as well. Out-marrying "sisters and daughters" (helar-miyar) have to be kept categorically separate from in-marrying wives (ask) by a domestic arrangement which keeps helar-miyar out of the natal home after puberty. This separation of 'wives' from 'sisters and daughters' reflects the fundamental schema of exchange on which the whole of Muria society is based. The externality of daughters in relation to their natal group is stressed in every way: daughters are not members of their father's clan and are not therefore bound to uphold clan food-taboos; daughters are not assimilated into the body of lineage ancestors and should they happen to die before their marriages, remain as wandering spirits on the bhat; during their life, daughters are forbidden entry into the inner room of the natal house where the ancestral pots are kept, they inherit nothing from their fathers, and even stays in the natal home by married sisters and daughters (before they become mothers) for periods of longer than one or two weeks are frowned upon by their brothers and parents. The distancing of daughter-sisters from the natal group is almost an obsessional concern of the Murias; once married, daughters and sisters are often spoken to by the name of their affinal village and the natally conferred name seldom used. Thus a woman married to someone from the village of Karaveda is henceforth referred and addressed as 'Karavedio', instead of Rissi, Ghassini etc. The separation of girls becomes vital once they pass the stage of childhood and achieve sexual maturity. In an earlier chapter I mentioned the tendency on the part of brothers to remain aloof from the suspected sexual involvements of their sisters, and to surrender all authority on such matters to the Ghotul laiyor. Sisters, like Ghotul-going laiyor are also encouraged to become independent in other ways before their marriages: they are permitted to keep for themselves the wages they earn from labour at Forest coops, or on road sites. The silver-bracelets, anklets, and necklaces sported by so many Muria girls have usually been bought by themselves, while their mother's ornaments are inherited by their brother's wives.

One can see how the Ghotul serves the schema of values in terms of which sisters and daughters should be dissociated from the natal home and all its members. But viewed from the same perspective, the mahala system of feasts and affinal visits can be seen as a reversal of the pattern of brother-sister relations prior to the sister's marriage, the recreation of
the relationship on a new basis, mediated by the exchange of offspring in marriage. The mahala feastings that take place (mainly, as has already been described between men in a real or classificatory WB/ZH relationship) are devices intended to restore the balance in brother-sister relations, and to re-incorporate the sister, in the guise of an affine, back into her natal group. From this point of view, both mahala and the Ghotul are two sides of the same coin: the sending off of sisters to the Ghotul is explicable in terms of the same set of values that mahalas confirm, namely that it is through her role as the wife of an affine, really as an affine herself, that the sister is significantly related to her natal group. It is participation in the Ghotul by the sister that gives impetus to the mahala system in that it is the initial sending away of the sister which is inversely mirrored in the polite solicitation of a daughter in the next generation. If this is so the crucial analytical question concerning the difference between the Muria and the Maria, and between the single-sex and mixed-sex Ghotul can be reformulated as follows: why is it that the Muria place a stronger stress on separating pubescent or post-pubescent girls from their natal families than do the Hill Maria?

The obvious answer to this question seems to be the closer association that has always existed between the Muria and neighbouring caste Hindu societies. Significantly enough all of these Hindu communities, for example, the Ryot, Kaler, Maraar etc. place a strong emphasis on pre-puberty marriage in girls. The stress on pre-puberty marriage among Hindus in Central India was signalled long ago in a short article by Dubey (1953) and the ideological background to the institution has been discussed by Yalman (1963) in an article too familiar to need recapitulation here. It seems a plausible argument, at least, to suggest that the local Hindu insistence on the propriety of pre-puberty marriage for girls, and the stress placed on removing girls from the natal household (physically, or only symbolically) is a cultural theme which has exercised a significant influence on Muria kinship morality, and is the factor behind their transference to the collective care of the Ghotul when they reach puberty. Among the Hill Maria, who do not live cheek-by-jowl with Hindus practising pre-puberty marriage, girls remain at home until marriage; among the Muria, there is a moral obligation to place them under an external authority, which has responsibility for their sexuality, in a formal sense, until it
is finally transferred to a husband upon marriage.

Let me turn briefly to the situation among the Muria's most immediate neighbours, the Maraar. Among the Maraar, it is absolutely obligatory that a girl, before puberty and the onset of menstruation goes through a marriage ceremony, known as pathauni, with a bridegroom of the appropriate kinship status. Should a girl reach puberty without this having been carried out, she becomes a witch, and is said to be so hideous to the sight that no one could survive a single glance from her. Because it is not always possible for the parents of a girl to find a suitable bridegroom in time for the pathauni ceremony, it is permissible for them to marry the girl to a pot instead, if it seems unlikely that she would otherwise reach puberty unmarried, and turn into a witch. This form of marriage to a pot is called kandabara; kandabara girls can get married later on to bridegrooms in human form, because both kandabara and pathauni are not primary marriage (shadi) but only secondary marriages, that is to say, holding operations which remove the mystical consequence of 'uncontrolled female sexuality' implicit in the existence of unmarried but post-pubertal girls in Hindu eyes (Yalman 1963) until the girl is socially transferred to a husband's household which usually takes place several years later. In other words, Maraar girls have two marriages: a secondary marriage and a primary marriage, the secondary marriage being performed first, before puberty, and the primary marriage only subsequently. My hypothesis, to explain why the Muria, unlike their Maria neighbours, send their daughters to the Ghotul is that this represents a transformation of 'secondary marriage' as practised among local Hindu groups, into the existing context of Muria society.

This is necessarily only a speculative point: Muria culture history as has already been stated, cannot be reconstructed with any exactitude; but the points favouring this interpretation can be summarised as follows. Muria marriage follows the pattern of local Hindu marriage in being a two-stage affair. The two stages are the change in status of the sexually mature but unmarried girl so that her sexuality is institutionally recognised and categorically separated from the natal family domain, and her actual marriage or marning. Among the Muria institutional recognition of the girl's sexuality takes two forms: firstly she becomes a Ghotul girl
identified with a Ghotul jor, an extra-familial heterosexual relationship, and secondly, she is linked to a bridegroom via a mahala exchange, while among the Maraar she is given in secondary marriage to a pathauni bridegroom, or, failing that, to a pot, although she continues to live at home. The second stage of marriage is the change of status accompanying the assumption of full marital obligations as a wife; among the Muria this is the marriage proper or 'marming' - the equivalent to Maraar primary marriage or shadi. This marriage is not concerned with the onset of sexuality as such so much as with the assumption of connubial responsibilities and wifely status.

Can one regard the Ghotul jor relation as being, in any sense a 'secondary marriage'? In a formal sense this is not so: the only formal ritual marriage is the marming ritual and there are no official rituals accompanying a girl's entry into the Ghotul. On the other hand, if one leaves aside ritual considerations, there is clearly a sense in which socially, as opposed to ritually, the girl's transference to the Ghotul and her being part of a jor relation while there, has marriage-like implications. This is explicitly recognised by the Muria themselves. The Ghotul girls and boys, according to Janki are "like husbands and wives" (ar-koytor lehka) and when we discussed with Malu the reasons why the Muria had a Ghotul and the Maraar not, he said: "The Maraars get married when they are little. We don't. We go to the Ghotul instead." From this kind of evidence, it would seem that the Muria recognise a parallelism between Ghotul-going and marriage, while falling short of giving this any ritual recognition as marriage proper. However, one does note certain ritual details which suggest that the unmarried Ghotul girls are treated as being 'married' before they are actually given to husbands at the marming ceremony. Thus the collective category which covers the Ghotul girls is helar-miyar which is also the category term applied blanket fashion to all out-marrying women of the village. In other words, Ghotul girls are classified as out-marrying women of the village (although of course some do actually marry in it) before they are actually married. Moreover, at the village pen karsna the Ghotuls girls as out-marrying women have to be treated separately from in-marrying wives and pre-adolescent female children; the black pigment (pichi) which is made from roasted castor seeds is prepared separately for them, and kept separate from the one
smeared on the foreheads of 'wives' during the ritual.

It would be a hazardous procedure to press this argument to the limits. The Muria do not have a formal concept of primary and secondary marriage which is explicitly modelled on the distinction found among Hindus. However, as Dumont has emphasized, marriage in India is not a unitary institution and there are a series of gradations between marriage in the full, primary sense, and not being married at all. (Dumont 1961) Sometimes it is ambiguous, as in the Nayar case, but above all, 'marriage' is something which is susceptible to different kinds of institutional expression depending on the total social and institutional contexts. The suggestion being put forward here is that the Muria have modified a set of given 'tribal' institutions, so as to reflect, if only in a fitful and ambiguous way, certain of the fundamental values of the Hindu system as it is found in their region. Their neighbours - for reasons which are bound up with the ritual control of female sexuality - ensure that the category of potentially fertile women coincides exactly with the category of 'married' women by symbolic secondary marriage. But this is purely a symbolic matter, a question of rendering female sexuality ideologically acceptable, since real (that is, socially consequential) marriage (gauna) only comes later, and during the intervening period the girls live at home as 'married' unmarried daughters. Turning to the Muria, we find the emphasis being placed, not on the ritual or symbolic dimension, but on the social dimension. The 'purity of women' theme, which is, so far as the Hindus are concerned, the motivating idea behind secondary marriage, is not salient in the context of Muria tribal values. Marriage is not a matter of controlling female sexuality, but simply a social obligation to exchange family members, the obligation to relinquish daughters and sisters is part of the social pattern of exchange. Hence, 'secondary marriage' ceases in the already given institutional context of Muria society to be a matter of secondary ritual marriage, and is re-fashioned as a secondary exchange - an exchange which is expressed in the social obligation to send daughters to the Ghotul.

At this point it is necessary to return to the introduction to the Ghotul section of the thesis. The Ghotul imposes an exchange obligation on village members which reflects the fundamental schema of marriage
alliance. This secondary exchange is expressed in the requirement that families relinquish control of their children at a certain stage in the life cycle prior to marriage. Among the Hill Maria, the obligation extends only to males, while among the Muria, possibly, as has been suggested here, as a result of Hindu influence, the obligation applies also to adolescent girls, who are removed from the natal home and categorically set apart as 'out-marrying wives' even while they are still incorporated into the village via the Ghotul. The institutional framework of Muria society can thus be seen as reflecting the pan-India pattern of secondary marriage via a transformation of the Ghotul institution 'in the direction of marriage', without reflecting the pattern in its complete form.


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Map I

INDIA

MADHYA PRADESH

BASTAR DISTRICT

area of fieldwork village

abujhmar

Narayanpur

Kondagaon

Jagdalpur