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Mahua : A Trait - Complex in the Kamar Tribe of Gariaband

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KEY WORDS *Mahua*. Liquor *(mOTH)*. Village Council. Social Ceremonies. Religious Festivals.

ABSTRACT The paper deals with the process of sustenence of a primitive tribe within the available scarce resources. The Kamars make multiple use of *Mahua* which has become an imperative necessity for providing food, economic and health security for all the members of the community.

INTRODUCTION

The Kamars, a Primitive Tribe of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) mainly inhabit Raipur district; their concentration is spread over in four tribal blocks, namely Chhura, Gariaband, Mainpur and Nagari. There are in all 249 Kamar villages, consisting of 13,110 people (as per 1991 survey, by Kamar Adibasi Bikas Pradhikaran, Gariaband). This paper mainly, based on a field work carried out in seven villages of Gariaband block of Raipur district, is concerned with the nature of the dependence of the Kamar on the forests with special reference to the *mahua (Bassia latifolia)* tree.

UTILITIES OF MAHUA

The native term for *mahua* is *roti*. They use its flowers, seeds, woods, and almost everything. The flowers play a more important role than the seed, wood, etc. After an early meal from the left-over of the previous supper (*bāsi*), the females go out for collecting *mahua* flowers everyday in April and May. These flowers are dried in the sun until they turn red. They are then carefully preserved and stored in baskets so as to be used for various purposes during off seasons. The stored flowers, after boiling for entire night, and taken as staple food during lean periods. Besides, they are used for brewing liquor (*mOTH*). The *mahua* seeds locally called *dori* are used for making oil which they take both as an edible and as a massage oil. The wood serves the purposes of fuel and also charcoal is prepared for sale.

Preparation of Mahua Liquor

Liquor preparation is a long process. *Mahua* flowers, whether dried or wet, are put in a earthen pot with water for fermentation. To prepare three bottles of liquor about three times of water is added to four kilogram of *mahua* flower. The proportion of water and flower is not based on any standard unit of measurement; it is based on approximation but it is always near perfection because of consumer's satisfaction. Experts of the liquor brewer generally allow the mixture nearly 72 hours to ferment. Then this fermented liquid is boiled for some time and then distilled. They collect the drink in bottles and use them at the time of their need.

ECONOMIC LIFE

Regular drinking has become way of life. The Kamars not only use *mahua* for their own consumption but also for selling. The males usually spend their time gossipping after taking *mOTH*, while their women economically more responsible, remain busy in selling the drink in local markets. The Kamars who have taken to liquor selling as a mainstay of occupation try to sell at least 50 bottles of the drink per month. The price of a bottle fluctuates from Rs. 15 to Rs. 20. It is generally seen that a family consumes almost half of the liquor they distill and the other half is sold. Monthly income from liquor comes to Rs. 360 and the yearly income varies from Rs. 2880 to Rs. 4000. It is true that

those families who take it as primary source of earning maintain it throughout the year which enables them to earn a large amount of money.

Trade is also done on the dry *mahua* flowers in the market in the month of April-May *i.e.* the *mahua* producing season. They sell the flowers at the rate of Rs. 3 to 4 per kg. Daily income from *mahua* flower is Rs. 12 and it continues upto 20 days. Thus in a season one member of the Kamar may earn about Rs. 240. The *mahua* seed is used for making oil. This oil is used for their consumption and thus it helps them to cut down the expenditure on edible oil. *Mahua* wood too plays a significant role in the Kamar's economic life. The Kamars use its dry leaves and wood for their fuel.

SOCIAL LIFE

In social activities related to birth, death and marriage liquor consuming has an immense role in this tribal life. The members of same clan generally share their hospitality by giving liquor. When a stranger comes the host must offer a glass of liquor as per rule of hospitality so as to show courtesy. As a custom, the Kamar carries a bottle of *mahua* with him when he goes to participate in a marriage ceremony, *tijnahan* (Purificatory funeral rite), *Chhatti* (Purification ceremony during birth), and to the host the offer is made. Below is given a list of the use of *mahua* in various social ceremonies :-

Chatti (Purification ceremony during birth)	- 8/10 bottles
Sagai (First negotiation)	- 7 bottles
Marriage feast	- 24 to 40 bottles
Marni (Mourning feast)	- 10 bottles
Piyar Dhuyani (Curtesey with washing of feet)	- 5 bottles, etc.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

To Kamars *mahua* tree is an abode of their deity - Thakur-Deo. They worship this deity before gathering and harvesting the forest and agricultural products. In every religious festival, *mahua* liquor is a must. It is used for purification of the shrine. In religious festivals they take liquor (*mahua*) in excess. After worshipping, the Kamar gather in a place in the forest and take *mOTH* together. If a Baiga (religious priest) is summoned for curing a disease, he is remunerated with a bottle of liquor along with other things.

POLITICAL LIFE

Mahua liquor has also its impact on the political life of the Kamar. If one is punished with imprisonment he or she after the completion of the jail term will be accepted by the community only when the person gives a feast of rice and meat with *mahua* liquor. Their village council decides all the cases of dispute. In each and every offence the offender has to pay as punishment a proportionate quantity of *mahua* liquor or its price. The Kamars are also found to be involved in illegal liquor selling. Such cases include transportation of country liquor. Cases occured in the last five years have been studied from the records of Warehouse at Gariaband. It is seen that the accused members of the Kamar had to pay fine nominally as a punishment.