

The *Karma* Festival and Its Songs

Durga Bhagvat

Introduction

The *Karma* or *Karam* is a harvest festival celebrated by the aborigines and lower-caste Hindus in the region of Madhya Pradesh and in the adjoining areas to its north and east. It is both a communal¹ and a household² festival. The celebration takes place in the bright fortnight of the month of *Bhado* (August-September), during the rainy season.

The festival comprises three distinct elements: ritual, dance and songs. The ritual consists of the worship of the *Karam* or *Kadamba* tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*). The *Kadamba* tree is an indigenous Indian tree, of tremendous cultural importance. It is mentioned in the epics and the Puranas as a beautiful shady tree blossoming in the rainy season. The *Kadamba* tree plays a remarkable role in the Krishna legend. Krishna and Radha loved this tree and chose it as their meeting place. They adorned themselves with the flowers of the *Kadamba*. Since then the flower has become a symbol of love in Indian poetry and culture.

The aborigines of East Bengal and the Bhils and Pavras of Khandesh regard the *Kadamba* tree as the flag of Indra, the Lord of Heaven. It is also a symbol of the rainy season. Thus the tree is associated with youthful love and with the monsoon.

The ritual during the harvest festival includes the worship of the *Karam* tree. This is accompanied by dances of varying formations and a variety of songs. The *Karma* festival is a very complex institution and unless we analyse each of these three elements, together with their geographic and ethnic distribution, we will not be able to understand how the ritual has become modified in course of time, how the dances have been elaborated and how the songs have developed links with the festival.

Geographic and Ethnic Distribution

The *Karma* is celebrated by all the lower-caste Hindus and aborigines in the eastern areas of Madhya Pradesh, that is Mandla, Balaghat, Bilaspur, north of Raipur and in the northern half of Durg in Chhattisgarh. It is also celebrated in the Jashpur, Raigarh, and Sarangarh areas which merge with the region of the Kaimur Range. On the Chota Nagpur plateau the *Karma* festival and dances are in a flourishing state. Thus, *Karma* does not extend beyond the limits of Singbhum³ to the east, nor beyond Nagpur in the west; in the north it extends only upto Mirzapur, and southwards just to the northern parts of Durg and Raipur districts. The absence of the *Karma*

in the south-eastern parts of the Raipur district (which merge into the Muria country) and in the south-eastern corner of Durg (the Oundhi and Panabaras areas, where we find some rare specimens of concentrated Gond culture), is in itself a very significant phenomenon. The *Karma* is not known in Bastar, or in the northern region of the Godavari district. This region is strongly influenced by the Gond culture of Bastar. Geographic distribution by itself shows that the *Karma* is not a part of the indigenous Gond culture; it has been superimposed on the Gond and allied tribes through contact with tribes living in the border areas. Thus it has been influenced either by the culture of the adjoining province or through migration of tribes belonging to some prominent neighbouring group. This leads us to an inquiry into the problems of the particular tribes in Madhya Pradesh among whom details of the *Karma* festival are still preserved in an elaborate form and into their links with tribes outside the province.

The ethnic distribution of the *Karma* dances and songs within the geographic limits mentioned above—in some cases accompanied by ritual, in others without ritual—is of primary importance. The subject sheds light on some moot points regarding: 1) the origin of the *Karma* festival; 2) the tribes which are special representatives of the ancient *Karma* worshippers, both in Madhya Pradesh and in the adjoining regions; 3) the technique of the ritual, dances and songs; 4) the popularity of the *Karma* dances and songs and 5) the religious significance attached to the *Karma*, as it is observed today.

All the agriculturists from among the lower-caste Hindus of Chhattisgarh, Mandla, Balaghat and all the way up to Nagpur, dance and sing the *Karma*. The language of the *Karma* songs is always the same as that of the eastern Hindi dialects. These forms have not reached those areas where the people speak Gondi, Marathi or Telugu. In Chhattisgarh, the *Karma* is very popular among the Rawat, Kosta and Panka.

Among the tribes, the Gond dance the *Karma* with great enthusiasm. The same can be said, with even greater truth, of the Baiga, whose *Karma* songs are famous. They know a variety of *Karma* dances.⁴ It is interesting to note that all the other tribes say that they have migrated into this province from somewhere else. The Baiga and the Bhumiya are the only two tribes who maintain that they belong here, that they have never migrated. They claim to be the original inhabitants of the province. The *Karma* songs of the Ghasia are well known, and still more famous are the *Karma* songs and dances of the Majhwar of Bilaspur. The latter also preserve the ritual worship of *Karam raja* or *Karam devata* in the form of the *Karma* tree. A few of their neighbours, both Hindus and tribals, imitate them in this respect. Equally famed are the Sahis' *Karma* songs and their ritual which is identical with that of the Majhwar.

Now, the Ghasia, Majhwar and Sahis are dispersed in great numbers in the bordering areas, in the Chota Nagpur and Mirzapur districts. Besides, in regions outside of Madhya Pradesh and especially in Chota Nagpur, the Hindu agriculturists dance the *Karma* more vigorously than

the Bhuiya, Munda and Oraon (the latter have their *Jadur* and dormitary dances first, and the *Karma* dances afterwards). This has led S.C. Roy to conclude that the *Karma* festival and dances were borrowed by the Mundu tribes from the Hindus.⁵ But in Madhya Pradesh and Mirzapur, though the lower-castes among the Hindus observe the *Karma*, the inspiration is most certainly from the aborigines, from the Baiga, Majhwar, Sahis and Gond in Madhya Pradesh and from the Majhwar and Sahis in Mirzapur.

Two Legends about the Karma

There are a number of legends about the *Karma*. These point to its origin and distribution and, on careful analysis, favour an aboriginal origin both for the ritual and for the dances and songs. The first of these legends came from the Majhwar of Mirzapur.

There were seven brothers of the Majhwar tribe who lived together. The six elder ones used to go out to work, while the youngest stayed at home to cook the food. He used to get his six sisters-in-law to cook the meal and when it was ready, he would take it to his brothers in the fields. This youngest brother used to plant a branch of the *Karam* tree in the courtyard, and dance in front of it with his sisters-in-law. Now this caused a delay in the cooking of the meal. One day the other brothers came home unexpectedly and found them engaged in this dance. They tore up the tree in anger and threw it into the river. The youngest brother was enraged by this act and left his home. Everything seemed to go wrong with him, until a day came when he saw the *Karam devata* floating on the river. He tried to approach it, but a voice from the branch sternly warned him not to come anywhere near because he was a sinner. He then propitiated the godling by prayer and was directed to return home. There he found that everything which had previously gone wrong was now set right. Even the family house, which had become dilapidated and his brothers who had been reduced to poverty, were now restored to their former state. He called his brothers and told them that such misfortunes had befallen them because they had dishonoured the *Karam devata*. Since that moment the deity has been worshipped by the tribe.⁶

The story contains two important points which accord with the aboriginal rather than the Brahmanical code of conduct. These include: (1) the intimacy between the younger brother and the elder brother's wife, and (2) mixed dance. The reference to the dance is all the more interesting, because the boy was not aware of the fact that the tree round which he danced out of sheer merriment was actually the abode of a deity which enjoyed music and dance. The 'sin' referred to in the story seems to be the insult to the deity, at the moment when the tree was thrown away. This seems to be a typical instance of the aboriginal idea of guilt. It is only the offensive action in itself that counts. Its motive is of no consequence to the god. And so the *Karam devata* does not take into consideration the fact that the youngest brother did not consent to his brothers removing the tree from their courtyard. The 'sin' cannot be a young man's making merry with his sisters-in-law, for this is quite in accord with the moral

code of the aborigines in these parts, except where the Brahmanical idea of 'decency' intervenes.

Another *Karam* legend, prevalent among the Pauri Bhuiya of Orissa and recorded by S.C. Roy, says that a merchant returned home after a very prosperous voyage. His vessel was loaded with precious metals and other valuables, which he had brought from foreign lands. Before he unloaded the ship, he wanted his wife, sons and daughters to go aboard and perform a religious ceremony as a thanksgiving for his safe return. But it happened to be the *Karam puja* day and the women were dancing round the *Karam* branches and the men were beating their drums. No one paid any attention to the merchant's plea. The merchant was furious with them. He uprooted the branches of the tree and flung them away. Immediately the wrath of the *Karam* god fell on him, and his ship with its all precious cargo sank to the bottom. The man then consulted an astrologer and asked him why the ship had disappeared and how he could get it back. The astrologer told him the curse of the *Karam* god was responsible and the only way to recover his ship was to invoke the deity's blessings. The merchant again set out on a voyage, this time in search of the *Karam* deity. He found the deity in the sea; he worshipped the *Karam Raja*, and the god then enjoined him to perform the *Karam* ritual every year. His sons and daughters-in-law were expected to fast for seven days and nights and dance and sing during the *Karam* festival.⁷

This legend shows the importance of the *Karam* ritual and the evil consequences of any omission on this score. Yet this story does not offer us any clues about the origin of the ritual. The legend implies that the *Karam* festival was already in existence, but the contemptuous way in which the merchant treated the sacred branches perhaps suggests that it was not a very popular custom among his class of people. No Hindu can treat a sacred object worshipped by his community with such disrespect. It is possible that the worship of this tree was prevalent in communities which were different from the one to which the merchant belonged; it must have prevailed mostly among the lower strata of society.

A story narrated among the Brahmins of Chota Nagpur says that there were two brothers: Dharma and Karma. Dharma was rich and Karma was poor. Karma's wife once asked him to go to the rich brother's house and bring home some money. Karma went. But his brother and his wife were very rude to him. Repulsed by their behaviour, he returned home in a very sullen mood. On his way, he saw some women worshipping the *Karam* tree. The women saw how dejected he was, and they advised him to worship the *Karam* tree like they did; that would make for prosperity and happiness. He followed their advice and soon his misfortunes came to an end. He continued this practice and others followed his example.⁸

This tale, too, does not mention the origin of *Karma* but only refers to the practice. The custom did not exist among the Brahmins of the province to which he belonged, but he perhaps introduced it to the Hindu castes.

Since the number of those who belong to the Hindu castes is very large as compared to the number of the tribal people, the chances for the spread of such a custom was much greater once it was introduced among the Hindus. There was also a greater likelihood of certain modifications of the original custom. Generally once a custom is sufficiently stabilized among the majority of the population, a reverse process takes place. The aboriginal minority, from whom the custom was originally borrowed by the Hindus, comes under the growing influence of Hinduism. In turn it tends to borrow new details from its Hindu neighbours. The cross-currents of culture thus pass back and forth, silently and yet with great momentum. A process of this kind seems to have taken place in the case of the *Karma* festival, which originated among the aborigines but was borrowed from them and popularised by the Hindus.⁹

The Manner of Observing the Karma Festival

Mirzapur: The *Karam* festival is observed in Mirzapur in a very simple manner. It begins on the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of *bhado*¹⁰ and lasts for at least ten days. Men fast on that day and wear a thread on the right arm over which some crude spells are recited. Then they go into the forest and cut a branch of the *Karam* tree, which they set up in the courtyard. The men bow before it and the women decorate it with red lead. Then they get drunk, dance round it and sing *Karam* songs. The festival is an occasion for wild license and debauchery. It is understood that if any girl takes fancy to a man, she has only to kick him on the ankle during the dance and the parents get the pair married.¹¹

During the dance, men and women stand opposite each other; they advance and retreat to the music of the sacred drum.¹² The dance continues the whole night; the next morning the branch is carried in a procession by the men and immersed in a tank or a stream outside the village.¹³

Bihar and Orissa: The Oraon observe the *Karam* festival with zeal. The chief elements of the ritual include:

1. Cutting three branches of the *Karam* tree, which are called *Karam raja*.
2. Carrying the branches into the village dancing ground, accompanied by dance and music.
3. Dancing and singing throughout the night.
4. Garlanding the branches the next morning reciting the *Karam* legend.
5. Offering flowers, rice and curds to the branches.
6. Red *Karam* baskets full of grain are placed in front of the branches and some ceremonially nurtured barley seedlings are distributed among the boys and girls, who put the yellow blades in their hair.
7. The branches are lifted and carried by the women through the village and then immersed in the stream.¹⁴

Among the Hill Bhuiya, the *Karma* is observed as follows: the men plant the *Karam* tree on the altar, while the women make a continuous 'hur-hura' sound. The girls bow low before the *Karam* branch and say, 'O *Karam Raja*, O *Karam Rani*, we are making *Karam-Dharam* night.'¹⁵ It is interesting

to note that the Hill Bhuiya, unlike the Oraon and Munda, do not have any special dances for the *Karma*.

Madhya Pradesh: The Majhwar in the Madhya Pradesh dance the *Karma* dance in the *asarh* (June-July) and *kunwar* (October-November) or at the beginning of the rains. The *Gaota* or the village-headman or the Baiga priest fetches a branch of the *Karma* tree from the forest and sets it up in his yard as a notice and invitation to the village. After sunset all the people, men, women and children, assemble and dance round the tree to the accompaniment of a drum known as *mandar*. The dancing continues all night and in the morning the host picks up the branch of the *Karam* tree and consigns it to a stream, at the same time regaling the dancers with rice, pulse and goat's meat. This dance is a religious rite in honour of the *Karam raja* and is believed to keep sickness at bay and bring prosperity.¹⁶ The Bunjhwar of Bilaspur perform the *Karma* ritual in the same way as the Majhwar.¹⁷ Among the Savar and Sahis of Bilaspur the same customs are observed with respect to the ritual. The Gond in the Bilaspur district and even the low-caste Hindus, like the Ahir, Kosta, Panka and Ghasia perform the *Karma* ritual in the manner mentioned above. However, the *Karma* does not form a nucleus of the indigenous Gond culture. In the south-eastern part of the province and in Bastar, where the Gond culture is found in a concentrated form, the *Karma* ritual is not observed at all. Nor is it observed in the western part of the province where the Gond are found in considerable numbers. It seems from this that though the Gond in the eastern portion of the province observe the *Karma* ritual and though the *Karma* dances and songs are so popular among them, it is an element borrowed from the local culture rather than from their tribal or Gond culture. The Baiga are adept *Karma* dancers but they do not seem to observe the ritual as do the Bunjhwar with whom they have racial and cultural affinities.

Transfer of the Karma Dances and Songs to the Jawara

The *Karma* ritual in its original form, that is the worship of the *Karam* tree, is observed by the tribes of Bilaspur. In the eastern part of Madhya Pradesh, the *Karma* dances and songs are transferred to another harvest festival called the *Jawara*; it takes place in the month of *Bhado*. Seven kinds of grain are sown by men in an earthen pot and then the women dance round the pot for three nights. On the fourth day of the bright fortnight, the pot holding the *Jawara* seedlings is thrown into a stream by women. The *Jawara* festival is observed all over the province, but only in these eastern parts are the *Karma* dances and songs performed during the festival. Among the Gond the *Jawara* festival is very popular. The Ghasia, Panka, Kosta and Baiga also observe it, but the latter seems to have dropped the *Karma* ritual entirely.

It is interesting to note that this transfer of the *Karma* dance and songs to the *Jawara* is not peculiar to the tribal people of Madhya Pradesh. The Oraon also have a form of the ceremonial use of the seedlings in the *Karam* ritual. There, however, it forms a secondary part of the ritual, while in the Madhya Pradesh it constitutes its central core. This transfer

of the dance and songs of one ritual to another shows how local culture gradually absorbs and transforms customs which belong to outside areas. The popularity of the *Jawara* among the Gonds and the transfer of the *Karma* dance and songs to it once again emphasize the fact that the *Karma* is not a Gond festival and it has been imported into the land of the Gond by other tribes, such as the Majhwar, Savar and Sahis, found prominently in the adjoining territory, in Orissa as well as in the district of Mirzapur.

The Karma Dance

The *Karma* dance is more popular, and geographically more widely represented than the *Karma* ritual. Even in parts where the ritual is unknown, the *Karma* dance with all its varieties is danced in a lively fashion. In the eastern portion of the Madhya Pradesh, the *Karma* has ceased to be a seasonal dance. It is danced all the year round, on any and every important occasion, in winter and summer alike, on moonlit nights or even on nights when the darkness is made less fearful by a glow of little fires, round which the young boys and girls dance. It is the principal dance of the tribal people in these parts. The social life and the love-life of the people acquire much of its colour from these nocturnal enjoyments.

The primary significance of the *Karma* dance lies in the fact that it was meant to accompany the ritual; hence it has a religious significance. As a monsoon dance complementing the harvest ritual, it implies certain magical qualities beneficial to a good crop. Certain movements in the dance are imitative of agricultural operations. This leads one to believe that the object of the dance is primarily magical,¹⁸ though it is true that the symbolism is many a time "vague and elastic."¹⁹

In Madhya Pradesh, however, the symbolism has almost disappeared as the ritual itself is observed by a very small section of the people, chiefly by tribes like the Majhwar and Savar, who are found in greater numbers outside the province than in it. The *Karma* thus ceases, to be a "festival dance" and is looked upon as a "traditional social dance" by the majority of the people in the province.

Two Variations of the Dance

The *Karma* is a mixed dance, with varying formations and steps. Though it is not possible for us to discuss the technical peculiarities of all the known variations in detail, we shall describe some of the chief forms. The variations of the dance are distinguished by (1) either a circular or linear formation, (2) a drum accompaniment or lack of it, (3) postures, (4) steps, and (5) slow or rapid movements.

In Mirzapur: Men and women stand in opposite lines and dance the *Karma* to the accompaniment of the drum.

In Jashpur: The standard *Karam* dance with the drum is one in which "boys and girls form two curving lines on the rim of a circle, and the dance then consists of a zigzag walk to the right with the torsos erect, followed

by a zigzag walk to the left with the dancers leaning forward. In the latter movement, emphasis is on every step on the left leg, the left foot being brought down firmly with a bend of the knee, while the right leg is brought lightly back behind".²⁰ The formation of the dance is either circular or semi circular.²¹ The two variations of the dance are: (1) The *Jugia Karam*, in which "the girls form two parts of a curved line half facing the centre of the circle. The boys are strung out in a loose line holding hands, while the girls interlock their arms and stand with their bodies touching. The line then moves round the circle, the girls walking smoothly while the men proceed with leaps. After an erect zigzag progress they move backwards, and then do a figure of four movements before the walk is resumed. This consists of two steps forward, first with the right leg and then with the left. The right foot then moves up to just behind the left, and the left is then brought back to a pace behind the right." (2) The *Lujhki*, "in which the movement is to the right and there is no reverse. The action consists of two figures, each with four movements, the rhythm rising and falling round the third movement of each figure. The dance is done with the knees partly bent and goes rapidly with running swing."²²

In Chota Nagpur: In Chota Nagpur the *Karam* dance is popular among the Hindus as well as the tribal people. The Munda also dance it. The *Karam* dances of the Oraon are very popular and are called "stooping dances" as distinguished from the other tribal dances like the *Jadur* and the *Kharia* dances which are danced in erect position.²³ In all the variations of the *Karam* dance the boys and girls form separate rows. The variations of the dance are (1) *Lujhki*, in which girls adopt "a peculiar limping gait" and clap with their hands; (2) *Hutungia Karam*, a dance in which each girl clasps her neighbour to the left by passing her left arm round the latter's waist and faces her neighbour on the right; (3) *Kesari Kappa*, a dance which imitates the gathering of the *Kesari* nuts or water nuts in the tanks. In this dance the girls kneel down and the drummers (the boys) squat on the ground facing them. The girls keep shaking their heads violently, so that their hair become dishevelled. As the dance progresses, it reaches a climax when one or more girls show signs of "spirit possession". Then the knot which fastens the clothing of the girl thus possessed by the spirit becomes loose at the waist. One of the young men must kick her or pull her by the hair till she comes back to her senses. This is a very exciting dance, and affords an occasion for obscenities.²⁴

Among the Munda: The Munda have three variations of the *Karam* dance which are different from those of Oraon. They are: (1) *Lashna Karam*—This is the central *Karam* dance from which the *Khemta* and *Binsari* have evolved. It is a mixed dance "in which the dancers join hands, stoop forward, and form themselves in an arc or circles. Towards the centre of the circle they advance with graceful steps and retire backwards in the same bending posture, with the dancers all the time moving slightly towards the left so as to complete the circle". (2) *Khemta Karam*—All that we know about this dance is that the movements are slow and graceful (3) *Bensari*—It is danced from cock crow to sunrise. In it "the posture is more erect than in other *Karam* dances".²⁵

In Madhya Pradesh: The *Karma* dance is an inter-communal dance, as it is danced by the low-caste Hindus as well as the tribes. The tribal dance, however, is more lively and vigorous. Among the Kolarian tribes like the Baiga, Savar and Majhwar, the *Karma* is the principal dance. It is danced not only during the rainy season, but even in the summer and winter. The Gond in these parts also dance the *Karma*. But the small and very typical forest tribes like the Bhunjia and Kamar in the Raipur district do not dance it. Neither do the Gond in the southern part of Durg and in the Bastar tract. It is only where Hindu influence is predominant that the *Karma* songs and dances thrive. It is also obvious from the ethnic spread of the *Karma* dances that it is the non-Gond tribes mentioned above who introduced the *Karma* in the province. Later the large Gond population took it up and popularized it. This led even close observers of the tribes like Russell to believe that the *Karma* was the central dance of the Gond.²⁶ The variations of the *Karma* dance are typified by the performances of the Baiga who are adept dancers. They are:

1. *Khalla Karma*, which affords a very good example of circular movement. The woman advances with the left foot, brings the right up to it and swings it back and to the right; she brings the left foot back a little to the right of its original position, and bows; then she repeats the gesture. Another formation of the circular movement is thus: the left foot is brought forward across the right, then back to the left of the original position, then the right foot is brought forward and across the left, then back; this, too, is a little to the left.

2 *Tadi Karma*: This formation and the "advancing and retreating movements" are significant. In the *Tadi*, there is a quick left, right, left movement forward, then the right foot is brought to the left, touches the ground with the toes and is taken back at once. The left follows, then right, then a bow, and the steps are repeated.

3. *Lahaki Karma* which is "generally sung to the rhymed songs and has a powerful effect of emotions, is a jerky, rather suggestive movement. The women stand in line; each lifts the left leg by bending the knee a dozen times, then puts the left leg a little forward, bends the knee, brings the right foot up beside the left, puts the left leg a little forward again, bends, brings up the right foot up beside the left, puts the left forward again, bends, brings up right, and so on. Or the line may go round and round; in this case the right foot is moved first a bit to the right, the left is brought up to it, but always a little in the front. In this movement, one foot only takes the lead and the other follows and at every pace the body is jerked from the knee."

4. *Jhumar Karma*: This dance is typified by its rapid movement and is very attractive. It is described by Elwin as one "in which the feet are alternately brought forward and back, very quickly. The right shoots forward and is back in its place immediately, and the left is out and back as quickly".²⁷ It is curious to note that while in Madhya Pradesh, the *Jhumar* is taken as a variation of the *Karma*, Crooke considers *Jhumar* or *Jhuhir* to

be a dance separate from the *Karma*, but corresponding to it²⁸ Dalton has also expressed the same opinion about the dance as it is practised by the Nagesur and Boyar tribes of Mirzapur.²⁹ The *Jhumar* in Bihar is also a separate dance and in no way connected with the rainy season dance, the *Karam*.³⁰

Karma Songs

Karam or *Karma* songs can be classified as follows:

1. Songs dedicated to *Karam Raja* in which the celebration of the ritual is glorified.³¹
2. Love-songs, in which marital as well as extra-marital love is described.³²
3. Licentious and obscene songs.
4. Songs relating to village gossip and recording events of social importance in the history of the village or the tribe. People of prominence also form a subject of the *Karma* songs. For example, king Bhavtari (Bhartrihari, the famous composer of *The Three Centuries of Verses or Shatakas* in Sanskrit and the brother of the king Vikrama of Ujjain), plays a prominent part in the *Karma* songs of the Sahis in Bilaspur.

In the Madhya Pradesh all varieties of *Karma* songs are to be found except the first, that is the glorification of the *Karam Raja*.³³

Karma Songs

(A) From the Baiga in Durg.

आचरा ओढ़त गोरी देरवत है
जोड़ी छूटत है।

1. (The fair woman pulls up the end of her sari, the *palu*.³⁴ And she throws a glance and a pair of bullets with it.)

नदियाके तीरमें जोगियाके डेरा
धमक गिरे
छोड़ देरे जोगिया डेरा तुम्हारे
धमक यहाँ गिरे
आमके डार कालाराम सब लोक रो लगावे।

2. (On the bank of the river the ascetic has put his camp. O ascetic! Give up your camp. Kalaram is going to plant a mango tree there.)

आमके सूवा डार पातर कोइली बोले
कोइली बोले पातर।

3. (On the branch of the mango tree the cuckoo bird cooes sweetly. Oh! the cuckoo cooes sweetly.)

काहेके आँगन डण्डा खेले
तेरे कचेरी हो दादा
आँगन डण्डा खेले।

4. (In whose courtyard do you play the *danda*?³⁵ In your office ground. O father, we play the *danda*.)

मुसाके चलवा पानी लाने
तेढी अनजमाँ मारे तेरिमें बैठके
मुसाके कलेच पानी लाने
गौरीके चन्द्रा काल बतियारे
बैसो बैसो हमारे काल बतियारे
झिनक पहुना आवे
हमारे रसिया
हमार बैठो बैठो हमार खटिया।

(5) (While she went to fetch water in a gourd pot, you were seated on a hillock and looked askance at the moon-face of the fair girl while she was fetching water, O Kalbatiya! Be seated, Kalbatiya, my darling. Be seated on my cot. All the guests have arrived. Be seated on my cot, O Kalbatiya.)

ये जिवलाकहाँ लुकवूँ गोंदली फूल
बागे भालु खाले गोंदली फूल
भैके पठावे हरामजादी तोला जानके
खटियामे देवे काकम सेन्दुर
तोला पठावे भैकामें ।

(6) (Where shall I hide myself, O *Gondali*³⁶ flower? Let tigers and foxes feast on my body. O *Gondali* flower, I shall send you back to your father's house, having found out your tricks).

ओहिले लेजावे मान्दुरी बजैया
मोर अचरा मत छिवे
मोर अचरा में महुर मीठा
छिवत छिवत परान जाही ।

(7) (Take this away, O drummer! But do not touch my breast-covering. Underneath my breast-covering are beautiful sweets. If you touch my cloth, it will kill me; so take the sweets away, O drummer.)

हँसीके ख्याल मत करो बाबु लैक
असरी बैठे सास ससुर बैठे खटियामें
बाबु हँसीके ख्याल मत करो बाबु ।

(8) Do not joke, my boy, do not joke. My mother-in-law sits on the verandah, my father-in-law squats on a cot, do not joke.)

उँच टेकरिया मझुर तेरी देवाथरे
शिकारिके जालं मे जीव जाही तोररे।

(9) (On a high hill you are screaming loudly, O peacock. Your life shall be installed in the bag of the hunter. On a high hill you are screaming.)

उँचे टेकरिमें लोक चार बैठे रे
उँचे खाटु बैठे कैंवटिन कलारिन रे
किया मंद पोते कलार

किया मंद पिया जवान
 बुढ़े मतवार
 जवान फुल्ली मत पिये
 बुढ़े मतवार पिये
 खटिया सोवादे बुढ़े मतवार
 पलङ्ग सुवादे जवानला।

(10) (On a high hill four men are sitting, in a high village. The fisherwoman and wine merchant's wife are sitting; the wine merchant has distilled the liquor himself. The wine was made, the youth drank it, and yet the old man got intoxicated. O young man! Do not drink *Phulli* wine. Let the intoxicated old man drink it. Let the old man sleep on a cot. Let the young man sleep on a bedstead.)

मान्दर बजैयाके सुन्दर सरीरा
 चोलाल घूँ काथे जाने कबीला
 कियावे सुनावे यहीं बजारमें
 यारला सुनावे
 हाथे हाथे नवा थैली जहोली हो
 हैसे मैं राजा बदन मइली।

(11) (The drummer has a beautiful body. Kabir knows that the body is subject to decay. Where does she inform her lover? In the bazar does she inform her lover? The lover with a money-bag in his hand? She tells him: O king! How is it possible? I am in an impure condition.)

लौंके माटी भिवा छाप लेवे
 तई तो बनवा गादी बिना
 लोहाके केसरी गंगरुवा के चारा।

(12) (Bring mud, smear the ground. You are in the habit of sleeping without a mattress.)

नवा मान्दरमें घुँगरु लगे
 चार भाई चौकिदार पहारा लगे।

(13) (The new drum has a string of bells. Four brothers are keeping a vigilant watch.)

बह्यर कचेलिमें लिप लेवे चुना
 आगे रसियाके मत करे गुन्हा।

(14) (The office at Bahyar, whitewash it properly. Do not make a mistake when the lover is watching you.)

भाटाके बाहिराला फोर फोर खावे
 रामगढ़े किल्लाला देखाला जावे।

(15) (The seeds of *brinjals* are broken and eaten. We go to the fort of Ramgarh.)

बीचे समुन्दर कुमड़ी गदेह आयी
 मत जाना मच्छरियाँ किला।

(16) (In the sea they have spread a net. Do not go into the stronghold of the fish.)

करिया फतोही दोदरी गुदाम
में कैसे मानूँ बहिन दामाद।

(17) (Black is your jacket, with a double row of studs. How can I resist you, O my sister's husband?)

नन्दियाके काँटी काँटी कोदे बोलाय लेखं
घरके तिरिया मर्द नवावे।

(18) (On the bank of the river, *Kodan*³⁸ is sown. A man is put to shame by his wife.)

एकइन रुखवाला जान कदेया
अमली के जवार होते लोटाला पानी देते
मोर चोला मरत है पियास।

(19) (A man knows only how to cut a tree. Yet another, a friend, gives it water from a pot. Oh, I am dying of thirst.)

पाँवमें चले पवन गाडी
कुँवामें लेव ड़ीरी नहीं बुड़ाव
में चला ले तो मोतारगाडी।

(20) (The bicycle is run by feet. Even if I am taken to the well, I shall throw a rope into it, but water I shall not draw, until I am taken for a drive, in a motorcar.)

खैरागढमें बिजोली चमके रे
हाथे धरे गोली मुठी तरवार
घोड़ाउपर रखे बघेला सरदार।

(21) (The lightning flashes in Khairagarh, the Bagela sardar, mounted on horse, holds a gun in one hand and a sword in another.)

छिपि चयिला छान छाये
बालक राजा जिलो जिलो है
सावन भादो काँसि फूले
डोंगरीके सूत कुटे
जोरी पिरीत नहीं छूटे।

(22) (The seed is covered well with its coat, my king; the baby is rocking well in the cradle. The *Kasi* flowers bloom, in the months of *savan* and *bhado*. When the yarns of hemp are pounded, love once realized never breaks off.)

आँधोरी करारमें छेक लेवे फाँदा
पिछुल के फाँदामें फाँदी गया मञ्जूर
आगुके फाँद गया रजनिया।

(23) (Keep the net ready on the dark night. The peacock is caught in the net behind. Rajaniya, the lover is caught in the first.)

ऐसा सोहाग फूल आँगन लगाया
में तु का जान भाई रे
पेड़ देखा छिदिर बिदिर

पान देरवा छिदराही
फूल बर नाही ।

(24) (Such a beautiful flower³⁹ has bloomed in the courtyard. How can I know about it, O brother? When I saw the tree, it was spread, I saw the leaves and they were huge; the bud, too, I saw, and it has not bloomed. How can I know about it, O brother?)

वारी जो आपन परदेसी भाई
चिरिया जो होथे धरके पढ़ते
तिरिया बरम नहीं पाये ।

(25) (The stranger wants to bestow knowledge upon us. If it is a bird, you can catch it and coach it. But when it is a woman, she won't pick up knowledge.)

(B) From the Gond of Raipur

लहर बहर आये कर्मा नाचुके
कर्मा कर्मा छोड़के बैव दे
धुर नकटा पैले जा
सनधरी रक्ड़े रा ।

(1) (With a gusto have you come to dance *Karma*. You have to give up mischief and stand quietly by the wall.)

लडका: लाल भाजी नसर फसर
हरदी नंगरगढ़ के
अरे वार दूरी
तेर देरवाला सुरित वार दियाला

(2) (Boy: The red vegetable is no good, in the turmeric the ploughshare is stuck. O blooming girl, light the lamp, so I may see your beauty.)

लडकी: अरे तोर घर गये हो
आगी मंगाये
चूर चल करे सारी राती
चले अरे डौका
बने लगे सारी कुरियामें

(3) (Girl: Oh! They have gone to your house to bring fire. Let it be burning the whole night. Go back, O man, to the hut, where you fitted so well.)

(C) From the Gond and Hindus of Bilaspur

हिचे जावे हमोल बुलावे
सानोकील नहीं जानूँ
हाथमें बुलावे
कोन हारा मोरा घरे
कोन हारा विसार
कोन हारा डबरा बटावे
सानुकी नी जानूँ हाथमें बुलावे ।

(1) (You be gone! Why are you calling me? I do not understand such things at all. Why beckon me by hand? Who will hold my basket? Who will hold the fish-net? Who will show the pond? I do not understand such things at all.)

कारी आचार पेढ़
कहाले लाने पोथी पुरान
कारी आचार पेढ़े
चुरीले लाने पोथी पुरान
कोरवल लानेला किताब ।

(2) (He reads black letters. From where have you brought scriptures? From Chhuri have I brought it; the *Kotwal* has brought only one book. And reads black letters.)

तननन बिगड़े बातके तननन
तुम फरे लामी लामी
मकन फरे चाकी
कमरमें दम नहीं
कैसे मारे आँवी राजा तननन
बिगड़े बातके तननन
दरस लागे चौड़ा पहाड़में
रान्धेला झुन गा साग
दोनो दोनो झोर
चौड़ा पहारला पथरा गिरे
दुनियाले सोर दरस लागे
कल कल देवी कुरे
मर मर खप्परमें जोरे
ऐन्ति मारे पैन्ति मारे
भाग भाग कर रे टोनामसान
राजा हवे बाजा बाजे ।

(3) (The fun of all talk is gone. You wander far and wide. Even in the house the cart moves on. As there is no strength in the waist⁴⁰ And yet you wink at me, O king! The fun of all talk is gone. You are seen in the Chanda Pahad. Drumstick vegetable is cooked. Eat it dish after dish; from the Chanda mountain falls a rock. And the world sees a sun now. The deities (birds) make *Kalkal* noise in the crevices. Stones are thrown this way and that. Run away, O witch, to the cemetery! O king, now the trumpet sounds.)

(D) From the Majhwar of Bilaspur

नाने दुलारा साहेब गिना गिहे थोरा
बाँधके खोकेँ र्विसा
और लुपेटा
बाहमें चन्दन छिटका
छातिमें रोरा
चढ़े गोमनाती घाट
फिर कटघोरा
लेन देन नहीं बनिस
प्रेम रसक थोरा ।

(1) (The small darling youth is considered a big person. He ties a beautiful turban and also a cloth on it. On his arms are marks of sandalwood. On

his chest, beads. He climbs the *ghat* of *Gomnati* and wanders in Katghora. He could neither give nor take sufficiently. As there are few who appreciate love.)

सास कहाथे नवा बहोरिया
पहरिन लाल धरिया
वैठेके भात परोसिया
कंचनके थारिया
आँव भेंगे करी कोइला
मूरव भेंगे करिया
कहाँके चूरी चाकी

कहाँके बनोरिया
कहाँके नयनकाजल
पहरिले बहोरिया
चोंपाके चूरी चाकी
छूरीका बनोरिया
कटघोराके नयनकाजल
पहरिले बहोरिया ।

(2) (Says the mother-in-law: The daughter-in-law wore a red *sari* and served rice, slowly, slowly, in the dish of gold. Her eyes were red, her face became dark. Where are the bangles? Where are the armbands? Where is the collyrium for eyes?)

गोरी रोवे सावन महिना
कारवर छुटथे मिलनुवा
चैलतो चुटे वारो रे बिहोवा
गोरीके छुटथे मिलनुवा ।

(3) (The fair woman weeps in the month of *savan*. Who can escape a co-wife? The man has left his wife, but the fair woman cannot escape a co-wife. And she weeps.)

(E) From the Dhanahar of Bilaspur

राजे केरतरि हो
खोचे कलिंदर फूल
तेली घरी तेल मंगावे
बामन घरले घीव
चले पीतमपूर
भाई केरतरि रे ।

(1) (The flower of *Kalinder* shines near the plantain tree. Ask for oil in the Teli's house, ask for ghee in the Brahmin's house. Come to Pitampur underneath the plantain tree.)

पानी आला केसा जाऊं
आपटि परे सिधा घघोरि गिरि गये
गधरीके ओठरन गुधरी
नारिक ओठरन मेह्यरमे
दुरवे रोवे ससुराय
हापथि फोरे
सिरघि घोला रे ।

(2) (Showers have come. How shall I go? The showers beat in the head. The water-pot falls down. A dung-heap is the shelter for a she-ass, and the mother's house for a woman. She weeps with pain, in the house of the father-in-law.)

कोड़ारी कोड़ारी माटी ए फेरवथेरे
केकरा हर खोजे आपन चेचरिला
पढ़ना खोजे मंजधार

कोतरि हर खोजे आपन झोरकिला
मगर चले थे वरात
माटी ए फेरवथे रे ।

(3) (With an axe the earth is dug. The crab is searching for its hole, the big fish searches for a deep current, the small fish for a ditch. The crocodile walks majestically, and dust is thrown up.)

(F) From the Sahis in Bilaspur

नाम ललिकार राजा भर्तरी
जे दिन लेइस जनम
बाजे तबला निसान
हरी हरी गोबर मँगायके
छे खुँटी आँगन लिपाय
तमें कलस मदाय
रूपे दीपन जलाय
कासीले पण्डित बुलाके
गाये मँगला चार
अलती कलती करमा नाचथ हैँ
मुँह करके किश आन ।

(1) (The king of the Bhartari line by name Lalikar, the day he was born, drums were beaten as announcement; fresh green cowdung was brought; with it the ground was cleaned; with six pegs was it marked. In it a water-jar was kept; a silver lamp was also kept burning. From Kashi, pundits were called. They sang auspicious songs. The ordinary folk danced the *Karma*. The farmers' faces lit with joy. Such was the king Bhartari by name Lalikar.)

राजा भर्तरी नाम ललिकार
फुदकी फुदकी मिरगा नाच थे
राजा खेलेला सिंकार
एके दचिना राजा मार थे
ते स्वर सनमुख घाव
धरती लोभावन मिरगा गिरथे
उठके करथे जवाव
खुरेला दे दे गौ लछमिला

घर घर लेही पुजाय
सिंगेला लेही दे दे कोई छती
रणमें झूजी मरी जाय
खडलिला दे दे कोई साधुला
बनमें करही बिचार
नैनाला दे दे चतुर नारिला
जगमें होही सहा ।

(2) (The king of Bhartari line by name Lalikar went out hunting. A deer was playing; it was romping about. The king shot in a moment, he shot an arrow in its direction. The beautiful deer fell to the ground. It got up for a while and said: Give my hoofs to the glorious cow, so they will be worshipped in every house. Give my horns to a warrior so that he will fight in battle and die. Give my hide to a sage, so that he will (sit on it) and contemplate. Give my eyes to a wise woman so she will be praised in the world.)

पाली बजार गये लुगरा के मोल करे
लेवत लेवत भोजत बाद पोर
हाथाला देख रहे हरदी बजारके कोसम तरी।

(3) (She went to Pali Bazar to buy a *sari*, while making the bargain she stopped looking at the man's hand. Near the *Kosam* tree. In the Hardi bazar.)

कनकीके पेज राँधूँ मैनाकी सिकार
आइ दूरी लुहुक डुहुक भागे रे बिचार
अमरेया जावो एके सिटिमके
अमरेया जावो रे

(4) (Shall I make gruel of wheat flour? Or shall I cook the *maina* bird? Surely this girl is in want. Wear, O daughter-in-law, bangles from Chapa, armlets from Chhuri, collyrium from Katghora. Wear them, O daughter-in-law.)

Summary

The *Karma* is not an indigenous part of the Gond culture, but seems to be the product of the Kolarian or Munda culture. In Madhya Pradesh, the Baiga, Majhwar and Savar are the people who chiefly practise the *Karma*, and the rest of the tribes have copied them. The *Karma* ritual is observed by Bilaspur tribes alone; in the rest of the eastern part of the province, the *Karma* dances and songs have been amalgamated with the ritual of the *Jawara* festival. It is very popular among the Gond and the Hindus all over the province. The *Karma* or *Kadamba* tree thus recedes into the background in the land of the Gond. There is only one solitary instance known to us (cited by Hislop) where the *Karma* or *Mundi* wood is used by the Gond to make *Nurma Pen* (a god in the Gond pantheon) in Chhindwara. There is no other instance in the Gond religion where the *Karma* tree is looked upon as sacred. The *Karma* dance, also owing to the deterioration of the ritual in the province, exists only as a social traditional dance of the rainy season, and we find people dancing the *Karma* even in summer and winter.

A study of the various forms of the dance in Madhya Pradesh and in the adjoining regions reveals that most of the movements of the *Karma* are circular. The steps are varied according to the technique of the performance. A contrast that strikes one between the *Karma* ritual and the dance in this province is that the ritual has undergone contraction while the dances have expanded. The original *Karma* ritual has been very much curtailed and the dances have been transferred to the *Jawara*. The dances, however, have spread over a wide area, and include even the *Jhumar*. The songs drop the rituals basis and are employed in the dances, depending on the emotions the dance is supposed to express. For example, the Lahaki is expressive of rich emotions. The chief theme of the songs is licentious, sexual love. Other subjects include gossip, natural beauty, hero-worship and satire. These songs flourish in the area. In short, the *Karma* is one of the most complicated festivals of the tribal people in the Madhya Pradesh. The ritual, the dance, and the songs are each of a complex nature and cannot be explained until we study them as they are practised by the tribes of the neighbouring provinces.

Notes and References

¹ Among the Bhuiya, Ghasia, Musahar, etc., in Mirzapur. W. Crooke, *Tribes and Castes of N. W. P. and Oudh, Calcutta, 1896*, II, pp 71-83.

- 2 Among the Majhwar in Mirzapur and the Savar in the same district. Crooke, *op. cit.*, also II, pp. 94-97; Roy, *The Kharias*, Ranchi, 1937, II, pp. 342 ff.
- 3 E.T. Dalton, *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872, pp. 131, 135, 198.
- 4 V. Elwin, *The Baiga*, London, 1939, pp. 432 ff.
- 5 S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Calcutta, 1912, p. 478.
- 6 D.L. Drake-Brockmans, *The District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Mirzapur*, XXVII, Allahabad, 1911 pp. 103-104.
- 7 Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas of Orissa*, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 367-369.
- 8 Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-260.
- 9 W. Crooke, *op. cit.*, Calcutta, 1896, III, pp. 439 ff.
- 10 It can also begin on the fourteenth day, called *Anantchaudas*, Crooke, *op. cit.*, II, p. 83; III p. 439.
- 11 Crooke, *op. cit.*, II, p. 83.
- 12 *op. cit.*, II, p. 439.
- 13 *op. cit.*, II, pp. 94-97.
- 14 Roy, *Oraon Religion and Customs*, Ranchi, 1928, pp. 240-247, W. Archer, *The Blue Grove*, London, 1940, p. 413.
- 15 Roy, *The Hill Bhuiyas*, p. 240.
- 16 R. V. Russell and Hiralal, *Tribes and Castes of the Central Provinces*, London, 1916, IV, p. 153.
- 17 Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, II, p. 335.
- 18 Roy, *The Oraons*, pp. 275-276.
- 19 Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 24.
- 20 *Ibid*, p. 204.
- 21 *Ibid*, p. 21.
- 22 *Ibid*, p. 202.
- 23 Roy, *The Oraons*, p. 294.
- 24 *Ibid*, pp. 294-295.
- 25 Roy, *The Mundas*, p. 478.
- 26 Russell and Hiralal, *op. cit.*, III, p. 136.
- 27 Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 432-435.
- 28 Crooke, *op. cit.*, III, p. 439.
- 29 Dalton, *op. cit.*, pp. 131, 135.
- 30 Roy, *The Oraons*, p. 299; Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
- 31 Archer, *op. cit.*, pp. 44 ff.
- 32 Elwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 444 ff., S. Hiwale and V. Elwin, *The Songs of the Forest*, pp. 51, 55, 61, etc.
- 33 Archer, *op. cit.*, p. 49; Crooke, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
- 34 *Pallav* of the sari that covers a woman's breast.
- 35 Stick-dance.
- 36 *Gondali* flower is the marigold flower. Lovers address their sweethearts using the name of some flower.
- 37 Saint Kabir, the famous Hindi poet.
- 38 A species of small millet.
- 39 This suggests pregnancy and childbirth. The woman sees the plant, that is her husband and herself, and its leaves, namely the relatives. The bud is the enlarged abdomen, the flower is the baby.
- 40 Viz. impotence.
- 41 The reference to king Bhartrihari is amazing. He is the famous king and sage, composer of *The Three Centuries of Verses*, on love, on good conduct, and on asceticism. Like Vikrama, he is popular among the lower classes in these regions. The ideology of the two songs is typically Hindu. The poetry in them is finely developed and the theme of the second song is superb. These songs are also sung during the pig-sacrifice.